‘RADICAL CHANGES IN APPEARANCE, RELIGIOUSNESS, LANGUAGE AND OPENNESS’ AMONGST A SMALL GROUP OF MALAYSIAN STUDENTS: RETHINKING THE INTERCULTURAL

by

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Abstract

This study investigates what a small group of Malaysian students choose to communicate when asked to reflect on their intercultural experience of living in the United Kingdom during their academic sojourn.

It reveals that ‘appearance’, ‘being religious’, ‘language’ and ‘openness’ are phrases, which some of them use, and which seem to encapsulate as sense of radical change. The term ‘radical’ is used by the researcher in this study because it seems best to express the sense of extreme change which each of them both talk about and display in their appearance and behaviour.

The initial objective of this study was to attempt to gain insights into the research participants’ intercultural experience of living in the UK. However, once the study had begun, it became clear to me that my initial positionality which was influenced by my own background and experiences did not match the participants’ understanding of the intercultural and was limiting the ways I was interpreting the data. Because of this, I began to question and re-evaluate the data I had collected. For example, I realised that at the beginning of the study, I was focusing on what I saw and heard from the participants as the result of culture shock.

After the event of interviews, it became apparent to me that not only have I found out about how the participants feel about things and how they represent themselves but also my own development on how I think about them. I began to notice that what I was saying was also important and that this represented a development of how I myself was thinking. Furthermore, my analysis from my field notes would often question the assumptions underlying my own recording of data after they had been written for some time, such as what I had meant by ‘my participant looks stunning’ or ‘my participant looks stylish’, consequently making me aware of the necessity to display my role in the research process more clearly. As a result of these incidents and having become more aware of the evolution of my thinking, I began to further question and consider my position and direction of research. For this reason, I began to explore the idea of including a small element of autoethnographic in the study. Consequently, what developed out of this study is not what I envisaged before, but something quite different: narratives of total interview experience of which my voice is part.

The study as a whole is therefore ethnographic in terms of attempting to understand what a small group of Malaysian students chose to say when asked
about their intercultural experience using interview, Facebook observation and field note data with an autoethnographic dimension to acknowledge the influence of my own perspective in understanding participants’ personal stories. It brings into focus how I, as a researcher, through re-evaluating my own data and as a result gaining greater insight into my own positioning, was able to gain better understanding of interculturality and the complexity of individuals’ personal journeys, and in the light of this to encourage readers to look deeper when dealing with unfamiliar settings in order to understand people and be cautious of the imaginary discourses that represent them.

It has implications for intercultural researchers to understand interculturality in general. It also has implications for all of us in terms of the need to understand the intercultural realities rather than to make hasty judgments about one another based on profound and influential discourses that are locked into global politics, particularly when we encounter people and practices in unfamiliar cultural settings. Additionally, this study can have implications for those interested to promote global citizenship at university level and more broadly by examining students’ experience of interculturality and that through this, to develop a more nuanced understanding of this and a better sense of what it is that needs to be taught and in what way.

This study may therefore be of interest to researchers, educators, students as well as everyone in general who are interested to understand intercultural communication and to disentangle intercultural problems.
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List of Abbreviations

UK - United Kingdom
B.Ed. - Bachelor of Education
TESL - Teaching English as Second Language
MA - Master of Arts
TESOL - Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages
Chapter 1: Introduction to the thesis

1.1 Introduction

This study investigates what a small group of Malaysian students choose to communicate when asked to reflect on their intercultural experience of living in the United Kingdom during their academic sojourn. ‘Appearance’, ‘being religious’, ‘language’ and ‘openness’ are phrases, which some of them use, and which seem to encapsulate as sense of radical change. I use the term ‘radical’ because it seems best to express the sense of extreme change which each of them both talk about and display in their appearance and behaviour. These findings emerge from a combination of interviews, Facebook posts and my own field-note reflections of what takes place during the collection of this data which enable a thick description.

Making sense of how these students choose to present themselves, also necessitate a reassessment of the nature of interculturality. It reveals the inadequacy of the more established view, in which we need to move between separate solid, fixed cultures, to a more open, fluid vision, in which people negotiate intercultural meaning wherever they are. It became apparent in the data that these students are not necessarily undergoing radical change because they have moved from one solid culture to another (i.e. Malaysian to British) but that this change could represent a more fluid ongoing set of changes which could take place at any time as part of a larger intercultural experience. This observation has implication for the concept of culture shock, which will be discussed in Chapter 7. Moreover, this observation that change is fluid and ongoing also brought about changes in my own perception as a researcher during the process of the study. For this reason, I feel the need to discuss the changes in my own positionality as a major driving force in the thesis and therefore place a chapter on the autoethnographic element of this thesis on its own to help me set the scene.

This movement of emphasis towards fluid, ongoing, and negotiated intercultural meaning and how these meanings are constructed leads me to position this study within the postmodern ethnographic research paradigm, which includes a small element of autoethnography, which is employed to deal with developing aspects of my own positionality.
1.2 Research questions

As a result of my change in positionality towards looking at interculturality as a more fluid process, my research questions evolved to become the following:

Q1: What does a small group of Malaysian students say when asked about their intercultural experience of living in the UK?

Q2: How does what the Malaysian students have to say impact upon how we understand interculturality?

Q3: How does what the Malaysian students have to say impact upon the researcher’s own development of understanding the complexity of the participants’ personal journey?

In Chapter 2, I will explain the details of how these questions evolved.

1.3 Background to the study

Looking at interculturality as a more fluid process has implication for my original reason for wanting to investigate the views of these Malaysian students.

Since the early 1990s, the number of overseas students in the UK has increased dramatically. Overseas students have been welcomed particularly for bringing diversity to the campus, adding fee income to British higher education institutions and for making significant contributions to academic research work, particularly research on the international students’ experiences in the UK. This research is extensive, undertaken by researchers with their own specific interests, and across different areas of study including psychology, counseling, business studies, and applied linguistics. As such, it inclines to be divided and informed by a number of different theoretical and methodological frameworks. However, it is observed that much of this research only gives a partial picture due to the fact that it is only able to demonstrate a broad-brush approach to understanding international students’ experiences (see for example those undertaken by Brown, 2008; Brown & Holloway, 2008a; Gill, 2007; Schartner, 2014).

In the light of the aforesaid partial picture, the initial impetus for carrying out the study came as a result of my personal experience and reflections of being an international Malaysian student (undergraduate and postgraduate) in the UK, prior to commencing this study, which has given me considerable insight into the
struggles and triumphs that my Malaysian course mates and I have experienced during our sojourns. Additionally, my interest in this matter grew stronger as I have been a member of a Facebook group for Malaysian students studying in the UK, and have therefore frequently had glimpses into these students' lives in a new environment, which these students regularly post on both the aforementioned Facebook group as well as their personal Facebook accounts. Over time, I was intrigued by the personal journey they undertook when they came to study in the UK.

Therefore, for this study, participants were drawn from the abovementioned ‘population’ and from this sample, 15 students agreed to be part of the research. These volunteers were Malaysian university students aged between 20-21 years old and had recently began to study in the UK. These were students who had just finished their foundation studies in Malaysia and came to the UK for the first time. They had never studied outside of Malaysia before and were doing different courses of study in various universities in the UK. While they were very different to me in age and length of stay in the UK, I did have some insights from my past experience of being a new arrival. Out of the 15 volunteered participants, eight were finally chosen to form the current research. Details on how the participants were chosen will be explained in Chapter 4.

The study therefore began as an ethnographically based study of the detail of the intercultural experience of a small group of Malaysian students’ intercultural experience of living in the UK, what they perceive as successes and failures in their intercultural encounters and what resources they bring with them to help them to engage with the foreign.

However, upon conducting interviews with the research participants, I began to discover something else that was unexpected. When asked about their intercultural experience in the UK, almost all of them talked about their ‘radical’ changes and responded varyingly with regards to the aspects of change. Over time, I began to notice that not only have I found out about how the participants feel about things and how they represent themselves but also about my own development of how I think about them, as a result gaining greater insight into how my own positioning had and was affecting my interpretations. Looking at interculturality as a more fluid process (my new positioning) brings more insight into the complexity of this personal journey. These revised interpretations of the data thus became a focus within the study.
The study as a whole therefore employs a degree of auto-ethnography, mainly present in my fieldnote data, to acknowledge the influence of my own perspective in understanding participants’ personal stories.

1.4 The Importance of the Study

The importance of this study resides in providing new knowledge concerning a small group of Malaysian students’ intercultural experiences of living in the UK on the non-essentialist line. As mentioned in the previous section, while bounteous volumes of research have been produced under the rubric of intercultural communication, research on international students’ experiences in the UK is often unsatisfactory in the way that it often does not take into consideration the complexity of individuals who interact with each other. This study therefore sought to look at the international students’ experience in a more critical manner and the insights of this study adds to the general understanding of what happens during international students’ academic sojourn abroad as well as helps readers to initiate better understanding of the intercultural (Amadasi & Holliday, 2017b). Not only that, this study on what a small group of Malaysian students choose to say about their intercultural experience in the UK may also make a potentially significant contribution to the development of critically informed pedagogic practices to help generate the intercultural learning that is currently being promoted in universities but has yet to be realised in practice.

1.5 Overview of how this thesis is organised

Having given an outline of the study in terms of the research questions and the contribution of the study, I conclude this chapter by describing how the thesis is organised. It is important for me to clarify that following this preliminary chapter are seven additional chapters that it is structured in a different way than normal for the following reasons:

Chapter 2: The autoethnographic element of the thesis. This chapter establishes my role and position in the research whilst also clearly showing the development of the thesis from its original focus and paradigm to the revised focus and paradigm thus providing the rationale for including the autoethnographic element in this thesis.
Chapter 3: Literature review from the perspective of my first positioning. This chapter presents literature review relevance to this study from the perspective of my first position which is the rationalist or essentialist paradigm. As such, this chapter offers a literature review of how the international students' intercultural experience has been theoretically and ‘commonly’ approached.

Chapter 4: The research process and methodology. This chapter discusses the research methodology used for this study. This chapter is placed ahead of the literature review chapters to set the scene of the study and foreground my own positioning and how this positioning effected of the study through autoethnographic element.

Chapter 5 to 6 present and discuss the data collected and analysed in this study and structured in the form of narratives of total interview experience of which my voice is part. In these two chapters, the small element of autoethnography is represented by the field notes and is highlighted to acknowledge the influence of my own perspective in understanding interculturality and participants' personal stories. These chapters are organised around the themes ‘appearances and religiousness’ and ‘language and openness’.

Chapter 5: Appearances and religiousness. This chapter presents and discusses participants’ communication relating to ‘radical changes in appearance and religiousness’. These are supported with extracts from their individual interviews and where relevant, Facebook posts and my field notes.

Chapter 6: Language and openness. While the previous chapter presents and discusses participants' communication relating to ‘radical changes in appearance and religiousness’, this chapter presents and discusses their communication with regards to ‘radical changes in language and openness'. Just like in Chapter 5, extracts from participants' individual interviews and where relevant, Facebook posts and my field notes are used to support discussion in this chapter.

Chapter 7: Reflections on the literature from the perspective of the discussion data. Chapters 7 reflects and reviews literature relevant to this study which includes key issues that are central to the study as well as classic and alternative
approaches to the study of international students’ intercultural experience. It seeks to demonstrate how the literature helped me to understand the impact of my initial rationalist positionality and to find alternative narratives, which drive the current thesis.

Chapter 8: Conclusions and implications. This final chapter summarises the key findings of the study and my interpretations of these findings which has developed through the data chapters. This chapter also highlights the main contributions to knowledge stemming from the findings and reflects critically on the process of undertaking the study and offer some suggestions for possible future research directions on the basis of this discussion. Finally, this chapter includes a brief review of my starting and ending points before considering the final reflections of the study.

1.6 Notes on key terms and concepts

Interculturality
Instead of using the adjective-turn-into-a-noun the intercultural, I use the term interculturality, adding the suffix -ality following Dervin’s (2016) suggestion which translates the term as a process of something in the making, a concept which I believe is the closest to the way intercultural experience are discussed in this thesis as a result in my change of positionality. However, since in essence, interculturality signifies the relationship between cultures, any discussion of interculturality requires a discussion of the different ways in which culture can be understood. Indeed, how one understands culture is central to how one perceives the inter part of interculturality, or the interrelationship holding between cultures, and has important implications for how we might describe an intercultural encounter and reflect on any distinctive processes and outcomes of such an encounter. This will be discussed in more depth in Chapter 7 of the thesis.

Positionality
Positionality refers to my stance in relation to the study which has changed during the inquiry process, from holding on to the established view of interculturality which is fixed and solid to a more open, fluid vision, in which people negotiate intercultural meaning wherever they are. As mentioned before, the changes in
my own positionality is a major driving force in the thesis and as a result, changes the direction of the study.

**Radical changes**

In this study, ‘radical changes’ refers to changes the participants had gone through after coming to the UK which I considered drastic compared to the way they were before when I first met them in Malaysia (before coming to the UK). The term ‘radical’ is used because it seems best to express the sense of extreme change which each of the research participant both talk about and display in their appearance and behaviour.
Chapter 2: The autoethnographic element of the thesis

This chapter establishes my role and position in the research whilst also clearly showing the development of the thesis from its original focus and paradigm to the revised focus and paradigm thus providing the rationale for including the autoethnographic element in this thesis.

During the early stage of data analysis of the study, it became clear that in order for me to make sense of how the participants choose to present themselves, I first had to recognise the impact of my initial positioning, an outline of which will be provided in this chapter was having on the study. To help me interpret, and in some cases reinterpret the data collected, I therefore used an autoethnographic approach in the study and through this, I was able to see interculturality in a better light, thus, bringing more insight into the complexity of the participants' personal journey.

Although this chapter could have been placed within the research methodology chapter, I am placing it here as a chapter on its own in order to highlight its importance within the study and to allow readers to see the rationale for the literature reviewed in chapter 3 (literature review from the perspective of my first positioning) and 7 (reflections on the literature from the perspective of the discussion of data).

2.1 Developing the focus of the study

This section outlines how the focus of the study began to develop due to two critical incidents during the first interview with the participants after the study had begun. It begins with an overview of the evolution of my thinking in terms of positioning myself in the field. I first provide an overview of my background, which seeks to explain where my starting position derives from and what may have contributed to my preconception of interculturality as solid and fixed communication between two cultures before moving to my current position in relation to reflexivity and my place within the research setting which leads me to appreciate interculturality as fluid and ongoing.

2.1.1 My starting position

The study began with an objective to discover Malaysian students' views, beliefs and values with respect to their intercultural experience of living in the UK. This was from my own perspective of being from Malaysia and having been an international student in the UK since the beginning of my undergraduate study in
2009, as a B. Ed TESL (Teaching English as Second Language) student, and then completing my MA TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) programme in 2014. However, what is important to note is that during this time, I did not myself experience radical change, neither did I know students who were going through it, as they seemed secure in their Malaysian cultural identity. Because of this, I was happy with the view that people’s behaviours and values were reducible to solid and fixed cultural traits or scripts, and that radical changes were results of culture shock. In fact, this notion of extreme culture shock has been reported in many Malaysian press. Below is an example of a report by a news website affirming that a Malaysian international student’s transformation is proclaimed as being the outcome of culture shock:

Nur Amalina Che Bakri is a brilliant student who shocked the country by being the best Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM)\(^1\) 2004 student once.

This girl shocked the Malaysian community with something extraordinary at the time when she was able to score academic excellence by earning 17A\(^1\)\(^2\) in her SPM.

However, controversy arose on Facebook, Twitter and many more social media regarding the drastic change of the smart girl, where Amalina was described as experiencing ‘culture shock’. She emerged with a new image of herself allegedly resembling the Hollywood's controversial celebrity, Kim Kardashian.

Her new appearance is seen to be revealing her aurah\(^3\) and considered sexy because it does not fit in with the origin of her identity as a Muslim and a Malaysian. According to the MyNewsHub report, Amalina has allegedly removed her scarf with a very significant change.

(Sidnor, 2017)

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\(^1\)A national examination taken by all fifth-year secondary school students in Malaysia, formerly known as the Malaysian Certificate of Education and is equivalent to GCE O-level.

\(^2\) Amalina scored A1 (the highest grade) for all 17 subjects she took for her Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia examination.

\(^3\) A term used within Islam which denotes the parts of the body, for both men and women, which must be covered with clothing and are not meant to be exposed in public.
The extract reveals how a Malaysian international student’s radical changes are seen as being the result of culture shock is probably one of the examples of ‘culture shock’ story notable to many Malaysians. Based on my experience too, this perception that associates culture shock with Malaysian international students’ transformations when they study overseas is not alien within Malaysian community, which only strengthen my initial belief that people’s behaviours and values were reducible to solid and fixed cultural traits or scripts.

Based on my personal enthusiasm and experience, I formulated my initial research questions:

i. How do Malaysian students studying in the UK cope in situations in which people of different cultural backgrounds and linguistic are involved?

ii. What ideas and feelings do Malaysian students associate with such encounters?

iii. What do Malaysian students believe are successes and failures in intercultural communication and what do they think helps and hinders their success in such situations?

iv. What are the factors influencing Malaysian students’ performances in such situations, how do the factors influence the students’ intercultural communicative and what resources do students bring with them which help them to engage with the foreign?

These questions allowed me to set out on a study, gradually developing interview questions for my research participants in order to encourage them to talk about their intercultural experience of being in the UK.

2.2 Changing direction

As a new PhD candidate, I enthusiastically began the study by soliciting and interviewing research participants instead of proceeding with the writing of my literature review chapter. The main reason for this was to allow themes to emerge from my data and to see where my data would take me. Nevertheless, I already had some background knowledge on the intercultural when I began the study which mainly came from the common, more established standpoint. Intercultural from this perspective merely refers to the relationship between cultures in which,
culture in this sense is understood as to be tied to geographical and/or national location.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, for this study, participants were drawn from the part of population that was close to hand during the beginning of my research, which were the people from a Facebook group that had been set up by and consists of Malaysian students studying in the UK of which I am also a member. This was exceptionally convenient for me since the Facebook group had been readily available and set up particularly for the purpose of sharing any information related to Malaysian students’ preparation before going to the UK, Malaysian Embassy in the UK as well as their experiences while studying in the UK. In addition to that, some of the members from this particular group were people whom I had met at a scholarship competition in Malaysia and therefore had the pleasure of knowing them, although, rather briefly. From this sample, 15 students agreed to be part of the research. It may be necessary for me to highlight that these volunteers were Malaysian university students aged between 20-21 years old and had recently began to study in the UK. These students were students who had just finished their foundation studies in Malaysia and came to the UK for the first time. They had never studied outside of Malaysia before and were doing different courses of study in various universities in the UK. The reason for choosing these students as my participants was because; I believed that they were appropriate for my research since they were still in the transition period (transition from studying and living in Malaysia to the United Kingdom) and were probably still settling down from being in this new environment. I thought choosing them as my research participants may be fruitful for the research outcomes.

Upon conducting interviews with the research participants, I began to discover something else, which I thought, was more interesting. Instead of getting answers to my initial research questions, I noticed how most of my participants had ‘radically’ changed in their appearance and behaviour since the first time I met them at the scholarship competition in Malaysia. The changes were also evident in the participants’ Facebook posts (pictures and Facebook statuses). Nevertheless, the ‘radical’ changes in appearance on some of my participants was what that first triggered the change of direction in this study in the sense that I thought the research questions could be changed due to my interest in the participants’ changes. I thought these changes were intriguing that I wanted to know more about them. Although, I had to admit that, regardless of my desire to
know more about these changes, I was somehow sure that these changes were results of culture shock due to my early positioning and belief as well as the literature and narratives concerning international students’ change that I was already familiar with (which came from common, established viewpoint). What I felt when meeting one of my participants for the first time are highlighted in the following field notes:

First meeting with Fatimah: prior to meeting Fatimah, my first participant, I was prepared to ask her questions that were related to her experience of being in the UK and how she copes with the strange setting. On the day of the interview, I met Fatimah. She looked so different. I thought she had completely changed - from appearing like a ‘good’ Muslim woman with hijab and looser fitting clothing to a non-wearing hijab woman with very revealing clothes. Could she be experiencing culture shock? Just like a friend of mine who came to study in the UK and started to try different styles in fashion - from wearing ‘decent’, looser fitting to body hugging type of clothing and I remembered many of my other friends and I thought that it was due to her being culturally shocked. I thought these incidents were similar to what I was seeing. [taken from field notes]

As I had then become interested in the participant’s change, I tried to carefully ask the participant to talk about her change during the interview and decided to change my interview approach. Instead of using my prepared interview questions, I chose to ask standard opening question to the participants, then let the interview questions developed from the immediate context and asked the research participants questions in the natural course of things, thus increasing the significance of the questions asked. I became more interested in these ‘radical’ changes afterwards as a number of my other participants too were talking and displaying these changes in their appearance and behaviour. In addition to that, the research participants started to disclose stories with regards to their ‘experience’, which I had never expected from the interviews. For example, during the interviews, when asked about the participants’ intercultural experience in the UK almost all of them talked about their changes and responded varyingly with regards to these changes, giving me the understanding that all of them had different perceptions of the term ‘intercultural’. Thus, making
me rethink the concept of ‘intercultural’ that I had in mind, which I acknowledge was rather naive. What I felt during as well as when looking back at the interviews are described below:

What I felt about the interviews: What were they talking about? Why would they talk about things like clothings, family backgrounds, upbringings? Why weren’t they talked about their ‘culture’ and the ‘British culture’? what was going on here? Weren’t they going through all of these changes to fit in? What am I going to do with what they were telling me? Do I have to start over? [Taken from field notes]

Fundamentally, the inquiry process had helped me realize how over-simplistic and perhaps damaging my early positioning was in the sense that it had made me a stereotypical person and possibly a racist. The result of the interviews too had given me the opportunity to acquire better understanding of the intercultural since I had previously understood the intercultural as to be merely about interaction between ‘us’ and ‘them’ and does not go beyond race, ethnicity, and nationality. This incident gradually made me feel the growing awareness of my lack of awareness and understanding of the intercultural, its process and people including my own self. My understanding of the intercultural now embraces a non-essentialist understanding of culture and with this new understanding, I was able to move forward with this study and understand the participants’ personal journeys since my earlier understanding was limiting the way I was interpreting the data I gained.

As a result of the abovementioned interview approach, the data collected comprised individual interviews as well as observations via Facebook and other opportunistic conversations and field notes recorded in the researcher’s log. The inquiry process during this study too allows me to discover new questions that emerged from my data analysis. ‘Although initial questions often emerge from a researcher’s passions and interests in particular topics, ultimately, the goal is to refine and possibly expand the inquiry through reflexive, iterative, and dialogic processes that are central to the theoretical and ethical positions taken up by the researcher’ (Agee, 2009, p. 446). Ideally, the inquiry process too allowed me an opportunity for an on-going reflexivity of my own theory regarding interculturality and also my view of the world around me. For instance, while analysing the data,
I realised that besides the participants’ responses to the interviews, what I had to say about my participants and my own self-reflection were also significant to this study. Furthermore, my analysis from my field notes would often question the assumptions underlying my own recording of data after they had been written for some time, such as what I had meant by ‘my participant looks stunning’ or ‘my participant looks stylish’, consequently making me aware of the necessity to display my role in the research process more clearly. As a result of these incidents and having become more aware of the evolution of my thinking, I began to further question and consider my position and direction of research. For this reason, I began to explore the idea of including a small element of autoethnography in the study which will be explained further in section 2.3.3.

2.3 Positioning myself in the field
This section summaries the development of my thinking in terms of positioning myself in the field. It first outlines my positioning in terms of insider-outsider perspectives, and then discusses how over the course of the study I firstly became more reflexive and later felt it necessary to include an autoethnographic dimension in the study, which, in turn, lead to the final research questions given at the end of the section.

2.3.1. Insider and outsider perspectives
There has been much discussion about the insider’s (emic) perspective versus the outsider’s (etic) perspective on events within the ethnographic tradition, while both are possibly important, though researchers have argued that the emic view hold a privileged research position (Hayfield & Huxleyb, 2015). In favour of the insider position, Heigham and Sakui (2009, pp. 97-98), suggest that, ‘by slowly adopting an emic position, overtime you learn to understand certain cultural practices and routines, participate in them, and learn some of the jargon… of the target culture’, though at the same time they do caution that, ‘you must also maintain an objective distance, an etic position, as a researcher’.

However, researchers like Styles (1979) seeks to demystify the outsider and insider myths, which believes that only outsiders can have the essential objectivity and that only insiders can understand a group’s true character. There are also researchers like Patton (2002, p.268) who believes in the middle approach, suggesting ethnographers, ‘methodologically, the challenge is to do
justice to both perspectives during and after fieldwork and to be clear with one’s self and one’s audience how this tension is managed’.

In this study, I attempted to follow Maykut and Morehouse’s (1994) suggestion which they propose that the researcher should aim to be both an insider and outsider all at the same time, maintaining a marginal position, being sufficiently close to access participant perspectives but at the same time avoiding the dangers of over-rapport.

2.3.2 Emerging reflexivity

The concept of reflexivity acknowledges that ‘social researchers are part of the social world they study’ (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p. 14) and it agrees that researchers ‘bring their own biographies to the research situation and participants behave in particular way in their presence’ (Cohen et al, 2011, p. 225). The above-mentioned concept was relevant in this study because as the study developed, I began to see how I, as a whole-person-researcher (a researcher who recognises the significance of the knowledge, feelings, and values that they brought into the field to the research questions that they came to formulate, to the analytical lenses that they chose to employ, and to their findings) was affecting the research and how the latter was affecting the evolution of my thinking, demonstrating my emerging reflexivity. Therefore, I see reflexivity as an important aspect that plays an important part in informing and shaping this particular research.

According to Starfield (2010, p. 54), reflexivity ‘refers to the researcher’s or writer’s ability to reflect on their own positioning and subjectivity in the research and provide an explicit, situated account of their own role in the project and its influence over the findings’. This was particularly salient in the context of this study because, as the study developed, I came to realise that I was becoming more aware of how much of my own biography that I had brought to the setting, and of the subjectivity that this had brought to the research process. I came to understand that my initial rationalist positionality which believed in one true social reality was in fact problematic in that it made me ignore my influence, preconceptions, and interpretations as a researcher (Erickson, 2011) as well as hindering myself from understanding the data and that I would need to question

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4 Rationalists believe that knowledge of a certain subject is innate in the sense that it is decided by nature rather than by e.g. a certain course of experience (Longworth, 2009).
and reassess my understanding of the nature of interculturality. Consequently, I was able to view interculturality in a better light and was able to take on a critical and reflexive stance towards it. My new understanding of this notion is discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.

With the new understanding of interculturality in mind, I began to recognise that many of the points I had noted at the beginning of the study did not reflect the way my thinking had developed since taking those notes. Because of this, the emphasis of the study has thus changed over the course of data collection and data analysis process. From the focus being on the students’ intercultural experience to the focus being on the sense I was making of how they choose to present themselves, the nature of interculturality and how this was itself changing over time, bringing more insight into the complexity of the students’ personal journey. For this reason, I began to explore the idea of including a small element of autoethnography in the study, which will be discussed in the following section as well as in Chapter 4.

Fundamentally, this emerging reflexivity became a resource that helped me to recognise that I was a part of the world constructed through this research and therefore results in a further confirmation that the knowledge claim that I make in Chapter 1 are results of my own experiences and opinions, not results of ‘objective scientific’ analysis external to myself (Anderson, 2002, pp. 15-16). As mentioned at the beginning of this particular section, it was this emerging and expanding reflexivity that influenced the postmodern paradigm of this study that is discussed in Chapter 4.

2.3.3 Introducing a small element of autoethnography

After my analysis of the data had begun, I realised that being merely aware of the need for reflexivity could not entirely reflect the development and significant changes in my own perspectives on the study over time. For instance, looking back at the early data, I comprehended that many of the ideas I had noted at that time did not reflect the way my thinking had developed since writing those notes. For this reason, I began to explore the idea of including a small element of autoethnography in the study. As Wall (2006, p. 3) notes:

The research community is relatively comfortable with the concept of reflexivity, in which the researcher pauses for a moment to think about how his or her presence, standpoint, or characteristics might have influenced
the outcome of the research process. However, new ‘methods’ such as autoethnoethnography, founded on postmodern ideas, challenge the value of token reflection that is often included as a paragraph in an otherwise neutral and objectively presented manuscript.

Hoping to go beyond simply being aware of the need for reflexivity in this study, the above assertion made me believe that presenting a small element of autoethnography into the study would allow me to do so by providing a more genuine and holistic representation of the study. Although Wall and many other writers who are in favour of autoethnography enthused me to choose this approach, I would not wish to describe this study as ‘an autoethnography’, rather as an ethnographic study with a small element of autoethnography, in order to avoid any impression that this study was exclusively about changes in my perspectives over time.

It should be noted that the balance between the actual research on a small group of Malaysian students’ intercultural experience in the UK and the autoethnographic nature of the thesis is difficult to describe precisely as the two features are interwoven throughout most of this thesis.

2.4 Final research questions
As discussed above, due to my emerging reflexivity which has caused my change in positionality towards looking at interculturality as a more fluid process, the focus of the study has thus changed over the course of data collection and analysis process. As a result of this, my research questions evolved (see section 1.2).
Chapter 3: Literature review from the perspective of my first positioning

3.1 Introduction
This chapter presents literature review relevance to this study from the perspective of my first position which is the rationalist or essentialist paradigm. As such, this chapter offers a literature review of how the international students’ intercultural experience has been theoretically and ‘commonly’ approached. The literature review proceeds as follows: first, the concepts of culture and culture shock will be presented, this will then be followed by an introduction to models of adjustment.

3.2 Defining culture from my first positioning
There are more than a hundred definitions of the concept of culture that can be found in the social science literature, with differing definitions adopted by different academic disciplines (Williams, 1981; Gudykunst, 1998; Smith, 2000; Jandt, 2001). The word culture derives from the Latin colere which refers to the ploughing of the soil (Hofstede, 1991); the term was first used as a noun of process (Williams, 1983), referring to the cultivation of crops, to people living in and using nature to live (Cope and Kalantzis, 1997). In the late eighteenth century, it appeared to refer to the spirit of people (Williams, 1981), and to intellectual refinement, or to cultivation of the mind (Cope and Kalantzis, 1997). Nevertheless, in most western languages, culture is defined as civilisation or refinement (Hofstede, 1991). A pluralist interpretation was developed in anthropology in the nineteenth century to designate a distinctive way of life, with the emphasis on lived experience, on human interaction and practices (Williams, 1981,1983; Cope and Kalantzis, 1997). This new understanding of culture was a product of the anthropological study of exotic societies (Cope and Kalantzis, 1997), which has influenced the emphasis in the modern concept of culture on the collectivity, as reflected in Hofstede’s (1991, 2001) comprehensive body of work. Hofstede (2001) states that culture is a phenomenon collectively generated by people who share the same social environment and are mentally programmed in a way that distinguishes them from other social groups. Most often used to categorise a nation, the term culture can be applied to any collective or community whose membership is self-defined and changeable (Huntingdon
This is of particular relevance to heterogeneous modern society, in which subcultures represent divergent though often overlapping life worlds where people hold beliefs and values that are often determined by their particular location within a culture (Giddens, 1991; Barker, 2000). Cope and Kalantzis (1997) argue that such communities share some but not all of the values, norms and rules of the larger culture; fragmentation does not imply the loss of cohesiveness. The durability of this argument will be challenged by the sub-cultural norms observed in this study.

Williams' (1981) distinction between the external manifestation of culture and culture as a way of life is helpful. Firstly, culture is manifested in social activities and in mass communication processes such as language, the arts, education, philosophy, journalism, fashion, and advertising; it refers to all institutionalised public forms of social communication that disseminate and perpetuate the cultural reality of a society (see also Bruner et al., 1956; Kim, 1988), and is manifested in physical surroundings, institutions, rituals, symbols and heroes (see also D'Andrade, 1981; Hofstede, 2001). According to Herskovits (1972) and Triandis (1972), it includes everything that is observable to those who arrive in a new culture and attempt to participate in the host environment.

Williams' second definition of culture refers to a country's social order, its way of life, which is informed by its systems of values. These are defined by Hofstede (1991) as lasting beliefs that are programmed early in life. Values, which vary widely from one society to another (Vontress, 1976; Davidson 1979; Forgas and Bond, 1985; Hofstede, 2001), influence every aspect of personal and social life, including food, religion, upbringing, rules of intimacy, expression of emotion and discipline (Hall, 1959; Kim, 1988; Gudykunst, 1998), and therefore carry an important, though often unrecognised, impact on personality (Wittkower and Dubreuil 1968; Hall 1976; Hofstede 1991). As noted by Price-Williams (1968) and Draguns (1979), group character is also influenced by individuals over time and that this intermixture of universality and uniqueness is not easily unravelled (Kluckhohn and Murray, 1949; Sundberg, 1976).

Culture is generally accepted to be transmitted from generation to generation through the process of socialisation (e. g. Wittkower and Dubreuil, 1968; Kim 1988; Hofstede, 2001). This involves conditioning and programming in the basic social processes of communication and providing children with an understanding of the world and culturally patterned ways of responding to it.
Most knowledge and rules of social behaviour is learned as a child through the observation of adults (D'Andrade, 1981; Rex, 1991; Cope and Kalantzis, 1997; Hofstede, 1991,2001), whose transmission of attitudes towards life and modes of perception are absorbed by the child and form the driving force behind their conceptions of right and wrong (Gudykunst, 1998; Hofstede, 2001). By learning the rules of a particular society's culture (Bock 1970; Hofstede 1991) and by incorporating a specific culture's rules of behaviour into the self, the child acquires a cultural identity that is so well programmed that by the time they reach adulthood, it becomes part of their personality (Kim, 1988). Adler (1975) and Hofstede (2001) state that the extent of cultural programming is unappreciated however, people experience the world through culturally influenced values, attitudes and assumptions but remain largely unconscious of this cultural imprinting that governs their personality and behaviour (Durant, 1997). They often only become aware of the influence of culture on communication when they interact with members of other cultures, when there is eccentricity from the familiar (Kim 1988; Gudykunst 1998). The cultural component of behaviour is revealed upon confrontation with diversity (Hofstede, 2001). Unaware of the impact of culture on their outlook and lifestyle, people largely act out of habit (Hall, 1969; Kim, 1988; Storti, 1990; Gudykunst, 1998). According to Hall (1980), the first step towards changing culturally ingrained behaviour is by developing self-awareness. However, patterns of behaviour that have been instilled over a lifetime are not easily changed, hence Hall's reference to cultural deprogramming as `the greatest separation feat of all' (p. 240).

3.3 Culture shock

Historically, investigations on international students' intercultural experience began in the early 20th century in response to the constant influx of immigrants to popular destination countries such as the US, Canada, Australia, and the UK. In the field of international educational exchange, majority of the studies on international students' experience are frequently supported by an understanding of international student experience as an adjustment process and is often related to one of the most powerful and practical concepts that is 'culture shock' which Oberg (1960, p. 24) described as:
anxiety that results from losing all our familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse. These signs or cues include the thousand and one ways in which we orient ourselves to the situations of daily life.

Like a fish out of water, Oberg portrayed individuals adapting in unfamiliar environments and thus coined the term ‘culture shock’ to explain what happens when the ‘foreigners’ meet the ‘natives.

Culture shock is commonly defined as anxiety that results from losing the familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse, and their substitution by other cues that are strange (Hall, 1959; Oberg, 1960; Adler, 1975; Detweiler, 1980). Familiarity is associated with comfort and reassurance whereas unfamiliar stimuli prompt feelings of anxiety, disturbance and meaninglessness (Detweiler, 1980; Guthrie, 1981). In many literature on transition, there is a commonly accepted idea that most sojourners will experience some degree of culture shock following their immersion in a new culture. This is because, move to a new environment is often cited as a traumatic life event as sojourners are usually forced to cope with extensive cultural change (Zajonc, 1952; Gudykunst, 1998; Berry, 1994; Kim, 2001; Hofstede, 2001). The clash between the clear home world (Bock, 1970) and the apparently chaotic and confusing new culture (Detweiler, 1980) provokes severe strain which taxes the sojourner's resources (Guthrie, 1981; Gudykunst, 1983; Torbiorn, 1994; Ward et al. 2001). Culture shock is likened by many writers to a period of mourning for the home world, characterized by feelings of grief and separation anxiety (Bock, 1970; Adler, 1975; Garza-Guerro, 1974; Detweiler, 1980; Furnham and Bochner, 1986; Storti, 1990; Furnham 1997).

In the literature on international students, culture shock is noted by many authors as one of the obstacles to adapting to the culture of the host society (e. g. Klineberg and Hull, 1979; Furnham and Alibhai, 1985; Lewins, 1990; Skelton and Richards, 1991; Blue 1993; Persaud, 1993; Sharples, 1995; Okorocha,1996; Ballard and Clanchy, 1997; Ward et al., 2001). However, not all migrants suffer culture shock, and individuals differ in the type and degree of shock experienced (di Marco, 1974; Thomas and Harrell, 1994; Kim, 2001).

3.4 The U-curve hypothesis

Proposed by Lysgaard (1955), the U-curve hypothesis is one of the most popular and frequently cited theories of sojourner change. This recuperation model
describes four stages of adjustment: an initial ‘honeymoon’ phase of excitement and euphoria which is followed by a phase of disenchantment or ‘culture shock’, a stage of recovery and, eventually, full adaptation. This simplified pattern of adjustment forms a U-curved pattern can be visualised by the picture below:

Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1962) expanded the U-curve model to comprise the re-entry experience of sojourners when they return to their countries of origin, proposing the ‘W’ in which they conceptualised the model as having two connected U-periods (or a ‘W’ shape). In their W-curve model they suggest that sojourners undergo a similar adjustment process or reverse culture shock, again in the shape of a U.

Despite its popularity in the sojourner adjustment literature and cross-cultural training programmes (Martin & Harrell, 1996), little empirical evidence has been found that supports the U-curve hypothesis (S. Bochner & Furnham, 1986; Church, 1982). In fact, recent findings do not support the notion of early ‘honeymoon’ euphoria. Rather, they depict the initial sojourn stage as a time of anxiety and nervousness. For example, studies on international students (e.g. Ward and Kennedy, 1996a, 1996b; Brown, 2008a, 2008b; Brown and Holloway, 2008) have found that the most severe adjustment difficulties tend to occur in the early stage of the sojourn when coping resources are likely to be at the lowest while the number of life changes is high (Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001). In addition, the general trend observed in longitudinal, monitoring studies of student sojourner transition is that psychological adjustment for example remains variable over time (Ward & Kennedy, 1996), suggesting that external stressors, perhaps of an academic nature, might ‘upset’ student sojourners’ psychological adjustment from time to time. Hence, the sojourner adjustment process might in reality be less predictable than suggested in the U-curve model.
Apart from weak empirical support, two further problems with early models of sojourner adjustment and the idea of ‘culture shock’ remain. Firstly, they were strongly influenced by medicine and psychiatry, viewing culture shock in the same way as a medical problem and focusing on its pathological symptoms (Arends-Tóth & van de Vijver, 2006; Ward et al., 2001). This perspective originated in research on migration and health, when indications that migrants were overrepresented in hospital admissions led to the assumption that migration and mental illnesses were inextricably linked (Ward et al., 2001). Secondly, as several scholars have pointed out (e.g. Bochner, 1986; Pitts, 2005), the U-curve and W-curve models conceptualise sojourner adjustment and culture shock as an inherently negative experience, or as a ‘crisis to be weathered before successful adaptation can occur’ (Pitts, 2010, p. 193). This problem-based view of cross-cultural transition tends to neglect the positive aspects of intercultural encounters and its growth-facilitating nature (Kim, 2001). Along the same lines, Adler (1987, p. 29) highlights that culture shock is not ‘a disease for which adaptation is the cure, but it is at the very heart of the cross-cultural learning experience, self-understanding, and change’.

3.5 From culture shock to ABC
In the 1980s, the widespread rejection of the traditional view of ‘culture shock’ paved the way for the development of new theoretical frameworks that went beyond mental health concerns (Ward et al., 2001). Rather than counseling and therapy for the ‘culturally shocked’ sojourner, preparation, orientation, and the acquisition of culturally relevant knowledge and social skills began to dominate the discourse on cross-cultural transition (e.g. Bochner, 1982, 1986; Furnham and Bochner, 1982). Sojourner adjustment has since been extensively studied from a social psychological perspective, investigating its affective (A), behavioural (B), and cognitive (C) elements. An illustration of these three approaches can be found in Ward et al.’s (2001) ABC Model of Culture Shock.

Major influences have been drawn from scholarly work in stress and coping (e.g. Lazarus and Folkman, 1984), social learning theory (e.g. Argyle, 1980), and social cognition and inter-group perceptions (e.g. Kosmitzki, 1996; Kunda, 1999). As a result, three theoretical approaches to the study of cross-cultural change, which portray sojourners as more actively responding individuals rather than victims of culture shock have become more firmly established in recent years:
Stress and coping approaches, representing the affective component of cross-cultural transition

Culture-learning and social skills perspectives, reflecting the behavioural element

Social identification theories, reflecting cognitive processes

Stress and coping frameworks (e.g. Berry, 1997) highlight the significance of life changes for the sojourner during cross-cultural transition and subsequent ‘acculturative stress’ (Berry, 1970). It is suggested that cognitive appraisal of the situation and coping strategies are required to deal with this acculturative stress (Ward et al., 2001). Advocates of stress and coping models hold that if adequate coping strategies are employed on the part of the sojourner, the acculturative stress experienced may be low; whereas if the coping strategies or resources are not sufficient, the acculturative stress experienced may be high and can result, in severe cases, in depression and anxiety (Khawaja & Stallman, 2011). Both, characteristics of the individual and situational variables, have previously been identified as influential (Ward et al., 2001), including personality (e.g. Ward and Kennedy, 1992; Ward and Chang, 1997), social support (e.g. Adelman, 1988; Hayes and Lin, 1994), coping styles (e.g. Zheng and Berry, 1991; Ward and Kennedy, 2001), cultural distance (Berry, 1997), and degree and quality of social relationships (Furnham & Alibhai, 1985; Young, Sercombe, Sachdev, Naeb, & A., 2013).

The concept of ‘acculturative stress’ was first proposed by Berry (1970) and is similar to the notion of ‘culture shock’ (Oberg, 1960). However, for this research, acculturative stress is preferred to culture shock for two reasons. First, as Berry (2006) points out, the term ‘shock’ is in its essence a negative one and implies that only difficulties will occur as a result of cross-cultural transition. Secondly, the term ‘culture’ may suggest that a single culture is the source of difficulty. By using the term ‘acculturative’ instead, Berry (ibid.) suggests that stressful experiences might occur as a result of interactions between cultures, rather than due to exposure to one particular culture.

In contrast to stress and coping approaches, which emphasise the affective components of sojourner adjustment, culture learning and social skills perspectives focus on behavioural elements. Culture learning theory has been
heavily influenced by Argyle’s (1980) work on social skills and interpersonal behaviours and implies that upon arrival in the host country sojourners experience difficulties in managing everyday social encounters. Thus, culture-learning perspectives emphasise the importance of learning the salient characteristics of the new environment (Furnham & Bochner, 1982, 1986), and conceptualise cross-cultural transition as a growth-facilitating experience, where initial adjustment difficulties are followed by steady improvement, resembling an ascending learning curve, as the sojourner acquires the ‘culture-specific skills’ required to function effectively in the new environment (Ward et al., 2001). This includes the acquisition of culturally relevant verbal and non-verbal communication skills (Gardner, 1952; Ruben & Kealey, 1979), as well as the learning of social behaviours (Triandis, 1977, 1980). Variables which have been identified as crucial for sojourner adjustment in this approach include general knowledge about the host culture, length of residence in the host society, language and communication competence, quantity and quality of contact with host nationals and social ties in general, cultural distance, and cross-cultural training (see Ward et al., 2001 for a review). Since the 1970s, Stephen Bochner and Adrian Furnham have been the main advocates of the culture-learning approach (see e.g. Bochner, 1986; Furnham and Bochner, 1982, 1986).

The third major conceptual approach to the study of cross-cultural transition, social identification theories complements stress and coping, and culture-learning perspectives (Ward et al., 2001). Drawing on works on social cognition (e.g. Kunda, 1999) and social identity theory (Tajfel, 1978), social identification theories are concerned with the way in which people view themselves and how they perceive in-group and out-group members (Ward et al., 2001). This approach therefore investigates the cognitive element of sojourner adjustment such as pre-sojourn expectations (e.g. Pitts, 2009), stereotypes and intergroup attitudes (e.g. Gudykunst, 1983), cultural identity (e.g. Kim, 2001), or value changes as a result of cross-cultural transition (e.g. Arends-Toth and van de Vijver, 2006).

Table 1 below provides an overview of the three contemporary approaches to the study of sojourner transition:
Table 1: Overview of the three contemporary approaches to the study of sojourner transition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theory</th>
<th>Theoretical Origin</th>
<th>Conceptual Premise</th>
<th>Factors Affecting Adjustment</th>
<th>Possible Intervention</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stress and coping (affect)</td>
<td>Social psychology – stress, appraisal and coping (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984)</td>
<td>Cross-cultural sojourners need to develop coping strategies to deal with acculturative stress</td>
<td>Personal (e.g. life change, personality) and situational (e.g. social support) factors</td>
<td>Training people to develop stress-management skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture learning (behaviour)</td>
<td>Social and experimental psychology – social skills and interpersonal behaviour (Argyle, 1969)</td>
<td>Cross-cultural sojourners need to learn culturally relevant knowledge and social skills to thrive in their new settings</td>
<td>Culture-specific variables such as knowledge about the host culture, language or communication competence, cultural distance</td>
<td>Preparation, orientation and culture learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social identification (cognition)</td>
<td>Ethnic, cross-cultural and social psychology – Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1978)</td>
<td>Cross-cultural transition may involve changes in cultural identity and inter-group relations</td>
<td>Cognitive variables such as knowledge of the host culture, mutual attitude between hosts and sojourners, cultural similarity, cultural identity</td>
<td>Enhancing self-esteem, emphasising inter-group similarities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 summarises the differences in theoretical origin, conceptual structure, factors that affect adjustment and implications for intervention of the three parts of the ABC framework. However, the complexity of the model is also seen as a problem, since it is difficult to separate the various components and do research on their effects. Another drawback of this framework is that the research of psychology in intercultural contact situations has not been related to research on different cultural travellers (Zhou, Jindal-Snape, Topping, & Todman, 2008). The table above provides a clear overview of the differences between the three components of the ABC theory, and makes it easier to distinguish them, even though they are all intertwined.

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5 Adapted from Zhou et al., 2008
3.6 The outcome of adjustment

The level of adjustment reached by the sojourner differs as a function of individual, cultural and environmental factors. Sojourners may adjust fully or minimally to the new culture, or they may reach different levels of adjustment in different aspects of life (Berry, 1994; Ward and Kennedy, 1999; Cushner, and Karim, 2004), choosing whether to fully embrace or to reject some or all of the new culture's norms and behaviour patterns (Gudykunst, 1983; Thomas and Harrell, 1994). The outcome of the international sojourn refers not only to adjustment, it also refers to the cultural and personal changes that take place in the sojourner as a result of an extended stay in a foreign country. This change is cast in the literature on transition and international education as at once negative and enriching (Hall, 1976; Gudykunst and Kim, 1984; Kim, 1988; Giddens, 1991; Hofstede, 2001), offering the development of cultural complexity (Hofman and Zak, 1969; Adler, 1975; Detweiler, 1980; Gudykunst, 1998), self-awareness (Kim, 1988; Giddens, 1991), increased pliability and resilience (Kim, 1988; Ting-Toomey, 1999), intercultural competence (Bochner, 1986; Taylor, 1994; Martin, 1994; Althen, 1994; Gudykunst 1998; Hofstede, 2001), independence (di Marco; Berry 1994; Martin and Harrell 2004), and increased employability (Westwood and Barker, 1999; Ryan, 2005a). These outcomes are a function of the adjustive strategy adopted by the sojourner (Thomas and Harrell, 1994), which is itself mediated by individual, cultural and external factors (Berry, 1994; Ward, 2001). Five possible strategies are distinguished in the literature on adjustment:

- The sojourner may remain monocultural, clinging to their own culture. This is the segregation approach, which implies an absence of substantial relations with the larger society, along with maintenance of ethnic identity, heritage and traditions; this may be imposed by the dominant group or may be sought by the acculturating group (Berry, 1994; Piontkowski et al., 2000). This is described by Bochner (1981) as exaggerated chauvinism. If segregation, also referred to as separation, is pursued, there is a reaffirmation of heritage behaviour, which may lead to conflict between the needs and expectations of mainstream society and the individual (Schmitz, 1994). Sojourners may also undergo a process of reaction, which refers to changes which retaliate against the environment, e.g.
Acculturating individuals may campaign for changes in schools and health care in the dominant society that better meet their culturally based needs.

- The sojourner may become monocultural, rejecting their own culture and replacing it with the new one. This is the assimilation approach, an option which involves relinquishing cultural identity and moving into the larger society by way of absorption of a non-dominant group into an established dominant group (Schmitz, 1994; Piontkowski, et al. 2000). If an assimilation strategy is pursued, substantial behavioural change occurs (Berry, 1994), as minorities, or less influential groups, are fully integrated into the dominant culture (Martin and Harrell, 2004). Bochner (1981) argues that this is incompatible with the desired outcome of adjustment, that of a multicultural society, indeed, according to Furnham (1993), it implies cultural chauvinism on the part of the host, which has made it necessary for the sojourner to abandon the culture of origin.

- The sojourner may become bicultural, retaining their own and learning a new culture. This is the integration approach, which implies the maintenance of some cultural identity as well as movement to become an integral part of a larger societal framework, with a number of distinguishable ethnic groups cooperating within a larger social system and sharing common goals (Berry, 1994; Piontkowski et al., 2000). Honeyford (1988) uses the term harmonious integration to refer to a situation whereby people maintain their original culture privately but assent to overriding principles common to all citizens. According to Storti (1990), the stress is on the sojourner to adjust in order to avoid alienating the locals, but in any case, individual change is often the only realistic option, as reaction may not be feasible in the absence of political power and withdrawal is not possible if the individual is not part of a larger sub-group (Berry, 1994). Ward and Rana-Deuba's study (1999) corroborates Berry's (1997) contention that integration is associated with the lowest levels of acculturative stress, given that change on the part of the incoming group reduces conflict and increases the confluence or fit between the environment and the individual.

- The sojourner may become marginalised, renouncing their own heritage and refusing a relationship with the dominant group. This involves feelings of alienation and loss of identity, as groups lose cultural psychological
contact with both their traditional culture and the larger society (Piontkowski et al., 2000), through forced exclusion or voluntary withdrawal (Berry, 1994). Though the dominant group usually dictates whether the outsider is allowed to form relationships with the host (Berry, 1994), some sojourners voluntarily withdraw from the dominant culture if the experience of adjustment is too difficult (Storti, 1990).

- The sojourner may become multicultural, retaining their own and learning several other cultures. Indeed, the acculturation strategy advocated by many writers (e.g. Bochner, 1981; Furnham and Bochner, 1986; Gudykunst, 1998; Ward et al., 2001) is multiculturalism: only the mediating response provides a real framework for acquiring multicultural attitudes, skills and self-perceptions, providing the basis for a pluralistic society (Kim, 2001; Gilroy, 2007) in which different groups retain their basic ethnic identity, practices, beliefs and language, while being united within an umbrella framework of national allegiance and having equal access to power and economic and political resources. According to Furnham (1993) and Martin and Harrell (2004), the multicultural approach avoids the ethnocentric trap of advocating the abandonment of the first culture.

(Adapted from Brown, 2008)

In the model of attitudes towards adjustment put forward by Berry and Kim (1988), two questions are posed, answers to which can be used as a predictive framework for determining sojourners’ strategies: is it considered to be of value to maintain one’s cultural identity and characteristics; is it considered to be of value to maintain relationships with other groups? This model has been further developed by Schmitz (1994) and Ward et al. (2001) and can be used to predict behavioural responses to many aspects of life in the new country, including interaction patterns. The strategies associated with the maximisation of the positive outcomes previously identified are multiculturalism, assimilation or integration (Berry, 1994; Ward and Rana-Deuba, 1999), but the multicultural approach is widely agreed to be the most relevant to contemporary society, given the implied fostering of the values of tolerance, cultural relativism and respect.
3.7 Summary

This chapter has provided reflections on the literature from the perspective of my first position. Having written this chapter, I realised that I had chosen to begin the study with a common, more established viewpoint, trying to understand the research participants’ experience, exploring intercultural and concepts related to it, again through common, more established viewpoint.

What I had not primarily realised was that this common, more established perspective of intercultural, also known as essentialism, was overly simplistic that it merely refers to the relationship between cultures. Culture in this sense is understood as to be tied to geographical and/or national location. However, it has become clear to me now that reading literature mainly coming from this established standpoint would have influenced my own perspective, a perspective that was already, subconsciously at the time, privileging essentialism due to my personal experience of being an international student in the UK.

However, it became clear to me that I was understanding these terms in different ways than the participants’, who in turn were seeing them in different ways than other participants. Realizing my own understanding of intercultural did not match the participants’ understandings, I began to view the early data collected in a different way by adding the autoethnographic element to the study and also felt the need to explore in more depth how the related concepts were discussed in the literature. Adding the autoethnographic element to the study not only allowed me to see the data in a different way, but to think about the literature, and the way I was looking at the literature differently. Consequently, the literature chapter had been extended in the sense that another literature chapter had been added and written from the perspective of the discussion data (see Chapter 6).
Chapter 4: The research process and methodology

4.1 Introduction
The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the development of the research methodology used during this study. This chapter begins with me defining the participants and setting for this particular research. It then continues by providing an overview of my background, explaining my starting and current position in the field. The next section locates the study within the qualitative research and postmodern ethnographic research paradigm and providing rationale for the approach taken. This continues with a section on a small element of autoethnography where I introduce the small element of autoethnography that is employed in this study and how I position myself in the autoethnographic field. The next section then provides a detailed description of the methods of data collection and data collected. Section 4.8 explains the data analysis process, focusing on how themes were developed. The rest of this chapter then discusses the process of writing up the study, my positioning as a researcher, the trustworthiness of the approach taken, ethical considerations, and some of the limitations of the study.

4.2 Defining the participants and research setting
This section describes the participants involved and the setting for the study.

4.2.1 The participants
The participants for this research were drawn from the part of population that was close to hand during the beginning of my research also known as opportunistic or ‘convenience sampling’ (Lavrakas, 2008, p. 148), which is “a type of nonprobability sampling in which people are sampled simply because they are ‘convenient’ sources of data for researcher”. In this kind of sampling, expert judgment is not used to select a representative sample of elements (Lavrakas, 2008). Rather, the principal selection criterion corresponds to the easiness of attaining a sample. Ease of obtaining the sample relates to the cost of locating elements of the population, the geographic distribution of the sample, and obtaining the interview data from the selected elements. In this research, the participants were people from a Facebook group that had been set up by and consists of Malaysian students studying in the UK of which I am also a member. This was exceptionally convenient for me since the Facebook group had been
readily available and set up particularly for the purpose of sharing any information related to Malaysian students’ preparation before going to the UK, Malaysian Embassy in the UK as well as their experiences while studying in the UK.

An introduction statement outlining the general purpose of the research had been written and posted on the Facebook group wall to invite participants to take part or volunteer for this research (refer to appendix 2). After the posting, 15 students finally agreed to be part of this research and participants’ consents were gathered via private Facebook messenger. Out of the 15 volunteered participants, eight appeared (to the researcher) to have changed ‘radically’ after being in the UK. What I mean by ‘radical changes’ in this study was what I considered ‘extreme’ transformations from the way the participants were before, and these were the participants that had formed the current research.

Since Malaysia is a multi-ethnic country, it might be important to note here that although all of these participants are Malaysians, not all of them are of the Malay ethnicity. Two of the research participants are from the other large minorities of Malaysian Chinese (one participant) and Malaysian Indian (one participant). While the country recognised Islam as the country’s established religion and Bahasa Melayu (Malay language) as the official or national language of Malaysia, one of the participants is not a Muslim and not all of the participants have Bahasa Melayu as their first language.

My approach in selecting informants for the current research was conforming to Hammersley and Atkinson’s (2007a, p. 107) view that:

‘Who is interviewed, when and how, will usually be decided as the research progresses, according to the ethnographer’s assessment of the current state of his or her knowledge, and according to judgements about how it might be best developed further’.

Fundamentally, all of the participants involved in the study were chosen purposively from an opportunistic sampling, where the researcher ‘hand picks the cases to be included in the sample on the basis of their … possession of particular characteristics being sought’ (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011, p. 156).
I chose to finally use purposive sampling\textsuperscript{6} in order to access people whom I felt best able to answer the research questions and provide insights into the study. I understand that this kind of sampling might result in the data being seen as having low level of reliability and bias. However, I believed proceeding with more purposeful targeting of informants would enable me to capture a wide range of perspectives relating to what the informants had to say when asked about their intercultural experience in the UK and their transformations that I was interested in studying. It is important to note that this is not a representative of all Malaysian students in the UK, but I am choosing an instance, which in this case, the participants’ changes rather than representing a wider community or scope of study. Even though it can be said that this particular study is merely scraping the surface, arguably, I believe that this one instance of social behaviour can become a piece of a huge jigsaw puzzle and take on meaning when it is looked at holistically. As Holliday (2016, p. 93) explains:

‘A very small qualitative study can be just one piece of a very large jigsaw puzzle, illuminating one instance of social behaviour, which when put alongside other instances from other studies, begin to build the larger picture’.

It was through this small qualitative study that I became aware of the fact that the changes that my participants went through are in fact fluid and ongoing and that the more established view of culture that is solid and fixed is rather inadequate. This small instance alone is evidently sufficient to bring about changes in my own positioning and perception of the nature of interculturality, which proves that ‘it only takes one instance of the unexpected to discredit generalisation’ (Holliday, 2016, p. 94).

\textsuperscript{6} A purposive sample, also referred to as a judgmental or expert sample, is a type of nonprobability sample. The main objective of a purposive sample is to produce a sample that can be logically assumed to be representative of the population. This is often accomplished by applying expert knowledge of the population to select in a non-random manner a sample of elements that represents a cross-section of the population (Lavrakas, 2008, p. 149).
4.2.2 The setting

In defining the research setting, I followed Holliday’s (2016, p. 34) way of establishing the research setting which aims to go deep into a definable setting in which:

‘phenomena can be placed meaningfully within a specific social environment. Such an environment can be groups of people, institutions, cases, geographical areas, communities, texts and so on… it is important that the scenario has clear boundaries.’

Therefore, my setting is a particular group of people who gave consent and is inhabiting different parts of the UK for the first time to further their studies and are all members of a Facebook group.

The process of defining the research setting was ongoing during the initial stages of my data collection. This means that, the question about the boundaries about the research setting develops as I steadily got to know my research participants and understand how to interact with them.

I determined my research setting as a result of considerable reflection regarding the participants’ relationship with Facebook. This Facebook account seemed to be suitable for my research, as it appeared comparatively closed in that it was set up by a group of Malaysian students who were also studying in the UK, which I was also a member. It was particularly fitting since the students had created this Facebook group for the purpose of sharing their experience while studying in Britain. This process fitted well with the initial steps of the classic ethnographic cycle which begins with the selection of a research project that involves finding the scope of the researchers’ investigation (Spradley, 1980).

Moreover, after a few months, I was able to observe not only what my participants were saying about their intercultural experiences, but also how they were showing images of themselves in uploaded photographs that showed changes in their appearances. I initially planned to contact my participants by commenting on their posts. This way, I would be researching as an integrated member of the community.

However, during this process it emerged that using Facebook account for this research was not as closed as it firstly seemed. It appeared to me that there were possibilities that other people who were not part of the studies might be able
to see my comments on my participants’ Facebook page. Therefore, I decided to make my bounded setting a particular group of students who gave me their consent for this research.

4.3 Qualitative research and postmodern ethnographic research paradigm

As mentioned in Chapter 2 before, the emerging and expanding reflexivity became a resource that helped me to recognise that I was a part of the world constructed through this research and also what influenced the postmodern paradigm of this study. With respect to the discussions in Chapter, I align this study with qualitative research methodology. It can be understood that, initially, my conceptualization of the research design could be described as wide, having broadly defined areas for investigation but at the same time being open to change, as opposed to having completely fixed research questions and a precise research procedure. However, as data was collected and my understanding of the setting grew, a more focused research design and more precise procedures emerged, including, for example, a greater focus on interview data and a more purposive approach to selecting key informants. Details on how these key informants selected has been given in section 2.2 earlier.

This study could therefore be characterised as ‘an investigative and descriptive focus’, ‘emergent and flexible’, ‘data collection in the actual setting’, ‘qualitative methods of data collection’, and ‘early and ongoing inductive data analysis’ resulting in a detailed, ‘rich description’ (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, pp. 43-47; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, pp. 14-19) that bore comparable characteristics often used to describe qualitative research.

While qualitative research is not always necessarily ethnographic, there is a strong link between the two. Hammersley and Atkinson (1995, p. 1) associate the growing popularity of ethnography in social research in part with ‘the disillusionment with the quantitative methods that for long held the dominant position in most of the social sciences, and in most areas of applied social research’. Blommaert and Dong (2010, p. 6) point out that ethnography has its origins in anthropology and thus ‘the basic architecture of ethnography is one that already contains ontologies, methodologies and epistemologies that need to be situated within the larger tradition of anthropology and do not necessarily fit the frameworks of other traditions. For this reason, it may be more accurate to
describe this study as one which makes use of an ethnographic approach rather than ethnography in the tradition of anthropology per se.

Ethnography was established by early anthropologists such as Cushing, Stevenson, Fletcher, Boas and Malinowski whose studies focused on specific groups of people usually living very distinct lives from the researcher undertaking the study. This suggests a direct link to the Greek origin of the prefix ‘ethnos’ meaning ‘folk people’, ‘tribes’ or ‘natives’. Anthropology has moved beyond those early colonial portraits of ‘the ambitious social scientist making off with tribal lore and giving nothing in return, imposing crude portraits on subtle peoples’ to a point where ethnography is now, at the very least, recognized as ‘enmeshed in a world of enduring and changing power inequalities’ where ‘its function within these relations is complex, often ambivalent, potentially counter-hegemonic’ (Clifford & Marcus, 1986, p. 9). Anthropology has had to engage with a postmodern world and postmodern ethnography. Tyler (1986, p. 131) explains, ‘a post-modern ethnography is fragmentary because it cannot be otherwise. Life in the field is itself fragmentary, not at all organized around familiar ethnological categories such as kinship, economy and religion…’. Yet, this notion of fragmentary lives also impacted my position as a researcher as my data seemed to open up endless interpretations.

4.4 Ethnography

Before going through and conducting the literature review, I decided to start the study by collecting data in order to allow theory or themes to emerge from my data. Having said that, I engaged with several methods of data collection without following a fixed research design which reflected the ethnographic work features that Hammersley and Atkinson (2007a, p. 16) highlight:

1. People’s actions and accounts are studied in everyday contexts, rather than under conditions created by researcher. In other words, research takes place ‘in the field’.
2. Data are gathered from range of sources namely interviews, Facebook posts and field notes, but participant observation (during interviews and based on Facebook posts) and/or relatively informal conversations are usually the main ones.
3. Data collection is, for the most part, relatively unstructured, in two senses. Firstly, it does not involve following through a fixed and detailed research design specified at the start. Secondly, the categories that are used for interpreting what people say or do are not built into the data collection process through the use of observation schedules or questionnaires. Instead, they are generated out of the process of data analysis.

4. The focus is usually on a few cases, generally fairly small-scales, perhaps a single setting or group of people. This is to facilitate in-depth study.

5. The analysis of data involves interpretation of the meanings, functions, and consequences of human actions and institutional practices, and how these are implicated in local, or perhaps also wider contexts. What are produced for the most part, are verbal descriptions, explanations and theories; quantification and statistical analysis play a subordinate role at most.

Reflecting on features highlighted above, the present research indeed was focused on a small group of Malaysian students, took place ‘in the field’, from which data collection were unstructured and gathered from interviews, Facebook posts and field notes, and involves interpretation of the meanings, functions, and consequences of human actions and institutional practices, and how these are implicated in local, or perhaps also wider contexts. Fundamentally, the study had all the five features of the ethnographic work mentioned above, which was very much in line with this approach.

However, while there are no rigid guidelines about what ethnographic work comprises, I did have some early concerns as I was struggling to see exactly how ethnographic this study was. Firstly, the matter of the conceptualization of ‘research in the field’ in ethnographic research seemed problematic for me as I was using virtual online medium, which was Facebook as a location for participant observation. This was problematic as I realized that some people inclined to believe that ‘the Internet is rather a questioned space for research and whether it is considered to be same or different from the offline world’ (S. Baker, 2013, p. 132). Hine (2000), for instance, proposed that the ‘virtual’ online world is prominently different from the offline world due to the physical versus experiential
nature of ethnographic research and the kinds of interaction that were possible in each domain. However, more recently researchers have contested that the real virtual dichotomy suggested by early Internet-based research such as Hine (2000) is no longer valid as the Internet has become an important part of our present-day social world (Beneito-Montagut, 2011; Garcia, Standlee, Bechkoff, & Cui, 2009; Murthy, 2008).

Secondly, I was aware of the issue of ‘prolonged engagement in the setting’ as frequently highlighted in literature concerning ethnographic work (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 131). Rather than spending an elongated period of time in the setting, my engagement was by regularly checking my Facebook profile in order to observe the participants’ being and doing before and when they were in the UK. Data from the observations provided instances of how the participants had transformed and chose to publish or not to publish their different ‘experiences’, which in turn provided vital background insight into the participants’ behaviours. In addition to that, observations of the participants’ offline lives were established as the ‘expanded field’ in the study and were carried out by spending time with them and interviewing them.

Thirdly, I was aware that the research was using interview data increasingly as time went on, rather than having a primary focus on participant observation as many ethnographic studies do and was conscious of the concerns of Atkinson and Coffey (2002) among others about over-reliance on interview data. However, considering the data as a whole, there are a range of sources, as detailed in later on in this particular chapter, which I believe have allowed a sufficiently ‘thick description’ (Geertz, 1973), which is a narrative of what has been found that shows the full complexity and depth of what is going on, to be created. My attempt to provide a thick description will be discussed in more detail in section 4.9.

4.5 A small element of autoethnography

As has been mentioned earlier in Chapter 2, after my analysis of the data had begun, I realised that many of the points I had noted at the beginning of the data collection did not reflect the way my thinking had developed since writing those notes. Since then, it became clear to me that simply being aware of the need for reflexivity could not fully reflect the significant changes in my own perspectives on the study over time. Consequently, I began to explore the idea of including a
small element of autoethnography in the study in order to allow me to provide a more genuine and holistic representation of the study.

4.5.1 Rationale for including an autoethnographic dimension

As I have mentioned previously, I did not initiate the study with an autoethnographic element in mind. Just as Muncey (2010, p. 2) describes:

‘I rarely come across people who set out to do autoethnography, but I do rather meet many people who resort to it as a means of getting across intangible and complex feelings and experiences that somehow can’t be told in conventional ways’

Instead of ‘resorting to’ autoethnography, I chose to include a small element of it in the thesis after gradually realising how my viewpoints have become an important part of the data throughout the process of data analysing.

During the course of the study, when looking at the data, I started to realise my on-going reflexivity of my own theory regarding interculturality and also my view of the world around me. For instance, during the inquiry process I discovered that my understanding of the concept interculturality had changed. From being a believer of the idea of interculturality to be merely about interaction between ‘us’ and ‘them’ and does not go beyond race, ethnicity, and nationality, my understanding of interculturality now embraces a non-essentialist understanding of culture and deems that interculturality can be understood to refer to all human interchanges, wherever they may take place. Additionally, I realised that besides the participants’ responses to the interviews, what I had to say about my participants and my own self-reflection were also significant to this study.

Furthermore, my analysis from my field notes would often question the assumptions underlying my own recording of data after they had been written for some time, such as what I had meant by ‘my participant looks stunning’ or ‘my participant looks stylish’. These statements that I made was problematic in the sense that they were subjective and appeared to have several subtle shades of meanings. For instance, by saying ‘my participant looks stunning’, I realised that I had probably given readers the understanding that I was approving the participant’s changes and illuminating my biases when it was not my intention to do so. This issue with subjectivity consequently making me became aware of the necessity to display my role in the research process more clearly. From being a
detached outsider/observer at the beginning of the study, I shifted to being a partial insider/participant along the way. Due to this changed role in the research process, I became aware that my experiences, both inside the immediate situation and beyond, were giving an impact to the study. For example, the data from this research was also analysed using my own prior experience as an undergraduate student as well as remembering the behaviour of other students and my views about them. As Muncey (2010, p.8) notes:

‘We are observers and participants of our own experiences: you cannot separate who you are from what you do ... subjectivity does not infect your work, it enhances it. Making links between your own experience and your work is healthy’.

As a result of the aforementioned circumstances, my thinking during the study was influenced by my previous experience.

Although I did not begin the study with an autoethnographic element in mind, as the research progressed, my intention became to continue with the study as an incorporation of both ethnographic and autoethnographic. The study hence became a ‘written account of a culture or group’ being the ethnographic part and ‘account of one’s life as an ethnographer’ reflecting the autoethnographic dimension of the study (Denzin, 2014, p. 15).

After all, autoethnographic fits with the postmodern orientation of the study. As Wall (2008, p. 42), drawing on Bochner and Walcott, notes:

‘Postmodernists believe that the methods and procedures that are employed in research are ultimately and inextricably tied to the values and subjectivities of the researcher. ... any efforts to achieve objectivity are foiled from the outset because ethnographers always come with ideas that guide what they choose to describe and how they choose to describe it’.

While I was primarily concerned about being excessively reflective and anxious about how others might view my research and to whom it would benefit, I tried to hold on to McCormack’s (2012, p. 183) view in relation to autoethnography, which was:
Far from being either self-indulgence or simplistic storytelling, this genre (autoethnography) works to enhance layered and nuanced reflexive capacities, increasing self-understanding and, by extension, offering resources for understanding of others.

Considering McCormack’s view, I subsequently gathered that in addition to answer the research questions, my reason to incorporate the small autoethnographic element to this study was to try to produce critical, accessible texts that can ‘change us and the world we live in for the better’ (Holman Jones, 2005, p. 764). I trust autoethnography provides an opportunity for me to do something meaningful for the world and myself included, in the sense that it enables both myself and the readers to enter the subjective world of the teller- to see the world from her or his point of view, to help myself and the readers to communicate with others different from ourselves, and to make us understand that these differences are not issues to be resolved but they are differences to be lived with, thus avoiding prejudice and bias.

4.6 Positioning myself in the autoethnographic field

My analysis of the field of autoethnography is explained in the following sections. I first try to understand what autoethnography is before looking at two different forms of autoethnography, namely, analytic and evocative. Finally, I discuss my choice of adopting a ‘combined approach’ in the study.

4.6.1 Discovering autoethnography

Autoethnography is one of the branches within ethnography. Having explored autoethnography, I came to realise that the subject is far more complicated than I had firstly imagined due to its contested term and the two broad positions that it holds.

Writers such as Carolyn Ellis (2004); Holman Jones (2005) describe autoethnography as an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno). More precisely, Canagarajah (2012, p. 260) explains that:

‘Autoethnography is conducted and represented from the point of view of the self, whether studying one’s own experiences or those of one’s
community… autoethnography values the self s a rich repository of experiences and perspectives that are not easily available to traditional approaches. … it frankly engages with the situatedness of one’s experiences, rather than supressing them’.

I believe Canagarajah’s description of autoethnography above resonated with the kind of writing I was doing in the study, which was narratives of total interview experience of which my voice is part.

Although the term autoethnography is often used interchangeably with other terms such as personal narrative or autobiography, Ellis and Bochner (2000, pp.739-740), with the former being the most identifiable voice with autoethnographic strategy assert that:

‘It seems appropriate now to include under the broad rubric of autoethnography those studies that have been referred to by other similarly situated terms, such as personal narratives ... lived experience, critical autobiography ... evocative narratives ... reflexive ethnography ... ethnographic autobiography ... autobiographical ethnography, personal sociology ... [and] autoanthropology’.

Ellis and Bochner’s argument suggests that autoethnography is a rather far-reaching field that it could accommodate the kind of writing I sought to produce in the study.

As mentioned at the beginning of this section, it is noted that autoethnographers recently began to make distinction between two types of autoethnography: one is analytic autoethnography, preferred by for example, (L. Anderson, 2006a), Atkinson (2006) and Walford (2009), and the other is evocative autoethnography advocated by for example, Ellis (2004), Ellis and A. Bochner (2000), Denzin (2006); Denzin (2014) and Muncey (2010). However, in its present form, autoethnography is often assumed to be synonymous with evocative autoethnography.

In the two following sections, I will discuss the debate between evocative and analytic autoethnography which I learned as I was exploring autoethnography.
4.6.2 Evocative autoethnography

In contrast to the above type of autoethnography, evocative autoethnography is described by C. Ellis and Bochner (2006, p. 431) as a journey focusing on ‘caring and empathizing…(and) the flux of lived experience’, with emphasis on evocation as goal… writing narratively’ (ibid., p. 432). They (ibid., p.433) go on to state their belief that:

Autoethnography shows struggle, passion, embodied life, and the collaborative creation of sense-making ... Autoethnography wants the reader to care, to feel, to empathize, and to do something, to act. It needs the researcher to be vulnerable and intimate… it shouldn't be used as a vehicle to produce distanced theorising.

Richardson (2000, p. 11) supports this viewpoint, seeing autoethnographic texts as:

highly personalized, revealing texts in which authors tell stories about their own lived experience, relating the personal to the cultural ... holding back on interpretation, asking the reader to emotionally ‘relive’ the events with the writer.

Responding to Anderson (2006a), Ellis and Bochner (2006, p.436) suggest that many autoethnographies are ‘both evocative and analytical’, believing that they ‘use stories to do the work of analysis and theorizing’. They also believe Anderson’s use of the term analysis is in any case restrictive and that his:

Paradigm of ‘analytical autoethnography’ ignores or overlooks how stories work. He presumes there is only one main form of sociological analysis and implies that an analysis produces some sort of propositional or explicit statement or explanation of what things mean or how they should be interpreted, akin to the discussion section of traditional research reports (ibid., p.438).

Their desire is ‘to make narrative and an anecdotal style unobjectionable as a form of sociological discourse’ (ibid., p.439), believing that researchers should
think of themselves ‘not as reporters or analysts but as storytellers and writers’. This view is further endorsed by Atkinson (2006, p. 403), who agrees that all ethnographic work implies a degree of personal engagement; but what should be guarded against is ‘the implicit assumption that self-transformation is the main outcome of such research processes’.

4.6.3 Analytic autoethnography

Anderson (2006b, p.378), proposes the term analytic autoethnography, suggesting that:

‘The five key features of analytic autoethnography … include (1) complete member researcher (CMR) status, (2) analytic reflexivity, (3) narrative visibility of the researcher’s self, (4) dialogue with informants beyond the self, and (5) commitment to theoretical analysis’.

In discussing these features, Anderson draws upon several ethnographic texts that exemplify the autoethnographic impulse. However, he acknowledges that often the examples he gives only partially cover the five mentioned points. I believe it is rather important for me to highlight the point above as it is evident in this research that is, like Anderson, this study too does not fully conform with all the five points mentioned above. For instance, the first point Anderson makes did not apply to me as I did not consider myself as ‘complete member researcher’ in the study (as discussed in section 2.11). However, this study did reflect his other four key features. In particular, his second feature of analytic autoethnography that is, analytic reflexivity. While still situating myself, the researcher, as both subject and object in the narratives, the study also includes critical analysis instead of using the self as the only locus of information. As noted by L. Anderson (2006a, p. 386), ‘analytic autoethnography is grounded in self-experience but reaches beyond it as well’.

However, Ellis and Bochner (2006, pp. 433) voice out their fear of Anderson’s view about autoethnography, saying that he was trying to tame autoethnography. According to them:

‘Autoethnography shows struggle, passion, embodied life and the collaborative creation of sense-making in situations in which people have
to cope with dire circumstances and loss of meaning … it needs the researcher to be vulnerable and intimate … it shouldn't be used as a vehicle to produce distanced theorising’.

4.6.4 My approach to autoethnography

After looking and understanding both analytic and evocative autoethnography, I decided to opt for a combined approach to accommodate the present study. As Stanley (2015, p. 150) suggests:

‘An evocative, verisimilitude-seeking, firmly “auto”- ethnography that focuses squarely on one’s own lived experiences but that also applies critical analysis and aims to formulate theoretical understandings, with the aim of creating understanding beyond the data itself … This is either evocative or analytic autoethnography, following Anderson’s dichotomy, but is, perhaps, the best of both worlds. Instead of seeing analytic and evocative autoethnography as opposites, I suggest combining strengths of each: an evocative, creative, testimonio of lived experience that is critically analysed with the aim of grounding theory in the data to produce broader understandings that may inform people in conceptually comparable, but distinct, situations’.

Despite his strong position on analytic autoethnography, Anderson (2006b, p. 454) too seems to agree with Stanley’s suggestion as he states:

‘I believe that realist ethnographers can benefit from observing the ways in which evocative autoethnographers bring self and other into their texts, and that in some cases we can find it useful to follow their lead’.

Hence, in this study, instead of choosing one approach or the other, I sought to combine both features of evocative and analytic approach, using evocative approach to tell stories in order to invite personal connections rather than analysis (Frank, 2000) and analytic approach to assess my own actions (Duncan, 2004).

Therefore, in the write up of this study, the narratives of the interview conducted were individually presented, with the participants’ words were indented and interwoven with my different voices, specifically my voice at the time of the interview and my voice at the time of writing as I looked back at the whole
interview data and field notes and attempted to reflect on the interview and my thoughts at the time of the interview as well as acknowledging my own prejudices. These voices are described in table 1 below which has been adapted from Holliday (2016, p. 140):
Table 2: Research voices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Voice 1</th>
<th>Voice 2</th>
<th>Voice 3</th>
<th>Voice 4</th>
<th>Voice 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Personal narrative of the rationale for the research</strong></td>
<td>The data</td>
<td>Comments on the data at the time of collection</td>
<td>Comments on Voices 1, 2, 3 at the time of writing</td>
<td>The final overarching argument</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What happened to stimulate the research or to help the researcher get into the data</td>
<td>Descriptions, artefacts, transcripts, recordings, documents, etc.</td>
<td>Also becomes data in Voice 4 about how the researcher felt when she was collecting the data</td>
<td>Has the critical role of directing the reader to the specific aspects of the data which is extracted from the corpus into the written study</td>
<td>Connects and pulls together all the other voices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Also data</td>
<td>Can in itself appear as another personal narrative about the experience of doing research</td>
<td>Commentary and argument</td>
<td>Commentary and argument</td>
<td>Speaks about the whole research process</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The voices described in Table 1 above overlapped and swirled around each other and were present in different parts of the study. Thus, is rather difficult to be very specific about these voices. Nevertheless, these voices were established within Voice 5, where all the voices were connected and pulled together, providing overall argument of the study.
4.7 Data collection

My data comprised:

1. Interviews of one to two hours with each participant, sometimes repeated.
2. Facebook posts (photographs and written statements) for each participant.
3. Field notes which recorded observations of voice 1 and 2.

Details about the abovementioned data collection will be further elaborated in the subsequent sections.

It was decided from the outset that the data collection would last no less than two full academic years, in order to investigate what the participants have to say when asked about their intercultural experience in the UK. The study was also informed by the researcher’s meeting with the participants five to six months before the study formally commenced, which was during a scholarship competition in Malaysia\(^7\). The data was collected through interviews, Facebook posts and field notes.

Generally speaking, the course of the data collection was initially concentrated more on observations and interviews. However, as the study progressed, data from interviews and field notes became more predominant as I reflected back on the data collected.

However, I should add that the data were not collected at one stage and then analysed at another during the research process. Instead, what happened was a ‘cyclical process’ of moving back and forth between data collection and analysis (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 126).

4.7.1 Narrative style interview

One of the data collection methods employed in this study was narrative style interviewing. While some theorists might question the use of narrative style interviewing in this study (an ethnographic study), debatably, I believe that broadly, ethnographic approach can take in almost anything that follows basic ethnographic disciplines or critically acknowledging and managing the positionality of the researcher in searching for lived experiences of the people in the study. This is in line with Brewer’s (2000) statement in which he clarifies that

\(^7\) A scholarship competition held by an organisation to sponsor selected Malaysian students to further their studies overseas.
flexibility in the field is a key feature of ethnography. For this study, conducting interviews seemed to fit with my objective of investigating what a small group of Malaysian students choose to communicate when asked to reflect on their intercultural experience of living in the UK during their academic sojourn. The interviews were set up in order to seek a more in-depth understanding of the informants and to ‘enable the researcher to access their perceptions, meanings, definitions of situations and constructions of reality’ when asked about their intercultural experience of being in the UK (Punch, 2005, p. 168).

As a method, the use of narrative interview, depart slightly from the typical ethnographic interview as unlike the life-story or focus group interview, narrative interview discourages structured narrative and prefer a more disruptive approach of collecting historical events and explanations of behaviour within those events. The importance is not placed on what researchers or practitioners have defined as what is the focus, but rather allowing participants to explore different avenues and through this exploration and sharing of experience, define what should be the focus. Prompting questions are designed to place respondents in a hypothetical situation and ask for them to recount or describe experiences that automatically place them in individual contexts. The method is meant to encourage recounts of authentic experiences rather than structured stories. This can be likened to the Boasian approach toward reconstructing history which reflects Boas’ own influence by a combined interest in (1) an objective empiricism, in the tradition of Leopold Van Ranke, who asserted that history should and only ‘wants only to show what actually happened (wie es eigentlich gewesen)’ (in Stern, 1973); and (2) the desire to properly understand human knowledge, and the way in which lived experience can provide emphatic understanding. This was viewed by Boas to be best articulated and culminated within the quote from Goethe (cited in Boas, 1996, p. 12):

‘A single action or event is interesting, not because it is explainable, but because it is true’.

Humans are pattern processors; people are essentially in practice, actions and functions ‘story-telling animals’, who shape their world through the stories they tell (MacIntyre, 1981).
Chase (2005) argues that a narrative interviewer needs to engage with the interviewee as narrators of their own story rather than respondents to interviewer’s questions. That is, to make an effort to transform the interviewee-interviewer relationship into one of narrator and listener. As Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) argues that, the interviewer needs to understand him or herself, metaphorically speaking, as a traveller, journeying through the landscape of the interviewee. The objective of this is to gather their narrative accounts to be retold to another audience. The goal of the interviewer is therefore to create a facilitating context to encourage those who are interviewed to tell their stories as completely as possible. With this in mind, broad guidelines on how to conduct narrative interviews, reflecting those of qualitative interviewing techniques in general, include: promoting an atmosphere of trust; developing a style conducive to building rapport; and ensuring the comfort and ease of the interviewee so he or she feels able to talk freely about the subject at hand (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Creswell, 2002; Reisman, 2008).

While I am fully aware of the different point of views regarding the relationship between narrative inquiry and an ethnographic study, about whether or not one can be placed within the other, I stand by my decision of using narrative interview in the study following Flick’s (2009, p. 15) suggestion of ensuring that:

‘… the object under study is the determining factor for choosing a method and not the other way around’.

Data collection is most consistently subordinated to the research question and the circumstances of the research. I chose to use narrative interview instead of ethnographic interview for this study as I felt that it was a more appropriate data collection method to use in order to study the complexity of the research.

During the inquiry process, I ultimately understood that methods are tools and not the ends themselves (Janesick, 1998). I realised how dangerous it was to lose sight of this fact (methods are just tools) as it had almost led me to value research method over my thoughts and ideas. For instance, there was a period during the course of this study that I spent too much time than I should worrying and thinking about which methods would be best described my research that I stop the progress of my data analysis for quite some time before I decided to continue working on it.
4.7.1.1 Setting up and conducting the interviews

All of the interviews were first set up in advance via Facebook messenger, email, and telephone call to interviewees. In terms of explaining the general purpose of the study, ensuring confidentiality and gaining informed consent, ethical procedures were obeyed.

The individual narrative interviews were collected between six months to almost two years after participants’ arrival in the UK. Depending on participants’ availability, some of the interviews were audio taped (e.g. Face to face interview, Skype videocall, Facebook videocall), while some were written in the forms of private messaging via Facebook (e.g. Facebook messenger).

A total of eight interviews were carried out and the interviews varied in length. The shortest interview being just over 5 minutes, and the longest just over an hour. However, the typical length of the interviews was between 50 minutes to an hour. A summary of the details of the interviews is given in table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Number of interview(s)</th>
<th>Interview type(s)</th>
<th>Length of interview(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fatimah</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>• Face to face</td>
<td>70 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Facebook messenger</td>
<td>7 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(Follow up interview)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Izzah</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>• Face to face</td>
<td>50 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wana</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>• Facebook messenger</td>
<td>45 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Skype videocall</td>
<td>20 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(Follow up Interview)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zyra</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>• Face to face</td>
<td>60 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Facebook messenger</td>
<td>10 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(follow up interview)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zack</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>• Skype videocall</td>
<td>50 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Skype videocall</td>
<td>20 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khairul</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>• Facebook videocall</td>
<td>60 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norman</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>• Face to face</td>
<td>50 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gary</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>• Facebook messenger</td>
<td>60 minutes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Summary of the details of the interviews

4.7.1.2 My approach to interviewing

In order to achieve the purpose of this research, I began my interview using Malay language, which is the national language of Malaysians in order to establish rapport and trust between me and my participants thus allowing my participants to produce ‘genuine and open responses’ (Welch & Piekka, 2006). Welch and Piekka (2006) further state that, to put the interviewee at ease and to prompt authentic responses from them, it is vital for researcher to choose the right language during interview. This is also supported by Rubin and Rubin (1995, p. 173) in which they note that, the use of the interviewee’s native language in
interview can be an effective way to show acceptance which indicate the interviewer’s ‘willingness to enter into the world of the interviewees’.

However, I did not restrict my participants’ choice of language during the interview as I also gave them the choice of being interviewed in either Malay or English, depending on how they responded to me at the beginning of the interviews. Although, I understood that since translation is an interpretive act, meaning may get lost in the translation process. Hence, whenever translation needed to be done when reporting my data, I took van Nes, Abma, Jonsson & Deeg’s (2010, p. 315) proposition by using ‘fluid descriptions of meanings using various English formulations’ instead of using just one fixed word and checked on the interpretations I made by revisiting the codes and my initial findings in the source language. Besides, since showing reflexivity, or sensitivity towards the ways in which the researcher ‘is part of the social world that is studied’ (Alvesson, 2003, p. 24) are pleas that are frequently made for qualitative researchers, I believe that the translation made in this research is a reflection of my reflexivity where mutual understanding was co-produced through acts of interpretation, which involved my participants and I to ‘draw on a range of contextualization resources’ (Welch & Piekkari, 2006).

At the beginning of the interview, participants were asked to answer specific question, which was, ‘how does your intercultural experience of living in the UK affect you?’ in order to obtain answer for the first research question and also to examine participants’ interpretations of intercultural and intercultural experience since, as will be discussed further in Chapter 7, the word intercultural depends on the word culture which is complex and can be applied to a wide-ranging group of different sizes. I was not trying to impose any particular understanding of culture, intercultural or intercultural experience instead, I was trying to find out what are the participants’ understanding of these terms and how did they associate these with their experience of being in the UK.

For the remaining questions, the informal conversational interview (Patton, 2002) was applied in this research whereby questions developed from the immediate context and were asked in the natural course of things which increased the importance and significance of the questions asked. The interviews focused on the participants’ experiences and changes that were detected in the way they dressed, talked and carried out their lifestyle activities during the interviews as well as based on what had been observed from their Facebook
activities. The movement between one issue to another were often led by the interviewee as I wanted to keep the conversations as fluent as possible. However, whenever there were necessities to find out more about certain issues from the interviewee, I would occasionally go back to previous issue. Follow up questions were also asked whenever needed via Facebook messenger, emails and Skype. However, data taken from the interviews were not taken at merely face. Aspects like participants’ voices, tones, and words choice were looked into when examining the data. The data collected were read and listened to in order for me to find common codes and themes. My thoughts regarding the data were then organised around the thematic headings that emerged.

4.7.1.3 Maintaining caution in collecting and interpreting interview data

I operated with a view of narrative interviewing as an interactional achievement, entailing the building of an emotional connection between each participant and myself. To build a sense of rapport and trust, I was mindful of the need to adhere to an open questioning technique, which I trust can encourage participants to converse freely.

It was also advantageous that the age gap between the participants and me was not too big that I believed it was possibly easier for them to interact and share their personal stories with me as I was probably seen as a friend or sister to them rather than a researcher. As noted by Hammersley and Atkinson (2007, p.176), how interviewees perceive the research and the researcher can strongly influence what they say. In addition to that, having understood some of the stories shared by the participants were considered personal and sensitive, I was cautious not to ask questions that I felt were sensitive to them.

Further, I was aware of Richard’s (2003, p. 80) concern in relation to interview technique that:

‘However, refined the interview technique may be, it does not guarantee access to the interviewee’s real self’.

With that in mind, I understood that as a researcher I therefore need to acknowledge that we could not always take what people say at face value. There may be specific reasons why they are responding in particular ways. For example, there is a possibility that interviewees may have wanted to construct themselves as religiously observant in order to come across pious.
Due the above risk, I always tried to keep in mind Baker’s (1997, p. 131) argument that interview responses should be treated as accounts more than reports, and to interpret what was said with caution, taking Murray’s (2009, p. 59) advice that researchers must be sensitive to the co-constructed nature of these stories if they are to evade misinterpreting the participants’ experiences.

Issues relating to the trustworthiness of the data are considered in Section 4.11.

4.7.2 Facebook posts
In this research, Facebook was used as a site for participant observation. My rationale for carrying out Facebook observations was to see how the participants were before coming to the UK and when they were in the UK and to try to stimulate reflection on what was going on in the participants’ ‘privately-public, publicly-private’ (Waskul, 1996) online lives.

I decided to use Facebook as a location for participant observation as I believed that online social networks such as Facebook was an attractive source of data since large quantities of information were often shared on the social networking site. For instance, the data I collected included content shared by the users like statuses, photos and a few other as can be seen in Chapter 3, allowing me to collect and access valuable data that would help me to capture the participants’ changes as well as understand their behaviours.

Facebook observation was mostly used at the beginning of the research to see the research participants’ being and doing before and when they were in the UK. Observations via Facebook were then carried out from time to time. It was through this medium that I managed to see how the participants had transformed based on their posting of images and Facebook statuses.

As mentioned previously in Chapter 1, in the study, participant observation was enacted in two ways. Firstly, Facebook was used to observe participants’ online lives, to see their being and doing before and when they were in the UK. Secondly, observations of the participants’ offline lives were also carried out by spending time and interviewing them and were established as the ‘expanded field’ in the study.

4.7.3 Field notes
The field notes used in the study represents the small element of autoethnography in the study and were mainly written during the first two years
of the study and they varied in terms of their forms. As described by Richards (2003, p. 137), ‘field notes take a different forms’, as well as ‘writing what is observed’, they need to consider ‘analytical issues’ such as ‘analytic insights, possible connection with theories, methodological points, and so on’ and ‘relational issues’ such as ‘personal reflections and resonances’. The field notes for the research comprised of a combination of observational notes concerning my experiences, methodological notes about the types of data I was collecting and still needed to collect, theoretical notes connecting my thoughts and ideas back to theories, and personal notes containing personal comments. Fundamentally, constructing the field notes helped encourage preliminary analysis and facilitate ‘precisely the sort of internal dialogue, or thinking aloud, that is the essence of reflexive ethnography’ (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007b, p. 151).

The field notes were my thoughts and ideas that were handwritten as soon as I could to ensure that I could examine and develop them after any event during the research process. Like my observation notes, the field notes were originally ‘written in a loose fashion’ as they were ‘documents not intended - at least initially - for any audience, other than the researcher’ (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2001, p. 358).

As the study continued, the way the field notes were written changed. At first, the field notes were merely written to help me gain a better understanding of the research in general. However, over time, they became a way for me to stimulate reflection and conclusively served as a means of analysing how my thinking had shifted over the course of the study. Truly, it was only when I began to review field notes and other data collected that I managed to see that I had somehow changed the way I was thinking and seeing things. For example, how I think about and see the intercultural, from separate solid, fixed culture to a more open, fluid vision in which people negotiate intercultural meaning wherever they are. Apart from that, the field notes also acted as a medium for me to critique my own description, comments made throughout the inquiry process and reflection, allowing me to interrogate my own prejudice and the way that this had changed during the study.

It should be noted that the data generated from the field notes was used to portray the small autoethnographic element of the study, which will be deliberated further, in the following section.
4.8 Data analysis

This section depicts the data analysis process, first giving an overview of the data analysis process and next describing how themes were generated.

4.8.1 Overview of the data analysis process

The analysis of the data for this research followed a cyclical pattern and was repeated over and over again, which fits Spradley (1980) basic ethnographic research cycle (refer to figure 1).

Figure 1: Ethnographic Research Cycle (Spradley, 1980, p. 29)

As with Spradley (1980) basic ethnography research cycle above, the data analysis procedure in this research was a process of back and forth between reading throughout the data, making analytic notes, coding and interpreting the data. It was through this ethnographic cycle that I realised that I kept on discovering new questions such as, what the participants meant when they talked about the intercultural? Were clothing parts of culture? and many more, which required me to repeat the cycle several times.

As a whole, my approach to making sense of the data combined both ‘formalized analytical procedures’, which gave structure to the data analysis process and further, by applying them in a transparent manner, they were intended to help convince audiences of the trustworthiness\(^8\) of the study and ‘subjective intuition’ that recognises:

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\(^8\) The trustworthiness of the study is discussed in section 4.11
the inherent importance attached to the subjective and reflexive involvement of the researcher in the analysis… and the need to maintain a fluid and creative analytical position that is not constrained by procedural traditions (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 244).

This view was exceptionally essential in the autoethnographic dimension of the study, discussed earlier in this chapter.

4.8.2 Coding the data and generating themes

‘Descriptive coding’ (Richards and Morse, 2012, p. 138) was used in order to store basic factual knowledge about the research participants and the research sites within the setting. Participants interviewed were described using pseudonym and field notes were coded in square brackets, e.g. field notes, are denoted as [Field notes]. Finally, responses gained from some participants interviewed via Facebook messenger or Skype after the interview were coded as Facebook messenger or Skype communication, i.e. [Facebook Messenger].

Having collected the interview, observation, and field note data, and typed it up into Word documents, I read carefully through this data and interpreted it in the margins of the Word documents. At this stage, the annotations made were a combination of comments relating to my research questions, general reflective thoughts, possible issues to think about and possible further lines of inquiry. Following this, I began labelling passages within the text ‘which express a particular idea or refer to an event’ (Richards and Morse, 2012, p. 139). Because the volume of the data was initially quite small, I did this manually by highlighting different parts of the data as referring to topic, “participants’ radical changes”.

As the data analysis process developed and themes began to emerge, the coding became more similar to what Richards and Morse (2012, p. 141) refer to as ‘analytic coding’. This process of developing themes was an undeniably messy one. It is perhaps best described as one of gradual approximation, starting off with loose themes, what Blumer called ‘sensitizing concepts’ (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p. 164 citing Blumer), suggesting directions to look in, which were then developed and refined into more specific themes and subthemes, gradually moving towards moving towards definitive concepts. While ‘radical changes’ were evident in all accounts, there was variability in the way this was manifested in
individual accounts. In this phase, I developed a number of themes, which then becomes the heading of my two main data chapters, Chapter 5 (Appearance and religiousness) and Chapter 6 (Language and openness), and each theme then contains several smaller ‘points of focus’:

Chapter 5: Appearance and religiousness

Appearance

Fatimah: ‘I can finally be myself’
Izzah: ‘I figured, if I am not going to wear hijab, I thought why not dress up the way I always wanted to’

Religiousness

Wana: ‘I am becoming closer to God and my religion’
Zyra: ‘I consider my circumstances a difficult one’

Chapter 6: Language and openness

Language

Zack: “I’ve got to use English with the real English people and acquire an awful lot of colloquialism!”
Khairul: I sometimes purposely use bombastic words just to show them how good my English is now!

Openness

Norman: ‘They made it legal here … to get married’.
Gary: ‘Third class mentality… She needs to get her brain fixed’

As seen above, within these smaller points of focus, narratives have been generated to illustrate the different changes the participants go through in terms of appearance (Fatimah and Izzah), religiousness (Wana and Zyra), language (Zack and Khairul) and openness (Norman, Izzy and Gary) and their reasons for doing so. These are supported with extracts from their individual interviews and where relevant, Facebook posts and my field notes. Each narrative account has been given a title capturing the main thrust of each narrative and adopting expressions employed by each of the participants in their interviews. The developing and defining of these themes continued into and during the writing up process.
Holliday’s (2016, p.103) description of the formation of themes also resonates with the way they were developed in this study:

The formation of themes thus represents the necessary dialogue between data and researcher… arriving at the themes can be result of formal data analysis but can also be born from what was seen during data collection. Often themes have been growing within the researcher’s mind through the whole research process… Furthermore, the way in which the researcher sees the data will be influenced by her own background.

This description again gives the sense of part formal data analysis, part subjective intuition, that I felt was happening while analysing the data for this study.

Further, in developing themes, I was mindful of Holliday’s warning that:

researchers need to be aware and honest about the influence they bring to their thematic analysis from their original preoccupations, where the themes themselves, although emergent, are also influenced by questions or issues that the researcher brought to the research (Holliday, 2016, pp.105-106).

I consequently tried to keep in mind that I was dealing with the reality of participants’ lives from their perspectives, not mine, and to ‘let the data speak’, allowing themes to come out of the data rather than using the data to support my own ideas. Following this, I managed to integrate a thematic structure to the chapters which works both with individuals and with themes as can be seen earlier. For example, Fatimah and Izzah connect with ‘appearance’ theme, Wana and Zyra to ‘religiousness’ theme, Zack, and Khairul to ‘language’ theme and finally Norman, Izzy and Gary to ‘openness’ theme. However, as I have mentioned above, this process was rather difficult since I had to find a way of combining references to both people and themes which created difficulties, but I believed this essentially worked in the best way that I could make it work.

The themes that were eventually developed form the basis of the data chapters, chapters 3 to 4.
4.9 Writing up the study

As explained in the above section, the data was analysed into themes which emerged from the data. Grouping together different themes, the data was then organised into chapters.

My aim when writing the data was to create a ‘thick description’ (Geertz, 1973), which Holliday (2010, p.99) describes as ‘a narrative of what has been found that shows the full complexity and depth of what is going on’. Denzin (1994, p. 505) similarly suggests that thick description ‘gives the context of an experience, states the intentions and meanings that organised the experience, and reveals the experience as a process’.

My attempt to provide a thick description which included data from a number of different sources, overlaid with my attempt to write myself into the study, was also influenced by Coffey’s (1999, p. 118) view that:

By incorporating, fragmenting and mingling these texts, and by reinforcing the intertextuality of ethnography, the claims to authenticity may be strengthened rather than weakened. Writing the self into ethnography can be viewed as part of a movement towards greater authenticity.

I have tried to write up the study with a sense and growing understanding of the effects my own presence in the setting, and to continue to engage in reflexivity, in terms of ‘the way in which researchers come to terms with and indeed capitalise on the complexities of their presence within the research setting, in a methodical way’ (Holliday, 2016, p.146), during the writing up process.

Another feature of the writing up process was the interplay between writing up and further analysis of the data. Indeed, I would agree with Holliday’s (2016, p. 128) assertion that ‘a key of postmodern view of qualitative writing is the realisation that writing itself is part of the process of qualitative investigation’. Rather than analysing data then writing about data, I tended to switch from one to the other depending on what I felt appropriate at a particular point in time.

Indeed, as with the processes of data collection and data analysis, the messiness of the writing up process should not be understated. However, particularly when writing up the small autoethnographic element of the study, much of which is focused on in chapter 5 and 6, I took note of Muncey’s (2010,
pp. 73-76) framework suggesting a broad five stages in the autoethnographic writing process: cognitive, scribbling, serious, polishing, and relishing. This provided a framework for writing myself into the findings part of the study. Applying it to the writing of chapter 5 and 6, there was a ‘cognitive phase’ of realising that I felt it important to write the changes that had taken place within me as a researcher and as an education professional during the research process, and the effect of this on the study, into the thesis, not just in terms of mentioning reflectivity in the methodology but also in the findings of the study. There was then a ‘scribbling phase’, a ‘messy phase’ of writing notes about events or moments that had affected the way I was interpreting the setting, followed by a ‘serious phase’ of trying to get the notes into some kind of order and create critical incidents, supported by field note and other data. There was then a ‘polishing phase’ of rereading, revising, getting feedback on and trying to improve what I had written, and finally a small ‘relishing phase’, knowing that, whilst what I had written could no doubt be improved or written differently, I had achieved my aim of writing myself into the thesis.

There were also a number of practical issues in writing up process. For example, as has already been mentioned, I struggled to decide where to place the bulk of the discussion around the rationale for the autoethnographic element to the study, before finally opting to outline my reasons for including it and to discuss it in more detail as a separate section in Chapter 2. I also decided to put the research methodology chapter ahead of both of the ‘after’ literature review chapters to foreground my own positioning and to explain how this positioning affected the study through the small autoethnographic element.

4.10 My positioning as a researcher

As a researcher in the interpretative tradition, in full acknowledgement that the findings to be presented in the following chapter are an interpretation of others’ interpretations of life events and their significance, I understand that my own on-going narrative unavoidably have a bearing on the sense I make of the stories related to me by the participants. Details about my background and interest in this study have already been provided earlier in section 2.3. Here my focus is to acknowledge and reflect on my position as a researcher in this study, that is the way in which power affects my relationship with the participants and the possible impact on the study, whether positively or negatively.
It is common to draw a distinction between two positions that researchers can occupy in relation to participants in a research study. Namely to be either outsiders or insiders (Leckie, 2008) but as I will suggest I find this problematic for a number of reasons. Firstly, this is because in reality we are always both insiders and outsiders to different degrees. As Sharan, Ntseane, Lee, Kee, and Johnson-Bailey (2001, p. 405) point out, there is a good deal of slippage between these terms. I would for example suggest that I was both an insider and an outsider in this project depending on which angle we look at the research setting and participants from. I could have been an outsider given that I was not familiar with most of my participants' norms and values. However, as a fellow Malaysian and a member of the same community (Malaysian international student in the UK that belongs to the same Facebook group) as these participants, I might be considered an insider.

A second problem I have with this dichotomy is that it is often assumed that insiders, because they are drawn from the same community as these participants themselves, through ease of access and familiarity, can build a better rapport between themselves and participants and thereby provide richer and fuller accounts of phenomenon. However, this may not always be the case. In a similar way, while outsiders may struggle to generate this sort of rapport initially at least, they are, however, able to develop a critical distance from the situation at hand to generate new insights that may not be so visible to insiders and to obtain information that might not be revealed to an insider that it might be assumed is already known. In reality, there are benefits and problems with both kinds of status and in reality it is not possible to accurately draw parallels with power and insider and outsider status and therefore difficult to predict the impact of status on the nature and quality of data generated and on the sorts of relationships that can be formed.

In this study, in line with my conceptual understanding of positioning as dynamic shifting and negotiated and the views of a number of writers engaged in debating issues around cultural positioning, I assumed the critical concern was not whether I occupied an insider or outsider position. Rather, that it was how I created an atmosphere of trust and respect and how this was uniquely worked out within each interview and in my evolving relationship with each participant over the year (Manathunga, 2009; Sharan et al., 2001; Shope, 2006). While it is conceivable that certain insider versus outsider positions may have been
significant in the early stages of the project, as our relationship developed over time, I believe these initial positions became less significant and evolved. Thus of more significance in terms of the data that was generated was not whether I was initially an insider with respect to my background and my relationship to these participants, but it was the ways I sought to ensure that my on-going relationship with participants over the year was mindful, responsive and ethical.

4.11 Trustworthiness

The intention of this section is to demonstrate that, of the many possible interpretations of the data collected, the interpretation given here provides a convincing, credible, accurate and clearly communicated representation of the data, and further that the procedures and processes undertaken during the study are justifiable.

In line with a number of authors (e.g. Maykut and Morehouse, 1994; Starfield, 2010), I feel that using terms other than ‘validity’ and ‘reliability’ is helpful in getting away from quantitative perceptions of how research outcomes should be viewed, and believe that the term ‘trustworthiness’ to be more suited to qualitative studies.

A starting point for ensuring trustworthiness relates to what Maxwell (1996) calls ‘descriptive validity’, the accuracy and completeness of the account. He notes that:

The first concern of most qualitative researchers is with the factual accuracy of their account - that is, that they are not making up or distorting the things they saw and heard. If you report that an informant made a particular statement in an interview, is this correct? Did he or she really make that statement, or did you mis-hear, mis-transcribe, or mis-remember his or her words? (ibid., pp.285-286)

In a similar vein, Silverman (2010) talks about the importance of an open and honest account of the research, providing full descriptions of what was done in terms of choosing your participants and methods, collecting and analysing data, and explaining and justifying your decisions.

Related to this, Dörnyei (2007, p.60) talks about ‘research integrity’ in the research process in terms of, for example, avoiding fabrication, falsification and
misrepresentation, and highlights the need for researchers to build up their integrity as a means of ensuring the trustworthiness of their studies. He suggests this can be done by strategies such as ‘leaving an audit trail’ by giving detailed and reflective account of procedures used, providing ‘contextualisation and thick description’ through ‘presenting the findings in rich contextual detail’, and identifying potential research bias’ (ibid.).

In this study, I have tried to address these issues and build integrity through various strategies, for example audio recording and precise transcription of all interviews in which the interviewee agreed to be recorded, and wherever possible asking the interviewee to confirm that the transcription was an accurate record of the interview, ‘leaving an audit trail’ as outlined throughout this chapter of the study, ‘proving contextualisation and thick description’ in the data chapters, and ‘identifying potential researcher bias’ throughout the study. Indeed, the latter has become a focus within the study.


For this study, I use the Rallis and Rossman’s framework to demonstrate how I have tried to ensure credibility, as described below:

‘Prolonged engagement’: I spent almost a year in the setting, and a period of over two years, observing the participants’ offline lives and keeping in touch with the participants. Though the time spent in the setting is not as long as for many ethnographic studies, I would suggest that the overall time spent considering the issues within the setting, alongside the time actually spent there, makes my engagement with the setting prolonged.
'Triangulation': I obtained data using different methods namely, interview, Facebook posts (observation) and field notes at different points in time that enabled me to build my understanding of the research and in turn helped me to construct a ‘thick description’ of my findings. Further, though not suggested as a measure of trustworthiness in itself, the ‘thick description’ provided intended to show the depth of the data as well as my own struggles to interpret the data, in particular to take into account the small element of autoethnographic.

‘Participant validation’: After preliminary analysis of the data, participants were given the opportunity to give feedback on the points I was making.

‘Using a critical friend’: In the case of doctoral dissertation, the critical friends were my supervisors, who commented on my emerging analysis when my work was reviewed and at other times.

‘Using your community of practice’: During the data collection and initial data analysis stages, I engaged in critical discussions with trusted participants in the setting, which helped me to check and validate my developing impressions while in the field. During the writing up phase, I engaged in similar discussions with colleagues in my normal work setting and with fellow research students, which helped me to make more sense of data, and in particular my own impact on the data.

To help to ensure thoroughness, I followed the advice of Rallis and Rossman (2009, p.284) and tried to make my own positioning clear by providing a clear conceptual framework, details of my research approach, details of the data collected, and details of how the data was analysed, and by aiming to be transparent about the whole research process.

To help to make the study potentially useful to others, following the advice of Rallis and Rossman (2009, p.285), I have tried to provide detailed description of the setting for the study, the research process and the findings of the study.
4.11.1 Trustworthiness and autoethnography

The trustworthiness of the study as a whole and strategies used to increase its trustworthiness were discussed above. In this section, trustworthiness is briefly discussed with respect to the small element of autoethnographic of the study. As is explained at the start of Section 2.12, the term ‘trustworthiness’ is preferred to ‘validity’ as talking in terms of validity evokes more quantitative interpretations of how research should be judged. Having said that, several of the quotes below use the term ‘validity’, but at the same time suggest that traditional criteria for judging it are inappropriate in autoethnographic work. Criticisms of autoethnography include that it can be:

- nonanalytic, self-indulgent, irreverent, sentimental, and romantic... too artful... having no theory, no concepts, no hypotheses... not being sufficiently rigorous, theoretical, or analytical (Denzin, 2014, pp.69-70).

However, those favouring more evocative approaches to autoethnography argue that ‘traditional criteria for judging validity cannot be and need to be applied to autoethnographic writing’ (Wall, 2006, p. 9). Richardson (2000, p. 11), for example, would prefer that narratives to be judged against the ‘literary criteria of coherence, verisimilitude, and interest’.

Along similar lines, Denzin (2014, p.70) suggests that, for autoethnographic accounts, ‘validity means that a work has verisimilitude. It evokes a feeling that the experience described is true, coherent, believable, and connects the reader to the write’s world’. Denzin (2014, pp. 72-74) further suggests that work should be judged in terms of ‘interpretive sufficiency’ - for example, providing sufficient depth, detail and coherence, ‘representational adequacy’ - for example, being free from racial or gender stereotyping, and being ‘authentically adequate’ - for example, enhancing moral discernment or promoting social transformation.

Muncey (2010, p.91) highlights that autoethnographic work should resonate with the reader, believing that it ‘must be seen to be plausible and trustworthy’ where ‘resonance is an appropriate criterion for evaluation and this can only be achieved by connecting with the audience through reading, performance or critical review’ (ibid., p.107).
Ellis (2000, p.273) offers a further perspective for judging autoethnographic work, suggesting she wants:

to be immersed in the flow of the story, lost in time and space, not wanting to come to the end (as in a good novel), and afterwards unable to stop thinking about or feeling what I’ve experienced.

In terms of criteria for autoethnographic work, Bochner (2000, pp.270-271) suggests seven criteria based on the work being of sufficient detail, structural complexity and credibility, demonstrating ‘transformation from who I was to who I am’, respecting ethics, being moving and being authentic, while Richardson (2000, p.937) proposes five criteria for reviewing ‘creative analytical practices’: substantive contribution to an understanding of social life, aesthetic merit, reflexivity, emotional and intellectual impact, and a clear expression of cultural, social, individual, or communal sense of reality.

Central to the trustworthiness of autoethnographic work is maintaining credibility and verisimilitude, as is important in all ethnographic work, while at the same time engaging and connecting with the reader in a personal way. I have tried to develop the autoethnographic dimension of this study with these points in mind.

4.12 Ethical considerations
In doing the research, I considered ethics on two levels, namely procedural ethics, the obligatory formal procedures, for example university ethics committees’ endorsement to pursue the research, and ethics in practice, which relates to the issues that occur in the practice of doing research.

At the beginning of the research, I obeyed standard procedures outlined by university in order to gain ethical approval to carry out the study. I also considered the general ethical issues mentioned by K. Richards (2003, p. 140) at the outset, which are issues relating to ‘consent honesty, privacy, ownership and harm’ and tried to cope with these issues appropriately during the course of research inquiry. For instance, during data collection, I always made sure that the participants were informed about the purpose of the study, that their right to anonymity and confidentiality were met, and that they were made fully aware of
their right to withdraw at any stage if they did not wish to continue with research. A copy of the ethical approval certificate obtained is shown in Appendix 1.

With respect to the precise steps I took in working with participants, at the start of the project, I first approached and interacted with the group of students whom I hoped would become the participants in this study on Facebook and explained the proposed project to them. The introduction statement outlining the general purpose of the research was written and posted on the Facebook group wall (see Appendix 2). The statement was explicit about how the participants’ information would be protected, processed and used in the study.

Being aware the need to ensure that no participants came to harm ‘as a result of the actual process of doing the research and/or through publications of the findings’ (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p.213), beyond assurances of confidentially, reassured that I was not trying to evaluate them instead, I was trying to understand them and see things from their point of view. I was always careful not ask the participants sensitive questions like, ‘why are you not wearing hijab now?’ or ‘why are you eating non-halal food’. Although, whenever I had the chance to ask questions that were considered sensitive, I would always try to ask the questions subtly and I would always avoid making any judgmental comments. In addition to that, all data was anonymised in order to ensure that no participant could be identified.

It is also important for me to highlight the presentations of visual data such as photos in the thesis when talking about ethical considerations. As indicated throughout Chapter 3 and 4, most of the photos are not of the participants themselves in order to protect their privacy and safety. Instead of using the participants’ personal photos, internet images are used to represent what I see during data collections. These are images which I considered as significant data that complement my descriptions about the participants to ensure that a full understanding of context is achieved by readers. As suggested by Glaw (2017, p. 1), visual data can be used to generate extra depth by adding richness and depth and revealing more than would have been revealed by the written data only. Even though the images used are not of the participants themselves, the subsequent elements were followed when identifying and citing an image, depending on the information I have available:

- Artist's/creator's name, if relevant;
Title of the work/image, if known, or description;
Ownership information (such as a person, estate, museum, library collection) and source of image;
Material, if known, particularly for art works;
Dimensions of the work, if known.

These elements were obeyed in order to avoid any ethical issues relating to the use of internet images that could possibly be raised.

4.13 Relational ethics
As I am including an element of authoethnography is the study, I understand relational ethics have to be intensified. This is because, using personal experience in this kind of study, not only I am implicating myself with my work, but also close, intimate others (Adams, 2006; Etherington, 2007; Trahar, 2009). For instance, as I told my participants' stories, they are implicated by what I said about them and it is difficult for me to mask my participants without altering the meaning and purpose of the story. I may try to mask the location of my participants however, I am aware that it probably does not take much work for others to identify my participants. Therefore, I consider relational concerns as an important aspect of my research, which must be kept uppermost throughout the research and writing process.

Due to this matter, in order to protect the privacy and safety of my participants, I had to alter identifying characteristics such as their names and race. I understand that in this research, the essence and meaningfulness of the research story is more important than the precise recounting of detail. In addition to this, I also felt obligated to show my work to my participants to allow them to respond and/or acknowledge how they feel about what had been written about them and to allow them to talk back to how they had been represented in the text.

4.14 Limitations of the research methodology
Any research design will carry limitations as well as potential advantages and there are inevitably a number of possible limitations with the design of the study as outlined above.

Since I was in the setting for a number of short periods rather than for a continued period, one possible limitation that may be caused by this is that some people may question whether or not the study can be considered ethnographic.
However, I am holding on to scholars like Bax (2006); (1997) idea in which they have strongly argued that an ethnographic approach can be carried out without the need for prolonged engagement.

Next, while not exactly a limitation, the fact that the autoethnographic dimension of the study only became apparent during the study itself certainly added to the degree of messiness in the study and to the struggle to analyse and organise the data, and to write up the study. Whilst perhaps there is no easy solution to this, what I have learned would be to think more carefully about what the research process is likely to involve and what impact I might have on that process before I start.
Chapter 5: Appearance and religiousness

5.1 Introduction

Chapters 5 to 6 present and discuss the data collected and analysed in this study and structured in the form of narratives of total interview experience of which my voice is part. In these two chapters, the small element of autoethnography, as represented mainly in my fieldnotes is highlighted to acknowledge the influence of my own perspective in understanding interculturality and participants’ personal stories.

This chapter presents and discusses participants’ communication relating to ‘radical changes in appearance and religiousness’. As explained in Chapter 2, while ‘radical changes’ were evident in all accounts, there was variability in the way this was manifested in individual accounts. Nevertheless, it can be seen that all of the participants seem to talk about their changes in very similar ways.

The four participants for whom narratives have been generated below, have been selected to illustrate the different changes they go through in terms of appearance (Fatimah and Izzah) and religiousness (Wana and Zyra) and reasons for doing so. These are supported with extracts from their individual interviews and where relevant, Facebook posts and my field notes. Each narrative account has been given a title capturing the main thrust of each narrative and adopting expressions employed by each of the participants in their interviews.

Before I proceed, it is also important for me to highlight here that there are certain words or expressions that are written in inverted commas throughout this and the following chapter. This is to indicate that the words are my own interpretations of things and that I am aware that they will probably mean different things to different people and possibly different things to the same people at different times.

5.2 Appearance

Change in appearance is one of the most important themes that was evident in this research. Three of the participants involved in this research, namely Fatimah and Izzah communicated about their ‘radical’ change in appearance during the course of the research and when asked about their intercultural experience of being in the UK. While both of the participants changed in the same aspect
(appearance), each of them indicated different intentions for changing their appearance.

5.2.1 Fatimah: ‘I can finally be myself!’
This first extract demonstrates Fatimah’s change in appearance due to the feeling of freedom she seemed to have felt after moving to the new place (UK). Following was my thought about Fatimah during our first meeting in Malaysia during a scholarship competition:

Fatimah looks very modest from the way she is dressed that day. Her face appears bare to me, as if she does not wear any make up at all. She comes to the interview, like most of the females who attend the scholarship competition, wearing traditional Malay clothes, baju kurung\textsuperscript{9}, however, just an ordinary, old or basic style baju kurung. She has a plain, beige hijab\textsuperscript{10} on, pinned under her chin and extending down below her waist. She is also wearing socks and handsocks\textsuperscript{11}, giving me the impression that she must be quite religious since she seems to be trying to cover her aurah\textsuperscript{12} ‘properly’. [Field notes]

The main reason why I had the impression that Fatimah was religious was because, based on my own experience with my Malaysian female Muslim friends, most of them are not really concerned about wearing handsocks or socks, even though when they are wearing foot wear that reveal some parts of their feet, which are considered as part of Muslim women’s aurah. According to the Islamic dress code, when a girl reaches puberty, it is not appropriate that any of her should be seen, except for her face, and her hands up to the wrists. Therefore, it seems to me that, to most of my Malaysian female Muslim friends, the big part about covering their aurah is to wear a hijab. In all honesty, I too sometimes fail to cover my aurah completely. Nevertheless, there are a few of my female Muslim friends

\textsuperscript{9} A loose-fitting full-length dress, consisting of a skirt and a blouse.
\textsuperscript{10} A head covering scarf that is worn by some Muslim women in the presence of adult males outside of their immediate family, which usually covers the head and possibly chest. In Malaysia, the type of hijabs and the way female wear them are linked closely to fashion in current time.
\textsuperscript{11} Garments designed to cover the wrist and forearm.
\textsuperscript{12} A term used within Islam which denotes the parts of the body, for both men and women, which must be covered with clothing and are not meant to be exposed in public.
who wear socks and handsocks and these friends are mostly relatively ‘religious’ by which I mean, they often attend Islamic classes or talks, constantly quoting the Quran and hadiths\(^{13}\) when they are talking to other people, and they appear to be very careful with their aurah, always making sure that their aurah is appropriately covered.

Although now that I think about it, I realise that what I said earlier is essentially my interpretation of the Islamic dress code which varies in actual practice in different parts of the world and between people who have different interpretations. This makes me realise that I should not make assumptions about other people and their actions based on my beliefs, expectations, emotions or wishes effortlessly as these assumptions may be faulty and can create unnecessary difficulties for myself and others. My thought about this matter is highlighted in the following excerpt:

However, it occurred to me afterwards that hijab and clothing probably do not represent how religious a person is. A piece of cloth on a person’s head or body does not define a person. Neither does it define a person’s relationship with God. A person can be either religious or not regardless of his or her attire. [Field notes]

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\(^{13}\) Reports of statements or actions of prophet Muhammad, or of his tacit approval or criticism of something said or done in his presence.
The image above is not a picture of Fatimah however, it is included here to give readers a better idea of how Fatimah looked like during the scholarship competition. The picture shows a woman wearing a hijab pinned under her chin and extending down below her waist. Although the woman in the picture is probably not wearing a basic style baju kurung, it can be seen that she is wearing a pair of handsocks.

There was also another incident that led me further into considering that Fatimah was indeed a religious person:

At the end of the competition, a non-Muslim man who happened to be one of the judges for the competition offered his hand to a Muslim woman contestant. When Fatimah saw this, she shouted out, ‘Haram!’\(^{14}\), while pointing at both of them. However, the place was quite noisy and crowded that time that not many (if any) people could hear her. I, on the other hand, could hear Fatimah since I was standing close to her. [Field notes]

\(^{14}\) Used to refer to any act that is forbidden by Allah
The said incident gave me the impression that Fatimah was conceivably a practising, devout Muslim, who followed the Islamic teaching where a person is not permitted to have physical contact with people of the opposite sex. Nevertheless, I do understand that there are some practicing Muslims who disregard this prohibition altogether. However, in Fatimah’s case, I suppose not many Muslims who follow the Islamic teaching concerning the opposite sex shaking hands would shout out ‘haram’ the way Fatimah did should they saw the incident. On one hand, some Muslims might not do this (shout ‘haram’ out loud) for fear of being offensive. On the other hand, they might not respond to this incident the way Fatimah did probably because they do not think that they are in the position to do so. As for me, I do not think that I would act the same way Fatimah did because I do not want to upset others and to avoid creating awkward social situations. Additionally, I do realise that there are Muslims who generally follow this Islamic practice but would probably still shake hands with the opposite sex anyway in some circumstances, and I am probably one of them. I thought seeing how Fatimah reacted to this incident made her seem like a ‘strict Muslim’, which probably made sense for me to think that she was a religious person.

The following excerpt is my thought about Fatimah when we first met at the scholarship competition in Malaysia:

Fatimah seems very confident, with her head held high and she is always ready to make conversation with people who come for the competition. She speaks English fluently and code switches to Malay language once in a while. I think she has a good grasp of English. We chat a little. She tells me a little bit about herself and her education background. I think her education background is rather impressive! She used to study in what is considered as one of the most well-known boarding schools in Malaysia¹⁵, and she did quite well in school and also in her national examination, Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM)¹⁶. [Field notes]

¹⁵ One of the boarding schools in Malaysia that is established to nurture outstanding students to excel in academics and extracurricular activities.

¹⁶ Malaysian Certificate of Education, a national examination taken by all fifth-year secondary school students in Malaysia, equivalent to O-level.
I did not meet Fatimah face to face again after our first meeting until the research interview. The only images of her that I saw after our meeting were those pictures of her that she posted on her Facebook timeline, though, not that many as she seemed to be an inactive Facebook user. Looking through her pictures that she posted on Facebook (before and after coming to the UK), I thought she still looked the same way she looked before. Despite the change in the way she styled her hijab, Fatimah's overall fashion style had not changed much.

Below is an example of Fatimah's new hijab style:

![Figure 3: A picture of loosely style hijab taken from Veronacollection's Instagram](image)

In her recent pictures that she posted on Facebook, I could see that she no longer styled her hijab the way she did during our first meeting. In her pictures, she seemed to be wearing loosely draped hijabs that covered half of her chest, almost exactly like the picture shown in Figure 4.

The following is an extract from the interview with Fatimah. The extract begins with my thoughts about Fatimah when I saw her for the second time which was during an interview [face to face interview]:

I meet Fatimah at a café. Fatimah’s appearance looks so much different than before. She is no longer wearing hijab. She has medium long, black hair. Fatimah wears an extremely short, low neckline, bodycon17 dress

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17 A bodycon dress is a one-piece figure-hugging garment that clings tightly to the body from the bust to the lower hem.
without tights. Therefore, I think her dress could be categorised as revealing even by the standard of most Malay Muslim women who do not wear hijab. In fact, it seems ‘revealing’ to me especially when she tells me that she comes straight from her university, a place where I think wearing that kind of dress will be rather inappropriate. She matches the dress with a pair of big vintage chandelier earrings and what according to her is a pair of black kitten heels. Somehow, I think she looks ‘stunning’! I find Fatimah’s transformation relatively drastic but very intriguing. I think her choice of fashion makes her look like the Hollywood actresses we normally see on television and magazines. [Field notes]

However, looking at the interview extract now, I question myself, why, at that time, did I say Fatimah look ‘stunning’ although I simply meant to say that she looked beautiful (not that she did not look beautiful before)? Reflecting on that particular comment, I realised that my response to Fatimah’s new look might be problematic. Saying that she looked ‘stunning’ might give people the impression that I thought Fatimah’s change of appearance (without hijab and wearing revealing clothes) made her look better or more attractive than when she was wearing hijab and modest clothing. It is important for me to comment on this matter especially since there is ‘a significant amount of people who consider that Islamic wear cannot be fashionable and frequently reflect plain black burqa’ (Asher, 2016). However, that was not what I meant to say. Personally, on one hand, I do not think that there is any particular attire, whether it is revealing or ‘conservative’, that makes a woman beautiful. I think Fatimah can look as stunning even with her hijab on, as there are clothes and hijabs that are fashionable and beautiful but still what I believe is usually considered, sharia compliant. Nevertheless, it is not in my place here, as a researcher, to judge anyone who is not wearing hijab because, on the other hand, I also believe that the hijab in itself does not confer attractiveness, nor does it take away the attractiveness of a woman. Ultimately, I believe physical beauty is subjective.

18 A short (usually less than two inches), thin, slightly curved heel from the back edge of the shoe.
19 A long, loose garment covering the whole body from head to feet.
20 Adhere to Islamic system of law and the totality of the Islamic way of life.
At the beginning of the interview, I tell Fatimah that I cannot help but notice how her appearance has changed.

Following is a part of my interview extract with Fatimah:

Is: I have to say that you look so different, Fatimah! Different [Pauses] but still beautiful!

Below is my explanation as to why I said what I said above:

I understand that I have to be very cautious when I talk about her changes in appearance, as I do not want her to be offended or to think that I am judgemental. I tell her that she looks different, but still beautiful, which I sincerely think she does, hoping that she will comment on her new appearance. [Field notes]

Fatimah: Thank you! You know… intercultural experience! [Pauses] I guess? [Laughs]

The following is what thought about her as she responded to my compliment:

Fatimah laughs after mentioning ‘intercultural experience’, possibly because she knows that is what we are going to talk about today and realises that it is a topic that we both share. Her response also seems like a confession that her change is what she thinks, a result of her intercultural experience. [Field notes]

Below is how I responded to her because of what she said:

Is: Oohh, I'm excited to find out more about it!

Fatimah: You knooow, I'm like soooo glad that I'm here, studying in the UK. I come from an old-fashioned family. My family thinks that being a girl, I don't have to pursue my study after getting my degree, which I am planning to, one day. And (Fatimah’s parents think) I should get married after getting my first degree [Pauses]
There was this one time I had to ask my friend to pretend to be my boyfriend so that my parents won’t try to find a guy for me. You know, like arranged marriage. Well, I know that their [Fatimah’s parents] marriage was arranged but why do they think it’s okay to do the same to me. Right? I mean, come on. The world has changed! [Pauses] Speaking of intercultural experience [Pauses] I love it here. I feel like I can be who I want to be. If you ask me, this is the effect of my intercultural experience of being in the UK. I can finally be myself! I don’t have to be or do what other people expect me to. It feels sooooooo good. I can wear what I want to wear, do what I want to do and go where I want to go! Freedom! Like soooooo awesome!

Here I am sensing that perhaps the way Fatimah was before was not really what she considered her true self. Especially when she mentioned, ‘I can finally be myself!... I can wear what I want to wear, do what I want to do and go where I want to go!’ Rather, her behaviour and her way of dressing formerly were something that was pre-determined or expected of her as the ‘ideal personality’, probably due to her family upbringing or because of the community she was living in. For instance, Fatimah was possibly wearing hijab before in order to obey her parents or because she was trying to blend in in her community and was not wearing her hijab voluntarily. Being away from her family and free from them and their surveillance, Fatimah probably felt more confident and freer to express herself, allowing her to determine her own personality and choices guided by her inner needs and preferences. The way Fatimah dressed after moving to the UK was probably how she had always wanted to dress. Living in a new place, away from her family gave Fatimah a freedom to choose who she wanted to be and allowed her the opportunity to reinvent herself.

Sometime after that interview, I saw a picture of Fatimah on Facebook in which she was tagged with a girl who claimed to be her sister according to the photo captioned, ‘Visiting my sister in Canterbury’. In the photo, Fatimah was wearing a hijab, long black jeans and a leather jacket, which I thought made her look ‘fashionable’, and at the same time, shariah compliant. So, I contacted Fatimah
via Facebook messenger to ask if she could comment on this [Facebook messenger interview]:

Is: I saw your photo with your sister on Facebook. You are wearing hijab again?

Fatimah: *LOL*. Nahh.

Fatimah: Just when she was here.

Fatimah: Haha.

Fatimah: Shhh… [A face with a displayed zipper instead of a mouth]

The following is what I thought about her based on her replies of Facebook:

From her reply, I presume that Fatimah is asking me to keep her new appearance a secret. I dare not ask her why she chooses to hide her ‘new’ personality from her family as I am worried that she might be uncomfortable and simply because, based on my experience this question can be a little too sensitive to some people. [Field notes]

From the extract above, I was almost certain that Fatimah’s family did not know that she had changed her appearance since she came to the UK. I gathered that she wanted to shield her new self from her family and probably from some other people in her Facebook community too. This is possibly because Fatimah thought her previous image was an ideal image compared to her ‘new’ image and would be more socially accepted by most of her Facebook community, which includes her family members. Often, the ‘Facebook-self’ can be very different from the user’s ‘real’ or ‘true self’ because the ‘Facebook-self’ is usually a more popular and socially acceptable self (Gil-Or, Levi-Belz, & Turel, 2015). In many cases, social media has often led people to create a different image of themselves and hide certain information they think will not be accepted by others. This probably explains why Fatimah did not post any picture of the ‘new’ her and why she was still using an image of her wearing hijab as her profile picture on Facebook. This again showed that her previous appearance was a personality that was partly

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21 An abbreviation that means laugh out loud.
pre-imposed on her and somewhat formed in accordance to the exigencies of her social surrounding before. Hiding her new self could be a way for her to protect herself from being judged by some people on her Facebook contact, which she also mentioned during the interview. Fatimah’s personality after coming to the UK was possibly therefore a result of her being away from her family surveillance which enable her to enjoy her freedom of choice and to express herself, thus allowing her to form her own personality.

5.2.2 Izzah: ‘I figured, if I am not going to wear hijab, I thought why not dress up the way I always wanted to!’

Izzah is another research participant who has changed her appearance drastically. From being a hijabi, Izzah has now taken off her hijab and also changed her choice of fashion. Although, unlike Fatimah, Izzah’s change in appearance was not something that I would have anticipated. Since Izzah came to study in the UK, I would have thought that if she were to change her appearance, her style would at least be influenced by what I considered the ‘West fashion’. However, Izzah’s new appearance seemed to be more influenced by ghoulish Japanese street style. Following was my impression of Izzah during our first meeting in Malaysia:

Izzah is what I would consider a person with positive attitude. She is polite and very soft spoken. [Field notes]

Izzah seemed courteous every time we met even when she was laughing. I thought Izzah carried herself well. Below is an extension of my impression of Izzah when we first met:

During our first meeting in Malaysia, Izzah wears a pair of white cotton baju kurung with small pink flowers printed. She pairs her baju kurung with a plain, soft pink hijab shawl and a pair of flower ballet flats in nude colour. She perfected her look with a pink peony flower shawl pin on the right side of her head, to keep her shawl in place and possibly as an accessory too. [Field notes]
To me, Izzah looked very ‘sweet’ in her attire on the interview day.

Below is the extract of my interview with Izzah [Face to face interview]:

Izzah and I met at a café in the town centre where Izzah lived on the day of the interview. Following was my impression of Izzah during our interview:

I come early to the café to wait for Izzah. After waiting for five minutes, a woman approaches me at my table. She smiles while she greets me. She sounds like Izzah but she does not really look like her as far as I could remember. To my surprise, she really is Izzah! Except without her hijab on. We exchange greetings. Despite her new look, she is still that courteous Izzah, shaking my hand and talking to me so politely. [Field notes]

I had never seen Izzah without hijab before our interview meeting, which explained why I could not recognise her when we met at the café. Besides, when I first started my research, I did not perceive Izzah as someone who would likely to change radically. Hence why I was relatively surprised to see her and her changes. Although, I learnt here that I should not have made assumptions about people. I reflected that, often, instead of establishing our understanding of people and events based on what we know for a fact, we regularly choose to make conclusions based on our emotions, beliefs, expectations and wishes. More often than not, the assumptions that we made are wrong. The danger of making assumptions is that, we may start to think that these assumptions are simply the truths. In this case, Izzah appeared to me very pleasant that it made me liked her and partly wished that she would just stay the same and therefore lead me to make an assumption that she would not radically transform her identity after coming to the UK. What I thought about Izzah when we met in the UK is noted in the following:

Although she is no longer wearing hijab, she does not wear ‘revealing’ clothes like Fatimah did. [Field notes]
I supposed, seeing Fatimah wearing ‘revealing’ clothes after she took off her hijab, I somehow expected that most Malaysian Muslim women who took off their hijab (which I considered one of the drastic things to do) would also change their style of clothing drastically by wearing ‘revealing’ outfits. However, after going through the extract again, I realised that I was again being presumptuous and rather stereotypical for thinking the way I did and that it was again wrong for me to make such supposition. Izzah’s fashion sense is highlighted in the excerpt below:

Nevertheless, Izzah’s fashion sense seems to have changed from the last time we met. On the interview day, Izzah wears an outfit that looks to me, to be representing the Harajuku Gothic Lolita fashion\(^{22}\) that features black Victorian inspired dress with plenty of lace and a pair of black, long skinny jeans. Izzah has a black lace glove only on her right hand. Izzah has her wavy, what seems to me like burgundy coloured hair done in twin tail\(^{23}\), giving what some people might consider a touch of innocence to her gothic look. She also has a fairly big, black, flower headband. [Field notes]

Izzah’s style had entirely changed after coming to the UK. Her fashion appeared to have been influenced by what I thought would be the Harajuku fashion\(^{24}\), which was also validated by Izzah later on in the interview. Below are two images of Gothic Lolita Fashion that I obtained from Google image to give readers rough ideas of how Izzah’s fashion looked like. Although, what Izzah was wearing was nearly similar to what is shown in the second picture however not as body hugging.

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\(^{22}\) Style that features Victorian, Edwardian or Georgian inspired dresses with plenty of frills and lace with an emphasis on the dark side of fashion featuring colours such as black, burgundy, greys.

\(^{23}\) Refers to twin bunches of hair on opposite sides of the head.

\(^{24}\) Styles originated among teens on the streets near Harajuku Station in Shibuya, Japan.
While gothic style is often associated by some people with violence, being eerie, mysterious, complex and exotic (Ferla, 2005), Izzah has proven that such claim is not necessarily true. During the interview, it was observed that despite her new
fashion identity, she seemed to have maintained her gracious, polite and soft-spoken self, the way she was before (when I met her in Malaysia). This indicates that, the characteristics which are regularly linked to Goth style or any other styles as a matter of fact, is indeed a stereotype and does not and should not be used to define a person who chooses any particular style of fashion. This also indicates complexity and that a person is capable of expressing a seemingly infinite amount of personality traits. In spite of everything, how can we know what someone is like by looking at his or her outward appearance? The answer is, we simply cannot.

After exchanging greetings, we talk. I ask Izzah:

Is: What has happened to you? You look different! [Humorously]

While I was asking her wittily at that time, still, I was really hoping that she would answer my question truthfully. [Field notes]

Izzah: [Smiles] I know… [Giggles] …I’m no longer wearing hijab [Giggles]… My mother told me not to wear it here (in the UK).

Is: Aahhh, I see…

The following is how I felt upon hearing Izzah’s response:

I am completely flabbergasted upon hearing Izzah’s answer. However, I try not to show it for I do not want to give her any wrong ideas or simply offend her as this might probably reduce my chance of obtaining deeper information regarding her change. [Field notes]

I was essentially surprised to hear Izzah’s answer at that time, as I thought it was reasonably uncommon for me to hear a Malaysian Muslim parent prohibiting his or her child from following what I consider a religious obligation (e.g. wearing hijab). I thought Izzah’s revelation was interesting, as, most parents would usually advise their children to do the ‘right thing’, which I believe, often includes fulfilling
their religious obligations. How I felt about Izzah’s answer is highlighted in the following:

I cannot help to question if her disclosure is indeed the truth or if it is an answer she gives to stop me from discussing this matter further? So, I ask Izzah if she does not mind telling me what her mother’s reason was to not let her wear hijab in the UK. [Field notes]

Below is Izzah’s answer when I asked her what her mother’s reason was to not let her wear hijab in the UK:

Izzah: She is just worried about my safety [Pauses] Well, my mum thinks that it is safer for me not to draw too much attention to myself [Pauses] So, she told me not to wear my hijab here [Pauses] that’s why.

I felt Izzah’s answer was rather strange that I highlighted about it in my field note below:

I find her reason rather eccentric especially when she is the only one in the café whom I think looks ‘different’ from the rest of the sitting customers that I can see in the café. [Field notes]

Is: You mean…
Izzah: After these (terrorist) attacks…

Below is my what I thought upon hearing Izzah’s response:

I suppose I do understand Izzah’s mother’s fear. After so many incidents related to Islam that have been happening around the world, which have probably given Islam and Muslims a bad name, Izzah’s mother is possibly worried and afraid of any anti-Muslims backlash that might affect her daughter, especially, if Izzah was wearing hijab, a garment that is often associated with Islam. Although hijab does not necessarily represent the Muslim women, it is somehow perceived to be a ‘visible religious symbol’ by many people (Ahmed, 2017). Hence, I suppose, it is quite
understandable why Izzah’s mother is concerned with Izzah having her hijab on. [Field notes]

Nonetheless, reflecting on our meeting at the café, I thought Izzah’s answer was rather ironic since I considered what she wore that day already made her stand out and probably would have already drawn some people’s attention. Her choice of fashion made her looked ‘different’ as I could not see anyone else at the café wearing the kind of outfit she was wearing. I thought, if Izzah was trying to prevent attack, it would have been better for her to ‘blend in’ with her surroundings instead of dressing differently. It seemed to me that there were contradictions between what she said and what she was wearing. However, I refrained myself from asking her the questions I had in mind as I was afraid that I might end up upsetting her.

Izzah: It’s scary.

I agree with Izzah’s statement. It is indeed scary. [Field notes]

I think now is really a hard time for Muslims around the world as it seems to me that these incidents have been causing rampant hatred toward most Muslims. Even though I have never encountered any kind of racial abuse, I personally do know a few people who had been victims to abuse and hate crimes in the UK and I have heard their stories which somehow helped me to make sense of what Izzah was telling me at that time as well as her mother’s fear. The excerpt below highlights what I told Izzah upon hearing her remark above:

I tell Izzah that I think I understand why her mother is worried about her wearing hijab in the UK. I contribute my thought about the (hate crime) issues that have been happening in the UK to assure her that I do understand her and her mother’s worry and that I am not simply saying ‘I understand’ just to make her feel better. [Field notes]
Izzah: I really cannot imagine it … if I have to face (racial) abuse like that … Like those people who have been abused for being Muslims … I don’t think I have the courage to say or do anything to defend myself … What am I supposed to do? I am just a small sized girl after all. [Utters as she maintains her smile]

Is: I know what you mean … It is indeed scary … especially if you have to face the abuse when you are alone …

Below is what I thought because of what Izzah said above:

I too do not know how I would react to hate crime if I were to be a victim. I am sure it is terrifying. I can only imagine being a victim to any kind of attack or abuse is frightening and we can only do so much to avoid attack or abuse. However, I also believe that ultimately it depends on our ‘circumstantial luck’ whether or not we were to be victims of abuse or attack irrespective of where we are. Suddenly, I feel interested to find out about what kind of friends does Izzah spend most of her time with, inside and outside her university. [Field notes]

Is: If you don’t mind me asking, may I know who are your close friends here? Are they Malaysians or any other foreign people and are they worried about this (racially motivated attack) issue?

Izzah: Oh! I am close with my housemates … they are all Malaysians, all four of them! You’ve met them the other day … we’ve never talked about this but I think they are worried too.

What I thought after hearing Izzah’s answer to my question is noted below:

I remember them. They are indeed all Malaysians as I recalled our past meeting and conversation and they were all Hijab wearing Muslim women. [Field notes]
The reason I asked this question to Izzah was to find out if she was spending her time with what I believe Izzah’s mother would consider ‘attention drawing’ people. Again, I find what she said and what she did was rather contradicting. It may be true after all that Izzah took off her hijab just to gratify her parents and she perhaps did not believe that it would prevent her from being racially abused. Or maybe, Izzah did not realise the consequences would probably be the same if she associated herself with people who wore hijab.

Is: Although, do you feel safe? … or safer now? I mean you are friends with people who are wearing hijab, right? Won’t they be drawing attention like what your mum thinks?

Izzah: [Giggles] I think so … so far, I have never had any problems! But I’m comfortable with them.

Though, I wonder if Izzah would still be wearing her hijab if her mother did not ask her to take it off. So, I ask her and she tells me:

Izzah: I think I would still be wearing hijab if it wasn’t for my mother… I have been wearing hijab since my school years so… it would be a bit awkward for me to take my hijab off actually…. Truthfully, when I first came here, I felt that way too. It was as if… you were incomplete… Like something was not right… something was missing… Like you were walking around naked! [Giggles] …But I believe that my mother knows best… Whatever she asks me to do or decides for me is only for the best. I think, apart from the hijab, I am still the Izzah that everybody knows. [Smiles]

The following is what I thought when Izzah answered me:

She is right! I agree that other than not wearing her hijab, I think she is still the Izzah that I met in Malaysia. The way she talks, she still seems like before, still courteous and soft-spoken. [Field notes]
From her answer, I gathered Izzah was possibly just being a good and obedient daughter. However, I wonder how Izzah overcame those feelings (incomplete, like something was not right, missing, naked), which I assume not an easy thing to do especially when she felt as if she was ‘walking around naked’ when she was not wearing hijab albeit she was in her clothes.

Is: Wow! How did you overcome those feelings then? It mustn’t have been easy.

Izzah: I don’t know. It was okay [calm and unhesitatingly]. You just got used to it I think [Giggles].

Here is what I thought because of what and how Izzah responded to my question:

I am quite surprised with her answer and the way she says it. I reflect it is somewhat odd that she competently says that ‘It was okay’ for her to overcome the ‘incomplete, like something was not right, missing, naked’ feelings she had and that too while giggling. [Field notes]

Reflecting on my comment during the interview, I gathered it was strange and enthralling at the same time that Izzah felt overcoming her feelings after taking off her hijab was ‘okay’ and she declared it without hesitation and with a giggle. Her reaction somewhat appeared to me that prevailing over those feelings was probably an easy thing for her to do when I thought it was supposed to be arduous instead. I actually expected to see feelings of resentment or at least a complaint from Izzah since she had to do something that I believe made her feel uncomfortable but surprisingly that was not the case. Hence, Izzah’s response makes me wonder if she was really taking off her hijab merely to fulfil her parents’ desire as she claimed it or if it was something that she had wanted to do already and now that she has had her parents’ permission, she was using it as an opportunity to reinvent herself. Or perhaps, she felt overcoming her ‘uneasiness’ was ‘okay’ as she conceivably believes that she has not done anything wrong, since what she did was just obliging her parents.
After a while, I ask Izzah about her change of style as I find it very gripping that she chooses to style herself in a Japanese Harajuku Lolita Fashion. [Field notes]

I thought Izzah’s choice of fashion was rather intriguing as instead of being influenced by the ‘western’ fashion (which I thought she would, if she was going to change her fashion sense), Izzah chose to wear outfit resembling what I thought was Japanese cartoon characters. It was not something I had expected. I wonder where she could have gotten that? I thought it was reasonably implausible for Izzah to be inspired to dress like a Japanese cartoon character because of something that she had seen here in the UK. However, it is perhaps not impossible after all since UK is a diverse place where we can see everyone from different communities and cultural backgrounds.

Izzah: I have always loved anime\textsuperscript{25}. I think they are kawaii\textsuperscript{26}! [Excitedly, almost shrieking] … I love anime! Everything about it! The exaggerated emotions, the impressive fight scenes, the comical moments, the sad parts that make you cry, the characters that you love, the suspenseful moments, the tragic moments. All this shown by amazing art! … Anime makes my mind wonder off somewhere, and it makes my imagination go wild! And… and… and… Most characters look better than real people! They are sooooooo attractive! Kawaii!! [Eagers]

The following is my impression to Izzah’s reaction:

I can see that Izzah looks very excited when she talks about anime. She talks about anime enthusiastically, full of emotions, facial expressions and gestures. [Field notes]

\textsuperscript{25} Japanese animation
\textsuperscript{26} Cute in Japanese language
The way Izzah talked to me about her love for anime somehow made me feel drawn into her story. It made me feel like I am really taken into another world, world of anime. The way she talked about how she loved anime literally made my eyes opened wider and stared at her in amazement. It seemed to me that Izzah was a huge fan of anime, probably explains why she was dressing up the way she did. What I thought about Izzah’s response is written below:

I actually get why Izzah is excited for I too was a fan of anime. They indeed have attractive characters. I find anime characters are both cute and beautiful instantaneously. I decided to tell Izzah that I used to love anime too hoping that my revelation about our shared interest will take us further into conversation. [Field notes]

I decided to disclose to Izzah that I used to like anime as I thought by bringing my personal trajectory, I would possibly be able to generate a thread way of talking, which ‘focuses attention on diverse aspects of our pasts that mingle with the experiences that we find and the threads of the people that we meet’ (Amadasi & Holliday, 2017a), in hope that my intervention would further engage Izzah with the interview. Looking back, I realised that this incident proved that pulling through things from my past experience to find and engage with the threads of other people’s experience is very helpful in the way that it helps me to develop conversations with other people and to bring us together. In my interview with Izzah, I thought I managed to work out how to find threads to connect myself with her.

Izzah: Really?! Oh my God! Oh my God! Oh my God! I am sooooo excited! … It’s not everyday you can find someone who enjoys anime like you do! Or at least… you did!

Izzah looks excited and happy.
I think Izzah seemed happy at that time conceivably because she felt like she found something that we both could relate to.

Izzah: You know, I figured, if I am not going to wear hijab, I thought why not dress up the way I always wanted to! … So, here I am! Trying to look like the anime characters! Not as cute but hey, I love it!

Izzah starts to open up to me after my revelation regarding my past interest in anime. Izzah sounds assured as she blurts out why she is dressed up in a Harajuku Gothic Lolita Fashion. [Field notes]

In the above statement, Izzah exhibited how she actually used the freedom (from wearing hijab) given by her parents to reinvent herself, confirming my assumption before. Izzah’s case somehow resonates with Fatimah’s in which regardless of their different way of changes and circumstances, both of them use the opportunities they had to express themselves and to form their own personalities. What I thought about Izzah then is highlighted below:

I admire Izzah’s confidence. Honestly, it is not a characteristic that I expected from her, as she is always looking very shy. She does not look like most of the locals because of the way she chooses to dress but she seems happy and sure about her choice of fashion. We talk more about her life in the UK. [Field notes]

Izzah sounded different than before, more confident. Before I share my personal trajectory with her, she still seemed shy and probably unsure about sharing her story with me hence why I think she was always giggling when she answered my questions. I thought my decision to bring my personal trajectory was a good decision. It had probably showed me the ‘current’ or maybe even the ‘real’ side of Izzah that I never knew.
Before we bid each other goodbye, I see that she is mumbling alone. So, I ask her:

Is: Are you saying something to me.

Izzah replies:

Izzah: Oh, no. I’m reciting a dua. My mum taught me to always pray before I do anything. To ensure my safety and to make sure that God is always looking after me and blessing what I do.

One thing I realise about her is that, she is always reciting a prayer before she does something. I realise that she prays before she sits, she prays before she drinks and eats at the café. Izzah amazes me. [Field notes]

Izzah: I always seek my parents’ advice before doing something. I feel safe that way. I know that I won’t make any wrong decision if I consult them first. They know best. Even if their decisions are wrong, I will take whatever the outcomes are positively. They are my parents, I’m sure they wouldn’t want anything bad to happen to me. [Utters while smiling to me]

I think it is hard to find someone who actually does this; recite a prayer every time he or she does something. Some people tend to forget to recite a prayer before doing some things, or simply do not bother to do it while there are also people who only recite prayers when they are in need of something or doing something important. It is really good to see someone like Izzah, who recites a prayer in almost everything that she does. Truthfully, it is not something I would have expected from a woman, who is not wearing a hijab. This is because, according

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27 Literally meaning ‘invocation’, is an act of supplication or simply means asking God for something also a call made to Allah asking for His help.
to my understanding of the Islamic dress code, wearing hijab is an obligation for Muslim women but since she does not follow the obligation for women to wear hijab, I truthfully do not expect her to do something that is not an obligation or a sunnah28 (reciting dua’ almost all the time). I realised that I was wrong again for thinking about her or any other person who does not wear hijab that way. Wearing a hijab does not define who you really are, and it does not mean that a person who is wearing hijab is better than another person who is not wearing one. We might be wearing Hijab, but we might be doing something incredibly wrong which cancels out the reward for wearing hijab. For all I know, Izzah could be a better Muslim than I am even though I am wearing hijab and she is not. After all, she did mention before that she took off her hijab because it was her mother’s wish. Perhaps, she was just being a good and obedient daughter, who listened and complied with her parents’ wishes. Although Izzah’s reason for taking off her hijab was different from Fatimah, both of them seemed to have used the opportunities they have (to take off their hijab) to reinvent their personalities.

**Summary**

Based on both narratives of Fatimah and Izzah, it is apparent that both of them have drastically changed their appearances. Their reasons for changing their appearances are different. However, as mentioned previously, both seem to have used the opportunities they have (to take off their hijab) to reinvent their personalities.

In these two narratives, we can see that our underlying personalities are impervious to change and can be influenced by people’s life circumstances. For instance, as mentioned before, Fatimah’s change was possibly a result of her being away from her family surveillance which enable her to enjoy her freedom of choice and to express herself, while in Izzah’s case, her change was due to her being obligated to her parents’ wish and she started to experiment with different fashion style which according to her made more sense now that she no longer wore hijab. This shows how people bring their personal trajectories and use these trajectories to negotiate their positions and make choices within the cultural landscapes to which they belong and that this process takes place all the time and is a basic essence of human being (Holliday, 2019).

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28 The verbally transmitted record of the teachings, deeds and sayings, silent permissions (or disapprovals) of the Islamic prophet Muhammad, as well as various reports about Muhammad’s companions.
5.3 Religiousness

The subsequent data shows evidence of radical changes to two participants’ religious practices. The findings show the inconsistency of the participants’ religious identifications and worldviews since they behave in distinctly different ways. Although both participants introduced changes to their religious practices, one participant showed changes in terms of becoming religiously observant while the other seemed to be the opposite.

5.3.1 Wana: ‘I am becoming closer to God and my religion’

In this particular section, Wana communicated about her transformation in which she had become a religiously observant person after coming to the UK. Below were my thoughts about my participant Wana when we first met.

Wana wears a pair of red ‘baju kurung’ and pairs them up with a plain, white, square hijab. Wana styles her hijab simply by pinning both ends of her square hijab to the opposite sides of her shoulders²⁹. She has a soft red coloured lipstick put on her lips. She looks ‘decent’. [Field notes]

However, after coming to the UK, from the recent pictures Wana posted on her Facebook, I realised that her image had significantly changed. In most of her pictures after coming to the UK, Wana seemed to prefer wearing abayas³⁰ or loose, long sleeve, knee length t-shirt with a loose pants and with long hijab on, longer than a normal hijab that it covers almost all part of her upper body.

The following is a part of my interview extract with Wana [Facebook messenger interview]. It was explained by Wana to me how her intercultural experience in the UK has brought her closer to God and her religion.

On the day of the interview, I send a private message to Wana on her Facebook messenger as we have both agreed. We chat a little before

²⁹ Left end of her hijab pinned to her right shoulder and vice versa.
³⁰ A simple, loose over-garment, essentially a robe-like dress.
we commence the interview. I start the interview question by asking her how the UK has been treating her so far. [Field notes]

Below is what Wana replied to me when I asked her about how the UK has been treating her:

Wana: Great! It has been an incredible experience so far! I mean I’m enjoying my life here. Most people are worried that their children will misuse the freedom being in a country far away from home. You know, you are here, far away from your parents’ supervision. You can do anything you want. Well, there are some truths in that but I’m glad that it does not happen to me. Being in the UK has actually gotten me closer to the creator.

Wana: Before I came here, I actually contacted my school senior who is already studying in the UK at that time… but not in the same university. We are quite close. We used to be in the same usrah31 group at school. I was so scared knowing that I will come here alone that I thought I should contact her and ask her what it’s like to study in the UK so that I could be prepared, physically and mentally. She was so nice that she offered to come and pick me up at the airport. I was relieved!

Wana: After we met at the airport, she travelled to my place of study together with me to keep me company during my first few days here. She was really nice. She also told me that she is a part of usrah group in the UK too and invited me to join her and her other group members. I agreed! … I have been joining usrah in Malaysia, I know it is a good thing. Especially now that I’m in the UK, not a Muslim country, I’d probably need it more. Plus, I think it’s also a way for me to make new friends … being far away from your parents’ supervision… and in a non-Muslim country where

31 A group of Muslim individuals getting together with faith in Islam, working and helping out one another, working together towards a better understanding and practice of Islam.
the circumstances could be different. Like you know… hard to find halal food, no mosque or prayer room and…. nobody to remind you to do what you have to do like pray, fast… you know. You might be tempted… to do something you are not supposed to.

Is: I get what you mean.

Wana then continues:

Wana: After my senior left, I felt so lonely. I didn't know anyone then. I cried the first night I was here. Hihi! [Indicating laughs]. And that night I thought to myself, I am alone here, I have no one. No one but Allah. I can only depend on Allah. So yeah, I feel so close to Allah now that I have nowhere or no one else to go to. When I’m sad, happy or anything, I’ll go to Him, talk to Him. It makes me feel closer to God. Being here. Alhamdulillah.

What I thought about Wana’s remarks is written below:

This makes sense to me. This has actually happened to me before. [Field notes]

What Wana said about her depending on God when she was feeling lonely was actually something I could relate to. I remember when I was really lonely at one point during my undergraduate study, I did not want to face the loneliness, I did not want to deal with it, and I kept thinking, ‘If I just had a person to be with . . .’ I wanted to never have to be by myself for an evening or a weekend and it finally hit me: what I need is not more plans or more people. I do not have to have something lined up for every night or every weekend. I just need to love God more, and I need to sit back, remember, and realise how much He loves me. With the simple realisation of that reality at a heart level, I noticed within a very short amount of time- within a matter of days- that my fear of being alone was gone. I did not suddenly need to fill up that space anymore. Reminiscing this incident
actually makes me realise that this act of people changing and becoming religiously observant is not something unique, unusual or shocking after all. Instead, it is an action that individuals take to ‘negotiate their position within the cultural landscapes to which they belong’ (Holliday, 2019, p. 3) and this actually involves skills and strategies. In Wana’s case, being closer to God and becoming more religious is perhaps an action that she takes in order to cope with her new setting.

Wana: And I’m also in a local usrah group, with some other Malaysian students here and I also join my senior’s usrah group as much as I can. Sometimes I’d travelled to other places to join these usrah. Oh, and I am actually the naqibah\(^{32}\) in the local usrah group here. Hihi.

Wana: These people, they are really nice. They treat me like family. We treat each other and everyone like family. We are sisters. And we remind each other of all things related to Islam. I feel belonged when I’m with them. I feel as if I was so close to my family. I think we are stronger here, in a different country. In Malaysia, we have usrah but we are not as strong as we are here because the organisation here is big. And we are all far away from our families so, we depend on each other more, which makes us stronger, closer.

Wana: I learn a lot with them... all good things. All the sisters that I met during usrah are very nice. Like very, very nice. I want to be like them. They portray that Islam is really a peaceful religion. I want to be like that. To be able to show the people here what Islam really is. Peaceful. I want people to know that Islam is not a violent religion like what the media has been showing to us.

Wana: …now that I’m in UK, I can try to do that… to change people’s perceptions about Islam [Says confidently].

Highlighted in the following is what I thought what Wana had said in the above excerpt:

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\(^{32}\) An Arabic word which means group leader
From the moment we started our interview, I grasped Wana keeps on emphasising about her becoming more religious after coming to the UK. I do not know how far her claim about her being more religious is true. However, based on the pictures of her that she posted on her Facebook (which was mentioned earlier), I think she does look like a religious person. [Field notes]

Wana indeed kept on emphasising about her transformation into becoming a more religious person after coming to the UK. Looking back at my field notes, I realised that for a moment there I actually agreed with her claim of becoming more religious based on the kind of attire that she wore and that too merely based on her photos that I saw on her Facebook post. Here I realised that I was making the same mistake again by making assumption too quickly just like what I did with Fatimah during our first meeting. I believed it is true that we make all kind of assumptions every day and that perhaps it is part of human nature to base our understanding of other people and the world not just on the facts that we observe but to a greater or lesser extent on what is going on inside of us, psychologically which I think is rather dangerous. So, how to we stop making so many assumptions and start basing our understanding of people and the world on more tangible facts? Perhaps, it will help if we simply pause as we are about to jump to our conclusions and ask ourselves, ‘How do I know this?’ However, I have to admit that it is easier said than done.

On another note, from Wana’s story, I also comprehended that her change was also associated with the feeling of belonging in which she had sought more existential comfort from her faith during her study sojourn. Personally, I think it is interesting for me to see an example of a Muslim student whose devotion was getting more robust despite being in what I would consider a Christian country. This is because, often I would hear the opposite which is, Muslim students whose expression of faith undergo modification ‘negatively’ when they are in countries where Islam is not the main religion. I find Wana’s change is also intriguing because, I would have thought that if people change after their move to the UK,
they would become more ‘Westernised’ however, Wana’s case is completely different.

Is: I see. So, how would you say your intercultural experience of being in the UK affects you then?

Wan: Like I said, I think I am becoming closer to God and my religion. Coming to the UK, it just [pauses] changes me that way I think, Alhamdulillah.

Below is what I thought after my first interview with Wana:

Frankly, I am not sure what else I could ask Wana from this interview. [Field notes]

Commenting on why I felt like I did not know what else to ask Wana from the interview, truthfully, this was mainly because she talked about becoming more religious and I did not want to sound sceptical if I asked her to comment more on her change. However, I was lucky that I had a chance to talk to Wana’s friend, Azza.

Is: You know I am currently doing my research right? And Wana is one of my participants. I am really interested in Wana’s changes.

I knew that Azza was Wana’s friend and housemate so when I met her, I intentionally started the following conversation to see if she could tell me anything about Wana’s drastic change. I was careful not to disclose to Azza what Wana told me during our online interview.

Azza: Oh, that. Yeah! She changes right, like so drastic! I mean, everyone’s been talking about it!

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33 To be influenced by ideas, customs, practices, etc of the West.
Is: Really?

Azza: Duhh! It's too extreme! Of course, people notice that! But, I don’t know, I think she was being too drastic, you know, from being someone ordinary she suddenly changes which is good as she is becoming more Muslimah\textsuperscript{34} but when you change so drastically, people normally say that you’d probably change back to the way you were before. You know what I’m saying? I mean it’s like too much. But I don’t know. We shall see. [Pauses] thing is, it’s good if she is becoming more pious and reflecting the way a Muslim should be. But there are things that I don’t quite agree with her (behaviour).

Is: Hmm. Interesting. Like what?

Azza: Well, it seems to me that there are things that she does that do not reflect a good Muslim, or you know, Muslim values. For example, she attends all these usrah and Islamic programmes, but she sometimes did not attend her lectures because of these programmes. I mean she is here to study. Where is her priority? I’m sure Islam is not like that right. It’s embarrassing us the Malaysian and also Muslim students here!

Is: Oh, I don’t know that.

Azza: Of course, you don’t. Why would she tell you? LOL. It seems to me that her usrah is her priority. She sometimes skipped class because she has to attend an usrah so far away. Oh, and there was one time when we had to do a group work and she didn’t make it on time because of her usrah. The thing is, she was the one who chaired the usrah so, I’d expect that she could you know, change her usrah time or something since the group work was supposed to be our priority at that time considering that we had to submit the work the next day and it involved four other people in our group! Oh my God, just talking about this makes me angry. Pfft. I’m not a bad Muslim you see, it’s just that, I think she should

\textsuperscript{34} Devout believer.
know her priority. If both are important, she should know how to manage both of them and not neglecting either one of them. After all, the main reason she comes here is to study, not to only do usrah.

Is: Do you think you know what really causes her to change like that?

Azza: I don’t know. I think it’s because of that Islamic organisation that she joins. They are good and nice people, they really know how to sort of make you feel welcomed and feel belonged. They know how to ‘pull’ people in. I mean there’s nothing wrong with that. Like I said, they are good people and that’s not a bad approach. It’s just that I think Wana should know how to manage her time and responsibilities better. It seems to me that she changes because she just likes the feeling of being with them, she feels belonged probably and also because she is like the usrah leader here, I think she likes to be the authority figure, you know, because she is in charged of the usrah group here and people often seeks her advice. Don’t get me wrong I’m not jealous of her. I just don’t get her. It irritates me to see that she is here on scholarship to study but instead she does not put her study as priority. I mean you can always study and do these usrahs at the same time as other people what? I have friends that are involved in these usrah groups too and they can balance both their studies and usrahs.

Is: I see. May I know on what basis you think that she changes because she wants to feel belonged and because she likes to be the authority figure?

Azza: Well, that. You know you can tell that someone is into something by observing how she reacts or responds to certain things right? Well, whenever I ask her about work or anything assignment related, she'll just give me a short answer or you know, just doesn’t show interest. And she is always waiting until the last minute to finish her assignment. But if you ask her about anything related to usrah, or the Islamic ideologies, you know things that she feels she is good at or better than you, she'll be very anxious
[pauses] excited to answer and to [pauses] you know [pauses] explain [pauses] elaborate [pauses] even when you say that you’ve understood it, she’ll keep on going on and on about it. She seems like a showoff too sometime. And self-righteous! She’s not all that bad but sometimes [pauses] she’s just [pauses] argh, I don’t know!

Is: Oh. What do you mean she is self-righteous?

Azza: yeah, she sometimes seems like she feels superior you know, when it comes to religious talk. In study too sometimes. Like she knows everything. I think that’s why she likes to be in the usrah group. Because she likes to feel superior and belonged. She wasn’t in any usrah group before coming to the UK and doesn’t look pious at all. She just looked like us before! You know, wearing t-shirt, jeans, short hijab. Then suddenly, bam! She is like the ustazah35 now. And always sort of judging people too. Always trying to preach on everyone and sometimes not at the right time. Pfft. Like so insensitive [rolls eyes].

Is: Have she been like that with you?

Azza: Well, once or twice. I mean, I came from quite a religious background myself, but chill, man. I don’t go around being all self-righteous like her. She is acting all religious, pious outside. But at home, she is just as crazy as us, laughing like a crazy person, gossiping with us. But outside, when she is with her usrah members, she’ll be all soft spoken, polite and she even covers her mouth when she laughs. It’s like a 360 degree change you see! That’s why it irritates me! Like, she tries to control herself so much, trying to look like an angel when she’s not. Like a fake. And people who don’t know her will be all, ‘ahhh, she is so perfect. She is so polite, so sweet’. Dude, you don’t even know her! Come on!

I thought Azza’s story’s about Wana is quite enticing. Her story makes me realise that they are always other interpretations about a character and his or her

35 Ustazah or usta’dha is an Arabic word which means female teacher.
intentions for doing something. Even though Wana said that her sojourn had made her become closer to God, she may have had other thoughts and motives, perhaps she actually wanted to display this part of who she was. Or perhaps at other times and for different reasons, she might want to appear ‘pious’. The point I am trying to make is that, I think Wana can and has the ability and knowledge to ‘play with the images for the best effect’ in which has been available through many resources (Holliday, 2016a, p. 40). On another note, Azza’s story also makes me realise that she too might have her own motives for responding the way she did towards Wana’s change. Furthermore, I do not know what else Wana said or did to get such comments from Azza.

I think Azza’s story about Wana is giving me more thoughts on what else I could ask Wana. So, I send Wana another private message on her facebook to see if she is available to do a follow up interview via Skype. Following is an extract from the follow up interview [Skype video interview]:

Is: Hi, Wana! How are you? How are you coping with everything? Your studies?

After my conversation with Azza, I wanted to see how Wana would respond to my question. I thought this could be a chance for me to see whether there is some truth in what Azza has told me about Wana.

Wana: Hmm, it’s fine, I think. Like other students too, struggling but I’m hanging on, Alhamdulilah.

The following is what I felt after hearing Wana’s reply:

Wana gives me a short and simple answer. She does not seem as confident as she was during our first interview. [Field notes]

The way Wana answered my question was not as enthusiastic as before that I thought perhaps, she was having a bad day, or it could be true what Azza said, Wana is more interested to talk about her new religious self than her academic.
Or perhaps, she is not comfortable to talk to me about her academic because she considers it something personal.

So, I try changing my questions:

Is: That’s good to know. So, what about your usrahs? Do you still attend or join them?

Wana: Yes! I am actually hosting some of the sessions these days!

Here is what I felt upon hearing and seeing how she responded to my question:

It is interesting to see how her response seems to have changed. [Field notes]

From her response, I can tell that she was more interested to answer my questions.

Is: Oh yeah? Well done! You seem pleased.

Wana: Of course, I am. It's good to be able to share what I know with other people and hopefully inspire them to be a better Muslim. It will be very rewarding for me. To see my ‘caterpillars’ turn into beautiful ‘butterflies’. I’m sure you understand what I meant. Ahhh…

Is: I totally understand. So, I’m guessing you are quite occupied with lectures and usrahs?

Wana: Oh, yes! But I don’t mind! Usrah is like an escape to a beautiful place for me!

Below is what I felt about Wana based on the above conversation:

Wana is again highlighting the usrah, which tells me which topic she is more interested in. Although I cannot help but feel like Wana feels
‘superior’ when she uses the terms ‘my caterpillars’ and ‘butterflies’ when she refers to the members of her usrah group. [Field notes]

Commenting on the interview extract and field notes above, I have to admit that I cannot help but think that Wana indeed thought of herself as an authority figure when she said, “to see my ‘caterpillars’ turn into beautiful ‘butterflies’”. To me, this somehow attests what Azza said about Wana’s change—because she liked being an authority figure. This again makes me question about Wana’s motives when she decided to change—whether Wana became religiously observant because she was trying to find comfort through her faith as she claimed before or if she was becoming more religious because she wanted to fit within the social group with which she associated with. It could also be that she changed for both reasons.

Is: Oh, that’s good. Is there any occasion where you have to choose between usrahs or lectures or perhaps assignments?

Wana: A few times… but rarely…

Is: So, when that happened, what did you do?

Wana: Frankly, I went to usrah. Haha! But I know how to manage my time so, I made sure that I have time to work on my assignments after the usrahs. So far, I’ve always get things done right on time!

I highlighted about what I thought about Azza’s comments on Wana based on my interview with Wana in the following field notes:

I guess there are probably some truth in Azza’s revelation to me before. Wana’s priority is her usrahs which I think is not something bad as long as she gets her other works done on time too. Although what she means by ‘right on time’ could be ambiguous. Does that mean she gets her works done at the correct time or earlier than the agreed time? [Field notes]

From the above field notes and interview extract, I understand that Wana was really captivated by usrah and being a member of usrah groups. However, I cannot be sure if her interest was genuine or like what her friend Azza said, if it
was something that made her feel superior. Though, Wana did mention at the beginning of the interview that usrahs and people from the usrah group that she joined made her feel belonged and a sense of belonging is something that most of us human need. Nevertheless, whatever the real or not the real reason for Wana’s change, I think what is more important here is for us to realise and acknowledge that there are indeed multiple realities, meanings and interpretations to this and all the other narratives in this study.

5.3.2 Zyra: ‘I consider my circumstances a difficult one’

In her interview, Zyra communicated about her change of religious practices and worldviews in the sense that she is more lenient and selective with her practices. Following was what I thought about Zyra when we first met:

The first thing about Zyra that I noticed was not her outer look but her strong character. Below is what my impression of Zyra on the day of the scholarship competition:

On the day of the competition, Zyra looks so calm and confident enough to say what she thinks and wants during the scholarship competition in Malaysia. [Field notes]

Zyra was very quick to answer the judges’ questions during the competition as if she really wanted people to take notice of her and her ability. When she was given a tricky question, she managed to answer it well and from my observation on that day, her opinion did not get swayed easily just because the judges and other participants said something differently. To me, she looked like she was the kind of person who had and would always stick to her principles. It was rather impressive as I think not many people can be as tranquil and assured as her during a nerve-racking event like this, where your future is probably at stake. I believe it also helped when she looked confident physically.

Below I what I further thought about Zyra during our first meeting:
Unlike the other participants in the interview group\textsuperscript{36}, Zyra opts to wear a black, classic, three buttons blazer over her navy blue batik\textsuperscript{37} printed baju kurung and pairs them up with plain navy blue shawl as her hijab which she wraps around her head and secures it with a rhinestones flower brooch, giving her a clean, polished and professional look. [Field notes]

Though Zyra looked different than the rest of us in that group, her choice of ‘classic’ and ‘simple’ pieces instead of ‘trendy’ and ‘flashy’ look did not give me a ‘look at me’ scream or even if it did, I believe in a very positive way. To me, her appearance did leave me a ‘good’ impression of her.

I commented of Zyra’s look further in the following:

Zyra’s full-rim glasses too help giving her the professional and smarter look. To me, she looks ‘intelligent’ with the glasses on. [Field notes]

Here, I honestly think that Zyra’s full-rim glasses did contribute to her looking intellectual. I suppose it is true after all what psychologists Leder, Forster, and Gerger (2011) found in their research that full-rim glasses, appear to reinforce certain impressions and one of them is making a person looks intelligent. Perhaps, that was really Zyra’s intention when making decision about which kind of glasses she was going for when she bought her glasses, as I did with mine. Perhaps it is not wrong to assume that people make their glass selections based on what they and others perceive to be the effects of the glasses on their appearances. However now that I am thinking about this, I wonder if I have fallen into the essentialists’ trap by making this assumption?

Below is the extract of my interview with Zyra [Face to face interview]:

\textsuperscript{36} Participants were put in smaller interview groups during the competition which consisted of ten to fifteen people in a group.
\textsuperscript{37} Fabric printed by an Indonesian method of hand-printing textiles by coating the parts not to be dyed with wax.
On our interview day, I meet Zyra at a café. She looks different now. I am quite surprised to see her ‘new’ look. Just like Fatimah, Zyra too, is no longer wearing hijab. Though, Zyra does not wear revealing clothes. [Field notes]

I would have thought that by now I would no longer be surprised to see a woman taking off her hijab after being a hijabi\(^{38}\), especially after my encounters with a few of my participants who had decided to do so. Reflecting on me being surprised during our meeting, I think the reason why I was still surprised to see this kind of change in my Muslim women participants was because, personally, this experience was something that was still new to me. It takes a lot of courage for a hijabi to be a non-hijabi and vice versa and not many people can do it and handle the repercussion of their changes. Hence, it surprises me to see and meet these, what I think, few people, directly.

Unconsciously, this experience has also got me into thinking why is it that Malaysian Muslims, including me, are often surprised and alarmed to see a hijabi taking off her hijab and decided not to wear it anymore? In fact, it seems to me that most Malaysian Muslims are generally more shocked and seek to condemn a hijabi who turns non-hijabi to a greater extent than a Muslim woman who is not wearing a hijab at all. Nonetheless, I do not think either group of people deserves to be criticised at all. While there could be many different responses to this question, based on my observation online (exemplified in the translated social media condemnation in the extract below), I believe probably the one famous claim is that, to most Malaysian Muslims, wearing a hijab is a religious statement supporting Islam as a way of living thus, taking it off could be an indication of mocking the religion or clear refusal to the ‘Islamic way of life’ which is something that is taken rather seriously among most Malaysian Muslims.

Despite the above assertion, it appears to me that some Malaysian Muslims without perhaps realising it have actually located this hijab-wearing act as more of a cultural expectation\(^{39}\) instead of religious statement. Some people deem that Muslim women who are not wearing hijabs have lesser value hence

\(^{38}\) A women or girl who wears the Islamic head-covering called Hijab.

\(^{39}\) What is thought to be right by a ‘culture’.
deserve lesser respect compared to those who are wearing hijabs since they believe that wearing hijab is something that is right and expected from a Muslim woman. My analysis concurs with Mouser (2007, p. 169) study in which she finds that the hijab has become a ‘social expectation for Malay women’ and there is so much social pressure on them to cover. Following is a translated extract of the social media condemnation on a picture of a Malaysian actress who has just taken off her hijab:

Person 1: Amazing! She has just aged 50 years, she already denied time space continuum… very impressive… God’s blessings have been taken away from this woman… but anyway… gone one of the means for me to remember God… he he he!

Person 2: honestly, you look better with hijab but honestly too, you look crazy ugly with your ‘rusty’ hair… Aiyoyoyo she has been remarkably sharing your picture without hijab… whereas so many fans have been condemning her… Hurmmm may we not be like her and people like her… Amen…

Person 3: It’s up to you… Your parents are responsible for your sins while you are not married… you’d like to see your parents in hell, wouldn’t you? Don’t you feel sorry for them?

Person 4: Kahkakah. This actress is finally back to her ‘good’ nature. Good good… This is definitely what the Satan like! Keep it up, keep it up… Hell, yeah

Person 5: Suggestion for her, while you are at it (taking your hijab off)… Why don’t you just get naked too, after all it’s not a sin, right?? We cannot force people to cover up their aurah, right?? Just my suggestion…

Person 6: she looks nice when she was wearing hijab…now that she has taken it off, she looks like a crazy person… hehe.. opss, there I’ve said it..
Person 7: Indeed the hellfire is unbearably hot and painful… Even the boiling water is enough to cause us excruciating pain… Repent, O people…

Taken and translated by the researcher from Bella (2016)

Above are comments that are mostly negatives, made on a Facebook page where a photo of a Malaysian actress who has taken off her hijab after three years of being a hijabi. Reflecting on this, I realise that some Muslims seek to condemn non-Hijabis thinking that they are doing it out of their understanding of the Quranic injunction of enjoining the good and forbidding the evil. Yet, they fail to take the right approach in doing it, in accordance with the example of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him), which was one of kindness, gentleness and patience. Truthfully, I do believe that covering aurah, which includes covering part of the head is compulsory for Muslim women (my interpretation of the Islamic dress code which varies in actual practice in different parts of the world and between people who have different interpretations) however, I also think Muslim women who are not wearing hijabs still deserve to be respected and treated with compassion.

The following is my impression upon meeting Zyra:

Zyra wears a plain body-hugging t-shirt with a printed flower long cardigan on top and pairs them up with skinny jeans and a pair of black long boots, highlighting her long, slim legs. I think she looks ‘simple’ but ‘nice’. We talk while waiting for a waiter to take our orders. Being careful not to offend Zyra because of her change, I tell Zyra that she looks lovely, which I think she really does. Zyra smiles. [Field notes]

Her face blushes as she speaks:

Zyra: Thank you!

She pauses for a while before she continues,
Zyra: Though I’m not wearing tudung\textsuperscript{40} now… [Grins][Smiles guiltily]

I commented below in my field notes when Zyra told me the above:

She tells me this although I did not comment anything about her not wearing hijab. She looks as if she has done something wrong. [Field notes]

I think Zyra was having this (guilty) look at that time as she was possibly having a guilty conscience; guilty that she has taken her hijab off now, something most Malaysian Muslims consider a sin for Muslim women that she brought that topic up before I did. Or perhaps, she was simply embarrassed that I, a hijab wearing Malay Muslim woman saw this change in her.

While she seemed embarrassed, her change in appearance was not a secret, as I did see some current photos of her not wearing hijab on her Facebook. I supposed she was more embarrassed to talk about that particular change than displaying it, which I thought is quite normal. I am saying this for it is quite a common sight on the streets in Malaysia to see Muslim women without their hijabs on, however, I believe what is difficult is to engage these non-hijab Malay Muslim women in a conversation about the hijab.

Is: [Smiles] Well, you still look nice! [Enthusiastically]

Below is what I wrote, commenting on my response to Zyra:

I responded to Zyra enthusiastically here to let her know and ensure her that I am ‘open’ and not there to judge her. [Field notes]

A little bit later, when the waiter comes, Zyra takes a look at the menu and she ‘casually’ orders a lasagne and a glass of orange juice. I am quite

\textsuperscript{40} Literally means ‘cover’, which is usually referred to as hijab or headscarf.
surprised, as I do not think the café serves halal food and it is written in the menu that the lasagne that she ordered has beef in it. Probably the café does serve halal food! I think to myself. Honestly, if they do, I would really like to order one for myself. [Field notes]

So, I ask Zyra:

Is: Do they serve halal food here? [Sound surprise]

I simply assumed that the café probably did serve halal food after seeing Zyra ordering beef lasagne, which she appeared to order it so nonchalantly. Since Zyra is a Muslim, I presumed that she would only consume halal food.

Zyra: [looks uncertain] Err…No [Pauses] I don’t think so [Pauses] Emm… But, I consider my circumstances a difficult one. You know, like living abroad, it is not easy to find halal food here. It’s circumstantial solution [Pauses] At least that’s what I think… [Confidently] [Grins]

In the following, I commented on Zyra’s facial expressions as she responded to my question:

Zyra lifts both her eyebrows while biting her lower lips after explaining to me her logic with regards to feasting of non-halal food by Muslims. [Field notes]

I believe, by doing so (lifting both her eyebrows while biting her lower lips after explaining her reason to me), she looked as if she was unsure with her reason or possibly trying to get my approval regarding this matter. I supposed Zyra either had been consuming non-halal food for quite some time now since she ‘carelessly’

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41 Arabic for permissible.

42 Food which adheres to Islamic law, as defined in the Quran.
ordered the (non-halal) beef lasagne as if she had done it before, forgetting that she was at that time, doing so, in the presence of myself, another Malaysian Muslim, or she simply did not mind that I knew she was not eating halal food only.

Instead of responding to her, I choose to ask another question to get more information from her.

Is: I suppose there’s no halal food around here? [Asks inquisitively]

I am curious to find out the answer, as based on my observation while walking around the city, I can see that there are quite a number of Muslims in the city. I wonder where do the Muslims in the city buy their halal meat if they want to? [Field notes]

Zyra: Well [Pauses] they do sell it in some shops here, but I think they are quite… [Pauses] far… [Looks dubious] [Pauses] from where I live…

Again, Zyra seems as if she is looking for my approval when answering my question. Or perhaps, she is trying to convince me of her choice (of opting for non-halal food). [Field notes]

Is: I see…

I maintain my calm look to show Zyra that I am not surprised by her choice (of consuming non-halal food) and I am not bothered by whatever it is that she has ordered. To convince her that I am not judging her or her choice, I tell her that what she has ordered looks delicious on the menu. [Field notes]

Then Zyra continues:
Zyra: I have to take a taxi or bus to get to the shop or walk 15 to 20 minutes to the shop. It’s very inconvenient!

Well, that’s not so bad, I think to myself. [Field notes]

On reflection, I was referring to the distance of the shops that was selling halal food, which was according to Zyra, would take her 15-20 minutes to walk.

Commenting on what I think about Zyra’s view on the condition that allows Muslims to eat non-halal food, based on my understanding regarding this matter, I believe, one is only permitted to eat food that is haram\textsuperscript{43} when one is in a very difficult situation like extreme hunger and there is no other thing to eat besides non-halal food. Personally, I do not think a Muslim under Zyra’s circumstance is yet permissible to consume non-halal food because according to her, there were still shops that sell halal food around and I think those shops were still reachable for her.

However, I do understand that there are a number of different views and arguments regarding Muslims consuming non-halal food but I believe, Muslims do need to consult more than one Islamic scholars to get better understanding of this issue. To me, Zyra either had different view on this matter or was probably taking it lightly. Thinking better of it, re-counting the view, ‘one is only permitted to eat food that is haram when one is in a very difficult situation’, I presume I do understand why Zyra believed that it was acceptable for her to eat non-halal food as how ones define ‘a very difficult situation’ defer from the others. However, I do realise that there are also Muslims who pick and choose which rules of Islam to practice according their convenience. I do not know which group Zyra belongs to, the first or the latter however, as a researcher, I am not in a place to judge her.

We then talk about the food there before Zyra finally mentions about her decision to take off her hijab, which according to her has something to do with her intercultural experience of living in the UK. It is also an opportunity for me to ask her to explain more about it. [Field notes]

\textsuperscript{43} Forbidden by Islamic law.
Zyra: I don’t know… I feel like it is safer for me not to wear hijab here. You know, Islamophobia and stuffs… Well, I knew someone who was punched and abused because he is a Muslim. He owns a shop near where I live now, and he has been living in the UK for more than 15 years now. 15 freaking years! Can you believe it?? And I still can’t believe why is he still being a victim of a hate crime! …The person who punched him told him to leave the country and threw some vegetables that he sold at his shop on the pedestrian walkway. I mean, come on… He’s been living here for so long and can already be considered a local and never caused any problem but suddenly, that happened. That doesn’t even make sense to me. The person who’s abused him probably doesn’t live here as long as he does… Point is… I think… I’m just scared… worried… you know, worried something like that will happen to me… So, taking off my tudung would be a good idea I supposed…

I nod my head showing her that I do understand what she is telling me, but still I ask to reassure. [Field notes]

Is: I guess that was the incident that made you decided not to wear hijab?
Zyra: I guess so… [Frowns] …Don’t you think so?

I think she does not sound convincing when she uses the word ‘guess’. Besides, she frowns when she says that to me, almost like she is unsure of what she is saying. [Field notes]

Perhaps, there was still something that she is not telling me since she somehow appeared uncertain to me.

Zyra: Some people find that wearing tudung can be difficult because of the frequent negative ideas surrounding tudung. For instance,

44 Fear and prejudice against Islam and Muslims.
wearing tudung kills job prospects. Especially when you are in a non-Muslim country. This is also an issue that I've been talking about with some of my friends who are also Muslims... People here... they may not say it but it's the reality. There are people here who won't hire the hijabis... This is something that a friend of mine, who is by the way a lecturer in one of the universities here, agreed.

I suppose there is some truth in her statement.

Zyra: …In Malaysia, I wore my tudung… on and off. Then I wore it when I first came here. Suddenly that happened and I talked to one of my housemates who is also a Muslim… but she is not Malaysian. She agreed that I should take my hijab off for safety reason. She told me that Islam is easy. I shouldn’t make it complicated, right? And if it’s for safety reason, I think, it should be all right... Don’t you think? …I think it is okay for me not to wear my tudung here... I don’t want to be abused just because I am wearing tudung… or because I look different than other people here... Being a Muslim in a non-Muslim country can be pretty scary, don’t you think? [Looks serious]

Zyra looks serious as she tells me this. At some point, she seems like she is ‘trying hard’ to make her point and also to convince me that what she does is acceptable. Particularly when she keeps on asking, ‘don’t you think?’ a few times as she gives her reasoning, which I think is a sign that she is somehow looking for my approval. Though, I could be wrong. [Field notes]

I believe I do understand what Zyra was going through. I think by the way Zyra was telling me her story, she was still grappling with a dilemma, whether to wear or not to wear hijab. I think, for Zyra, being someone who recently just turned a full-time hijabi, it could be rather normal for her to feel insecure or worried about
what people could be thinking about her, especially when she was in an unfamiliar town and probably a town where Muslim community might be small. From my understanding of Islam, the religion does allow Muslim women to take her hijab off to avoid harm. Nevertheless, according to al-Munajjid (2006), before a Muslim woman decides to take her hijab off for any safety reasons, it is crucial for her to understand the current situation she is facing and find out whether or not the situation has reached the degree of necessity that would make it permissible for her to remove her hijab. Nonetheless, in Zyra’s case, I do not know whether or not the situation had reached the stage where it was required for her to take her hijab off, nor am I in the position to give any opinion regarding Zyra’s situation for I am a researcher and also because, I do not possess adequate knowledge to offer her advice regarding this matter.

Nevertheless, it is possible that when Zyra decided to put her hijab on when she first came to the UK, she was still contemplating with the idea or probably was not doing it wholeheartedly. Therefore, it was possible for her to be swayed from her initial decision of becoming a full-time hijabi. Or perhaps, she was looking for an acceptable reason to take her hijab off, a reason that other people would sensibly accept and not judge her, conceivably explaining why she kept on looking like she was asking for my approval. Though, one thing I was almost certain was that, her friends’ opinion and stories did help her to make her decision, which was to take her hijab off.

However, it was not until later after the interview that I found out, Zyra’s housemate who gave the advice to take off her hijab was also not wearing hijab. Perhaps, that was why Zyra was convinced that she should take her hijab off apart from Zyra’s lecturer friend’s opinion regarding hijab and job prospects in the UK. Though, I wonder what was really Zyra housemate’s agenda when advising Zyra to take her hijab off? Was she genuinely worried about Zyra’s safety when she gave her the advice or was it for any other reasons like, wanting Zyra to be like her, a non-hijabi Muslim woman? Who knows?

Our conversation continues:

Is: I understand your dilemma… I think there are different views regarding this matter, but I believe, at the end of the day, it is really
your choice whether or not you would like to wear tudung here. I trust you know yourself and your situation better.

Zyra: [Nods] [Sighs]…I guess so…

We talk more while eating our food. After Zyra finishes her food, she opens her handbag and grabs a small pouch. She takes her lipstick out and put it on her lips. While she is doing so, I glance at her unzipped handbag and I can see that she has a box of cigarette in her handbag.

[Field notes]

When I saw the cigarette box in Zyra’s bag during our interview, I could not stop wondering if she is a smoker now or if that cigarette box belonged to someone else? Has she always been a smoker? Or was smoking something that she picked up here, in the UK? I did not want to ask her about it, as I feared that I might offend her.

I find it rather taboo for a Malay Muslim woman to be smoking. Though now that she was no longer wearing hijab, I think that probably looked less taboo for her to do so since she can now look like any other girls in the UK who smoke. I realise that this probably seems double standards, but it is the reality. I have seen this on the Internet, on Facebook particularly. I have seen how some Malaysians have been giving nasty comments on images of Malaysian women vaping\(^{45}\) (which I considered almost the same as the act of smoking cigarette). From the comments, I could see that people inclined to admonish Malaysian women wearing hijab for vaping more than those who were not. Though I apprehend that, in certain cities in Malaysia, people have begun to accept the act of Malaysian women vaping or probably smoking publicly as rather ordinary.

After Zyra finishes putting her lipstick on, we talk about the upcoming Muslims’ fasting month. She tells me about her plan to get some dates

\(^{45}\) Inhale and exhale the vapour produced by an electronic cigarette or similar device.
in preparation for Ramadhan\textsuperscript{46}, something I find common for Muslim during the fasting month\textsuperscript{47}. [Field notes]

**Zyra:** I am going to get some dates for Ramadhan at the city centre later. A friend of mine is meeting me and we are going to get it together.

**Is:** Oh, so she will fast… [I think to myself].

The reason why I was thinking this to myself was, I would not have thought that she would fast after finding out about her view regarding her situation and halal and non-halal food consumption. It seems slightly ironic to me for a Muslim to be fasting while at the same time he or she is still consuming non-halal food. From the way I saw it, it was almost like she efficiently picked and chose what to and what not to practice in Islamic teachings.

I ask Zyra then:

**Is:** Are you going to buy them somewhere special? Because I know they do sell dates at Tesco… and Asda too! You do have Tesco and Asda here, don’t you?

**Zyra:** No! I don’t want to get dates from Tesco or Asda [Looks displeased] …I don’t trust them! …It’s just that we are meeting someone, a friend of my friend, who is going to give us dates that are not from Israel!

I am given the understanding that Zyra is boycotting Israeli products, explaining why she is really trying to find dates that are not from Israel. [Field notes]

\textsuperscript{46} The ninth month according to the Islamic calendar also known as the Muslims’ fasting month. 
\textsuperscript{47} It is said that dates are probably known as the food that the prophet Muhammad ate when he broke his fast and Muslims mostly break their fast by eating dates before they begin to eat other food.
I think what she did (boycotting Israeli goods) was impressive as her action showed me that she was feasibly firm with her principle, that she was willing to go through the trouble (of meeting her friend and a person she may or may not know) in order to get some dates that were not from Israel when she could easily get some dates from nearby shops.

In my opinion, it is really not that easy to boycott Israeli or ‘Israeli-related’ products (Jewish products made in Israel or made outside of Israel that directly or indirectly support Israel), as there are so many of them in the markets nowadays. I have so much respect for people including Zyra who are able to hold on to their principles. Yet, I find it peculiar that Zyra was willing to go through the trouble (of going somewhere and meeting a person she has never met before to get some dates that are not from Israel) while she considered it troublesome for her to go through some or probably the same kind of trouble in order to buy halal meat for herself. I wonder what was really going on here but again, it might be offensive for me to ask her about this matter.

After the interview, we bid each other good-bye. I look at her as she leaves. She walks through the middle of the crowd but I can still see her walking. Zyra then takes her cigarette box out of her bag, pull out a cigarette, lights it and smokes before she finally disappears into the crowd. [Field notes]

Is: Ahhh... It (cigarette) is hers… [Talk to myself]

In a follow up interview via Facebook messenger [Facebook messenger interview], Zyra and I managed to talk about her being a smoker. I found out that Zyra essentially started smoking after a few months being in the UK. She first tried it after being persuaded by one of her (Muslim) housemates who also started smoking after being in the UK.

Zyra: I smoke because it helps me to reduce the study stress and also it helps me to socialise… to bond or connect with other people… I think smoking can be a good icebreaker! … A lot of times I would take smoke break while studying for difficult exams and I would run into other smokers. We all bummed cigs off of each other…
and going on smoke breaks together allowed us to have some great conversations. It's weird! …Smoking does kind of bring people together in its weird way…. It also gives you something to focus on when you're talking to people… You know… it gives you something to do with your hands instead of just standing there twiddling your thumbs… My only issue with smoking is the cost. It's friggin’ ridiculous! Haha! [Laughing emoticon]

Zyra tells me that her housemate who persuaded her to smoke is the same housemate who advised her to take off her hijab. In fact, Zyra is not the only one she had persuaded. There is also another Muslim housemate who is now, according to Zyra, is ‘one of us’. From Zyra’s story, it seems to me that her housemate is now acting like their ‘leader’.

[Field notes]

Even though Zyra claimed that she smoked due to her friend’s persuasion, she also in a way admitted that smoking was a way for her to bond with people around her. This shows how social interactions actually inform Zyra’s ‘new’ self. This in a way interconnects with Wana’s story in which people use skills and strategies to negotiate their position within the cultural landscapes to which they want to feel or actually feel belong.

Zyra: She tells us what to and what not to do sometimes… Like our leader in a way… I don’t really like it sometimes but… yeah… I don’t like to argue… She has a very strong character… She explains her understanding of Quran to us and we kind of trust her since she is from the Middle East. You know… These people read Quran like we read novels! [pauses] It's their language! I think they know better [pauses] Well [pauses] Most of the time.

I suppose my earlier thought about Zyra’s housemate wanting Zyra to be like her was probably correct. Why? Possibly because Zyra’s friend wanted to feel belonged or to have someone she could relate to, now that Zyra is probably what
I would assume, a ‘Muslim woman like her (friend)’. Zyra’s choice to smoke also perhaps was making her friend feel free of guilt, knowing that her Muslim friends were practically, if not precisely like her and vice versa. Therefore, they will possibly not judge each other’s choice of living.

Summary
In this section, we can see that both Wana and Zyra has radically changed in terms of their religious practices. While on one hand the way Zyra had changed could be somehow imagined or in other word, expected by some people - becoming more lenient in terms of her religious practice, Wana on the other hand had become a religiously observant person after coming to the UK.

As has been mentioned in the previous section, people’s personalities can change and that this happens every day. However, it is their personal trajectories as well as other factors that probably explain why two people in similar circumstances (being in the UK for the first time) might end up with different outcomes. This is evident in Wana’s and Zyra’s narratives in which we can see how the two changed in the opposite directions as they negotiated in the cultural process. While Zyra becoming a little bit more lenient in practicing her religion, Wana claimed to become a religiously observant person after coming to the UK.

Conclusion
The four narratives presented in this chapter reveal the variability of ‘radical changes’ in individual accounts namely in terms of appearance and religiousness. While the changes amongst the participants might be different, they all seemed to talk about their changes in very similar ways - these were not necessarily changes, instead practices that they and people in general actually engage every
day, it is the nature of the experience that we all bring with us to cultural travel. As Holliday (2016, p. 25) puts it, they are ‘cultural identities that people carried with them and built on them as powerful resources to engage with new cultural environments’. Being in new, unfamiliar settings, instead of learning a new culture, all the four participants in this chapter creatively engaged in the new cultural domains, drawing on and using variable resources such as their past as well as present personal experiences (i.e. Fatimah changed from wearing attires that were expected of her to wearing something she had been wanting to wear, Izzah from being a hijabi to a non hijabi in order to obey her parents’ wishes then wearing Harajuku style clothing since she did not have to wear hijab).

Apart from that, it is also evident in the narratives that the participants as well as people in general can actually relate with many cultural realities in order to create meanings, founded by a variety of layered factors such as religion, class, family, education, and many others which will provide framing for their self-formations. For instance, Fatimah and Izzah in their story claimed family to be one of the factors for their self-transformations while Wana and Zyra both used religion as one of the factors to relate to their cultural realities. Not only that people can relate with many cultural realities in order to create meanings, they too can employ different and sometimes even conflicting and competing discourse of culture in order to enable them to construct and reconstruct their narratives inconsistently depending on their situations and anything that suits them at the time. Just like how Zyra appeared to pick and choose which rules of Islam to practice according to her convenience (for example she fasted in Ramadhan because she is a Muslim, but she also consumed non-halal food, food that is forbidden for the Muslims).
Chapter 6: Language and Openness

6.1 Introduction

While the previous chapter presents and discusses participants’ communication relating to ‘radical changes in appearance and religiousness’, this chapter presents and discusses their communication with regards to ‘radical changes in language and openness’.

Just like the previous chapter, the participants narratives have been generated and selected to illustrate the different changes they go through however, in terms of language (Zack and Khairul) and openness (Norman, Izzy and Gary) and their reasons for doing so. These are again supported with extracts from their individual interviews and where relevant, Facebook posts and my field notes.

6.2 Language

Two of the research participants talked about their improved English language proficiency when asked about their intercultural experience of being in the UK.

6.2.1 Zack: “I’ve got to use English with the real English people and acquire an awful lot of colloquialism!”

Following were my thoughts about my participant, Zack:

Zack is a friendly person. The first time we meet, she seems quiet, shy and serious most of the times. Zack appears to know a lot about things and issues based on how she answers the judges’ questions during our scholarship competition. I think she is very smart, and her English language proficiency is quite remarkable too. [Field notes]

I was captivated by Zack’s speaking skills during our first meeting because I thought she spoke very well and her English sounded fluent to me. Furthermore, I thought certain vocabulary that she used as she talked that day were quite sophisticated in the sense that they were not frequently used words in an everyday conversation (i.e. mesmerise, eloquent) and her grammar was spot on.
Below is the extract of my interview with Zack. During this interview, I realised how Zack’s English has improved and sounded ‘different’ than before. This interview is an opportunity for me to find out about how Zack’s intercultural experience has, according to her affected her use of English language.

I call Zack on Skype on the day and time that we have agreed on before [Skype videocall interview]. We greet each other. Zack smiles and giggles the moment she sees me on Skype.

Zack: Well, this is awkward.

I think it is indeed awkward since it is the first time we are having a Skype interview. I smile back and tell her that it will get better. We begin the interview with me asking her how she has been doing and to share with me her experience of being in the UK so far. [Field notes]

Zack: I am really happy to be here. It is such a blessing. I have always wanted to go abroad and see the world. It is a life changing experience. And I do develop some confidence, to develop myself [pauses]

Zack, instilling simultaneous feelings of wonder and apprehension, glimpsed the academic sojourn as a life-changing event. [Field notes]

As she goes on about her experience in the UK, I realise that she uses English all the time as she speaks; however, with a different accent than she used to have before. It sounds British to me especially when she uses glottal stop\(^\text{48}\) to pronounce words like bottle, water and button during the interview. Zack also uses what I would consider low frequency

\(^{48}\) The glottal stop is a plosive created by complete closure and then opening of the glottis or the vocal cords (vocal folds).
words\textsuperscript{49} like ‘transcend’ during our interview, which I think, is very interesting.

Recalling our first meeting in Malaysia, I realise that her use of low frequency words was not something unfamiliar after all. This was actually something that she had been doing since our first meeting. I thought the only difference that I could spot about Zack was her newly developed accent. Other than that, her speaking skills was still pretty much impressive as before. However, with the new accent, she sounded even more extraordinary to me. I thought if my eyes were closed and I did not know that if was her, I might think that the person I was talking to is a British person.

\textbf{Is:} I see you sound like a local now. That's impressive!

I tell Zack, showing her how I admire her ability to speak like that and hoping that she will comment more on that matter.

\textbf{Zack:} I definitely have developed, language wise. It's very fortunate that I've got to learn to talk to the locals here. So, I've got to use English with the real English people and what's more interesting is that I've acquired an awful lot of colloquialism! Something I wouldn't get in our country.

\textbf{Is:} What do you mean by that?


I smile and nod, showing understanding.

\textsuperscript{49} Words that are not commonly used.
Zack: Though I have to admit that there are times when I am confused with some of the English words or expressions. You know like, whether they are slang, informal or formal words. You know, I told my English friend that I am pissed off the other day and he was so surprised. He said that he couldn’t believe that I said that. He said I could have said that I was mad or angry instead of pissed off. I was a little embarrassed at first but then, who cares. I mean everybody is using it. Maybe because that friend of mine is older. He is from a different generation perhaps. He is in his forties. [Zack laughs].

Zack: And one more thing, a lot of edging when we talk. Because, we are used to the British way of talking. We like to sugar coat shit.

Below is what I thought upon hearing Zack’s response:

I laugh upon hearing her using the word ‘shit’. She says it very naturally, without any hesitations. Often from my personal experience, people particularly a young woman does not talk like this, especially with a person whom they are not closed with. Besides, it is really not something you would expect a woman to be saying if it is in Malaysia. Normally, women in Malaysia are expected to be polite and shy. [Field notes]

Looking back at the above extract, I am suddenly reminded of this politics of structure - how there are structures that are often associated with so-called ‘national cultures’. For instance, how I was brought up to look at people or in this case, to look at or expect Malaysian women to be well-mannered. I understand that I did mention ‘from my personal experience, people particularly a young woman does not talk like this’ but now that I rethink about it, I realise that I had been around girls or women who used vulgarities when I was younger. This makes me realise that I have indeed fallen into the essentialist trap which has led me into imagining the essentialist stereotypes that (1) women do not use swearwords, (2) Malaysian women are polite and shy. Now I am also beginning to ponder if this expectation of a woman to speak in a polite manner is something that is only exclusive to Malay or Malaysian women or all women in general?
Either way, I believe this statement or any kind of essentialist statements, whomever they are applied to is definitely harmful.

Zack: Like the sandwich effect. Like, ‘it would be better if…’ or ‘I would love to go but…’

Is: You mean Malaysians like to sugar coat?

I am confused with her statement thus I ask for her clarification.

Zack: No! Brits do that! We don’t.

Is: I have always thought that most Malaysian like to sugar coat because they are worried that they might offend people when sometimes they don’t even mean what they say and that the Brits are more straightforward.

I commented on my reply below:

Maybe I was wrong? Although that is not what I always have in mind.

[Field notes]

What I meant to say here was that I have always thought that Malaysians are very synonymous with being polite. Therefore, I thought when Zack said, ‘we like to sugar coat’, she meant ‘we Malaysians like to sugar coat’. Looking at this again, I apprehend that without realising it, I have been involved in this politics of Self and Other when I made proclamations about Malaysians are polite people. In all honesty, this idea of Malaysians as being equivalent to polite people has always been in my mind and has constantly been the first thing that came out of my mouth when people ask me to talk about Malaysia or it’s citizens. Again, I have fallen into the essentialists’ trap. And so did Zack. I supposed, here is where my idea about Malaysians has been challenged, but of course in a good way. Looking
back at this, I realise that I should be aware of this matter and not easily make claims about things.

Zack: But Brits are pros. That is for sure [giggles].
Zack: They always say nice things first, and then they say bad things. And then they say nice things again. Which is sandwich, you know [grins].

I smile upon listening to her explanation. Now I get what she means by sandwich effect. The term makes sense. [Field notes]

Zack: We Malaysians, we go straight to the meat.
Is: Is there really such term as ‘sandwich effect’?
Zack: There is no such thing though. It’s a term I invented.
Zack: I’m a genius like that! [Zack laughs]

I noted about what I thought in the following:

I agree. Coming up with that term is genius. [Field notes]

From Zack’s way of explaining the sandwich effect to me, I gathered that she actually studied how feasibly most of the British talk and she really looked up and admired their ways of talking.

Truthfully, I am really impressed with Zack’s ability to speak English with an accent, which I consider almost a British-like accent. Usually when my Malaysian friends try so hard to speak with a British accent, it almost sounds fake to me. It does not sound natural, as if they were imitating the accent. But with her, I think it is rather brilliant. However, I do know people who speak English with very good accent and sound natural too.
Just when I thought our interview has already finished, Zack says to me:

Zack: I actually feel sad for those people who came to the UK to study but are not really bothered about improving their English. It actually annoys me! [looks annoyed]

Below in noted about how Zack looked as she told me the above:

Zack does look annoyed upon expressing her view on this matter. [Field notes]

Zack: They are defeating their purpose of furthering their studies in the UK. As we all know, English is used as the medium of instruction in the UK. If they are really thirst for knowledge or seek to make the most out of their stay in the UK, English is prerequisite! It annoys me, really.

Again, I am impressed with Zack’s thinking as well as her choice of word: prerequisite. It is not a word that is frequently used by most Malaysian that I’ve talked to. Often, most of my Malaysia friends or colleagues and even myself will simply use ‘requirement’ or ‘a must’ instead of ‘prerequisite’.

From the interview, it is evident to me that Zack was concern about improving her English language while being in the UK. Nevertheless, I wonder if there are more reasons behind her wanting to speak English and even sound like British. Perhaps, being able to speak English ‘properly’ or ‘good’ English shows people that she is refined. Especially when the status of English is placed as the second language in Malaysia and most Malaysians often consider it as the language of the elite minorities in Malaysia (Sung, 2013). If so, this would explain why Zack chose to speak English throughout the entire interview, with British-like accent.
and choosing to use sophisticated English words when talking to me, another Malaysian.

In a follow-up interview, which was carried out using Skype [Skype videocall interview], Zack and I talked more about how Zack always preferred to speak English even she was with her Malaysian friends.

Zack: English is like an asset to me. Ermm [pauses] It’s like my pride [pauses] I don’t even like to ask people or my friends to proofread my assignments, you know! I feel like it’s the only thing that I have [pauses] that I can be proud of. My only pride [pauses] So [pauses] you know [pauses].

Is: Yes, yes.

I believe the above extract has just proven what I thought about Zack’s language use and her new accent. On one hand, she was really concern about the importance of English language in general. On another hand, she indeed admired the language, the British’s ways of talking and accent which I believe can indicate certain characteristics. Perhaps, due to this admiration she decided to change her accent which enables her to indicate belonging to her ideal type of people, the British. This actually makes sense because language is indeed exclusive and a great divider of people and ‘as soon as people use language, they are often judged by the people who hear them as belonging to certain social groups, and the images and stereotypes that are attached to these groups may be invoke and applied to them’ (Holliday, Hyde, & Kullman, 2010). Hence, instead of unthinkingly imitating the way the British talk, I think Zack definitely has her own agenda of doing it.

6.2.2 Khairul: ‘I sometimes purposely use bombastic words just to show them how good my English is now!’

To me, Khairul was a ‘simple’ looking man. Looking from the way he usually dressed, he did not seem like he was trying to impress anyone with his
appearance. The next paragraph describes my thought about Khairul when I first met him at the scholarship competition.

Khairul wears formal clothes; plain white long sleeve (unknown brand) shirt, a pair of black trousers and a pair of black shoes. From his accent, I reckon that he is from the northern part of Malaysia for he has a very heavy northern accent. When we talk during break time it slips into our conversation that Khairul comes from the northern part of Malaysia. Khairul wears a pair of full-framed glasses, making him look like the nerdy\textsuperscript{50} Peter Parker in the Spiderman movie to me; overly intellectual and lack social skill except that Khairul is taller and thinner. Yet, look can be very deceiving, I tell myself.

Unlike most of the people I meet at the competition, Khairul inclines to use Malay language most of the time he talks to me. He does code switch between Malay and English language a few times. Though, he seems to be more comfortable using Malay language. My initial judgement of Khairul was wrong as he turns out to be very friendly. He is not awkward or shy at all. When we talk, I actually feel like I am talking to a friend that I have known for a long time. [Field notes]

We became Facebook friends after our first meeting and infrequently I do look at Khairul’s Facebook page. Remarkably, now that he is in the UK, I realised that most of his Facebook postings are written in English. I thought he uses English more often now because his circle of friends on Facebook has expanded. He probably has more friends that come from outside Malaysia now. Nevertheless, I gathered that Khairul does use English language when he posts something in which I assume might not be of his foreign friends’ interest such as the Malaysian football or politics. I am really fascinated to know if there is any particular reason for this behaviour.

\textsuperscript{50} A slang for a person considered to be socially awkward, boring, unstylish etc.
I interviewed Khairul via Facebook video call [Facebook videocall interview] as I thought it would be easier for us to talk directly than to type our conversation using Facebook messenger. Besides, I thought it would be interesting to see if Khairul has changed the way he talks too, like some of my other participants. Paragraphs underneath show how the interview went.

I call Khairul on Facebook video call after he tells me that he is ready to be interviewed. The moment we see each other on the screens, we smile. Khairul immediately says hi to me and asks me how I am. That is very nice of him, I thought. Once again, he makes me feel like we have been good friends. I am really glad that he started the conversation first as I think he just made us both feel comfortable and this, I believe simultaneously release the interview stress and anxiety.

I noted below what I thought about the way Khairul greeted me:

What I find interesting here is the way Khairul greets me the moment he sees me on his screen. [Field notes]

Khairul: Hiyya mate!

He says that to me; almost like how most of the people in the UK greet each other. Although, it is something that I have expected to see, a part of me still feels like it does not seem like him at all; the Khairul who spoke to me in Malay language most of the time we talked, with a heavy Northern accent. I feel like I am talking to a totally different person as he greets me in English and that too using slang and with a different accent.

I begin the interview by asking him his wellbeing after being in the UK for almost a year now. He seems very excited to share his story. After talking about his experience being in the UK, I cannot help to ask him questions that are related to language, as I think that is really a noticeable and
interesting change that I see in him. I tell Khairul that he seems to be using more English nowadays, which I think is very good. [Field notes]

He responds to me while laughing:

Khairul: Well yeah! I think this is a really good opportunity for me to improve my English!

I assume he is referring to the opportunity to study in the UK. I smile, telling him that is true and encourage him to tell me more about it.

Khairul: When I first came here, I had troubles understanding what the locals told me as well as having them understood me. There were a few times where I had been dropped off to wrong places by taxi drivers because of the way I spoke or pronounced the name of places. In fact, I was once told off by a taxi driver in London because he told me that I didn’t pronounce ‘Trafalgar square’ correctly. It was very embarrassing! [higher pitch]

Khairul suddenly talks with a higher pitch. He looks upset and angry.

Khairul: He did it in front of my friends!
Is: Oh my God! Really?

I reply to him to show my disbelief, as I really cannot believe that actually happened. I thought that was disrespectful of the taxi driver.

Khairul: I was embarrassed but then I tried to say it correctly afterward but to no avail and the taxi driver seemed to be annoyed. I thought he was rude. After all, I was his customer. He could have asked me properly if he didn’t understand what I was saying [pauses]
and he works in London, he should be more understanding. I’m sure he’s been working with people from many different parts of the world and I don’t think I am the only person who was not able to pronounce correctly.

Khairul: I was lucky that my friends didn’t think it was funny. They also thought the taxi driver was rude. That was one of the things that made me realised how important it is for me to speak English. Correctly. Well, of course it is important but, not that everyone can (referring to the ability to speak English perfectly). [sighs]

Below is what I noted because of what and how Khairul responded to me:

Khairul admits this to me but his face shows a little bit of disappointment. I guess he is really frustrated. He is right, not everyone can speak perfect English. I have been in the UK for a while now and I am still struggling with the language. [Field notes]

Khairul: I had the same problem with the bus too! he chuckles. Trying to hide his embarrassment probably, as I can see that he is blushing while telling me the story. I am really glad that he is opening up to me.

Khairul: Once I told a bus driver that I wanted to stop somewhere but I guess I didn’t pronounce the name of the place correctly. So, he kept on asking me to repeat what I’ve said a few times that I ended up keeping other people queuing behind me for a while. It was embarrassing and I felt so bad for holding other people up. I’m sure the people behind me were annoyed.

Khairul: I also have.. err.. had?

I nod my head indicating that he is using the correct grammar. [Field notes]
Khairul smiles and continues:

Khairul: Yeah, I also had troubles understanding lectures. Some of my lecturers speak with a really thick slang [pauses] accent [pauses] to the point that I thought they were mumbling. There’s this one lecturer who sounds like he muffles all his words as he speaks. It’s really hard. I felt so stupid.

Khairul: At the beginning (referring to his early days in the UK), it was so hard. I knew I was expected to talk when my lecturer asked me questions, but I didn’t even understand the questions, how could I say anything! Supposedly I remember in one class, my lecturer asked the same question to each student in turn and I couldn’t think of anything to say. I couldn’t listen to other people’s opinions I was so worried.

Khairul: I had the same problems with some of my non-Malaysian classmates too. I find it difficult to understand some students’ pronunciation. Well of course, it gets easier over time but up until today, I still won’t sit close to non-Malaysian students and one of the reasons is because of their pronunciation. I can’t understand things that they said most of the times. And it would be impolite for me to ask them or my lecturers to repeat things. So, I think it’d be better if I not to sit with them.

Khairul: Besides, when I worked with them, I couldn’t say anything to them because I didn’t understand them, so I was just nodding most of the time. So, it’s embarrassing. Either they would feel I am stupid, or they would have to know I couldn’t understand them.

Khairul: Well, that was then. Now I’m trying to improve. So now I have decided to use English as much as possible (in daily conversation). I figured that’s how I can practice and brush up my language. It really helps now that I’m here. People (here) don’t judge me for speaking in English most of the time, though sometimes it is broken English\(^{51}\). They’ll try to understand you.

\(^{51}\) Incorrect or awkwardly structured English.
I’m picking up their slang too and nobody is making fun of me. It’s awesome!

Khairul: dju no wha am saying (do you know what I’m saying), yeah!

The following is what I thought about Khairul’s accent:

Khairul says to me with what I would say sounds like a British street slang. Though, at times it seems to me that Khairul sounds like he is imitating the way people in the UK speak and their British-like accent. Mainly because he still has that heavy northern accent as he speaks. I am glad that he feels comfortable speaking English now even when he speaks to me, a Malaysian whom according to him will usually judge and make fun of him when he speaks English, especially with slang. He seems confident. [Field notes]

Unlike Zack, it appeared to me that Khairul might be less skilled at switching and controlling his new accent and this is not something unusual. I think even I myself am not be able to do so. However, it could be that Khairul was only speaking in such accent to be humorous. Or perhaps he was not?

Khairul: Oh, and I post (on Facebook) in English too these days!

Is: Won’t your Malaysian friends make fun of you then?

Khairul: Nah. Not anymore. Now that I’m studying in the UK, it seems like they kind of expect me to do so, I think. I mean, I’m studying in the UK, English is the main language here. That’s the language I’m using everyday now. Why would they make fun of me? In fact, if I were them, I will expect that my English to be better than theirs. That’s what I’m going to show them.

Khairul: To be honest, I sometimes google\textsuperscript{52} my sentences first before I post them on Facebook. Just to make sure that my English

\textsuperscript{52} Search for information about (someone or something) on the Internet using the search engine Google.
sentences have no errors and [pauses] frankly, I sometimes purposely use bombastic words just to show them how good my English is now! [laughs]

Recalling the interview, I realised that Khairul tried his best to use English during the whole interview. I am sensing that what he had experienced in the UK really affected him that he was very determined to improve his English. He did code switch once in a while when he could not find the right English word to say it. I tried to encourage him by speaking in English too. Though I tried not to use words that were probably too advanced as I did not want to unintentionally demotivate him.

What Khairul said to me in the above extract reminded me of what Holliday et al. (2010, p. 268) mention in their book, ‘all communication…, is also… of the signalling of the status of the interactants, of the social distance between them…’. Even though Khairul did clarify that he was using more English in order to improve his English and his adjustment to life in the new country - with good language skills facilitating acceptance by the host community and reducing everyday communication difficulties -, I still think that just like Zack, Khairul too wanted to use his ability to speak English more fluently to imply his power or upgraded status in order to gain respect from his friends and those who used to make fun of him. This also makes me realise that very frequently people jump to conclusions about people’s worthiness and character simply from the way people talk. It may not look like it to some people but despite being a bridge between people, language too can act like a wall that can divide people. “As noticeable as the colour of one’s skin, the noises on makes to communicate with other human beings is an obvious indicator of ‘difference’”(Holliday et al., 2010, p. 267).

Summary
The narratives above display how Zack and Khairul communicated about their improved English language proficiency when asked about their intercultural experience of being in the UK.

For Zack and Khairul, this change allowed them to experience themselves as having become different, better or perhaps more intelligent person, of having developed aspects of themselves in different ways. Language according to the participants are more than simple means of passing information from one person
to another, it bounds up strongly with our social identities and our use of language aligns us with different social groupings (Byram & Fleming, 1998). Instead of changing the way they talk (using more English) and their accent due to becoming culturally shocked, both Zack and Khairul being reflexive, used English to reshape their selves so that they would be perceived as part of certain social groups or perhaps as part of ‘global community’. In this narratives, it is apparent that knowledge of English language which Zack and Khairul had acquired is seen as realising aspects of the self which have been pushed aside or, more positively, as being part of a self-conscious reshaping of the self (Britton & Baxter, 1999).

6.3 Openness
Two participants chose to talk about openness (verbal and non-verbal openness) when asked to reflect on their intercultural experience of living in the UK during their academic sojourn.

6.3.1 Norman: ‘They made it legal here … to get married’.
The subsequent excerpt is what I think about Norman after he came to the UK to further his study.

To me, Norman is a very stylish man. Though he was already stylish when I met him in Malaysia and also based on his photographs on Facebook before he came to the UK, I think he looks more fashionable these days. He dresses well. He has an undercut hairstyle in which, his hair is shaved on the sides and long in the front, dyed in dark burgundy\textsuperscript{53} colour and is always looking very neat and tidy. Unlike the other male participants, Norman wears ear studs on both of his ears, which to me is rather strange as I come from a background where it is unacceptable for men to wear earrings especially for Malay, Muslim men. [Field notes]

Commenting on above field notes, ever since I was young, I was brought up with the idea that men should look like men, not women and it is a sin for men to look like women. Typically, it has always been women who wear earrings and men who do, I find them not particularly masculine. However, having been in the UK

\textsuperscript{53} Dark red, red wine colour
for almost many years now, I try not to be judgemental and to accept such thing as current fashion when I see men wearing earrings.

Interview with Norman was quite interesting to me as I now learned about what he said about and how he constructed his sexual orientation and how he is now more open about this. The interview started off rather uncomfortably for me as I was struggling to understand Norman however, this gradually changed as the interview continued. Below is the chronology of what happened on the day of the interview as well as the interview extract [Face to face interview]:

On the interview day, we meet in front of the hotel where I am staying. Norman waves his hand at me when he sees me from across the street. I wave back. Norman offers his hand to shake. I take some time before finally shaking his hand. Being a Muslim woman, I really feel that I should not reciprocate the gesture, as it is not permissible for Muslims to shake hands with members of the opposite sex. [Field notes]

Personally, what happened between Norman and I here was really an awkward situation for me, but I genuinely did not want to disrespect or embarrass Norman if I did not shake his hand in response thus probably causing me my interview outcome with him at that time. I wondered at the time as to why he offered his hand to me since he is a Muslim too and I thought he should know better. Was it unintentional? Perhaps he did not fully practice Islam or maybe he thought that I did not. Or maybe, he was like some Muslims who make exceptions to adapt to ‘western’ settings and he thought that I did too, particularly now that I am living in the UK?

We decide to have our interview at the hotel lounge area. We talk about his experience being in the UK and how he loves being in the UK. Following is the extract of the interview:

Norman: I love it here! It’s very carefree… the people here, my lecturers, my friends, they are very nice. Unlike most of my previous
lecturers in Malaysia, almost all of my lecturers here are nice and seem like they genuinely care about me. They make effort to at least memorise our names here... I studied two years in Malaysia for my preparation programme before coming to the UK and I think some of my lecturers, they don't know my name or that I even existed. Even if they know me, that’s because they considered me a problematic student. It’s really nice to know that your lecturers care about you and that they don’t have favouritism.

I tell Norman:

Is: I do understand how you feel because I too had experienced the same things with some of my teachers and lecturers in Malaysia. It was very upsetting and demotivating especially when the teachers only acknowledged your friends who were considered the ‘A-students’.

Norman: I know right! They are horrible! I like it here. Everyone is so nice to me! Frankly, I’m planning not to go back after my course ends [pauses] but I don’t know, we’ll see how.

Norman: They made it legal here [pauses] to get married. So, the more reason for me to stay here.

In the following, I commented on what I thought when Norman told the above to me:

I do not really understand what he means by that and I try to work it out on my own. Though somehow, I assume that he is talking about same-sex marriage because I know that same sex marriage is legal in the UK. However, I do not want to ask him directly what he means by that, as I am worried that it may come out wrong. [Field notes]

Is: Oh yes! I’m guessing you already found someone special here?
I ask him, while pretending to know what he is saying.

Norman: Yes! [Norman smiles at me]
Norman: We actually met on a dating website [pauses] and now, here we are, a couple.
Is: That's so sweet!

I noted the following, commenting on why I said what I said above:

I interjected. I think it is sweet that some people know each other online and manage to develop their relationship to becoming a couple. I can see that Norman looks very happy. He cannot stop smiling the moment we talk about his special someone. He takes out his phone and shows me a picture of him and a Caucasian man on a punt. [Field notes]

Norman: That's him!
Is: I was right! [I thought to myself].

I noted below when Norman told me the above:

He is indeed talking about same-sex marriage! Though now I am feeling a little bit awkward. [Field notes]

Responding to the above field note, I felt a little uncomfortable discovering that we were beginning to discuss about same sex marriage as I have never met a homosexual or at least people who chose to reveal that side of them to me, let alone a Malay, Muslim homosexual. My understanding of Islam is that it is a big sin for a Muslim to become homosexual (to perform any homosexual acts). I understand that I have mentioned this before in previous
narratives, however, I think it is probably best that I reaffirm here that it could possibly be the case that Norman had different understanding of Islamic law with regards to homosexuality. Furthermore, being a Muslim, I questioned myself at the time of the interview if I should inform him about the sin of being a homosexual in Islam or if I should just let it be as it is also a sin in Islam for me to embarrass or hurt others’ feelings. This instance left me questioning myself on how I should deal with this matter in the future and to be honest, I still am trying to figure it out myself.

I eventually decided to act natural and show him that I am not going to judge him. For this study, I believe this is a probably good decision as I think due to my natural reaction towards his revelation, he starts to share more of his intimate stories about his relationship with me. I remain to act natural though I am really surprised by his stories. He also reveals to me that he has been gay since he was in school but only now, he feels that he can be fairly open about it. [Field notes]

Norman: Hmm… my family does not know about it. Whenever I talk about my special someone, they’d probably assume that that person is my girlfriend. I’ll just let them be for now. I don’t know what their reaction would be if they knew about this.

I ask Norman:

Is: Is your family a religious or traditional Malay family who holds very close to Malay values.

Norman: No. They are quite modern, open minded.

The following is what I thought about Norman’s reaction:
He does not look worry to me. Perhaps he is hiding his worry, or he really is not worry. [Field notes]

Norman: I don’t go around telling people that I have a boyfriend. At least not to my Malaysian friends but if they know, they know. I don’t really care.

I noted the following because of what Norman said above:

I assume he really does not care if his Malaysian friends know about him being homosexual mainly because most of his close friends are non-Muslims as I can see from his Facebook page (based on his pictures and friends who commented on his posts) that he is closer and often spends his time with, I assume his foreign and non-Muslim friends. Though, it is not apparent on his Facebook that he is homosexual, or he has a boyfriend. I have never seen any pictures of him and his boyfriend on Facebook, but I do realise that he once posted a picture of him with a rainbow effect (rainbow banner over profile picture) on Facebook in which I understand is an indication that he supports Gay Pride. [Field notes]

I ask him about this, and he answers:

Norman: Well, why not. It’s about time that we embrace the freedom of speech, act and whatnot. It’s just a picture, it’s not like I’m causing people any harm and I’m here, not in Malaysia where this can be something very taboo.

Based on Norman’s story, it becomes apparent to me that he probably did not care if his friends find out about his sexual orientation or perhaps, he was

54 The idea that gay people should be proud of their sexuality and not keeping it a secret.
gradually coming out\textsuperscript{55}. Based on the interview too, it appeared to me that Norman was indeed portraying his openness to me for he casually opened up and revealed about his boyfriend, disclosing pictures of him and his boyfriend and also stories, which I would consider intimate. During the interview, Norman mentioned that his family and most of his friends did not know about his sexual orientation. This implies that he had never told people about this side of him before coming to the UK. This shows how he had changed to becoming more open after coming to the UK which I think was probably due to the society that he was in, of which he can be openly gay or not. The point I am trying to make is that, individuals are capable of changing, adopting or rejecting practices depending on the setting they are in.

Nevertheless, it occurred to me that during our conversation, he never once mentioned the word ‘gay’ or ‘homosexual’. This in some way implied that perhaps Norman did not like to be labelled or he perceived that being homosexual was normal and acceptable especially now that he is in a country where being homosexual is legal, where hatred against homosexual people is considered a crime, unlike in Malaysia. Though, I think we cannot deny that there is a possibility that Norman is still in denial of his homosexuality explaining why he did not use the word ‘gay’ or ‘homosexual’ when he talked about himself.

\textbf{6.3.2 Gary: ‘Third class mentality… She needs to get her brain fixed’}

Gary is a student at a university in the UK, majoring in Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL). Paragraph below shows my thought about Gary before and after coming to the UK:

Before coming to the UK, Gary looked like a ‘simple’ and ‘innocent’ man. He seemed ‘boyish’ as I thought he looked younger than his age, was always very polite, and did not talk so much and he smiled a lot too. With regards to his attire, Gary was often in simple collar shirt or t-shirt without any fancy images on them. When he wore his formal clothes, he always looked smart though not in a stylish way as he usually wore loose, plain,

\textsuperscript{55} Term used by lesbians, gay men and bisexuals to describe their experience of self-discovery, self-acceptance, openness and honesty about their sexual orientation and their decision to share this with others when and how they choose (Urban Dictionary).
basic colours\textsuperscript{56} shirt and matched them with a pair of straight-cut trousers. Gary hair was always side parted and neat. [Field notes]

After coming to the UK, I could see that Gary had gradually changed his style and appearance (based on my observation during our few meetings online and offline and also on his Facebook posts). I thought Gary looked more ‘stylish’ in the sense that he was always dressed in the latest fashion after being in the UK compared to before. He wore ‘fashionable’ and colourful clothes, making him looked a little like a Korean pop star I would say. Once I met Gary in the UK for one of our interviews, he was wearing a white graphic t-shirt with a text written, ‘this is what perfection looks like’, yellow sweaters and yellow pants. His hair was dyed with a two-tone hair colours that time; pink and blonde and he was wearing a pair of button earrings and also a crystal necklace. He also wore high cut shoes with some studs on. In fact, I had seen his hair colour changed quite often ever since he came to the UK based on his photographs posted on his Facebook timeline. [Field notes]

While this particular narrative is intended to discuss about openness, the above field notes also resonate with Fatimah’s and Izzah’s narratives (Chapter 3) where I talk about their change in appearance. Gary had indeed change in terms of his appearance however, unlike Fatimah, he was rather open about it in the sense that he did post pictures of his new image on social media sites like Facebook and Instagram.

The following is the interview that I conducted using Facebook messenger [Facebook messenger interview]. During this interview, Gary told me how he his intercultural experience has affected his way of thinking and also his English language. I began the interview by asking Gary how he was. I also complimented him on his look based on Gary’s recent photographs on Facebook.

The following excerpt is our conversation:

\textsuperscript{56} A colour: either red, yellow, or blue, that in mixture yields other colours also known as primary colour.
I think Gary looks ‘stylish’ based on his recent photographs posted on Facebook and so, I tell him:

Is: You look good these days. So stylish!

I thought Gary’s new look was fashionable and I wanted him to know that I did not think negatively of his change that I opted to use the word ‘stylish’ to describe his new image.

Gary: Thank you!

He replies to my messenger with a laughing and shy emoticons. After we exchange greetings and updates, we start with our interview and I straight away ask Gary about how does his intercultural experience of being in the UK affect him so far? He replies:

Gary: I feel good about the experience of studying abroad. It definitely contributes to the change of my thinking and the improvement of my English.

Is: That’s wonderful!

What I thought about Gary’s remarks is highlighted below:

I am really glad to know that being in the UK has been advantageous for Gary and his development so far. Afterwards, I tell Gary that I do realise

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57 Keyboard characters used in text-based communications to represent a human facial expression and are used to convey emotion, much in the same way we use facial expressions when we communicate with people face-to-face.
that he has so much concern on the use of English language as I could see that he often post articles about English language, the importance of English language and rules of grammar on his Facebook timeline\(^58\) after he has come to the UK to further his study. [Field notes]

Here, Gary mentioned about how (1) his thinking had changed as well as (2) his improved knowledge of English, just like Zack and Khairul in the previous section. Even though Gary claimed to have improve his English, in my opinion, his English was already very good before in the sense that he was articulate and never have I noticed him made any grammar mistakes when he talked before. However, what I did realise was that after coming to the UK, he had been rather open about his concern on the use of English language and correct grammar based on his Facebook posts.

Gary: Yes, I do. What I realised here, sometimes; the native is less particular about the grammatical structures as they are listening for meaning when INTERACTing with us.

Gary replies to me, highlighting on the word 'interact'.

I assume that he does that because he is referring on the use of English in the ongoing communication with the locals, not the academic English part.

Gary: They don’t grammatically penalise us. Sorry la [Speaking Malaysian English] I’m a grammarian. My brain is quite grammatical. Hahaha.

Is: LOL\(^59\)

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\(^58\) Where you share your photos, posts and experiences on Facebook.
\(^59\) Abbreviation or an internet slang means; laughing out loud
I reply to him, showing agreement also to express amusement.

Below is what I thought about Gary because of what he claimed to be:

I thought Gary was quite confident to be proclaiming that he is a grammarian. [Field notes]

I thought claiming himself to be a grammarian did not only assure me that his English and grammar must have been very good, it also proved to me that he was very confident. Not everyone can make such statement openly.

I ask him if he thinks that people in Malaysia tend to penalise his grammatical mistakes since he is saying that the locals do not penalise grammatical mistakes?

Gary: Well, look what happens in school, in colleges. Once your grammar is out, then it will bring down your standard and reputation. I am very happy that I am able to speak English freely here. Unlike in Malaysia, where people tend to tease me when I used English to speak to my friends at school. It happened and still happens quite a lot in Malaysia. That’s why there are some students who dare not read out loud, let alone use English in daily life. When they read, their friends will make fun and laugh at them. You know, I used to teach at a primary school while waiting to further my study abroad.

I realise that he is speaking based on his experience of being both a student and a schoolteacher.

Gary: Most of us are subjected to guilt. As we tend to make fun of others’ mistakes. Some of us dare not speak in English because we are guilty of being those people who tease others for speaking in
English. And remember, people will label those who speak English as show off. Like the issue where a lady condemns English teachers who use English, on Facebook [referring to an issue that went viral for a period of time].

We then talk about the issue for a while which both of us find frustrating which also help us to reduce the interview anxiety at the same time.

Gary: Third class mentality… She needs to get her brain fixed.

Gary: Apart from that, I can’t help but compare the way of life abroad; first class mentality to our own. Not condemning our own people but too bad, that’s the truth. And then some people claim that UK people are generally ‘cold’. But I feel those whom I come across are very warm. Plus, the elders here are warmer.

I thought the following upon listening to Gary’s experience:

It seems to me that Gary intercultural experience has indeed changed his way of thinking. [Field notes]

Looking back at the excerpt above, I agree that Gary did change his way of thinking and not only that, he too was very blunt about his thoughts. This is shown in the excerpt above where Gary referred to a lady as having a ‘third class mentality’ and that ‘she needed to get her brain fixed’. Gary statement gave me the impression that he had become rather outspoken in his criticism, a change I saw in Gary whom I regarded as a polite man before. In addition to that, Gary’s intercultural experience seemed to have turned Gary into becoming prejudiced against his ‘own people’, the Malaysians. While some people would normally assume that travelling could improve people’s intercultural awareness, Gary’s change to becoming what I would say, the opposite is not peculiar either. Many scholars have demonstrated that traveling and meeting others do not necessarily boost intercultural awareness (e.g., Abdallah-Pretceille, 1986) and that, on the
contrary, they can also contribute to creating more stereotypes, negative and positive representations about the self and the other.

I also ask Gary to comment on his change of style as I think it is something, I find obvious. Gary then replies:

Gary: Hmmm [pauses] Change of style [pauses] I would say the culture here is more to embrace and accept individual differences. I once went to school here with my pink hair. LOL. So, I would say, instead of being mechanical, shaping individual into what the norms dictate, freedom to embrace oneself in here (in the UK). People accept it instead of condemning [pauses] or criticising.

I think Gary answers my question quite quickly and confidently, like he has nothing to hide or to be embarrassed about.

I was honestly overwhelmed by Gary’s way of answering my question regarding his change of style. In my experience, most people like Gary would consider questions like this as sensitive. Perhaps it was how I asked him the question or perhaps he was just an open-minded person. Or maybe the reason as to why he seemed calm answering my question was because, we were not having a face-to-face interview. Regardless, I think Gary has changed for he used to be quiet and I supposed being in the UK is one of the factors that has caused this change—becoming more open.

We talk about the issue for a while. Then, I ask Gary:

Is: Other than that, can you tell me how else has your intercultural experience affected you?

Gary: My intercultural experience does enhance my positive impression towards UK… punctuality… courtesy… It made me become more aware of the first-class mindset and third-class mentality. Sorry to
say la [Gary speaks with what people would normally say, Malaysian English].

Again, from Gary’s answers since the beginning of the interview, I realised that he had been prejudiced against most Malaysians but now he seemed to open about it. The way he answered the interview questions was rather direct and I thought at some point, he sounded a little bit rude and he did not seem to mind showing this boldness. On another note, some might think that Gary was only stereotyping Malaysian people, but I gathered that he was also doing the same to British people albeit, positive stereotyping. For instance, in the extract above, Gary did mention about his positive impression towards (people in the) UK, claiming that they are punctual and courteous which I think can be seen as simplistic labelling.

Gary: Malaysia is very much competitive, and majority of people tend to be self-centred. Just take ambulance as an example. In UK, all the cars would do their best to make way for the ambulance. Even they have to bring their car up onto the pavements. But in Malaysia… you can see how certain selfish drivers take advantage on the situation [pauses] instead of making way for it, they speed through either in front or behind the ambulance… Individual interest will always be the priority.

Gary: Another simple example, cars in UK will stop for pedestrians. In Malaysia, pedestrians have to run for their life.

Gary: *exaggerating* [indicating that he is probably exaggerating his last statement].

Gary: Because cars just won’t stop as if there is no brake in the car.

Gary: Next, compare the environment. Rubbish is basically everywhere in Malaysia. People won’t take responsibility for it. I remember how I first came to the UK… that I had to separate rubbish, as the rubbish collectors will come fortnightly according to general waste and recyclable items alternately. In Malaysia, there are three big
bins… with lots of promotions and advertisement of awareness… but to no avail.

Gary: Oh and, being a student in Malaysia, you have a set of what you can and what you can’t list to follow. It reminds me of the illustration where educators are cutting all the students’ thought into the same shape, as perceived acceptable and norms in the society… people tend to box you in instead of embracing the differences…

Gary: When schools are concerned, academic performance are given too much emphasis. We all know the fact that we shouldn’t use the same measurement for different animals… you shouldn’t test a fish on its flying skills, a bird on its running, an elephant on its climbing.

Gary: Instead of using the very same standard measurement and perception of ‘academic excellence is equivalent to success in life’, students’ talents and potentials should be looked into instead. Everyone is born with difference intelligent. Some are better in their IQ, some others in SQ and so on. The formative assessment in UK schools is encouraging practice. Malaysia Ministry of Education (MOE) tried the same assessment, so called PBS. By the end of the day, the very standardised national exam results will determine how ‘successful’ a students is instead of helping the students to explore what they are good at and how they achieve their goals from where they are currently at, the Malaysian so called formative assessment has defeated the purpose of formative assessment as the number of As is still being the central focus.

Gary seems to really look up to what he had seen and experienced in the UK. As a Malaysian that has been in the UK for many years now, there are certain things that Gary had said that I have to both agree as well as disagree. However, I would have done differently than Gary is that, I would be cautious and not oversimplify everything what I had experienced to the whole UK population as I had seen some of the negative things that Gary said about Malaysia and Malaysians
happened in the UK too. I think interviewing Gary makes me see how harmful and wrong it is for people to stereotype others even if it is positive stereotyping. I understand that applying ready-made theory about certain culture can be convenient to go along with, but it is a reducing act regardless of how positive it could be.

**Summary**

In this section, both Norman and Gary both talked and displayed their changes in terms of being more open now compared to when they were in Malaysia. However, Norman communicated this matter of openness in a non-verbal manner while Gary the opposite (verbally).

The narratives in the above section show Gary and Norman’s abilities to be reflexive in the sense that they encountered modes of thinking and acting that might differ from what they were accustomed to. For example, Norman was becoming open about his sexual orientation, while Gary had become more critical and open about his opinions and worldview compared to the way they were before. Although some international students may feel threaten and retreat as a result from being in unfamiliar settings, Norman and Gary proved that there are people who would question their usual ways of being and through the act of engaging in deep, critical refection, they might revise their initial interpretations of their experience and develop new understandings. As they negotiate their identities in intercultural interactions, they gradually developed more appreciation of different perceptions and practices. This experiential-reflective process as Mezirow (1994) states, has the potential to bring about life-altering transformation, including the restructuring of one’s identities. Thus this transformational theory is in accord with poststructuralist perceptions of identity as dynamic, complex and multiple (Block, 2006, 2007; S. Hall, 1992; Norton, 2000).

**Conclusion**

The four narrative accounts presented in this chapter establish the idea that people have the abilities to be reflexive and to operate and innovate with meaning and practice in the sense that they can negotiate and take action depending on the forces of tradition, politics, hierarchy, prejudice, environment and many more. For instance, Zack and Khairul, thinking how English could make them appear more intelligent, both of them, being reflexive, decided to ‘reshape’ to the new
version of themselves—Malaysian people who spoke in English almost all the time and with accents too. This new version of Zack and Khairul would, according to them, make people look at them differently and in a better way.

Nevertheless, people’s abilities to be reflexive does not necessarily mean only in a positive way. This is because, human also has the ability to manipulate these forces negatively. For example, from the narratives, we can see how Gary’s reflexivity had turned him into someone who was openly prejudiced against people from his own country. He even went into using the term ‘first-class mindset and third-class mentality’ when comparing people from the UK and Malaysia. While I thought it was a positive thing that Gary had become more open and critical after coming to the UK, it was also displeasing that this had also made him who stereotypes.

Regardless of both the positive and negative outcomes of the participants’ intercultural experiences, the narratives in this chapter actually acknowledge the complexity of cultural realities that are often unrecognised and marginalised by the established world, which is, people have the abilities to be reflexive and to negotiate intercultural meaning wherever they are. As Holliday (2016, p. 26) states, ‘we are not confined by essentialist cultural boundaries and can engage creatively in new cultural domains’. In other words, this means that, these ‘radical changes’ that the participants in this study went through are actually rather common and not unusual as I had imagined at the beginning of this study after all.
Chapter 7: Reflections on the literature from the perspective of the discussion data

7.1 Introduction

This chapter presents reflections on the literature from the perspective of the discussion data and intends to show how the literature has helped me to understand the impact of my rationalist perspective was having on the study and to seek out alternative perspectives, and as a result to rethink the concept of interculturality and unveil the complexity of the participants’ personal journey. Adding the autoethnographic element to the study not only allowed me to see the data in a different way, but to think about the literature, and the way I was looking at the literature differently.

Having written this chapter, I realized that I had chosen to begin the study with a common, more established viewpoint, trying to understand the research participants’ experience, exploring intercultural and concepts related to it, again through common, more established viewpoint.

What I had not primarily realised was that this common, more established perspective of intercultural, also known as essentialism, was overly simplistic that it merely refers to the relationship between cultures. Culture in this sense is understood as to be tied to geographical and/or national location. However, it has become clear to me now that reading literature mainly coming from this established standpoint would have influenced my own perspective, a perspective that was already, subconsciously at the time, privileging essentialism due to my personal experience of being an international student in the UK (as mentioned in Chapter 2).

This chapter reflects the ongoing tension between my initial essentialist led perspective on what was important for the study and a revised perspective influenced by the autoethnographic element to the study. Although early drafts of this chapter were in place before the autoethnographic element to the study was included, the chapter has been redrafted to take this dimension into account. For example, the discussion of key concepts such as culture and intercultural were initially a briefer one, in quite definitive ways, assuming these concepts to be unproblematic and commonly understood. However, this was extended when it became clear to me that I was understanding these terms in different ways than the participants, who in turn were seeing them in different ways than other
participants. Realizing my own understanding of intercultural did not match the participants’ understandings, I began to view the early data collected in a different way and also felt the need to explore in more depth how the related concepts were discussed in the literature.

7.2 Exploring key concepts
This section explores in depth a number of key concepts that are relevant to this study.

7.2.1 Probing the term interculturality
As mentioned ahead, interculturality in essence refers to the relationship between cultures. Nevertheless, due to the term ‘culture’ that is central in the word intercultural being a contested concept, any discussion of it entails a discussion of the different ways in which culture can be comprehended. Essentially, how a person understands culture is significant to how he or she apprehends intercultural, the interrelationship between cultures, and has important consequences on how one might depict an intercultural experience or encounter and reflect on the unique processes and outcomes of such an encounter. In order to define interculturality, it is essential that the notion is first explored in depth in what follows below, by first probing the different concepts of culture.

7.2.1.1 Essentialist and non-essentialist understandings of culture
Generally speaking, there are two ways of talking about culture in the literature on intercultural namely essentialist, which I originally advocate myself to and non-essentialist constructions of culture (Holliday, 2010; Holliday et al. 2010; Dervin, 2010). Drawing upon insights from the anthropologist explicitly Clifford Geertz (1973) among others, the literature emphasises different views of culture with regard to its position and meaning to individual subjectivity and also disclose how definitions of culture in the literature are a manifestation of certain ideological positions.

An essentialist understanding of culture is one that sees culture as a stable common frame of reference for a group of people, typically those sharing a language and country. It refers to the collective accumulated shared systems of norms and values, which distinguish one group of people from another. In this way it emphasises what is universal about a given group of people, or how they can be seen as a distinctive group (Holliday, 2010; Holliday et al, 2010). An
essentialist understanding of culture lies at the heart of early attempts to differentiate between groups of people such as those by E. T. Hall (1976) to distinguish high context and low context cultures, polycronic and monocronic cultures and in the classifications developed by Hofstede (1994) between individualist and collectivist cultures. These remain popular in terms of their adoption and their appeal and have served as the inspiration for a host of comparative perspectives on cultures, including, for example, attempts to describe the academic learning styles of international students versus home students (see for example Cortazzi & Jin, 1996). The result of this process is the production of a particular grammar of culture, a set of cultural ‘facts’ (Dervin, 2010) through which they can be contrasted and compared.

An essentialist understanding of culture is therefore one which understands culture to be tied to geographical and/or national location. It encourages us to see the world as a mosaic of bounded and discreet groupings (Pieterse, 2004) (and to talk of culture as a monolithic entity as in, for example, Japanese culture, American culture and so on. Moreover, an essentialist position is one, that as Abdallah-Pretceille argues, assumes that ‘knowing the other takes place through knowing her culture as a static object’ (Abdallah-Pretceille, 2003, p. 13). In other words, it assumes that the behaviours and values of the other are reducible to stable cultural traits or scripts.

This essentialist position, invoking as it does an ‘us-and-them’ reading of culture, is one that continues to be a view that many subscribe to and, as Appadurai has argued in his book (Appadurai, 2006) is one that people continue to draw upon to describe their sense of self within a globalized world. However, among the community of academic researchers who research and write about culture and interculturality there is an increasing acknowledgement of the need to problematize this essentialist reading of culture within the context of globalization and for a need to embrace other, non-essentialist understandings of cultures to be discussed below. Concerns focus on a number of things. Firstly, the dangers of a homogeneous reading of culture with respect to representation leading to the production of unhelpful stereotypes of people according to such things as nation and region (see for example Zamel, 1997; Kumaravadivelu, 2003). A second concern is the assumption that an individual is to be understood as produced by a particular set of norms and values in a given geographical setting (see for example, Guest, 2002). Finally, concerns have also been raised
about the Eurocentric constructions underpinning these essentialist constructions of culture and the ways in which these contribute, whether intentionally or otherwise to a process of cultural othering (Dervin, 2010).

Nevertheless, as several writers have recently observed, despite acknowledging these short-comings, in many accounts, it is possible to detect what Holliday (2010) calls a neo-essentialism in the treatment of culture, whereby writers promote non-essentialist understandings of culture but undertake research and adopt research methodologies which lead them to conclusions which are essentialist in their articulation. Holliday provides a very helpful and thought provoking account of why researchers can end up appearing Janus-faced as Dervin (2010) puts it. He suggests that this highlights an inherent tension between a western liberalist desire to accept diversity and to be fair in its treatment of others with a persistence of the belief in the possibility of scientific neutrality in research and the failure to acknowledge or recognise the contradictions and hidden prejudice in what they do. This raises a number of very important questions for how we undertake research into intercultural encounters, as I will discuss further below in section 5.4).

An essentialist reading of culture, as outlined above, is one that is arguably closely aligned with the modernist project of nation-building (Holliday, 2010). In contrast, a non-essentialist understanding of culture is seen to be one which adopts and reflects a poststructuralist and post-modernist turn in the social sciences, one which is seen to better address the condition of globalization. The questions posed by the emergence of globalization as a phenomenon and the move towards postmodernism and post structuralism has led to a number of important re-workings of the concept of culture including, as will be discussed below, whether it is appropriate to continue to use the term culture at all.

Firstly, there has been recognition of a need to acknowledge that the concept of culture interfaces with the construct of nation and region in complex ways. On the one hand this has led to the recognition that culture can apply to groups of all shapes and sizes and not only to region or nation as a group. This means that cultures can be understood as applying to larger affiliations and allegiances than nation, and smaller ones too.

From another related perspective there is an increasing recognition of the need to view cultures as dynamic open systems and to recognise the increasingly fuzzy nature of the boundaries between groups. While this has been brought into
sharp focus by the increasing globalization brought on by the technological revolution in the 21st century, for many, the interconnectivity of cultures has always been there, and the belief that it was otherwise needs to be understood as part of the construction of the modernist project of nation state building alluded to above (Delanty, 2006; Rizvi, 2008). That is to say, those holding a non-essentialist perspective on culture subscribe to a view that cultures are always best understood as dynamic and in a state of flux. To acknowledge in other words that they are simultaneously: ‘archaic, residual and emergent’ (Williams, 1976, p. 63). It is this sense of interconnectivity as central to a conceptualization of culture which has led to those who subscribe to a non-essentialist understanding of culture to emphasise cultures as hybrids rather than discreet entities, as always in a state of dialogue and under construction.

Alongside this re-articulation of culture as dynamic, changeable and hybrid in light of globalization there has been a re-examination of the essentialist construction of the relationship between individuals and culture. That is to say, with the general undoing of the essentialist position on culture that has been occurring in recent years, there has been recognition of a need to afford people a much more active role in managing the multiple potential calls on their identity afforded by globalization. In other words, to move away from a sense of individual subjectivity being determined by a stable set of externally driven cultural norms and values to one that affords them a much greater agency as reflexive subjects generating their own dynamic shifting ‘cultures’ out of their multiple group allegiances and affiliations (Giddens, 1991; S. Hall, 1991; Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004). This, as D. Atkinson (1999) has highlighted a need to raise questions among some who subscribe to a non-essentialist perspective as to whether there is any currency left in the term culture at all or whether as Clifford (1986, p. 10) has argued: ‘Culture is a deeply compromised concept I cannot yet do without’.

7.2.1.2 Towards a definition of interculturality

From the discussion of culture above, it is apparent that there is considerable debate around what culture might mean and, as mentioned earlier, different perspectives on culture are likely to have different implications for how interculturality might be seen and defined. In light of this, it is surprising to note that my reading suggests that the term is widely adopted in the literature without clear definition and the inherent complexity in the term. Since I believe that it is
important to be clear about how interculturality is used in this thesis and acknowledge the understandings of the word culture that inform it, I will offer my definition of the term in this section. Before I proceed, it is important for me to inform that in this study, my use of the term interculturality now embraces a non-essentialist understanding of culture. However, I also acknowledge that to adopt this stance actually raises serious questions about the conceptual viability of interculturality, as I will explain below.

The basic components of the term intercultural are ones that would suggest that interculturality describes a process that occurs between cultures. While it is not difficult to relate this to an essentialist cultural perspective, it is much more challenging from a non-essentialist perspective, precisely because the consistency and discreteness of cultures as solid entities borne out of people’s socially constructed experiences of living in particular localities is opposed (Spencer-Oatey & Franklin, 2009, p. 39). Arguably, from a non-essentialist perspective, since it is not possible to identify and define cultures, it might be argued that it is also not possible or helpful to talk of interculturality either.

Rather, according to Rich (2011), a non-essentialist advocate, with its emphasis on cultures in a dynamic state of flux and hybridity, shifts the location of the ‘in-betweenness’ or inter component of interculturality to the meaning of culture itself and the logical outcome of this is that, interculturality might be seen to refer to all human interchanges, wherever they take place, which is evident in the study.

7.2.2 Understanding interculturality: acculturation or third space?
Implied in the different understandings of culture discussed above are different conceptualisations of how the process of meaning making and the potential and purpose of an intercultural encounter can be imagined. Namely whether this is best understood to involve a process of acculturation entailing the acquisition of new cultural behaviours or as a space where people or ‘cultures’ meet and intermingle generating new or ‘third’ ways of being. I will consider each of these perspectives in turn before going on to consider the contributions of cosmopolitanism to an understanding of interculturality in section 5.2.3 below.
7.2.2.1 Interculturality as acculturation
Drawing upon an essentialist understanding of culture sees interculturality as a divide between people who embody a cultural identity and is interested to explore how people move across this divide. In its purist form, this is understood to be a process of culture shock, acculturation or assimilation whereby an individual learns to relinquish old norms and values and come to take up the norms and values of those of the new cultural group they seek membership of. This representation of interculturality, widespread in the literature of interculturality, is, as I will discuss below (see section 5.4), also variously referred to as adaptation, adoption and accommodation and acculturation (Kumaravadivelu, 2008, pp. 66-68). While there are arguably subtle differences between these processes, they are also broadly aligned with an understanding of interculturality as a process of adjustment to a new cultural experience whether long or short-term. Moreover, as the models of adaptation developed by two of their most well-known protagonists (Kaplan, 1966; Schumann, 1978) picture this, this leads to a view of interculturality as primarily a process of surrendering one set of cultural scripts or values for another and places the burden of responsibility for intercultural ‘success’ on one party, that is the newcomer. It is a view of interculturality, which resonates, in no small measure with the usual discourses of international student.

7.2.2.2 Interculturality as third space
The second, informed by the non-essentialist understanding of culture outlined above, is one which understands interculturality as a meeting place capable of generating new forms of knowing and being (Rich, 2011). A prominent figure with regard to this understanding of interculturality, is Bhabha (1994) who along with a number of other writers such as Fougere (2008) and Soja (1996) is interested to consider this in-betweenness as a third space that opens up between self and other which can generate new, hybrid forms of knowing and being that surpass those generated from our own ‘cultural’ experiences. As Bhabha (1994, p. 37) argues, this third space is one replete with possibility, one in which: ‘the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated and rehistorised anew’. For Homi Bhabha, working within a post-colonial tradition, intercultural encounters are spaces, which afford the possibility for people to be liberated from their histories and to negotiate and lay claim to new forms of individual identity (Kumaravadivelu, 2008).
The ideas of hybridity and third space have come to be seen as particularly relevant in light of the global condition, which is seen to be a hallmark of life in the 21st century. Other post-colonialists, notably Stuart Hall (1991), have, for example, suggested that this hybridity is not only a possibility, but also within the context of globalisation and the movement of people around the world, a reality, as increasing numbers of people form diasporic communities, and find themselves engaged in a process of living in-between, of translation, and hybridity (Hall, 1991). Hall and Bhabha are two of the growing number of writers who argue that there are considerable lessons to be learnt about the nature of interculturality from an examination of the lived reality of life in such contact zones, a central premise of this thesis, and one on which I will elaborate further below.

The ideas of hybridity and third space are also seen to have an appeal among those who are interested in describing the sense of global personhood and citizenship which globalisation is seen to require (see for example, Kim, 2008; Jackson, 2008) which might be seen to emerge through engagement in global educational contact zones.

Notions of hybridity and third space have however attracted some criticisms raising questions about their potential to adequately describe interculturality. The first of these concerns the relationship between a concept of hybridity and third space. Hybridity suggests that we view any given reality as evolving from a process of syncretism, in a state of continuous in-betweenness (Kumaravadivelu, 2008, p. 124) and it would appear that from this perspective it is challenging to talk of a third space as this would appear to be predicated on a view of interculturality which assumes this is an outcome of the meeting of two discreet worlds (or first and second spaces) and therefore ultimately adheres to a view of meeting across cultural difference. Indeed, there is an evident sense in which third space is adopted to refer to the outcomes of a meeting of people as culturally defined subjects in some studies which adopt this (see for example, Jackson, 2008; Feng, 2009) and I agree with Holliday (2010) that this ultimately, albeit unintentionally, perpetuates an essentialist view of culture. If however, we engage with the spirit of this term as a way to describe the possibilities for the generation of new understandings of individual post-modern agentive subjects it would, as Hermans (2009) has argued, however, seem to be helpful.
A second related concern with the use of the term third space to talk of intercultural processes and outcomes relates to the lack of attention given to the ways in which wider issues of power and representation are part and parcel of an experience of interculturality and must therefore be accommodated in a theorising of this ‘space’ (see for example, Anthias, 2006; Kumaravadivelu, 2008). In other words, it is argued that there needs to be more recognition of the fact that people bring sets of characters as a result of their diverse experiences in different socio-cultural setting to undergo their experience of interculturality. This means that a theory of interculturality is one that needs to acknowledge and accommodate the ways in which the subject positions borne out of participants differing ethnic, linguistic and ‘cultural’ affiliations will impact on the outcomes of an intercultural encounter. This is likely to be particularly significant in settings, such as the one that forms the focus of study reported in this thesis, where some participants in an intercultural encounter have relocated and experience these encounters as what Anthias (2006, p. 26) refers to as: ‘translocational spaces’, giving rise to particular forms of ‘translocational positionialites’.

In light of these problems, those interested in theorising and researching interculturality have drawn upon an alternative way of describing this. Namely, cosmopolitanism, a theoretical understanding of global communication that emphasises universal values that exceed difference, as I will discuss in the following.

7.2.3 Interculturality and cosmopolitanism agendas: from global cosmopolitanism to cosmopolitan realism

Debates about globalization and increased contact between peoples around the globe have increasingly drawn upon cosmopolitanism for theoretical inspiration. The reason for this is that it is a movement that seeks to articulate a concept of global universals. However, within the cosmopolitanism ‘school of thought’ there a number of different traditions which can be seen to inform different understandings of interculturality and its outcomes. A central distinction, to be

60 ‘Useful concept for investigating processes and outcomes of collective identification — that is, the claims and attributions that individuals make about their position in the social order of things, their views of where and to what they belong (and to what they do not belong) as well as an understanding of the broader social relations that constitute and are constituted in this process’ (Anthias, 2002, p. 491)
discussed here is between global cosmopolitanism and cosmopolitan realism. Whereas the former has tended to emphasis universals in moral and political terms, the latter is interested in reflecting on social universals (Delanty, 2006)

7.2.3.1 Global cosmopolitanism and interculturality.

The view of an outcome of interculturality as global personhood or citizenship is informed in part by a renewed interest in ‘global cosmopolitanism’ (Bhabha 1994: xiv) which takes its inspiration from its original conception by the ancient Greek stoics who invoked this to describe the idea of common shared values and an ethical openness-to- other which transcends ethnic racial or national boundaries and differences (Kumaravadivelu, 2008; Delanty, 2006). This moral ideal, couched in terms of a shared universal ethics is in some accounts of global citizenship seen to be a useful way of describing the potential inherent in the third or hybrid space that is envisioned by non-essentialist constructions of interculturality discussed above. There is, in other words, an evident conjoining of the discourses of interculturality as generating greater mutual respect and tolerance for others and their cultures (as in the work of Young, 1996; Kim, 2008) and those underpinning the cosmopolitan ideal of a universal moral code or world political community as proposed by Immanuel Kant and as revived by Nussbaum (1996) among others (Delanty, 2006).

However, there is an apparent tension in the attempts to describe cosmopolitanism as an outcome of a third space as Delanty (2006) has pointed out. This is because, cosmopolitanism refers to a universal openness to other which is primarily an underlying even present quality of being human and is therefore something that we bring to bear on our experience as much as it is a possible outcome of this. Thus, while cosmopolitanism is in part a reflection of the interconnectivity that is emphasised by hybridity, it is about more than this. To put this another way, it could be argued that whereas hybridity contributes to interculturality and understanding of how we can understand the meeting and blending of different cultures and ideas, cosmopolitanism starts from the more radical assumption that these cultures and ideas are already together in one world, and is interested to reflect on what has enabled humanity to communicate in a world where difference has always been a feature of lived reality. Thus, I suggest that whereas ultimately hybridity approaches an understanding of interculturality through a cultural lens, cosmopolitanism concerns itself primarily with the ‘inter’ part of interculturality.
To sum up, as a way to describe the intermingling of values, cultural practices and languages as well as the emergence of diasporic communities that appear to be increasing marked features of 21st century globalization, hybridity appears to retain considerable currency in the literature. However, as a way to describe the process of meaning making that occurs in and through an experience of interculturality, some important questions are being raised, particularly from those who subscribe to a more cosmopolitan outlook. Nevertheless, in recent years, as I will discuss below, while cosmopolitanism has been the focus of renewed interest, the global cosmopolitan vision outlined above itself come under sharp criticism from those writers within the cosmopolitan movement who align themselves with what might, following Beck (2002) be called a cosmopolitan realist perspective.

7.2.3.2 Cosmopolitan realism and interculturality

Among the many critics of the global cosmopolitanism perspective (see for example, Bhabha, 1994; Delanty, 2006; Holliday, 2010; Kumaravadivelu, 2008), a central theme is a concern for the ways in which a notion of shared common universals that might transcend differences between us has been largely configured around a euro-centric vision of cosmopolitanism. One which is seen to deny the reality of cosmopolitanism as a feature of lived reality which has taken many different forms in many different places throughout human history (Holliday, 2010). This has, however, not detracted from the perceived potential of cosmopolitanism to provide a vision for intercultural communication within the context of increasing globalization, but to concerted efforts to re-theorise this. That is, to re-theorise this in ways that allow for the essence of a cosmopolitanism imagination as ‘world openness’ (Delanty, 2006, p. 27) to be retained but also to allow for it to be locally realised in different ways, reflecting the realities of different local settings and the historical, economical, political and cultural realities inherent in these.

This move has led to new ways of conceptualising cosmopolitanism including vernacular cosmopolitanism (Bhabha, 1994), rooted cosmopolitanism (Appiah, 2007), critical cosmopolitanism (Delanty, 2006) and cosmopolitan realism (Beck, 2002). A fundamental stance of these new forms of cosmopolitanism is that examining how people engage with moments of world openness in locally realised global contact zones wherever they occur can provide us with a more grounded and critically informed understanding of how we
can articulate the processes and outcomes of interculturality. Moreover, they allow alternative, often marginalised forms of cosmopolitanism to be made visible (Bhabha, 1994; Holliday, 2010), which is also the essence of the argument that informs the work of Stuart Hall. It is also one that supports the conceptualisation of interculturality that informs this study.

The debates regarding cosmopolitanism discussed above highlight a number of interesting developments with regard to how interculturality, and the processes and outcomes of meaning making this affords, might be theorised.

### 7.3 Interculturality, changes and identity

When discussing about sojourn intercultural experience and ‘radical changes in appearance, religiousness, language and openness’ amongst a small group of Malaysian students in this study, I believe it is somehow expected from some readers that the theory and politics of identity should also be deliberated in this thesis. This is because, geographical movement has been shown to have transformative effect to identity. According to Chryssochoou (2004), the experience of living in intercultural zones, places where people and groups from previously unrelated cultures come into contact promotes changes and pushes questions of identity to the fore. It is also revealed in David Comp’s content analysis approach data that ‘sojourners experience intellectual, psychological social, and/or physical changes as a result of their study abroad experience’ (Comp, 2008, p. 84). However, this is not necessarily true. Arguably, every one of us is an intercultural traveller throughout our lives regardless of where we are and therefore, we constantly and creatively negotiate the intercultural realities of everyday lives. Our abilities to negotiate this is a cultural skill that ‘helps us to understand and engage with cultural behaviour wherever we find it and helps us to understand the way in which cultural behaviour is always somehow intercultural’ (Holliday, 2019, p. i).

To be clear, I do not mean to reject the concept of identity or its political importance in certain struggles. However, based on the research data, I believe it may be wise to place this research within the broader context of intercultural communication instead of locating it from the discourse of identity. Therefore, instead of accommodating the common idea of loss of identity or culture shock with regards to student sojourners transition, implying that the Malaysian student sojourners are expected to have certain ‘Malaysian values’ and that their ‘radical’
transformations (e.g. not behaving like Malaysians anymore) suggest that they are confused or deficient, inspired by Holliday’s grammar of culture which will be elaborated in the following chapter, this study seeks to go below the surface and to work towards more multifaceted cultural realities.

7.4 Approaches to the study of international students’ intercultural experience

This section offers a literature review of how the international students’ intercultural experience has been theoretically and generally approached. This is then followed by discussion on alternative frameworks to the study of international students' changes, which has aspired this particular study.

7.4.1 Classic frameworks to the study of international students’ intercultural experience

As mentioned in Chapter 3, investigations on international students’ intercultural experience are frequently supported by an understanding of international student experience as an adjustment process and is often related to one of the most influential and practical concepts that is ‘culture shock’. In his book, Oberg (1960, p. 24) coined the term ‘culture shock’ to explain what happens when the ‘foreigners’ meet the ‘natives’. The term has particularly been used for sojourners; particularly students abroad which include Malaysian international students.

Emerged and evolved alongside the ‘culture shock’ concept are the ‘U’ and ‘W’ curves of adjustment models (as already discussed in Chapter 3) which are usually complemented by visual illustrations that claimed to describe and even predict a ‘typical’ trajectory that such stressful encounters would produce.

In the 1980s, the widespread rejection of the traditional view of ‘culture shock’ paved the way for the development of new theoretical frameworks that went beyond mental health concerns (Ward et al., 2001). Rather than counseling and therapy for the ‘culturally shocked’ sojourner, preparation, orientation, and the acquisition of culturally relevant knowledge and social skills began to dominate the discourse on cross-cultural transition (e.g. Bochner, 1982, 1986; Furnham and Bochner, 1982). Sojourner adjustment has since been extensively studied from a social psychological perspective, investigating its affective (A), behavioural (B), and cognitive (C) elements (as described in Chapter 3). An illustration of these three approaches can be found in Ward et al.’s (2001) ABC Model of Culture Shock.
However, as mentioned earlier in Chapter 3, the complexity of the model is also seen as a problem, since it is difficult to separate the various components and do research on their effects. Another drawback of this framework is that the research of psychology in intercultural contact situations has not been related to research on different cultural travellers (Zhou et al., 2008).

Although some findings from the current approaches to the study of sojourner transition and their experience of interculturality (see Gill, 2007; Gu, Schweisfurth, & Day, 2010) were seen to challenge the overly simplistic linear view of intercultural adaptation presented in the studies by Schartner (2014) and Brown (2008) for examples, I reflect they still have not captured a holistic understanding of participants’ intercultural experience and have yet to yield a fuller understanding of this complex phenomenon in relation to the participants’ transition during their academic sojourn. This is because, the said studies nevertheless appear to conclude the experience of interculturality as predominantly a process of relinquishing one set of cultural scripts or values for another.

7.4.2 Alternative approaches to the study of international students’ intercultural experience

Through the use of essentialist understandings of culture, culturalist language and falsely positioned good intentions, critical intercultural communication has established that preceding approaches to study on international students’ intercultural experience had the potential to do more harm than good. In contrast, with its focus on a broader picture, this study is underpinned by a number of grounds that stem from a cosmopolitan realism view of culture that has been discussed in chapter 2, social action model of society that derives from the sociology of Weber (1964) and by Holliday’s (2011, 2013, 2019) grammar of culture in which people are seen as ‘not confined by essentialist cultural boundaries and can engage creatively in new cultural domain’ (Holliday, 2016a, p. 26).

7.4.2.1 Social action theory

The social action theory of Weber (e.g. 1964, 1968), is in sharp contrast to the dominant sociological model which emphasises national culture as the essential unit for explaining cultural behaviour. This can be traced to structural-functionalism (e.g. Durkheim, 1933; Parsons, 1951) in which national culture is
treated as a system which contains the complementary elements of every aspect of social life—social structure, behaviour, values and ideology, each telling us something about the other. In this model what is observed about social behaviour can thus be explained and indeed predicted in terms of the other parts and the functions of the whole. Therefore, if a culture is deemed collectivist, any behaviour within it can be explained as contributing to (or as an exception to, or deviant), and also determined by its collectivism.

Social action theory presents a very different model with the independence of action as a major feature. Weber made it a major point of his methodology not to determine the precise nature of human behaviour and not to package national culture, social structure and behaviour, values and ideology into a solid organic system. Social action theory therefore places social structure, politics, religion, the economy, etc. and ideology and culture, all in dialogue with each other. From this dialogue can be generated the trajectory of action of the type expressed in the interviews in this paper, which can also develop new cultural behaviour. Social action theory thus supports the ‘cultural realism’ expressed by Kumaravadivelu. This acknowledges the fact of nation but from a postmodern or constructivist perspective where identity is ‘fragmented, not unified; multiple, not singular; expansive, not bounded’ and the individual takes over a modicum of agency in determining a sense of self (Kumaravadivelu, 2007, pp. 143-144, citing Giddens). It means that despite ‘a preconstructed social world which is largely beyond their control’, people are still ‘agentive, strategic and reflective beings, and the preconstructed social world is a socially, humanly, constructed world, the outcome of past and continuing human agency, strategy and reflexivity’ (Fairclough, 2006, p. 163).

7.4.2.2 A grammar of culture

‘Grammar of culture’ is relevant in this thesis in the sense that the processes of culture construction that are mapped out in this framework are very much evident within my research. Just as the concept of cosmopolitan realism allows for navigation between the importance of context and universality, Holliday’s grammar of culture also recognizes the ‘interaction between the particular and the universal’ (2013, p.1). In avoiding a static structural-functionalist model despite the name possibly suggesting otherwise, the grammar of culture reflects ‘a strong sense of negotiation and movement’ between ‘three aspects of cultural reality’ which are ‘particular social and political structures’, ‘underlying universal
cultural processes’ and ‘particular cultural products’ (2011, pp.130-131). Figure 7 below represents Holliday’s grammar of culture and is explained further in the following:

![Holliday's Grammar of Culture](image)

**Cultural negotiation**

The arrows across the top and the bottom of Figure 7 signify an interaction between the power of underlying universal cultural process owned by the individual and the influence of the particular cultural realities which stem from national structures. According to Weber’s social action theory which has inspired Holliday’s grammar of culture, ‘everyone has the potential to dialogue with structures of their society’ (Holliday, 2016b, p. 31). Holliday (2016b, p. 31) adds, ‘however, the degree to which this potential can be realized will depend on other forces of tradition, politics, hierarchy, and prejudice acting against it’. Fundamentally, what is implied in cultural negotiation is the idea of individual negotiating culture, taking social action on a daily basis.

**Particular social and political structures**

Next, on the left side of the grammar are structures which in many ways form us and make us different from one another. They provide the backdrop for personal cultural trajectories and small formation on the go. The first domain is cultural
resources, which is to do with how we are influenced by and draw upon certain social and political structures in our daily lives. It is here where there will be differences between us because of the particularities of how we are brought up in different societies, and it is this sort of difference that relates most closely to what many of us refer to ‘our culture’. The way we were educated, our national institutions, the manner of our government, our media, our economy, and so on are different from nation to nation and will indisputably influence us. These resources may be imagined as mapping precisely onto each other, for example, where a nation state such as Malaysia corresponds mainly with one religious group that is Islam, one language- Bahasa Melayu and one economic system. However, this occurrence is likely to be imagined than actual, “residing in our idealisation of ‘tribe’, where we might be seduced by the idea of a single ‘culture’ where all the members share things that no one else does” (Holliday, 2019, pp. 3-4). It is important for us to understand that these resources do not restrict the way we think, and what we do and even when these resources are imposed on us, we still have personal resources which allow us to resist within the personal trajectory category.

The following domain, global positioning and politics concerns how we position ourselves and our society with regard to the rest of the world. This is influenced by how we are all inscribed by long-standing constructions of who we are in relationship to others, in our histories, education, institutions, the statements of politicians, upbringing, media representations and other resources in the cultural resources’ domain. These are powerful resources since our opinions are not only shaped by them, but depending on our circumstances, we also choose to employ them in different ways and at different times.

Largely, the social and political structures domain raises difficult questions about the relationship between how we construct the culture and reality as we need to think carefully how far the idea of culture that we talk about matches the reality.

**Underlying universal cultural processes**
The source of social action which is implied throughout the grammar is in the underlying universal cultural process in the very centre of the grammar. These processes are shared by all of us and are common across all cultural settings. They involve skills and strategies through which everyone regardless of
background participates in and negotiates their position within the cultural landscapes to which they belong. This according to Holliday (2019) is the basis upon which we are able to read, engage with and take part in the production of culture creatively wherever we find it.

At the core of the underlying universal cultural processes domain is small culture formation. Holliday (2019) describes small cultures as cultural environments, small social groupings or activities where there is consistent behaviour. He adds, examples of groupings are families and leisure and work group. They can be as small as two people in some form of relationship. They are the basic cultural entities from which all other cultural realities grow. However, more important than being places, they are the locations of social action. Small culture formation is the process in which people form rules for how to behave. In fact, wherever we go, we automatically either take part in or begin to build small cultures whether we realise it or not. In this sense, small culture formation happens all the time and is a basic essence of being human. Thus, small culture formation on the go is the everyday process that takes place all the time, everywhere, with whoever we meet or even think about and where we make choices about positioning and engaging or not engaging- creating, joining, leaving, conflicting with, encouraging, changing. It emphasises how impermanent and changing small culture can be.

Also, in the centre of the grammar is personal trajectories which comprise the individual's travel through society, bringing histories from their ancestors and origins. Through these trajectories we are able to step out from and interact with the particular social and political structures that surround us and even cross into new and alien domains. This category thus provides the everyday experience for the underlying universal cultural process.

**Particular cultural products**

The product of cultural activity is on the right of the grammar. The first domain, artefacts, incorporates the ‘big-C’ cultural artefacts such as literature and the arts. They include cultural practices, which are the day to day things we do that often seem strange for people coming from foreign cultural backgrounds- how we eat, greet, show respect and so on. These are the things which are most commonly linked with ‘our culture’ or national culture, but they also differ between small groups within particular society.
The second domain, statements about culture, is to do with how we present ourselves and what we choose to call ‘our culture’- how we position ourselves and how we choose to play the ‘culture card’. There is a deep and tacit politics here which means that what we choose to say and project 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 a genuine presentation of Self which involves a sophisticated manipulation of reality.

An observation of the grammar of culture

Essentially, an observation of the grammar of culture is that the aspect of culture which Holliday categorises as ‘particular cultural products’ (e.g. dress, cultural practices) is often thought of by others as what defines culture in its totality. The individual differences within this category are exaggerated and lead to the false idea that these differences are somehow much more significant than they are. As these differences are emphasized, fetishized, admired or even imagined, they somehow take on a much greater meaning than they should and hinder people seeing others as people. Thus, the remaining components of the grammar of culture that includes the personal trajectories, the underlying universal cultural processes and the political structures are forgotten or ignored. This is similar to what Dervin and Tournebise recognize as ‘turbulence’ within intercultural communication education where there are ‘differentialist biases’ which are often built on binary opposition which are then used to ‘explain encounters between people from the ‘West’ and ‘East’ or ‘North’ and ‘South’ (2013, p. 534). Similarly, the social and political structures that influence the process of constructing Self and Other are denied. While the grammar of culture demonstrates how ‘everyone has potential to operate and innovate with meaning and practice across unfamiliar cultural boundaries’, which is apparent in this research, this is hindered by a portrayal of particular cultural products or artefacts as much more significant than they are and as exclusively representing what culture ‘is’ (Holliday, 2015, p. 3).

In the present research, Holliday’s grammar of culture is used as a map which I believe helped me to understand the intercultural events that the research participants communicated about. Reference to the grammar of culture and
certain domains in the grammar are made within the following chapter (Chapter 6).

**Summary**

This chapter has provided reflections on the literature from the perspective of the discussion data which highlighted the predominant paradigm which has historically framed the study of international students’ intercultural experience and competing paradigms surrounding it, including alternative approaches to the study. This chapter has also introduced Holliday’s Grammar of culture and noted its relevance to this thesis.
Chapter 8: Conclusions and implications

8.1 Introduction
This study has attempted to investigate narrative accounts of a small group of Malaysian students when asked to reflect on their intercultural experience of living in the UK during their academic.

My intention as outlined in Chapter 1 being to focus on what a small group of eight Malaysian students studying in different universities in the UK chose to say when asked about their ‘intercultural experience’ in Britain, and how what they had to say impacts upon my own development of understanding of the intercultural and identity. The latter was not clear at the commencement of the study but was uncovered through my own self-reflection and in light of this, I decided to re-evaluate my own positioning and include myself to the setting of this study. This allowed me to discover the changes of my own thoughts and understandings of interculturality and the complexity of the participants’ personal journey.

In this final chapter of the thesis, by way of a conclusion, I will sum up the findings of this study and my interpretations of these findings which has developed through the data chapters (Chapter 5 and 6). I will also highlight what I see as the main contributions to knowledge stemming from the findings. I will then go on to critically reflect on the process of undertaking the study and offer some suggestions for possible future research directions on the basis of this discussion. Lastly, before considering the final reflections of the research, I will briefly review my starting and ending points.

8.2 Major findings
This section pulls together the important aspects of the discussion which has developed through the data chapters (Chapter 5 and 6). What the nine participants told me about their intercultural experience brings broader observation about how we understand interculturality (the focus of research question 1) and my own development of understanding the complexity of the participants’ personal journey (the focus of research question 2).
8.2.1 Intercultural as all human exchanges, wherever they take place

I began the study by asking the participants about their intercultural experiences of being in the UK. What emerged were statements about radical changes ‘appearance’, ‘religiousness’, ‘language’ and ‘openness’ they went through, believed to be the result of their intercultural experiences. The participants’ accounts have led me to revisit my understanding of the intercultural and the word ‘culture’ that informs it.

As indicated in Chapter 5, indeed how one understands ‘culture’ is fundamental to how he or she perceives the ‘inter’ part of the intercultural, or the interrelationship holding between cultures and how this have significant implications on how an intercultural encounter can be described and how any process and outcomes of such encounter can be reflected on. Profoundly, the experiences participants shared with me suggest that the term intercultural refers to relationships that go beyond nations, continents, ethnics, religions and many more.

Prior to the study, like many others, I used to believe that intercultural refers to relationship between ‘cultures’ in which the notion ‘culture’ by default becomes what Holliday (1999, p. 237) terms as ‘large culture’ that often signifies regions, countries, organizations, ethnic and other sub-national groups. For instance, at the beginning of the study, I somehow imagined to gather evidence such as ‘… is the culture of people here (UK)’, ‘… is the Malaysian culture’, ‘I am like this because this is the Malaysian culture’ or ‘I am now embracing the UK culture’ from the participants, where participants would use the idea of national cultures or simply an ‘us-and-them’ way of describing their intercultural experience or encounters.

However, as can be seen from my data in Chapter 5 and Chapter 6, none of the participants has made such remarks during the interview. The participants instead communicated about different aspects of radical changes that I believe do not directly relate to the essence of ethnic, national or international identities. Having looked at the participants’ responses to me asking about their intercultural experience, I learned that the term intercultural which depends on the word ‘culture’ can be adopted to apply to a wide range of groupings of different sizes. This is supported by Rich (2011, p. 65) in which she states that:
‘…culture can apply to groups of all shapes and sizes and not only to region or nation as a group.’

This means that cultures can be understood as applying to both larger associations and allegiances than nation, and smaller ones too. As such, this wide range of groupings of culture confounds attempts to place culture simply in geographic terms (Holliday, 1999). I believe my data which refers to clothing, religious practices, use of language to name a few, attests what Eliot (1948, p. 104) says about culture:

‘Culture…includes all the characteristics activities and interests of a people. Derby Day, Henley Regatta, Cowes, the 12th of August, a cup final, the dog races, the pin table, the dart board, Wensleydale cheese, boiled cabbage cut into sections, beetroot and vinegar, nineteenth century Gothic Churches and the music of Edgar’.

Further, I am also aware of Longhurst et al. (2008, p. 2) statement of culture:

‘Culture can be opera, a play by Shakespeare or football, who does house chores at home or how the furniture is arranged at ones’ house’.

Culture is indeed multifaceted, has a diverse range of meanings and is everything and everywhere. Therefore, aspects that were disclosed by the participants in the previous two chapters can all be considered as different features of culture.

The discussion has led me to depart from the traditional terms with which we speak about culture and the intercultural. Due to my new understanding of the term ‘culture’, my idea of ‘intercultural’ has significantly changed and at present embraces a non-essentialist understanding of culture (as mentioned in Chapter 5), which subscribes to a view that ‘cultures are always best understood as dynamic and in the state of flux’ (Rich, 2011, p. 65). As mentioned earlier in Chapter 5, the word intercultural with its emphasis on cultures in a dynamic state of flux, shifts the location of the ‘in- betweeness’ or
inter component of the intercultural to the meaning of culture itself and the reasonable outcome of this is that, intercultural might be seen to indicate all human exchanges, wherever they take place. I conclusively realise that all interaction is essentially intercultural.

8.2.2 Interculturality and small culture formation on the go

What emerge from the data in chapter 5 and 6 which reinforces my new understanding of the intercultural correspondingly leads me to the notion of interculturality which I find a useful concept with which to make sense of the data because of Young and Sercombe’s (2010, 181) suggestion that it involves ‘a dynamic process’ of intercultural sense-making which can lead to ‘innovation and the adoption and adaptation’ of cultural behaviour. I also find useful the idea that there is no need to use the notion of cultures as solid blocks of experience to understand intercultural processes (Dervin, 2014).

In this research, the participants notably do not refer to travelling from one culture to another (i.e. from Malaysian culture to British culture) at all as they communicated about their intercultural experience of being in the UK. Instead, they seemed to be more concerned with the changes that they went through and to make better sense of the process. Their sojourn to the UK does not seem to represent a separate culture to which they have to adapt. It is rather a cultural domain with particular resources that enables a deeply reflexive, or self-interrogating interaction between the participants, who somehow become owners of the whole process. This I believe is reflected throughout all the narratives in the study.

My understanding of interculturality is therefore that it is a more seamless process whereby we employ our existing cultural experience to engage with new cultural domains within which we can also find ourselves, and we make new sense of the existing cultural identities of ourselves and others. And for this small group of Malaysian students, this takes the form of the innovative interpretations that come from and impact on their personal journeys.

This process of engaging with multiple aspects of the intercultural experience also resonates with the notion of small culture formation on the go which Holliday (2013, p. 56) defines as the ‘daily construction of culture through
the invention and performance of routines and even small rituals as we engage, plan, solve problems, get used to things, and move from one group to another’. We encounter and learn to position ourselves with small cultures such as family, school, other families, all the groups and institutions that we join or interact with. We carry this intercultural competence with us to apply to new cultural locations.

8.2.3 Culture is politically and ideologically constructed
The discussion of the data in Chapter 5 and 6 above raises the major theme that there are forces that act against our ability and potential to understand one another and that is the prejudices that we face and also carry with us. For instance, the idea of solid Malaysian culture that I initially subscribed to, made me believe that the Malaysian students’ transformation was indeed the outcome of culture shock and hindered me from understanding the participants and the data at first. I believe this happened due to our histories and national narratives that lead us to perceptions of global disparity and superiority which set us apart with ‘us’ and ‘them’ imagination. Without realising it, my idea of Malaysian is actually something political and ideological in the sense that, I believed that Malaysians are polite and they need to adhered to particular ‘Malaysian values’, dress and behave in certain ways or else, they can be accused of betraying the ‘Malaysian culture’ and are entitled to be criticised. Evidently, according to Delanty, Wodak, and Jones (2008), this is not something unusual and embroiled in an everyday Self and Other politics where we make proclamations about culture that demonise others and idealise ourselves and vice versa.

However, having looked at the overall data from a changed position (postmodern paradigm), understanding the reasons behind their transformations (e.g. Fatimah and Izzah who had always wanted to dress and try different fashion but only able to do so because of the new surroundings and circumstances they are in), I was able to recognise that culture is politically and ideologically constructed. The findings suggest that a particular culture with permanent defining attributes is unreal. Hence, my early tightly definable idea about Malaysian that was influenced by the dominant essentialist discourse is false and rather delusive. As Holliday (2016a, p. 30) has pointed out, ‘such a particular culture is less an objective reality than a projection in the minds of
people who make reference to it’. This projection about Malaysian culture I believe is an ideology\textsuperscript{61} that serves a political interest in the sense that it serves an exclusivity which can claim a superior position on both global and local level. Below I turn to a consideration of unrecognised cultural abilities and contribution that are represented by the cosmopolitan realism discourse.

8.2.4 Unrecognised cultural abilities and contribution

As discussed in Chapter 5 and 6, participants in this study express a number of motives (e.g. being able to express self freely in the UK, obliging parents, change due to past experience, etc.) to explain their radical changes, revealing the ‘hidden realities that reside within the emergent world’ as Holliday (2016a, p. 36) puts it. Neither of them mentioned or demonstrated that their changes were merely a form of coping or adopting the 'new culture', hence satisfying the culture shock or adjustment theory as commonly claimed in studies of sojourner experience of interculturality (refer to Chapter 3). The research findings, however, demonstrate participants’ abilities to be reflexive and to operate and innovate with meaning and practice that is frequently unrecognized.

As understood in Holliday’s (2013b) grammar of culture, it is the personal trajectories that each participant brings to the process that invigorate and occupy it. Indeed, it is these trajectories that the participants communicate – the changes that have developed from the life experiences that have brought them to this point –family circumstances, living under new circumstances, history with using English, and so on. Looking at the ‘new’ individuals the research participants had become, people who accept the idea of the dominating discourse which is the essentialist discourse of culture would probably accuse the participants of betraying their ‘home’ culture by changing the way they look, their religious practices, language use as well as their worldviews and portraying themselves as what most people would believe as the ‘real’ Malaysian. However, it seems to me that the participants’ accounts on their changes essentially proves ‘the complexity of cultural realities that are unrecognised and marginalised by the established world’ (Holliday, 2016a, p.

\textsuperscript{61} Ideology in this respect is that it is a way of presenting knowledge about the world that serves a particular interest.
36). Furthermore, just because a social practice is found in a particular cultural environment does not mean that it should be accepted as unchangeable.

8.2.5 We are all naturally interculturally competent
The discussion in the data chapter also demonstrates that we are all in fact naturally interculturally competent throughout our lives. This means that, intercultural competence is not something to be learned as a new field when we encounter the culturally strange like some might think, but it is something to be retrieved from our experience of everyday life. For instance, this is shown throughout participants’ narratives in which their changes were results of their reflexivity and creativity which they built on their cultural identities.

Participants’ narratives in the study show that intercultural competence involves global politics and implicit discourses; it involves choice, action and responsibility; it involves sense-making that relates forwards and back between home and abroad across entire trajectories of experience; it requires both pulling threads from the past and searching for unexpected threads in the present. It appears that these difficult skills allow us to be understood by others who have not experienced what we have experienced; and, conversely, they put us in a position to understand them. At the same time, knowing that others will have experienced what we might or might not have experienced will enhance a sense of respect and sharing, hesitation and caution. Therefore, we have to understand that communication might not be easy and that things have to be worked out on a daily basis.

8.3 Contribution to knowledge
I believe that the approach I have taken to exploring what a small group of Malaysian students choose to say when asked about their intercultural experience in the UK is one that can make a useful contribution to theorising intercultural learning and that through this, can provide useful insights into how this can be best supported within the context of internationalisation in UK universities.

Foregrounding the inter part of intercultural as I have done in this study has, I suggested, provided a useful counterbalance to the tendency in much of the literature to emphasise the cultural part of interculturality which pushes us
to foreground intercultural encounters as places where culturally bound subjects meet. While participants do mention national culture as a way for accounting for the ways in which they engage in experiences with others, they mention many other things as well which relate much more to the immediacy of their efforts to make meaning with others. Thus, by foregrounding inter-relations and transactions, it has been possible to see when and how national and regional ‘culture’ is important and when it is not, instead of imposing this as a lens through which to look at what happens in an intercultural encounter.

The study has also made an important contribution to an understanding of the ways in which a sphere of interculturality is one which is rooted in and draws upon wider discourses which position participants as more or less powerful. For example, from the narratives, it can be seen that the participants were not confined by the established essentialist discourse (for instance, they are Malaysian hence they should act or dress like Malaysian), instead they have the abilities to be reflexive and engage creatively in the new cultural domains they were in, drawing from resources they both brought and observed (i.e. personal trajectories). This has been largely neglected in the research into intercultural learning to date. These discourses have been shown to exert an important influence on the ways in which participants manage their relational dilemmas in this study, and recognition, audibility and face have all been highlighted as important ways in which to acknowledge the need to engage in research, which acknowledges the messy reality of intercultural encounters. In other words, the findings suggest that if we are to take seriously the idea that an experience of interculturality affords learning, we would do well to develop more robust accounts of this which move away from an idealised understanding of the outcomes of an intercultural encounter and towards ones which acknowledge their full complexity. The understanding of this offered in this study can be seen as a small contribution in this direction.

Another contribution of this study has been its attempts to consider the potential of a cosmopolitan realist perspective to developing an understanding of the ways in which the nature of interculturality and an experience of interculturality can draw upon a universal shared orientation towards communication and meaning making with the other. I have drawn a tentative conclusion that this may have less to do with a universal communicative
competence than with the ethical orientation towards the other that underpins this. This is clearly something that would need to be further investigated. However, I suggest, as with the other insights into intercultural learning undertaking this study has offered, that this might provoke and stimulate debate with respect to how and where we look for evidence of intercultural learning.

Taken together, I suggest my study raises a number of important questions regarding the current narrow and banal accounts of intercultural learning presented in the literature, and which have been co-opted by those interested to promote global citizenship at university level and more broadly. By examining what happens in the local real-life encounter with the cultural and linguistic other it has revealed a number of aspects of interculturality that might be used to develop a more nuanced understanding of this and a better sense of what it is that needs to be taught and how. For example, universities could design a curriculum or course in which teaches students to recognize the that we can all carry our cultural identities with us and build on them as powerful resources to engage with new cultural environments, but there are however other forces like competing and powerful discourse of culture that ‘act against our ability to find ourselves as travelers in cultural domains abroad, which act against the human potential to understand each other’ (Holliday, 2016, p. 29).

8.4 Critical reflections on the study and possible future research directions

The study reported in this thesis is one that has been developed out of my own extensive professional experience of working in global contact zones and my own interests in better understanding these for professional purposes. When I embarked on my PhD several years ago, it was with the intention to better understanding international students’ perspectives on the experience of intercultural learning. At that time very little attention to the international student perspective in research had been undertaken. While since then many more studies have appeared which take this perspective, I still find that a focus on a relational understanding of interculturality such as I have applied here has not been the focus of much attention. However, theoretically speaking there have been some important shifts in theoretical understandings of interculturality in my field, notably in the work of Kumaravadivelu (2008) and Holliday, (2010),
particularly with respect to the potential of critical or realist forms of cosmopolitanism. I have been able to draw upon these and feel that they have a close resonance with the practical situated understandings of learning I have promoted and doing so I believe has strengthened my theoretical framework.

With respect to the study design, with hindsight there are a number of things I might have done differently. Chief of which is to have also sought out the views of the UK students who formed part of the student cohort that was the focus of my research. This would perhaps have generated data and findings that could have shed different sorts of light on global citizenship and its promotion in UK universities. Similarly, narrative inquiry, as I have come to realise is an area that offers a number of creative ways of presenting the sorts of data I generated and I acknowledge there are perhaps a number of ways in which I could have told the story that was generated out of this study differently as discussed in chapter 3 and 4. Nevertheless, I believe the thesis has succeeded in throwing up a range of new ways of thinking about interculturality which can serve as the basis for a range of future research projects both within the context of interculturality and UK universities but also more broadly and I hope will be felt by others to make a useful contribution in this respect.

8.5 Personal Starting and Ending Points

Before considering final reflections, I would briefly like to review my starting and ending points. As mentioned earlier, at the beginning of the study, because of my positionality which was influenced by my own background and experience of being an international student in the UK in which I did not myself experience radical change, neither did I know students who were going through it, I was happy to settle with the view that people’s behaviours and values were reducible to solid and fixed cultural traits or scripts, and that radical changes were results of culture shock.

However, as the study developed, it became clear to me that my initial positionality did not match the participants’ understanding of the intercultural and was limiting the ways I was interpreting the data. For example, I realised that at the beginning of the study, I was focusing on what I saw and heard from the participants as the result of culture shock. Due to this matter, I was not able to understand the complexity of the participants’ personal journeys.
As I became more aware, for example, of my early positionality and its influence on my data collection and the fact that the easy and obvious explanations were not necessarily the only or the best ones, I was able to see the complexity that existed within the setting. Further, I came to realise that it is important for me and other researchers in general to avoid reductive interpretations of particular situations or events, acknowledging that there may be something else going on than what is directly apparent, and developing an awareness that there may be different ways of seeing and interpreting the same situation or event.

Here, the implication of the study concerns researcher development, and the need to focus, not just on different aspects of research methodology in a theoretical and research methodology- literature sense, but also on how particular aspects apply or can be applied in practice in specific situations. It is unclear to what extent this practical application of research methodology is something which can be taught in a more formal sense, as opposed to something that needs to be learned once in the unfamiliar setting, however the broad point here is that, for inexperienced researchers in unfamiliar settings, awareness of these methodological issues needs to be raised.

Even though this particular study has changed my understanding regarding the intercultural and how I make sense of other people and myself, the complexity of the participants’ and individuals’ personal journeys in general, I would also like to stress in my ending point that however, it has not shattered my principles regarding certain matters especially those concerning my religious beliefs. This is extremely important to me for it encompasses my personal beliefs, values and guide myself throughout my life in all circumstances, irrespective of changes in my goals or strategies.

8.6 Final reflections
In a world where globalisation is more obvious, every day we find ourselves in the explicitly intercultural. The intercultural has always been with us as we move through diverse settings in everyday life, from school to work, through friendships and relationships. However, this new global arrangement, with its inclination to easier movement of people from one side of the world to the other and new opportunities for narrative blending and employment, pushes the
researcher to question the more common use of the term ‘intercultural’. Researchers need to reflect on their responsibilities regarding how they disseminate ideas about the intercultural. I believe the emerging critique of the dominant theory is more to do with the everyday processes through which individuals universally negotiate the intercultural. While we are different because of how we are brought up in different national contexts, all of us negotiate the intercultural in very similar ways.

8.7 Summary
This thesis has endeavoured to describe a process as much as it has produced a final outcome. I set off looking for insights into the research participants’ intercultural experience of living in the UK and their perspectives on particular issues in the setting, not realising the impact my initial rationalist positionality which believed in one true social reality was having in shaping both the data I was collecting and the way I was in interpreting that data. Over the course of the study, I began to question more of the way my initial positioning was affecting the study and as a result was in a better position to understand interculturality and the complexity of individuals’ personal journeys. Nevertheless, that had not been apparent to me until I had added the autoethnographic dimension to the study.
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List of appendices

Appendix 1: Ethical approval certificate
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Appendix 1: Ethical approval certificate

31 August 2016

Ms Ismatul Zaharin
c/o School of Language Studies and Applied Linguistics
Faculty of Arts and Humanities

Dear Ismatul

Confirmation of ethics compliance for your study “A study of intercultural experience of the undergraduate Malaysian students studying in the UK.”

I have received your Ethics Review Checklist and appropriate supporting documentation for proportionate review of the above project. Your application complies fully with the requirements for proportionate ethical review as set out in this University’s Research Ethics and Governance Procedures.

In confirming compliance for your study, I must remind you that it is your responsibility to follow, as appropriate, the policies and procedures set out in the Research Governance Handbook (http://www.canterbury.ac.uk/centenary/ethics-governance/governance-and-ethics.asp) and any relevant academic or professional guidelines. This includes providing, if appropriate, information sheets and consent forms, and ensuring confidentiality in the storage and use of data. Any significant change in the question, design or conduct of the study over its course should be notified to the Research Office, and may require a new application for ethics approval. It is a condition of compliance that you must inform me once your research has been completed.

Wishing you every success with your research.

Yours sincerely

Roger Bone
Research Governance Manager
Tel: +44 (0)1227 923272 (direct line)
Email: roger.bone@canterbury.ac.uk

cc: Professor Adrian Holliday
Appendix 2: Introduction statement outlining the general purpose of the research written and posted on the Facebook group wall

Hi everyone! I am currently doing a research on Study of Intercultural Communication with reference to the Malaysian students studying in the UK: understanding intercultural communication of Malaysian students in interactional contexts and explore the factors influencing it. Basically, the aim of this study is to explore intercultural communication among Malaysian students and this would include exploring what Malaysian students believe to be successful or unsuccessful communication encounters which help them to survive in a foreign country as well as discover what resources Malaysian students believe help them adapt to their surroundings. Here are my research questions for the research:

I. How do Malaysian students studying in the UK cope in situations in which people of different cultural backgrounds and linguistic are involved?

II. What ideas and feelings do Malaysian students associate with such encounters?

III. What do Malaysian students believe are successes and failures in intercultural communication and what do they think helps and hinders their success in such situations?

IV. What are the factors influencing Malaysian students’ performances in such situations, how do the factors influence the students’ intercultural communicative and what resources do students bring with them which help them to engage with the foreign?

As I am looking for participants for my study, I would be really grateful if you would be willing to take part in my study. If you are interested, please let me know here or contact me privately at … (my phone number) or my Facebook messenger. If you do so, you will have the chance to find out more about the study before coming to any decision. You would be under no obligation to take
part and are free to withdraw at any time. Any information given by you may be used in future reports, articles or presentations however; your name will not appear in any of these reports, articles or presentations. Essentially, confidentiality will be assured throughout the research and all personal data will be secured and will only be made public behind a shield of anonymity. Your interview/story/experience will be recorded for the purpose of this research only.

Please take some time to read this carefully, and feel free to ask if anything is not clear or if you wish to discuss it further. Once again, I would really appreciate it if you would be willing to take part in my research. Thank you for your consideration!
Appendix 3: Consent form

I have been fully informed about the aims and purposes of the project. I understand that:
there is no compulsion for me to participate in this research project and, if I do choose to participate, I may at any stage withdraw my participation
I have the right to refuse permission for the publication of any information about me
any information which I give will be used solely for the purposes of this research project, which may include publications
if applicable, the information, which I give, may be shared between any of the other researcher(s) participating in this project in an anonymised form
all information I give will be treated as confidential
the researcher(s) will make every effort to preserve my anonymity
............................................... (Signature of participant) (Date) .................
..................................................
(Printed name of participant)
One copy of this form will be kept by the participant; a second copy will be kept by the researcher.
Contact phone number of researcher(s): ............................................
If you have any concerns about the project that you would like to discuss, please contact:
..................................................................................................