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Fluid Cultures and Identifications:

The Intercultural Communication Experiences of

Saudi International Students in the UK

Muneer Alqahtani

A Thesis Submitted in Fulfillment of the Requirement for the Degree

of Doctor of Philosophy in the University of Durham



School of Education

June 2015

Abstract

Fluid Cultures and Identifications: The Intercultural Communication Experiences of Saudi International Students in the UK

This thesis is an investigation into the intercultural communication experiences of Saudi international students in the UK. It focuses on the friendship experiences that Saudi international students form with home and international students in order to engage in intercultural interactions. It further investigates how Saudi international students experience interactions with individuals from the opposite gender with whom they have limited interactions with in Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, the study focuses on the incidents that may motivate or demotivate Saudi international students from engaging in intercultural communication. Finally, this thesis considers the changes that the participants had introduced to their worldviews, identifications and practices as a result of their overall intercultural experiences in the UK.

The findings show that 1) the participants' identifications of in-group and out-group members were inconsistent and the boundaries between both categories were difficult to identify. 2) In contrast to studies, which suggest that Saudi international students are homogeneous Muslims who come from a collectivistic culture, the findings show that the participants had different worldviews and identifications and cannot be categorized in a fixed category. 3) The findings also illustrate that despite the segregation between men and women in Saudi Arabia, Saudi international students do not necessarily find interaction with individuals

from the opposite gender challenging, as some literature claims. 4) The experiences that demotivated the participants from engaging in intercultural communication are not necessarily negative ones, since universities religious organisations, such as the Islamic Society, which was perceived positively by the participants, may also contribute to demotivating their attendees from experiencing intercultural communication. 5) The overall intercultural experiences in the UK had influenced the participants' worldviews, identifications and practices on various levels. Thus, some participants introduced significant changes to their worldviews and identifications, others accepted changes that do not contradict with their understandings of religion, while others resisted any changes. Overall, the study argues for moving beyond essentialist descriptions for Saudi international students that describe them as a homogeneous Muslim group, coming from a collectivistic culture in a country where men are dominant over women.

The study gives valuable insights and practical implications for UK universities and Saudi Cultural Bureaux abroad where Saudi international students form a noticeable number amongst other international students.

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Declaration

No material contained in this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree in this or any other university.

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to my parents, family and friends

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

According to Byram (1997),

> FLT is … concerned with communication but this has to be understood as more than the exchange of information and sending of messages, which has dominated 'communicative language teaching' in recent years. Even the exchange of information is dependent upon understanding how what one says or writes will be perceived and interpreted in another cultural context; it depends on the ability to decentre and take up the perspective of the listener or reader. But successful 'communication' is not judged solely in terms of the efficiency of information exchange. It is focused on establishing and maintaining relationships. In this sense, the efficacy of communication depends upon using language to demonstrate one's willingness to relate, which often involves the indirectness of politeness rather than the direct and 'efficient' choice of language full of information. (p. 3)

1.1 The beginning

I first encountered the ideas quoted above in Byram's book *Teaching and Assessing Intercultural Communicative Competence* (1997) while I was in the process of writing my master's dissertation on TESOL for Saudi Arabian English language learners. Before then, the idea of teaching English had meant teaching and facilitating the learning process for the learners in order for them to acquire the linguistic ability to maintain intelligible conversations with other English speakers, whether native or nonnative speakers. However, Byram's thoughts on foreign language teaching (FTL) encouraged me to question whether linguistic competence alone guarantees successful communication. I began to wonder how the relationships which Byram (1997) highlighted above were established and maintained. Communication, I realised, involved further issues that needed to be investigated in relation to TESOL. For that reason, I decided to add the concept of

culture as a dimension in my master's dissertation. However, I quickly realised that a single chapter in a master's dissertation would not be enough to satisfy my interests in researching the topic of intercultural communication. That realisation prompted me to go further and to undertake a doctoral dissertation on the subject.

1.2 Researching international students (background to the study)

Once I had decided to research intercultural communication, I began reading studies that have been conducted on international students in general. I noticed that a considerable number of the earliest studies describe international students as one homogeneous group, despite their diversity (Spencer-Rodgers, 2001), and as individuals who are experiencing difficulties in the host culture from the "deficit" perspective (Fox, 1994, p. 69). In many cases, international students were viewed as deficient individuals (Landis, Bennett, & Bennett, 2003; Mestenhauser, 1983), confused students (Pedersen, 1991), or as lacking the ability to adapt to the new education system (Paige, 1990).

Furthermore, international students have been also described as individuals who are struggling to adapt and integrate culturally into the host country where they study (Leong & Chou, 1996) because they lack the necessary language skills and cultural understanding (Bond, 1986; Stroebe, Lenkert, & Jonas, 1988). In addition, some of the literature on international students categorises and stereotypes them according to their race, ethnicity, and nationality (Ashmore & Del Boca, 1981) and, in some cases, even when they are recognised as a diverse

group by host nationals, they still continue to be seen as a group of foreigners (Spencer-Rodgers, 2001).

It seems that many of these early studies may have oversimplified international students and tagged them with reductive descriptions. They also show that international students have been conceived of and seen as one, uniform group. Conclusions such as these lead in turn to a more essentialist view that underestimates the complexity and the diversity of international students in matters concerning their intercultural communication, adaptation to the new educational system, or the academic issues they face. Reading the literature on stereotypes revealed that, as Marginson, Nyland, Sawir & Forbes-Mewett (2010) argues, the purpose of stereotyping is that it helps us to recognise the Self by creating barriers between ourselves and Others. Therefore, "The individual … seeks to create distance from others who are different from them so that they can remain comfortably in denial … [This includes] the common tendency to relegate others who are different to a subhuman status" (Lee Olson & Kroeger, 2001, p. 102). This comment exactly captures my first reactions when I read the studies on international students mentioned above.

The focus of the more recent literature that has been published on international students has moved away from creating stereotypes about them and towards offering advice to potential international students (Midgley, 2009). However, Kumar (2005) warns that such studies still oversimplify the overseas experiences of international students because they ignore the fact that

international students come from different backgrounds and have different experiences that distinguish them from one another (Koehne, 2005).

In the case of international students who come from Muslim or Arab backgrounds, Hanassab (2006) points out that Middle Eastern international students tend to be more stereotyped than other international students. Stereotypes about Arab and Muslim individuals go back as early as the late nineteenth century when Thomas Edison in his film *Fatima Dances* showed an Arab woman dancing to seduce a group of Arab men, in the process depicting an image of a misogynistic, male-oriented society (Qumsiyeh, 1998). In the 1970s, the image of Middle Eastern society, however, changed after the discovery of oil in the Gulf States, which include Saudi Arabia, with the new stereotype portraying Arab men as rich sheikhs driving expensive cars (Shaw, 2010). Yet later, the image of an angry Muslim Arab bomber became the predominant one in American films (Qumsiyeh, 1998; Shaheen, 2003; Shaw, 2010).

Such stereotypes not only lead to depicting international students as one group and, therefore, as with other international students, to oversimplifying their cases, but they also attach a negative image to these students. This distortion can be seen in a number of studies that have been conducted on Muslim and Arab students' intercultural communication experiences. For example, since women in Muslim and Arab societies are often presented as being oppressed women (El Saadawi, 2007), some researchers have described Muslim women as less capable of integrating into Western societies, sometimes struggling to make new friends from different backgrounds (Poynting, 2009), and facing judgments from non-

Muslims based on their appearances (Bilge, 2010; Bouma & Brace-Govan, 2000; Liederman, 2000; Haw, 2010; Peek, 2003). Some of the literature also describes Muslim men as facing intercultural communication challenges abroad, difficulties which lead them to socialise with their in-groups (McPhee, 2005).

All of the studies mentioned above that focused on international, Muslim, and Arab individuals seem to have oversimplified their experiences abroad in order to provide a brief understanding of those experiences. Nevertheless, as an international student in the UK who was brought up in the Muslim-majority country of Saudi Arabia, I did not feel that I could fit into such essentialist descriptions. However, I did not know whether it was just me who did not fit into these descriptions, and thus that I was an exception, or if this sense of being misrepresented and misunderstood also applied to other Saudi Arabian international students. In formulating this question, I realised that I had chosen my research topic and context: Saudi international students and their intercultural experiences in the UK.

1.3 Saudi international students in the UK

Saudi Arabia has been sponsoring Saudi international students since its foundation in 1932, initially with the purpose of sending students to pursue Arab and Islamic studies in countries such as Egypt and the Lebanon (Taylor & Albasri, 2014). In 1960s, Saudi Arabia expanded opportunities for Saudi international students to study abroad to include countries in Europe and the United States, and by 1975 there were thousands of Saudi international students studying abroad (Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission to USA, 2012).

The current opportunities for Saudi international students to study abroad go back to 2005 when the late King of Saudi Arabia, King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz (who died in 2015), issued a royal decree to launch the King Abdullah Scholarship Programme (KASP). Initially, it was intended to last for 5 years, but, when it came to an end in 2010, it was later extended for another 5 years (Saudi Arabian Cultural Bureau in London, 2014). The programme was then extended for a third time, and for another five-year period which began after the end of the 2014 fiscal year (Ministry of Education, 2013).

By 2012, the number of Saudi international students studying abroad had reached nearly 150,000. More than half of those sponsored by KASP are studying in the United States alone (Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission to USA, 2012), while there are 9,000 sponsored students in the UK (UKCISA, 2015). Although the main goal of KASP is "to equip students with knowledge and skills needed to be future world leaders. Other KASP objectives include Patriotic Commitment [and] Cultural Exchange" (Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission to USA, 2012, p. 1). Neither the Saudi Cultural Mission nor the Ministry of Education elaborates upon or provides further definitions of what is meant by "Patriotic Commitment" and "Cultural Exchange". Rather, they attach two images (see Figure 1 below) which illustrate these ideas. One shows what seem to be a group of Saudi nationals holding the Saudi Arabian flag under the heading "Patriotic Commitment". The second image entitled "Cultural Exchange" shows an image of two females; one is dressed up in what seems to be a traditional, female, Saudi costume (left), and the other individual is wearing a "different" non-Saudi costume.



(Figure 1, Cultural Exchange and Patriotic Commitment.
Source: Ministry of Education, King Abdullah Scholarship Program.
http://www.sacm.org/ArabicSACM/pdf/Posters_Sacm_schlorship.pdf)

Further, in neither the Saudi Cultural Mission nor the Ministry of Education documentation is there any emphasis on how Saudi international students perceive these two objectives, and, most importantly, whether they have achieved these goals or not. Consequently, this thesis attempts to shed light on such issues by investigating how Saudi international students experience intercultural communication in the UK in terms of cultural exchange and patriotic commitment.

1.4 Research problem

Despite the significant number of Saudi international students studying abroad, only a very few studies have focused on the overseas intercultural experiences of these individuals. For example, Midgley (2010, p. ii) focused on male Saudi

international students' "experiences of difference" in Australian universities, while Heyn (2013) followed a similar path and focused on the lived experiences of male Saudi international students in the USA. Further, Abdel Razek (2012) focused on the engagement of Saudi international students in the USA; however, he included female students in his study, while Alhazmi and Nyland (2013) focused explicitly on the experience of both male and female Saudi international students in a mixed-gender environment.

I have not found any studies on Saudi international students in the UK regarding their intercultural communication experiences. However, the main issue does not concern the country in which the study was undertaken, but rather, that these studies (as will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter) seem to have used terms such as *Saudi culture* and *Saudi identity* as loose or taken-for-granted concepts. Therefore, their findings seem to simplify the intercultural communication experiences of Saudi international students. Terms such as Saudi culture and Saudi identity should not be taken-for-granted terms and treated as if they constitute static meanings on their own (Dervin, 2013). Rather, such terms should be dealt with more carefully and critically. Therefore, throughout this thesis, I try to avoid using terms such as culture and identity as fixed definitions in the way they were used in the previously mentioned studies on Saudi international students abroad.

1.5 Research questions

The shortcomings briefly identified in the above studies, and the limited understanding of the concepts of cultural exchange and patriotic commitment in

the Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission to USA (2012) documentation led me to develop the following overarching question:

How do Saudi international students experience intercultural communication in the UK?

This question guides the research in general, but the investigation includes more specific questions:

1. *How do Saudi international students experience friendship in the UK?*

Friendship provides rich data for understanding intercultural communication (Sias et al., 2008) and, therefore, investigating the meaning of this concept in terms of Saudi international students' intercultural communication experiences may provide some insights into how they perceive the cultural exchange objective. I do not intend, however, to assess, evaluate, or answer the question as to whether or not they have been successful in achieving this objective. Rather, I intend to investigate how they experience intercultural communication during their sojourns in the UK. It is important to make this distinction clear because I do not intend to use quantitative measurements or tests to assess the success, or otherwise, of Saudi international students' intercultural communication experiences in the UK. Rather, I use in-depth interviews to unravel their intercultural communication experiences and how they experience those lived encounters.

2. *How, if at all, do Saudi international students' gender worldviews and identifications influence their intercultural communication?*

Whenever Saudi Arabia is mentioned the situation of women in the country and their subordination come to the forefront (Al-Rasheed, 2013). Further, Alhazmi and Nyland (2013) argue that this subordination is a result of what they refer to as a *Saudi cultural identity* that privileges men and gives them superiority over women. They further argue that Saudi international students struggle when they communicate with individuals from the opposite gender. In this thesis, however, I try to avoid following a similar essentialist view; instead, I explore how Saudi international students perceive their gender worldviews differently from one another, regardless of whether they are men or women.

3. *What are the other experiences that may motivate or demotivate Saudi international students to experience intercultural communication in the UK?*

This question focuses on any additional intercultural experiences that may motivate or demotivate Saudi international students from experiencing intercultural communication in the UK. These experiences may arise out of the students' intercultural experiences with their friendship groups, out of their interactions with individuals from the opposite gender, or out of other experiences more generally. Nevertheless, it is important to address them because they may have some influence on the intercultural experiences of Saudi students during their sojourns in the UK.

4. *How, if at all, does the whole experience of being in the UK impact their worldviews and their identifications of themselves?*

This question is motivated by the concept of patriotic commitment, which is an identification related to being a Saudi national. However, the notion of self-identifications and worldviews in this question are expanded to cover any other forms of self-identification such as being Muslims, Arabs, Saudis, men, women, or possibly even terms such as *international/global citizen* with which the participants in this study may choose to be identified. Therefore, this question covers their gender, national, and religious self-identifications and what it means to be a Muslim, Arab, Saudi, Saudi man/woman, identifications which may have come to light as a result of their international students experiences in the UK.

In order to answer these research questions, I structure the study's findings into four chapters; the first chapter is "Experiencing Friendship in the UK", the second chapter is "Gender and Intercultural Communication", the third chapter is "Motivating and Demotivating Experiences for Intercultural Communication", and the final findings chapter is "Worldviews, Identifications, and Intercultural Communication". Each of these chapters answers one of the research questions. The first of the findings chapters answers the first research question; the second findings chapter answers the second research question; the third chapter answers the third research question, while the fourth findings chapter answers the fourth research question.

1.6 Key terms

It is important to clarify the key terms that are mentioned very often in this study.

1.6.1 Identification

I use the term *identification* instead of *identity* in this thesis. Here I follow Machart and Neo Lim's (2013) argument that the suffix "-ation" in identification marks a process, as *in the state of becoming* or *arrival at an end point*, while the suffix "-ty" in identity indicates *the state of* something. Therefore, when using the term identification in this thesis, I view identification as an inconsistent process, as shifting, and as not given (Dervin, 2013). As a result, I do not consider that the identifications of Muslim, Arab, Saudi, man, woman etc. that are used in the thesis hold a static meaning. Rather, identification is seen as something that is perceived by each participant differently and uniquely, and whose meaning comes to be understood through the communication that occurs in intercultural encounters and as a result of the experiences of living in the UK as an international student.

1.6.2 Worldview

I link identifications to the second term *worldviews*. Duckitt and Fisher (2003) identify a worldview as "individuals' beliefs about the nature of the social world—that is, what others are like, how they can be expected to behave toward one [another], and how one should therefore respond or behave toward them" (p. 202). Further, the individual's beliefs about the nature of the social world could be religious worldviews (Naugle, 2002), gender worldviews (Ibrahim, 1991), or any other type of worldview. Therefore, worldviews include the components of religious, gender, national, or any other types of identifications. In other words, if an individual identifies himself or herself as Muslim, for example,

their worldview would be a component of that identification and what it means to be a self-identified Muslim.

The same concept of a worldview applies to individuals who identify themselves as a man, woman, or any other form of gender identification. In this case, their worldview may be influenced by what it means to be a man, or a woman, for example. The issue has a further complexity when individuals intersect their religious and gender self-identifications: for example, what it means to be a Muslim man or woman and what behaviours, beliefs, and meanings that identification entails. The term worldview will be used in this thesis when it comes to explaining the participants' understandings and meanings of the identifications that they identify themselves with.

1.6.3 Culture and intercultural communication

There are many definitions of culture (Byram, 1997) and many of them are what Dervin (2012) refers to as "slippery slopes" (p. 187). Therefore, in order to negotiate these slippery slopes, I follow Byram's (1997) advice to avoid mentioning the word 'culture' as far as possible and instead use terms such as beliefs, meanings, and behaviours. However, Byram (1997, p. 17) points out:

> One of the defining characteristics of a social group is the shared world which its members accept, and they in turn are accepted as members because they subscribe to the beliefs, behaviours and meanings of that shared world. This is however, not a static definition. People become members of a group through a process of socialisation over time, and when they are members, they are constantly negotiating their common understanding of details, which over time may become major changes in their beliefs, behaviours or meanings.

Although Byram (1997) argues in the second part of the quotation that individuals' identifications with a social group are ever changing through the process of socialisation, the argument remains that it is acceptable to identify social groups according to their shared meanings, beliefs, and behaviours. Therefore, although I follow Byram's argument (1997) in using terms such as beliefs, meanings, and behaviours, I do not view them as characteristics that are shared by social groups. Rather, I view them as characteristics that are constructed and reconstructed by individuals independently from one another regardless of the social group that they may, or may not, choose to be identified with (Dervin, 2013).

Further, although I avoid using the term culture as far as possible, I do use the term *intercultural*. Machart and Neo Lim (2013, p. 32) argue:

> The word [culture] and its adjectival derivate come into contact with various prefixes: inter-, trans-, co-multi- or sub-cultural implying the contact of (at least) two 'cultural' entities. The prefixes add to the confusion as researchers do not agree on the definitions: the term *intercultural* excludes any kind of fluidity for Welsch (1999) whereas it is implied for researchers like Abdallah-Pretceille (1986) and Lavanchy, Gajardo and Dervin (2011).

This quotation illustrates the point that the term intercultural may be every bit as problematic as the term culture, because it implies that cultures are separated and, therefore, that intercultural facilitators such as professional mediators work to bridge and connect separated lands (Dervin, Gajardo, & Lavanchy, 2011). As a result, defining *intercultural communication* may be as problematic as defining culture and, therefore I avoid adding a fixed definition for the concept. That said, Dervin et al. (2011) argue that the language that is used should be suited for the

context. Although it could be argued that *interpersonal* would be a better term than intercultural, since individuals as independent agents influence each other during their interactions (Machart, 2013), using the term intercultural to describe the daily life experiences of Saudi international students during their sojourn in the UK does not indicate a fixed, absolute, or a definite reality (Dervin et al., 2011). I use the word intercultural because it suits the context of this study (Dervin et al., 2011): a group of Saudi international students, holding Saudi Arabian citizenship, experiencing daily interaction with individuals, many of whom are non-Saudi, and whom they thus may view as out-group members due to the different beliefs, meanings, and behaviours that they hold.

1.7 Concluding remarks

This study investigates the intercultural experiences of Saudi international students in the UK. Through the study I explore the unique daily life stories reported by the participants which show their individually different intercultural communication experiences. Therefore, although the participants come from Saudi Arabia, are self-identified Muslims, and have Arabic as their first language, their identifications of themselves, as well as the identifications ascribed to them by others, vary. Further, their worldviews and what it means to be a Muslim man/woman and a Saudi national are also perceived differently one from another.

This study aims not only constructs the stories of Saudi international students in the UK. It also aims to deconstruct the stereotypes that have been formed about Saudi international students abroad. These stereotypes have tended to depict

them as being homogeneously religious *Wahhabi* Muslims (Baroni, 2007; Commins, 2009; Kumaraswamy, 2006; Nevo, 1998; Prokop, 2003; Vogel, 2000), as coming from a collective society (Abdel Razek, 2012; Darwish & Huber, 2003; Heyn, 2013; Sampson, 1977), and as having been brought up in a society where women are subordinated and inferior to men (El-Fadl, 2001; Doumato, 1992, 2000, 2001, 2003; Kabasakal & Bodur, 2002; Mackey, 2002; Zanati & Salam, 2001). Finally, through this study and guided by my research questions, I argue that the intercultural communication experiences of Saudi international students are complex and that these complexities need complex understandings to address them rather than reductive essentialist explanations that oversimplify the experiences of the study's participants.

1.8 Outline of the chapters

This chapter has both introduced the research problem through which the intercultural communication experiences of Saudi international students in the UK will be investigated, and highlighted the importance of this study. In the next chapter, the focus will be on reviewing the studies that have been conducted on Saudi international students abroad. Many of these studies followed essentialist approaches that have oversimplified the cases of Saudi international students and the self-identifications that may play a role in their intercultural communication experiences. The third chapter will focus on the methodology that has been used in this study. It emphasises the methods that have been used in collecting and analysing the data.

The fourth chapter will present the first of the findings chapters. Its focus is on the friendship experiences of the participants in this study. It shows how their individual experiences varied depending on their self-identifications as well as their worldviews. The fifth chapter will focus on the participants' interactions with individuals from the opposite gender. It shows the complexity of the participants' gender worldviews, even though they come from the same country of origin. The focus of the sixth chapter will be on the additional intercultural communication experiences that some participants had but which did not take place with their friends or with individuals from the opposite gender. These experiences are important because they may have motivated or demotivated the participants' willingness to experience intercultural communication with individuals whom they view as out-group members. The final findings chapter discusses how the overall experiences of being in the UK have influenced the participants' self-identifications and worldviews. It focuses on the diverse self-identifications and worldviews that the participants had —or had not— (re)constructed as a result of their intercultural communication experiences in the UK. Finally, chapter eight will present the conclusions and discussions sections of this study. It will also highlight its limitations and the importance of future studies on Saudi international students abroad because they will continue to be a presence on the campuses of many universities around the world in the future.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The aim of this thesis is to explore the intercultural communication experiences of Saudi international students in the UK. In order to address that aim this chapter, reviews the main theories found on identities within the intercultural communication literature, and studies that explore these ideas, in particular, with reference to Saudi international students' intercultural communication experiences. The first section begins with a discussion of the concept of *cultural identity*, how it has been essentialised, and how this essentialisation has led to a shift away from *identity* towards *identification.* I then discuss how cultural identity in Saudi Arabia has been essentialised along three simplistic lines —that is, as being a homogeneous Wahhabi, male-dominant, and collectivistic culture— before considering how this conception of Saudis influences their intercultural communication abroad. I argue that it is necessary to pay more attention to the complexity of the identifications of Saudi individuals that influences their intercultural communication rather than to provide essentialist analysis and descriptions of their identities and intercultural communication.

In the second section, I review the studies that have been conducted on Saudi international students abroad and discuss how the majority of them seem to have followed an essentialist analysis, often along the lines mentioned above. Throughout the discussion of these studies, I, therefore, shed light on current undrstandings of Saudi international students, and then, how these

understandings may have limitations in light of the research questions proposed in Chapter One. In the final section of this chapter, I review some approaches to the study of intercultural communication in order to decide upon the most appropriate approach to adopt to guide the study.

2.1 Cultural Identity, Identities and Identification

The concept of 'cultural identities' has often been linked to intercultural communication (Dervin, 2012). This is because an individual's cultural identity is likely to influence his or her intercultural communication encounters (Hecht, Warren, Jung, & Krieger, 2005; Hortobágyi, 2009). The term c*ultural identities* has been defined in different ways. However, in a broad sense, it could be argued that these definitions can be categorised into three distinct groups: essentialist definitions, definitions that are essentialist in a lesser degree, and more complex definitions. Dervin (2013) uses the terms *methodological nationalism, transnational paradigm,* and *mixed intersubjectivity* to describe these broad groups of definitions respectively. In the following section, I attempt to review these three different groups of definitions which have attempted to define the term cultural identity.

2.1.1 Essentialist definitions (methodological nationalism)

A number of studies have defined cultural identities as a fixed set of values and beliefs of a society. These definitions, however, tend to underestimate the complexity of the term (Dervin, 2012, 2013; Kramsch & Uryu, 2012). Ting-Toomey (2005), for example, defines cultural identity as "the emotional significance we attach to our sense of belonging or affiliation with the larger

culture. To illustrate, we can talk about the larger Brazilian cultural identity, or the larger Canadian cultural identity" (p. 214). However, this definition seems to equate the term cultural identity with a national state such as Brazil and Canada, and in so doing seems to lack some accuracy (Triandis, 1995).

Dervin (2013) refers to this approach as methodological nationalism because it is built on "the assumption that nation/state/society is the natural and political form of the modern world" (Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2002, p. 302). This approach provides essentialist explanations for the term cultural identity whereby knowing individuals happens through knowing their culture as a static object (Abdallah-Pretceille, 2003). Further, although cultures do not have autonomy or material nature, but rather are, according to scholars such as Eriksen (2001) and Unni Wikan (2002), blurry concepts, such explanations for cultural identities continue to be overused in explaining intercultural encounters. However, as Unni Wikan (2002) points out, it is the acting individual who thinks and behaves. The essentialist approach tends to put individuals into boxes (Machart, 2013) and presents them in unhelpful, fixed categories (Jack, 2009), leaving individuals with little space for what they do and coconstruct with the people they meet (Dervin, 2013). Further, linking both the terms culture and identity "makes the concept a contended one, as the two words are polysemic, slippery and 'illusory'" (Dervin, 2012, p. 181). Therefore, asking the questions "*What is their cultural identity? What is their culture* ... cannot be fully/accurately answered in today's mixed, global/cal and complex societies" (Dervin, 2013, p. 12). Hence, in order to capture the complexity that Dervin (2013) points out, more complex definitions are required if we are to avoid essentialist definitions.

2.1.2 Essentialist definitions in a lesser degree (transnational paradigm)

In order to avoid any essentialist definitions, alternative definitions that have attempted to pay more attention to the complexity of the term cultural identity have been offered. However, these definitions followed – though in a lesser degree—the same essentialist approaches that the essentialist definitions mentioned above had used. For example, cultural identity has been defined as "a complex set of beliefs that people have about themselves in relation to their cultural and historical context and this includes transmitting, and inculcating knowledge, beliefs, values, attitudes and traditions" (Alhazmi & Nyland, 2010, p. 7; see also Berry, 2002; Boski, Strus, & Tlaga, 2007). Jameson (2004) defines cultural identity as "an individual's sense of self derived from formal or informal membership in groups that transmit and inculcate knowledge, beliefs, values, attitudes, traditions, and ways of life… Cultural identity changes over time and evokes emotions" (p. 199). While both these definitions share similarities, they also highlight some important aspects of identity; i.e., it is transmitted, inculcated, and changeable. This concept of transmission is also present in Hall's (1993) claim that:

> Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power … identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past. (1990, p. 225)

This definition adds additional characteristics to the concept of cultural identities by adding the idea that, in addition to being changeable and

transmitted, they are flexible and, therefore, that individuals can choose to be positioned by and position themselves within them.

However, the problem seen with the methodological nationalism above remains the same with these definitions. They indicate that an individual's identity is flexible in terms of its changeability, transmission, and inculcation from one given, solid identity to another. Dervin (2013) refers to such definitions as the transnational paradigm which, unlike methodological nationalism that limits an individual's identity to one entity, restricts the individual's identity to two —or multiple— clearly defined identities. For example, when individuals point out that they feel that they are both German and English at the same time, they restrict themselves to two —or even more— well-defined identities. This way of defining cultural identity creates neo-culturalism/neo-essentialism (Dervin, 2013) or neo-communitarianism (Wimmer & Glick, 2002) that "reproduce[s] the standard image of a world divided into nations and thus naturalises this vision of the world in new forms" (Wimmer & Glick, 2002, p. 324). Therefore, there is a need to move beyond both methodological nationalism and the transnational paradigm to a more complex understanding of identities that may impact an individual's intercultural communication encounters.

2.1.3 Complex definitions (mixed intersubjectivity)

In order to avoid the essentialist approaches of methodological nationalism and the transnational paradigm, one needs to be cautious about conceptualising an individual's identity only as attributable to his or her cultural background/s as doing so runs the risk of essentialising the characteristics of both the concepts of

identity and of culture (Kramsch & Uryu, 2012). Consequently, Dervin (2013) and Machart and Neo Lim (2013) argue that it is time to move away from identity to identification. Identities should not be viewed as preexisting realities but as an ongoing process within the interaction.

> The English term *identity* comes from French *identité.* Both words make use of a suffix (-*ty* or –*té*) meaning "the state of". In this light, *identity* is thus more a product than a process. However, both languages (English and French) have the word *identification* where the suffix –*ation* marks a process. (Machart & Neo Lim, 2013, p. 37)

Dervin (2013) calls this paradigm mixed intersubjectivity. Here "People are thus often in the midst of identity 'inconsistencies' and 'shifts'… identity is thus taken as a discursive phenomenon and by no means a given" (Dervin, 2013, p. 16). Further, during interactions, individuals not only establish themselves as members of a particular group (de Fina, 2006, p. 352) but they also construct realities (Machart & New Lim, 2013). Therefore, "the concept of identity … never signifies anything static, unchanging, or substantial, but rather always an element situated in the flow of time, ever changing, something involved in a process" (Wodak, de Cillia, Reisigl, & Liebhart, 2009, p. 11). Therefore, rather than asking the question "what is someone's identity, the question should be "'how do they construct what they present as their identity?' or 'how do they identify themselves?'" (Dervin, 2013, p. 16). However, Byram (2013) argues that it is not enough for an individual to identify himself or herself as belonging to a specific group without the approval of others:

> You cannot just declare that you are a teacher; other people have to accept you as one — and that you have been formally qualified or initiated. Even being a father is an identity which has to be recognised by others, and if you don't look after your children properly society will deny you the identity of father and even take your children away … Social identity has, like a coin, two sides,

> defining yourself but also being defined by others as belonging to a group or not. (Byram, 2013, p. 47)

The problem with this analysis is that, just as with the inconsistencies of our self-identification, others' identifications of us are also inconsistent. For instance, Byram's (2013) assertion above that "society will deny you the identity of father" if you do not look after your children properly seems to describe "society" as a consistent entity rather than as a group of different, inconsistent individuals. What may seem to be a 'good parent' for some members of a society may not seem so for other members of the same society. Dervin (2013) argues that, although an individual's self-identification may be influenced by how other people identify someone, these 'definitions' are not necessarily true nor may they correspond to the individual's own reality. Therefore, as with our self-identifications, the identifications by others are also inconsistent, ever changing, and involved in a process.

Once individual identities are viewed conceptually as fluid and constantly flowing and changing, identification becomes a more suitable term with which to replace the term identity, without the meaning being changed (Machart & New Lim, 2013). On the other hand, both the terms identity (in its fluid and constantly changing meaning) and identification could also be used as synonyms (Henry, Arrow, & Carini, 1999). Since the point of the discussion on identity and identification is not to decide which term to use but to highlight the complexity of both terms, I will continue to use the terms identification and identity (in its fluid and constantly changing meaning) synonymously. As Machart and Neo Lim (2013) note, words are easier to change than concepts, and thus, as long as the

complexity of both concepts is presented, it does not create a significant difference if these terms are used interchangeably.

2.1.4 Saudi cultural identity, identities and identification

When analysing cultural identity (or identification) in the context of Saudi Arabia, many studies have followed the methodological nationalism approach and thus have essentialised the cultural identity of Saudi Arabia in a simplistic way. For example when describing what they refer to as 'Saudi cultural identity' the authors of these studies often present it as being homogeneously Wahhabi – an orthodox form of Islam– in terms of its religion (Baroni, 2007; Kumaraswamy, 2006; Nevo, 1998) and as having a tribal nature (Baroni, 2007; Blanchard, 2010; Long, 2005; Long & Maisel, 1997; Zuhur,2005). Moreover, other studies have described Saudi Arabia as having a collectivistic culture in which higher priority is paid to the group than to the individual (Darwish & Huber, 2003; Sampson, 1977). Furthermore, some of the most discussed issues surrounding Saudi culture can be found in Alhazmi and Nyland's (2013) study, in which they argue that Saudi cultural identity is linked to Saudi Arabia's gender segregation, and that this segregation has created a male-dominated society (Kabasakal & Bodur, 2002), blaming both Wahhabism (El-Fadl, 2001; Doumato, 1992, 2000, 2001, 2003) and the tribal traditions in Saudi Arabia for the subordination of women (Mackey, 2002; Zanti, 2001).

Such descriptions seem to essentialise the concept of what they refer to as Saudi cultural identity, and these descriptions have the potential to influence Saudi international students' intercultural encounters in three ways. First, describing

Saudi Arabia as homogeneously Wahhabi in terms of its religion implies one image of Islam and thus neglects the fact that there are different groups of self-identified Muslims in Saudi Arabia, but that some of them do not follow the Wahhabi teachings, for example, Saudi Liberals and self-identified Shia people who form a noticeable percentage of the population (Wynbrandt, 2010). This description of Saudi cultural identity also simplifies the strong yet complex link between Saudi Arabia as a national state and the religion of Islam in its Wahhabi form. I shall discuss this complex connection in more detail in the next section.

The second essentialist description of Saudi cultural identity refers to the idea that it is a male-dominated society that does not provide women and men with equal social opportunities. Most studies blame both the strict teachings of Wahhabism as well as the tribal traditions for this subordination of women without having taken a thorough look at the history of Saudi Arabia that led to this subordination of women. The subordination of women in Saudi Arabia has created a gulf between men and women and, therefore, Alhazmi & Nyland (2010) argue that Saudi international students find communicating with individuals from the opposite gender challenging during their sojourn abroad.

The third way in which Saudi cultural identity is essentialised is to describe it as having a collectivistic culture. This misconception has led some studies on Saudi international students' intercultural experiences to use similarly essentialist explanations when presenting their findings (e.g., Abdel Razek, 2012; Heyn, 2013). This point will be discussed in more detail in section (2.2.1) in this chapter.

The next three sections question the assumption that the main components of the cultural identity of Saudi Arabia are: that it is a homogeneously Wahhabi state; that it is a male-dominant society; and, that it is a predominantly collectivist culture. I follow Dervin's (2013) mixed intersubjectivity approach to critique the studies that used methodological nationalism approaches and the transnational paradigm in describing what they refer to as the cultural identity of Saudi Arabia.

2.1.4.1 Wahhabi Islam and Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia has been described as a homogeneous Muslim state that follows the orthodox, Wahhabi form of Islam which has created its religious identity (Baroni, 2007; Commins, 2009; Kumaraswamy, 2006; Nevo, 1998; Prokop, 2003; Vogel, 2000). In order to understand why Saudi Arabia is thought to have a strong religious identity, it is necessary to revisit the part played by Wahabiism in the country's history.

The contemporary Saudi state can trace its origins back to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (1744-1818) when the First Saudi State was cofounded by a political leader called Mohammed Ibn Saud and his religious partner, Mohammed Ibn Abdul Wahhab. The name Saudi Arabia comes from Mohammed Ibn Saud's surname, while Wahhabiyya, Wahhabism or Wahhabi Islam is named after Mohammed Ibn Abdul Wahhab. Ibn Saud, who first controlled a small town called ad-Dir'iyya in the centre of the Arabian Peninsula, had ambitions to expand his power to other regions of the Arabian Peninsula and to neighbouring towns. He, therefore, cooperated with Ibn Abdul Wahhab who declared that most

Muslims in the area had strayed from Islam by introducing myths and different practices into the religion and thus needed to be brought back to the 'genuine Islam' (Steinberg, 2005). This mixture of political 'Saudi' and religious 'Wahhabi' ideologies also resulted in the belief that both overlap and that each represents the other (Al-Rasheed, 1996). However, the First Saudi State collapsed in 1818 when the Ottoman Sultan decided to remove the regime by sending his troops from Egypt to fight the founders of the First Saudi State and put an end to that era (Al-Rasheed, 2010).

More than a century later, in 1932, the current Saudi State was founded on the same basis as the First Saudi State, and a religious nation predicated on Islam in its Wahhabi form was established (Al-Rasheed, 2010). As a result, Saudi Arabia adopted religious nationalism as an identity of the state (Dekmejian, 2003). Since Wahhabism implements strict views of Islam, it prohibits travelling to non-Islamic countries (Abu-Sahlieh, 1996; Alhazmi & Nyland, 2010) and thus it discourages initiating communication with non-Muslim individuals on the basis that such communication could influence Muslim individuals' beliefs and identities (Ibn Baz, 2000). Therefore, if Saudi international students decide to follow strict Wahhabi teachings regarding not initiating intercultural communication with non-Muslims, this decision may influence their intercultural experiences when they study abroad.

Although, as a country, Saudi Arabia adopts a religious nationalism based on Wahhabism, this national positioning does not necessarily mean that every Saudi citizen — including Saudi international students —follows the Wahhabi teachings

on not initiating intercultural communication. There are a number of other Saudi groups, religious communities, and tribes who do not follow the Wahhabi traditions (Steinberg, 2005). Before talking about these communities, it is important to point out that by mentioning a number of 'cultural identities' in Saudi Arabia, I do not intend to follow the transnational paradigm. Rather, it is my intention to deconstruct the homogeneous Wahhabi image that has been attached to Saudi Arabia and, therefore, I follow the mixed intersubjectivity approach in order to provide more complexity.

One community in Saudi Arabia that does not follow the Wahhabi teachings is the self-identified Shia (or simply Shia) community which makes up between 10 and 15 per cent of the entire population (Teitelbaum, 2010). Despite their sizeable percentage, Shias are still not noticeable and they are rarely mentioned when talking about the religious identity of Saudi Arabia because they are overshadowed by the followers of the mainstream Wahhabi form of Islam (Al-Rasheed, 1998; Ibrahim, 2006; Lacey, 2010). When it comes to Shia and intercultural communication, Ameli and Molaei (2012) studied a group of self-identified Shia and self-identified Sunni individuals (simply Shia and Sunni) in Iran and investigated both groups' intercultural sensitivity. Their findings show that the Shia group showed more interest in initiating intercultural communication with their Sunni counterparts, while the Sunni group seemed less interested in doing so with their Shia counterparts. Ameli and Molaei (2012) suggest that this difference is a result of the fact that Sunnis are the minority in Iran —unlike in Saudi Arabia where it is the Shia who are the minority— and thus they initiate less intercultural communication in order to preserve their 'Sunni

cultural identity'. Carrington (1998) adopts a similar view and argues that minorities tend to use 'cultural resistance' against majorities by forming their own communities that separate them from others. However, this view seems to follow the traditional methodological nationalism approach and thus it seems reductive. Instead, it is individuals —not groups— who perceive and negotiate their identities differently from one another (Unni Wikan, 2002). If we consider the views of Ameli and Molaei (2012) and Carrington (1998), then self-identified Shia in Saudi Arabia who are a minority are supposed to restrict their interactions with other communities to preserve their cultural identity. Nonetheless, a number of Shia clerics in Saudi Arabia have encouraged their followers to initiate intercultural communication with their Saudi Sunni counterparts (Saudi Shia, 2014).

On the other hand, a number of Wahhabi scholars who are the majority and thus should be less concerned about restricting interactions with other communities warn against initiating such communication (Al-Fawzan, 2004). Therefore, Shia in Saudi Arabia are an example of non-Wahhabi Saudi citizens who do not follow the mainstream Wahhabi path that has been associated with Saudi Arabia. Further, this example also shows how minority and majority individuals, whether self-identified Shia or self-identified Sunni, renegotiate and reconstruct their identities —identities that may either encourage or discourage them from initiating intercultural communication— differently from one another.

Another example of a Saudi group who do not follow mainstream Wahhabism and its teachings on initiating intercultural communication can be found in

cosmopolitan Hijaz (a geographical area in western Saudi Arabia where the two holy sites of Mecca and Medina are located). Historically, its indigenous people intermingled with other Arabs as well as other groups such as Turks, Indians, Africans, and central and South East Asians who came to perform religious pilgrimage and settled in the area over time (Al-Rasheed, 2013). Therefore, Hijaz was "diverse ethnically, linguistically and religiously — many belonged to different Islamic schools of jurisprudence …" (Al-Rasheed. 2013, p. 13). As a result, unlike followers of Wahhabi teachings, people who lived in Hijaz (Hijazis) have long been involved in intercultural communication experiences with different individuals from different parts of the world.

It is important to point out here that, by mentioning Hijaz, I do not attempt to follow the transnational paradigm and view Saudi Arabia as having multiple cultural identities. Rather, I attempt to deconstruct the homogeneous Wahhabi image that methodological nationalism approaches have linked to Saudi Arabia. I was unable to find any studies that focus specifically on self-identified Hijazi individuals, or individuals who live in the geographical area of Hijaz and their intercultural communication experiences. Nevertheless, the reason for mentioning Hijaz and its diversity is to show that there is more than one side to consider when the discussion comes to describe Saudi Arabia as a homogeneously religious place.

Another group of people who do not follow Saudi Arabia's mainstream Wahhabism and its teachings are the self-identified Saudi liberals. Saudi liberalism is an ideology adopted by a group of Saudi intellectuals who call for

the adoption of a Western, (with my reservation about the term) liberal lifestyle and they challenge the traditional, strict Wahhabi teachings (Dekmejian, 2003; Doran, 2004; Lacroix, 2004). This ideology has existed in Saudi Arabia since the 1950s, however, its presence has strengthened since the events of September 11, 2001 that put Saudi Arabia under severe criticism because the majority of the 9/11 attackers held Saudi Arabian passports (Dekmejian, 2003; Lacroix, 2004). Therefore, in order to change the image of Saudi Arabia as being —even remotely— responsible for those events, Saudi liberals have urged initiating intercultural communication with Western countries and societies. Further, they have also tried to introduce Western practices such as opening cinemas in the country or liberating women from religious constraints, all in order to look 'more Western' i.e., not religiously extreme.

These attempts resulted in initiating state scholarships programmes for Saudi individuals to study abroad in Western countries. The purpose of these scholarships, over and above the gaining of academic qualifications, is to initiate more communication with Western societies and also to create a more positive impression about Saudi Arabia (Lawson, 2011). Therefore, unlike the teachings of Wahhabism whose scholars prohibit people from initiating intercultural communication, self-identified Saudi liberals seem to focus on creating opportunities to initiate intercultural communication with individuals from different parts of the world.

Nonetheless, self-identified Saudi liberals themselves view liberalism differently. For example, Al-Hamad (1999, 2001) argues that secularism, as in the separation

of religion and the state, is the way for a liberal society with democratic and liberal values that enable individuals from different parts of the world to initiate intercultural communication, share interests, and enrich the meanings of each other's lives (Youzhong, 2011). In order to achieve this goal, Al-Hamad (2001) argues that what he refers to as the 'west' is a perfect example that Saudi Arabia and other countries should follow. This statement shows how Al-Hamad (1999, 2001) uses methodological nationalism in describing the west, suggesting that the west is one unit that perceives democratic values identically.

Contrary to Al-Hamad (1999, 2001), Hamada (2004) argues that democratic values that enable individuals to initiate intercultural communication can be achieved from an Islamic perspective. Therefore, he proposes what he refers to as 'Islamic intercultural communication'.

> [The] Islamic intercultural communication perspective … is capable to overcome [sic] the problems generated by the other alternatives and provides the globe with the values of tolerances [sic], freedom, democracy, equity, balance, justice, modernity, rationality and peaceful coexistence. (Hamada, 2004)

Hamada (2004) follows the same steps as Al-Hamad (1999, 2001) in using methodological nationalism, but, unlike Al-Hamad (1999, 2001), he argues that Islam is the source of democratic values that enable individuals to initiate intercultural communication. The same problem emerges here too, however, since Hamada (2004) assumes that Islam is one unit that is perceived identically by all its followers.

Al-Ahmari (2012), in contrast, goes beyond the descriptions of Al-Hamad (1999, 2001) and Hamada (2004) and argues that liberal and democratic values are

neither 'Western' nor 'Islamic', but that they belong to all humanity regardless of their backgrounds. In this case, Al-Ahmari (2012) views all humans as one unit that shares democratic values but may differ in the way it introduces them in their societies. Therefore, the work of these scholars shows that, despite their efforts to introduce liberal democratic values in Saudi Arabia that enable individuals to initiate intercultural communication, self-identified Saudi liberals construct their Saudi liberal identities differently one from another.

Revisiting the history of Saudi Arabia and its link to Wahhabism is important as doing so serves the purpose of this study in a number ways. First, it explains why Saudi Arabia has been described in a number of studies as a homogeneous Wahhabi country despite the noticeable population of other groups within it who identify themselves as Shia, Saudi liberals, and Hijazis. Nonetheless, members of these self-identified groups also construct their identifications in a variety of different ways. Therefore, self-identified Shia individuals do not necessarily fall into the minority stereotype of showing less interest in interactions with other communities; self-identified Hijazis have experienced intercultural communication throughout generations; and the self-identified Saudi liberals emphasise introducing democratic values but differ in whether these values should be construed as Western, Islamic, or universal human values. Therefore, labelling Saudi cultural identity as being strictly Wahhabi seems simplistic, i.e., it does not show the complexity inherent in the concepts of culture and identity. Furthermore, it fails to show the complexity of Saudi's heterogeneous society. Another purpose for revisiting the history of Saudi Arabia and its link to Wahhabism relates to the second essentialist conceptualisation reported in some

studies: i.e., viewing Saudi cultural identity as being grounded in a male-dominant society. Some studies (e.g., El-Fadl, 2001; Doumato, 1992, 2000, 2001, 2003) have argued that Wahhabism, alongside tribal traditions, is responsible for the subordination of women in Saudi Arabia, that it has enlarged the gap between men and women, and thus that it has influenced their communication with individuals of the opposite gender (Alhazmi & Nyland, 2010). In the next section, I review these arguments that appear to follow the methodological nationalism approach and describe Saudi Arabia as having a male-dominant cultural identity.

2.1.4.2 Saudi Arabia as a male-dominant society

As pointed out earlier, both Wahhabism and tribal traditions have been argued to be responsible for enlarging the gulf between men and women by creating a male-dominant society in Saudi Arabia (El-Fadl, 2001; Doumato, 1992, 2000, 2001, 2003; Kabasakal & Bodur, 2002; Mackey, 2002; Zanti, 2001), resulting in communication challenges between men and women (Alhazmi & Nyland, 2010). According to Alhazmi & Nyland (2013), these challenges may influence Saudi international students' intercultural encounters when they experience interactions with individuals from the opposite gender abroad.

Therefore, in this section, I investigate these arguments and attempt to argue that Saudi Arabia does not simply have a male-dominant culture that influences Saudi international students' communication with the opposite sex. Rather, Saudi individuals — both men and women — perceive and construct their gender worldviews differently from one another as independent individuals. In order to

make this argument, I first look at the traditional paradigms of *dominance* and *difference* that describe how an individual's gender directly influences the way men and women communicate. My focus then shifts from these paradigms to a more complex paradigm that uses a poststructural feminist approach. The next section reviews how some studies on women in Saudi Arabia have followed the dominance paradigm as well as the methodological nationalism approach, and thus through that combination have produced a double-essentialist description for Saudi Arabia: that is, of a country with a male-dominant cultural identity.

Finally, I attempt to deconstruct this description by arguing that there is more to the story behind the subordination of women in Saudi Arabia than simply ascribing it to the creation of a 'male-dominant cultural identity' under the influence of both Wahhabi strict teachings and tribal traditions. The importance of this discussion lies in its argument that Saudi international students do not necessarily, as Alhazmi & Nyland (2010; 2013) argue, find communication with individuals from the opposite gender challenging. Each individual's perception of being a Saudi man and a Saudi woman is different and thus their identities should not be essentialised as being 'dominant males' or 'oppressed women', as will appear from the discussion below.

2.1.4.2.1 Gender identity, identification and intercultural communication

First of all, providing a brief background on gender and its impact on communication between men and women seems useful. Early work on gender and its impact on communication followed similar essentialist explanations to both the methodological nationalism and transnational paradigm approaches to

cultural identity. However, rather than describing an individual's cultural identity and how it impacts his or her intercultural encounters, this line of study focused on the individual's gender. Coates (1998) and Shi & Langman (2012) point out that such studies can be separated into two categories: those that follow either the dominance or the difference paradigm.

In the dominance paradigm, early research looked at gender as a fixed and unchangeable factor that impacts the way men and women communicate. For example, some studies suggested that women have less power than men and thus they tend to speak 'powerless language' where they sound less certain and weak (Shi & Langman, 2012). This supposed powerlessness leads women to use more prestigious language than men because they experience social insecurity and thus using such language helps them to bridge the gap between themselves and men (Trudgill, 1983). On the other hand, men tend to exhibit their social power by using different strategies in communication such as interruption, delayed response, or silence (DeFrancisco, 1991; Swann, 1997; West & Zimmerman, 1983). Such studies show that "gender is seen as a fixed preexisting aspect of an individual's identity that therefore allows for predictions of behaviour" (Shi & Langman, 2012, p. 168). This paradigm of dominance seems to have depicted women in a negative way and thus the second paradigm of difference attempts to offer an alternative explanation for how gender impacts the way men and women communicate (Shi & Langman, 2012).

In the difference paradigm, some studies report that when examining both men's and women's same-sex interaction, both men and women have different gender-

specific styles of communication (Maltz & Borker 1982; Tannen, 1990). Therefore, any miscommunication that may occur between men and women is a result of the different strategies that both genders employ (Shi & Langman, 2012). For example, Tannen (1990) assumes that women's style of communication is centred on supporting cooperation of social roles and relationships, while men's style of communication is centred on supporting a competitive orientation to social relations. Coates (1998) and Swann (1992) assume that this orientation comes about because, from their childhood, boys are raised to be competitive while girls are raised to be cooperative. This paradigm of difference does not negate the idea that the way men and women communicate may have something to do with power differences between them. However, unlike the dominance paradigm, it assumes that on top of the power-related differences, there are other differences between men and women that also impact the way they communicate.

Both paradigms are different but similar at the same time. They are different in the sense that the dominance paradigm depicts women in a negative and patronising way and assumes that the way they communicate is influenced by their inferiority to men. The difference paradigm, on the other hand, shows that women are equal to men but that they employ different communication strategies. Therefore, any differences in the way women communicate are a result of other aspects that may or may not be related to power differences (Shi & Langman, 2012).

However, both paradigms share the core assumption that an individual's gender directly influences the way he or she communicates. Further, both paradigms assume that the way individuals perceive their gender is preexisting, fixed, and immutable (Shi & Langman, 2012). Therefore, as with the methodological nationalism approaches and transnational paradigm, both the dominance and difference paradigms create essentialist explanations for the way men and women communicate, and hence any behaviour men or women show during interaction can be explained by the simple fact of being a man or a woman. As a result, the limitation of both paradigms is related to the essentialist explanations they give for the role of gender during communication.

In order to overcome this limitation, a new paradigm that adopts a feminist poststructural approach has emerged (Davis & Skilton-Sylvester, 2004; Langman, 2004; Norton & Pavlenko, 2004; Pavlenko, Blackledge, Piller, & Teutsch-Dwyer, 2001). Central to this paradigm is a call to avoid any essentialist approaches such as the dominance and difference paradigms (Shi & Langman, 2012) and to show more complexity and deeper understandings for the presumed direct role that gender has on the way men and women communicate. Further, the new paradigm distinguishes between gender per se and gender identification and worldview. What is meant here by gender identification is how an individual perceives himself or herself, such as being a man, a woman, or any other form of gender identification, while gender worldview is related to the components of this perception (Greenstein, 1996). For example, when two males from Saudi Arabia identify themselves as men (gender identification), interact with an individual from the opposite gender such as a woman, both men may

have different perceptions of what being a man from Saudi Arabia interacting with a woman actually entails. One of them may, for instance, shake hands with the aforementioned woman to greet her, while the other may refuse to do so (gender worldview). In this case, gender is influenced by different contexts, values, and beliefs resulting in diverse social behaviours that cannot be explained by gender alone (Shi & Langman, 2012).

Holliday, Hyde & Kullman (2010) mention an example of an Iranian woman, Parisa, who worked in an international convention. She was creative, assertive, and articulate, but nonetheless she was perceived by her European colleagues as westernised as they did not expect an Iranian Muslim woman to have such qualities because they are meant to be Western. When an Iranian male colleague joined their team, he had similar qualities to Parisa. Their similarity provided a useful illustrative example for her European colleagues as it demonstrated that there are Iranian individuals of both gender with such qualities. The problem in Parisa's case was that her European colleagues had a stereotypical and an essentialist image of what it means to be an Iranian Muslim woman and thus they essentialised her gender worldview as being introverted and submissive. This example shows that gender worldviews are highly complex and should not be essentialised as Parisa did not fit the image of an Iranian submissive woman, nor was she Western herself (Holliday et al., 2010). Thus, people's gender worldview is not something that is passed to them by the family or the society; rather, it is something that is ever-changing, performed, and constructed by the individuals themselves (Witt & Wood, 2010).

Moreover, this new paradigm overlaps with mixed intersubjectivity in that it questions the stereotypical roles of gender in communication that the paradigms of difference and dominance seem to have created. Consequently, what was considered to be gendered is actually a fluid construction made up of the different experiences of the individual (Philips, 2005; Shi & Langman, 2012; Wood, 2010). Therefore, as Phillips (2005) argues, this construction of gender worldviews may vary even in the same society:

> …the early work on gender ideologies was written as if there were only one gender ideology for each society. This was a problem, because the actual existence of multiple gender ideologies in all societies made it easy to counter claims of any one such position. (Phillips, 2005, p. 260)

Therefore, gender worldviews are influenced by other factors such as community status, age, ethnicity, race, and sexual orientation (Shi & Langman, 2012) that shape the individual's gender worldview at an individual level rather than at a group level (e.g., the gender worldview for a Saudi individual rather than the gender worldview of Saudi people).

2.1.4.2.2 Gender worldviews in Saudi Arabia

When applying the analysis outlined above to Saudi Arabia, some studies have followed the dominance paradigm and thus argue that gender worldviews of both men and women in Saudi Arabia give dominance to men over women (Kabasakal & Bodur, 2002) as a result of strict Wahhabi teachings as well as tribal traditions (El-Fadl, 2001; Doumato, 1992, 2000, 2001, 2003; Mackey, 2002; Zanti, 2001). Moreover, Alhazmi & Nyland (2010) go further to link this male-dominance and subordination of women to what they refer to as Saudi cultural identity. These studies seem to be based on two main points. First, that

the gender worldviews of Saudi men and women, and thus their behaviour, could be predicted —men are oppressors while women are oppressed— because, arguably, Wahhabism and Saudi tribal traditions encourage men to behave in this way. Secondly, because of the gap that has been created between men and women as a result of the subordination of women and gender segregation (Padavic & Reskin, 2002), Saudi men and women may encounter difficulties when they interact with individuals from the opposite gender (Alhazmi & Nyland, 2013).

Such descriptions seem simplistic and, therefore, the focus of this section is to question these descriptions and unravel the complexities of any issues related to gender in Saudi Arabia. This section also argues that Saudi men and women construct their gender worldviews differently from one another as independent individuals and, therefore, that their behaviour cannot be predicted when they are in intercultural or intergender encounters. In order to discuss these arguments, I start by questioning the traditional reasons i.e., Wahhabism and tribal traditions that are thought to lie behind the subordination of Saudi women.

First, when it comes to Wahhabism, Al-Rasheed (2013) argues that religious views on restricting women are not exclusively linked to Wahhabism alone since such practices are also seen in, for example, some ultraorthodox Jewish practices which impose many restrictions on women in places such as Israel. Nevertheless, such practices and restrictions have not stopped Israeli women from progressing and having equal rights to men (Kraus, 2002). When it comes to the second argument regarding the tribal traditions in Saudi Arabia, tribalism is not unique

to Saudi Arabia and it is spread around the Arab region (Al-Rasheed, 2013). Yet, tribalism has not stopped women in Kuwait, for example, from participating in politics (Al-Mughni & Tetreault, 2000) nor has it stopped Omani women from occupying jobs such as ambassadors or deputy ministers (Al-Azri, 2013).

Further, while several tribes in Saudi Arabia have branches in other Gulf countries such as Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates with which they share similar traditions (Al-Rasheed, 2013), the subordination of women in Saudi Arabia is still more prevalent than in other Gulf countries. Therefore, it is important to understand the reasons behind the subordination of women in order to avoid any simplistic explanations that use the concept of a Saudi male-dominant cultural identity as an argument to explain gender worldviews in Saudi Arabia.

In attempting to provide deeper explanations for the situation of women in Saudi Arabia, Al-Rasheed (2013) argues that their subordination goes back to the foundation of the Saudi state when Wahhabism was used to create a religious national identity for the state i.e., religious nationalism. This religious nationalism in its Wahhabi form has used women as a visible sign to show the state's Islamic authenticity.

> While secular nationalism aspired in its rhetoric to a modernity in which women are central, religious nationalism constructed women as icons for the authenticity of the nation and its compliance with God's law. In both cases, women are turned into symbols, representing anything but themselves. In this respect, the boundaries between secular and religious nationalism may be blurred, as both appropriate the 'question of women' to create national and collective identities, albeit with different outcomes. (Al-Rasheed, 2013, p. 17)

This quote shows how women have been used throughout history as symbols that introduce a collective identity of any society or state. Hence, Saudi Arabia is not an exception and thus the subordination of women in Saudi Arabia is a result of the notion of the religious nationalism that Saudi Arabia attempts to reinforce. For example, when a group of Saudi women started the *Women2Drive* campaign to lift the ban on women driving (Shmuluvitz, 2011), the Saudi police arrested a woman called Manal Al-Sharif in 2011 for driving her car in Saudi Arabia (Agarwal, Lim, & Wigand, 2012). Her arrest shows how the state wants to exhibit its religious nationalism as a collective identity for the whole country, and women were used as symbols to achieve this end. It was neither Wahhabi scholars nor the tribal members that led to Al-Sharif's arrest.

Despite their subordination by the state, Saudi women do not always fit the stereotypical and essentialist descriptions that depict them as submissive or marginalised individuals in the society. Therefore, many of them continue to demand their rights. For example, despite her arrest, Al-Sharif managed to deliver her message of empowering women in Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, when it comes to employment opportunities for Saudi women, some Saudi women, such as El-Bishr (in Al-Rasheed, 2013), have also managed to deliver their messages to empower women. Thus they call for a greater flexibility for Saudi women in order to increase their employment opportunities "even if this means relaxing prohibition on mixing between the sexes and lifting the ban on driving" (Al-Rasheed, 2013, p. 30). On the other hand, there are other Saudi women who reject the idea of relaxing any prohibition on issues such as mixing between

sexes or lifting the ban on driving. They assume that mixing of the sexes in the workplace creates obstacles to finding jobs (Al-Rasheed, 2013).

A further example of Saudi women who do not fit the essentialist description is the group of women who, while calling for relaxation of the prohibition on issues such as mixing of the sexes and lifting the ban on driving, demand that the state enacts these changes (Al-Rasheed, 2013). There are also other women, such as the winner of the 2012 International Women of Courage Award, Mrs. Badawi, who also call for relaxing such prohibitions without seeking the state's approval (U.S. Department of State, 2012).

All these examples serve to show that Saudi women do not always fit the essentialist descriptions of being submissive or oppressed by a male-dominant cultural identity, as reported in some studies. Further, their contrasting views on how to achieve empowerment show that Saudi women perceive and construct their female-gendered identities (i.e., their gender worldviews) along differing lines rather than in one single way.

In addition, Saudi men are similar to Saudi women in that they too are affected by Saudi's religious nationalism. In her 2006 novel, *Hind wa al-askar* (*Hind and the Soldiers*), El-Bishr (as cited in Al-Rasheed, 2013) talks about how men in Saudi Arabia have been described as "wolves" (Al-Rasheed, 2013, p. 198) who may attack women as a metaphor for describing men as dangerous individuals who want to fulfil their sexual desires. Therefore, women should stay at home in order to remain "safe" (p. 198). To enforce this idea, the state has reinforced

strict segregation between the sexes to ensure that unrelated men and women do not mix together (Padavic & Reskin, 2002). Furthermore, the state, in cooperation with Wahhabi scholars, has issued more than 30,000 religious statements on women (Abdullah, 2005; Al-Rasheed, 2013) in order to discourage both men and women from interacting with each other.

However, similar to the aforementioned Saudi women who fought for their rights, many Saudi men also do not fit the essentialist image of being oppressors of women. For example, hundreds of Saudi men signed petitions and letters addressed to the state to show their positive positions and approval regarding the Saudi women who sought their right to drive (Middle East Policy Council, 2014). This action shows how Saudi men do not fit into the stereotypical image of being dominant or oppressing individuals and, therefore, that they construct their gender worldviews as independent individuals. While Alhazmi & Nyland (2010, 2013) argue that the gender worldview in Saudi Arabia that results from a male-dominant cultural identity creates challenges for Saudi international students when they interact with individuals from the opposite sex, this section has shown, by contrast, that there is more than one gender worldview adopted by Saudi men and women. Therefore, it may not simply be assumed that all Saudi international students encounter the same challenges when they communicate with individuals from the opposite sex during their sojourn abroad.

From this discussion, it has become apparent that the subordination of women in Saudi Arabia pertains to both men and women at the same time. Further, this subordination of women cannot be simply explained away by the existence of a

male-dominant cultural identity that has been influenced by strict Wahhabism and tribal traditions, as has been the case in some studies that followed the dominance paradigm. Rather, the subordination of women is one result of the Saudi religious nationalism that introduced restrictive laws against women. Despite these restrictions, Saudi women cannot all be stereotypically categorised as being submissive, given that examples exist of women who are pushing for female empowerment in a number of different and distinct ways.

Similarly, contrary to the stereotypical image that Saudi men are oppressors, a noticeable number of men in Saudi Arabia have supported Saudi women who have sought their rights over issues such as driving. This response shows the different perceptions that individuals have about their gender worldviews, even though they live in the same society (Phillips, 2005). Finally, these mixed and yet complex perceptions of gender worldviews of both Saudi women and men come under the new gender paradigm that uses a poststructural feminist approach. They also seem to comply with the mixed intersubjectivity approach, and therefore —as is the case with any form of identification or worldview— gender worldviews are also inconsistent, ever changing, and constructed by the individual.

What can be concluded from this section is that similar to the methodological nationalism approach and the transnational paradigm that essentialised the influence of cultural identity on intercultural communication, the dominance and difference paradigms on gender also followed the same path. They essentialised the influence of an individual's gender on the way individuals communicate.

Further, as with the mixed intersubjectivity approach that I followed to show the complexity of Saudi individuals' identifications that have been essentialised in some studies, I have attempted to do the same in this section and thus followed a poststructural feminist approach by arguing that Saudi individuals' gender worldviews cannot be essentialised either. All Saudi individuals have their own ever-changing and self-constructed gender worldview that influences their intercultural or inter-gender communication encounters. Therefore, it is hard to predict how Saudi international students' intercultural and inter-gender encounters will be enacted during their overseas sojourns because each individual will behave differently.

2.1.4.3 Saudi Arabia as a collectivistic culture

In the previous two sections I have reviewed the studies that have essentialised Saudi Arabia and described what they term Saudi cultural identity as a homogeneous Wahhabi country that has a male-dominant society. Then, I attempted to question these essentialist descriptions by following the mixed intersubjectivity approach and a new gender paradigm that adopts a poststructural feminist approach. I argued that Saudi individuals' identities should not be simply explained by their being followers of the mainstream Wahhabism in Saudi Arabia or in terms of a Saudi gender worldview that subordinates women and favours men over them.

In this section, I follow the same structure as in the previous sections in questioning the third essentialist description of Saudi cultural identity i.e., that Saudi Arabia has a collectivist culture that influences the intercultural

communication of its citizens (Gudykunst et al., 1987; Gudykunst & Matsumoto, 1996). I therefore start with a brief review of the concepts of collectivism and its opposing concept, individualism and consider how, according to some studies, these concepts influence intercultural communication. Consideration is next given to some of the research that has followed the methodological nationalism approach and the transnational paradigm and in so doing essentialised Saudi Arabia as having a collectivistic culture. Finally, I attempt to question such descriptions and argue that labelling Saudi Arabia as a place that has a collectivistic culture seems simplistic.

2.1.4.3. 1 Collectivism, individualism and intercultural communication

The collectivist-individualist dimensions that describe cultures come from the early work of Hofstede (1980). Triandis (1995) defines collectivism as a set of beliefs, values, attitudes and concepts that tie individuals with bonds toward their own group. In this case, the group as a whole receives more attention than does the individual (Hofstede, 2001; Nisbett, Peng, Choi, & Norenzayan, 2001) which results in submission and conformity to the group values and beliefs (Darwish & Huber, 2003). Further, Sampson (1977) points out that in collectivistic cultures, individuals have less privacy because of their dependence on the whole group. As a result, individuals identify themselves by maintaining their places in the social structure and, therefore, they prioritise the whole group's goals over their own, individual goals (Baron & Byrne, 1997; Darwish & Huber, 2003). Such values are not forced on the individual but come from the belief that an individual's gains come through the group (Caldwell-Harris & Aycicegi, 2006). As a result, this reliance on others intensifies the sense of

belonging to the group (Ma & Schoeneman, 1997) and thus individuals care for their group members (Iyengar, Lepper, & Ross, 1999).

On the other hand, the term individualism relates to individuals who pay more attention to their own interests, needs, and rights, and give more priority to their personal rather than the group's goals (Triandis, 1995; Bird, 1999). Therefore, individuals from individualistic cultures are expected to look after themselves or their immediate family (Hofstede & Hofstede, 1991).

Gudykunst et al. (1996) argue that both dimensions influence individuals' intercultural communication. For example, unlike those from individualistic cultures, individuals from collectivistic cultures prefer to focus on their belonging to their in-groups (Hofstede, 1980; Ramamoorthy & Flood, 2004). They prefer indirect and implicit communication and any direct communication is considered to be rude (Rodriguez, 1996), while individuals from individualistic cultures prefer this kind of direct communication. Therefore, individuals from individualistic cultures are said to be more capable of initiating communication than individuals from collectivistic cultures are (Gudykunst 1998).

Triandis (1995) points out that what distinguishes a culture as being either individualistic or a collectivistic is the degree of industrialisation in the geographical area where it is situated. Other studies argue that the categorisation is based on the degree to which the individuals of that particular culture cling to their traditional customs and to the values of the group

(Caldwell-Harris & Aycicegi, 2006). While a number of studies have based their categories on geographical locations and, therefore, categorised Europe and North America as having individualistic cultures (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1996; Lukes, 1973), other studies have described Asian, African, and Latin American cultures as collectivistic (Cai & Fink, 2002; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Maznevski, Gomez, DiStefano, Noorderhaven, & Wu, 2002; Singelis, 1994).

When it comes to the Arab countries, they too have been categorised as collectivistic cultures in some studies (Buda & Elsayed-Elkhouly, 1998; Sagy Orr, Bar-On, & Awwad, 2001), because of the influence of Islam and Arab culture in these countries (At-Twaijri & Al-Muhaiza, 1996). Saudi Arabia, in particular, has been perceived as highly collectivistic (Abdel Razek, 2012; Bowen, 2008; Heyn, 2013; Long, 2005). Irrespective of the collectivist-individualist orientation an individual is labelled with, Gudykunst et al. (1996) argue that individualism and collectivism directly influence the individual's style of communication and that Saudi international students' intercultural encounters will consequently be influenced by their collectivistic culture.

These studies seem to have followed the methodological nationalism approach and the transnational paradigm and thus essentialised what they refer to as Arab or Saudi cultures as being collectivistic. This essentialising seems simplistic because the concepts of both collectivism and individualism are problematic. They divide the world into two broad categories (Kumaravadivelu, 2007) based on geographical location (Holliday, 2011). Although Triandis (2004) points out

that both categories are neutral, Holliday (2011) argues that individualism implies positive characteristics of open-mindedness and consistency while collectivism does not, since, in the words of Min-Sun Kim (2005), "not so long ago the world was 'us' versus 'savages'… The 'others' were 'foreign devils' or 'barbarians' and we 'the centre of the universe and civilisation' (p. 108).

Holliday (2011) refers to this process of imagining the Self in relation to the Other as "cultural chauvinism" (p. 147) where individuals try "to make sense of the other — as a normal everyday process for everyone. It is to do with any social group establishing an image of strength and superiority in the face of other groups" (Holliday, 2011, p. 147). Therefore, not only do the dimensions of individualism and collectivism contribute to establishing an imagined Self in relation to the Other by creating an in-group and out-group, but they also establish a favoured and superior Self and an Other who is less so.

Further, both categories offer easy answers that risk underestimating the complexities of an individual's characteristics (Kumaravadivelu, 2007). For example, describing places such as the United States for having an individualistic culture (Bellah et al., 1996) does not seem to be accurate because European Americans are neither less collectivistic than Asian Americans nor more individualistic than African Americans or Latinos (Oyserman, Coon, & Kemmelmeier, 2002). This observation shows how individualism and collectivism categories neglect the diversity and complex characteristics of individuals even when they live in the same geographical area.

Similarly, when applying this analysis to an Arab world —including Saudi Arabia —that has been categorised as highly collective (Abdel Razek, 2012; Heyn, 2013), it becomes apparent that the diversity in the Arab world is significant. Zaharna (2009) argues that the Arab world is not one homogenous culture but that it is a diverse and heterogeneous place that consists of many different cultures. This reconceptualisation means shifting from the idea of an Arab culture – as a singular entity — to Arab cultures in the plural (Ayish, 1998, 2003; Feghali, 1997; Iskandar, 2007). Furthermore, as Nydell (2005) points out, "One might wonder whether there is, in fact, such a thing as Arab culture given the diversity and spread of the Arab region" (p. 13). As mentioned in the first section on the image of Saudi Arabia as being a homogeneous Wahhabi country, Saudi Arabia itself is diverse and heterogeneous. In addition to the Shia minority, the diversity in other parts such as Hijaz — western Saudi Arabia — and Hasa — eastern Saudi Arabia — is significant (Al-Rasheed, 2010). Further, it would be difficult to label Saudi liberals who call for adopting a Western lifestyle in Saudi Arabia as collectivists while the west is presumably individualistic.

Furthermore, the boundaries between individualistic and collectivistic characteristics are unclear since an individual can be both individualist and collectivist at the same time. Ayish (2003) argues that individualism which is, apparently, linked to Western cultures and lacking in Arab cultures — has deep roots in pre-Islamic Arabia and also in some Islamic scripts. Zahrana (2009) points out:

> The sense of individuality, and even speaking out against the collectivity, is evident in Islamic and cultural icons in the region. In the Quran, the idea of an individual proclaiming his or her belief in

> God, even at the risk of not only going against the group collective but being exiled from it, is exemplified in the related stories of the prophets … The prophet Noah is shunned and called a madman. The Prophet Abraham destroys the idols of his tribe and forsakes even his father. The prophet Lot is threatened for denouncing sin. These stories of earlier prophets give context to the Prophet Muhammad, who is persecuted by his own tribe, the powerful Quraish of Mecca, and migrates to Medina. (Zahrana, 2009, p. 185)

These religious examples, where the events are believed to have taken place in the Arabian Peninsula, show that Arab individuals could be just as individualist as so-called Western individuals. Therefore, it cannot be assumed that Saudi individuals have a predominantly collectivistic culture that directly affects their intercultural communication, as some studies claim.

Similar to the methodological nationalism approach and the transnational paradigm that essentialise the influence of an individual's cultural identity on their intercultural communication, and the dominance and difference paradigms that essentialise an individual's gender on the way they communicate, individualism and collectivism dimensions seem to have followed the same path. They divide the world's population into two broad categories with an assumption that individuals' intercultural communication will be influenced by one or other category. In this section, I have followed the mixed intersubjectivity approach and thus have attempted to argue that Saudi individuals should not be simply categorised as coming from a collectivistic culture that influences their intercultural communication. Rather, they perceive their identities — whether collectivistic, "individualistic, or even both together — differently from one another. Therefore, their intercultural communication encounters may not be simply predicted because of a category that has been placed on them.

2.1.5 Conclusion for section 2.1

In this section, I reviewed studies that followed the methodological nationalism and the transnational paradigm approaches that essentialised what they refer to as Saudi cultural identity. The importance of this review lies in its relation to the claim that an individual's cultural identity is likely to influence his or her intercultural communication encounters (Hecht et al., 2005; Hortobágyi, 2009). Some of the studies attempted to describe the cultural identity of Saudi Arabia in order to understand the intercultural communication experiences of Saudi international students and, in doing so, the majority of these studies have essentialised Saudi Arabia as being a homogeneous Wahhabi, a male-dominant, and a collectivist society. As a result, I have attempted to question these essentialist descriptions through the use of the mixed intersubjectivity approach and by arguing that the term 'Saudi cultural identity' is in itself problematic. Every Saudi individual has his or her own identity (identification) and worldview that are ever-changing and constructed by the individual himself or herself, and which distinguish them from one another as independent individuals rather than as a whole group. Thus, when studying Saudi international students' intercultural encounters, any essentialist descriptions as to their cultural identity should be avoided and, therefore, the focus should be on each individual's identity (identification*).*

In terms of this study, I attempt to avoid essentialist descriptions of Saudi international students and their intercultural communication encounters. I do not attempt to view their intercultural communication experiences as

consequential events that result from what is presumed to be their cultural identity i.e., assumptions that Saudi Arabia has a male-dominant, collective society built on exclusively Wahhabi teachings. Instead, I view Saudis' intercultural communication experiences as being as complex and diverse as their worldviews and self-identifications and thus view them from a postmodern perspective. The next section reviews those studies that have focused on Saudi international students' intercultural communication encounters during their sojourns abroad.

2.2 Saudi international students and intercultural communication

In the previous sections, I reviewed both the concept of Saudi cultural identity and studies that applied the methodological nationalism approach and the transnational paradigm to it; I then attempted to critique their essentialist descriptions and analysis by following the mixed intersubjectivity approach. In this section, I follow the same steps. I begin by reviewing studies that have been conducted specifically on Saudi international students and their intercultural communication experiences abroad. I critically review these studies and any essentialist analysis or explanations that they may provide. I also critique any methodological drawbacks in these studies, such as the methods that were used to collect or analyse the data. I do not limit my critiques to the data analysis or the methods of these studies, as there may be other aspects that need to be critiqued, such as the samples that were used to collect the data. This approach will enable me to position this study and to shape the research questions it asks.

2.2.1 Studies on Saudi international students

There is little literature that focuses on Saudi international students and their intercultural experiences abroad (Alhazmi & Nyland, 2010; Midgley, 2009a, 2009b, 2010; Shaw, 2010) for a number of reasons. The first reason relates to the relatively recent discovery of oil. Before its discovery in the 1930s, the Saudi people had been isolated and had had no real opportunity to engage in direct communication with individuals from different parts of the world (Shaw, 2010). After the discovery of oil, the economy of the country grew rapidly and thus Saudi Arabia could afford to send its citizens abroad to study. However, Saudi international students are a relatively new phenomenon when compared to students in neighbouring countries such as Egypt which has been sending students to study abroad since as early as the nineteenth century (Colvin, 1998). This situation has affected research on Saudi international students even though Saudis studying abroad has been common for some time now. The second reason is related to the restrictive religious statements —*fatwas*— by some Wahhabi scholars in Saudi Arabia that, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, prohibited Saudi citizens from travelling abroad even for study.

The literature on Saudis studying overseas is limited, with the majority of the research being conducted, in the main, on Saudi international students' perceptions and attitudes of their new academic settings as well as the services and facilities provided for them by their host university (Akhtarkhavari, 1994; Al-Dakheelallah, 1984; Al-Jasir, 1993; Al-Nassar, 1982; Basfar, 1995). Some studies have, however, focused on students' academic issues (Al-Harthi, 1987; Gauntlett, 2006; Mustafa, 1985; Al-Shehry, 1989), achievement perceptions (Al-

nusair, 2000; Rasheed, 1972; Shaw, 2010), home-stay experiences (Fallon & Bycroft, 2009) and financial issues (Al-Jasir, 1993; Al-Shedokhi, 1986; Alkhelaiwi, 1997; Hassan, 1992). In addition, some studies focused on the English language and how it seemed to be a challenge for Saudi international students (Jammaz, 1981; Rasheed, 1972; Shabeeb, 1996; Shehry, 1989) and, also for some Saudi businessmen, when communicating in English (Adelman & Lusting, 1981).

Only a few studies have focused directly on Saudi international students' intercultural communication experiences, for example, the early works of Jammaz (1981) and Shabeeb (1996). The former focused on the adjustment issues of Saudi students in the United States. Jammaz used a questionnaire to survey 400 people to collect his data and reported that age, marital status, and the study area of the participants played a role in the process of adjustment. He points out that younger students were less well-adjusted than older students, that married students were better adjusted than single students, and that those who studied natural sciences were better adjusted than those who studied humanities and social sciences.

Shabeeb (1996) also focused on adjustment issues of Saudi students in American universities. He sent out 150 questionnaires to collect the data and — similar to Jammaz — the focus was on whether aspects such as age, marital status, area of study, gender, and level of study had affected the students' adjustments. His findings show that the main adjustment issues were related to English language and to other aspects of life such as religious services, health services, students'

activities, and academic registration. He reports that the female participants in his study encountered more difficulties in registering in their courses than their male counterparts did even though they were more linguistically competent than the male participants. When it comes to the age of the participants, he points out that younger participants expressed and discussed their problems more than older participants. His findings also show that the participants who were doing undergraduate courses encountered more adjustment issues than the postgraduate participants did. Finally, similar to Jammaz (1981), Shabeeb (1996) argues that the students who did natural sciences were better adjusted than those who did humanities and social sciences.

Although both Jammaz (1981) and Shabeeb (1996) provide rich data, both studies drew general conclusions that neglected important complexities of adjustments issues because they used quantitative approaches in order to collect and then report their data. Such results led to the drawing of general conclusions and thus overlooked adjustment complexities. They did not discuss the actual, real interactions that the Saudi international students experienced. Rather, they were more interested in a general conclusion that silences too many voices (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Therefore, they viewed Saudi international students as one group of students who share the same intercultural communication and adjustment experiences. Drawing on my earlier discussion on gender worldview and identity, for example, both studies reported those aspects in general terms. Therefore, both studies seem to have neglected the various and different personal experiences that their participants may have had. For example, they did not pay enough attention to investigating the way their

participants experienced daily intercultural interactions, such as experiencing friendships or interactions with other individuals whom the participants may have perceived as out-group members. Therefore, more focus on these complex experiences is necessary to provide richer understanding of Saudi international students and their intercultural communication encounters.

In an attempt to provide more complex understandings of Saudi international students' intercultural communication experiences, a number of other studies such as Abdel Razek (2012), Alhazmi & Nyland (2010; 2013), Heyn (2013) and Midgley (2010), have employed qualitative research methods. Heyn (2013) interviewed nine Saudi male university students in the United States. Her findings show that the students in her study had mixed perceptions of the United States as some, on the negative side, thought it was unsafe and unfriendly, despite, on the positive side, its having some of the best universities and most advanced technology in the world. However, some of the participants changed their perceptions about the United States over the course of their studies. For example, Heyn (2013) reports that some of the students had changed some of their values and beliefs (or what I call reconstructed their identities). Therefore, some students had, compared to when they first arrived, changed their views towards women and thus now believe that women should have equal rights to men.

Although Heyn (2013) attempted to investigate the actual intercultural communication interactions of the students, she does draw general conclusions in many parts of her study. For example, she points out that the Saudi

participants in her study needed more social support than other international students "because Saudi Arabian students come from a collectivist culture where family is the primary basis of identity and status for individuals and a key source of support" (Heyn, 2013, p. 124). She argues that the family is the most important motivator that encourages Saudi students to succeed in their studies since "embedded in the Saudi Arabian culture is the value placed on honoring and not disgracing family" (Heyn, 2013, p. 126). Further, throughout her analysis she compares what she referred to as Saudi "collectivistic culture" and American "Individualistic culture" (p. 91). This approach demonstrates what Holliday (2011) calls an "essentialist view of culture" where culture is oversimplified and viewed as "A physical place with evenly spread traits and membership … Associated with a country and a language" (Holliday, 2011, p. 5).

Despite her efforts to show the complex daily-life intercultural interactions of a group of Saudi international students by employing qualitative research methods, Heyn's (2013) analysis seems to follow what Holliday (2011) calls 'neo-essentialism'. The term refers to "the dominant approach within the subdiscipline of intercultural communication studies which follows the essentialist and highly influential work of theorists such as Hofstede, while claiming a more liberal, non-essentialist vision" (Holliday, 2011, p. 6). Heyn's attempt to explore Saudi international students' intercultural communication experiences viewed the study's participants as a single, homogeneous entity rather than as diverse and complex individual cases.

Another attempt to provide complex understanding of Saudi students' intercultural communication experiences was the study by Abdel Razek (2012). He studied a number of Saudi international students — both males and females — in the United States. His findings show that the participants in his study tried to initiate intercultural communication with other international students. However, they struggled to engage with certain multicultural events organised by the university, since some of these events included alcohol, non-halal food, or the fears on the part of the women of not being accepted by non-Muslim international students because of wearing the headscarf. However, similarly to Heyn (2013), Abdel Razak (2012) seems to have followed the neo-essentialist approach and used essentialist terms such as collectivistic culture to describe Saudi international students, which, as argued before, is an oversimplifying description for a complex group.

Further, in choosing his sample, Abdel Razak (2012) chose 11 Saudi students but those students were recruited and recommended by professors and administrators as being "active and reflective students" (Abdel Razek, 2012, p. 12). The disadvantage inherent in this careful selection in choosing the sample is that it makes findings from the sample more difficult "because the information has to be collected before a decision about exclusion or inclusion can be made — and thus before the person has been invited to participate in the qualitative study" (Ritchie, Lewis, & Elam, 2003, p. 97). This approach seems problematic when it comes to research ethics since the participants had been observed by their professors and administrators before the actual data collection started. The other drawback of this careful selection of samples is related to the deliberate

choices to be made by the researcher about who should be taking part in the study (Ritchie et al., 2003). Hence, there is a strong possibility of bias in the selection process regarding who is eligible to take part and who is not.

Another study which used qualitative research methods to investigate Saudi international students' intercultural communication was conducted by Midgley (2010). He interviewed 10 Saudi male nursing students in Australia. Three major themes emerged in his study: expectations, differences, and struggles. The findings on the first theme showed that the students in his study had expectations of experiencing more intercultural encounters with people in the local community since they had expected the university to be located in a lively vibrant city. However, they —disappointingly —found themselves in a university situated in small town, which limited their chances to initiate intercultural communication. This finding assumes that the participants would have had better chances to initiate intercultural communication if they had lived in a larger and more urban city. However, it should not be assumed that larger and more urban cities create better opportunities for creating intercultural communication since initiating communication is possible in both larger cities and smaller towns (Krupat, 1985).

The second theme in Midgley's (2010) study is related to the 'cultural differences' that his participants had experienced, such as finding halal food, the opening hours of shops in Australia, and the modes of greetings. For example, he points out that the participants greeted other Saudi males by touching their cheeks and holding hands with other males, gestures which were not deemed

acceptable in Australia. The final theme in Midgley's (2010) study focused on the theme of 'struggle'. He reports that the participants' challenging experiences ranged from facing some academic and language difficulties to issues related to their intercultural communication with other Australian and international students, such as having to experience the nightlife or going to pubs. Midgley (2010) concludes from his study that the expectations, differences, and struggles experienced by his participants varied one from another, although all the study participants are Saudis. Therefore, Midgley (2010) concludes "reductionist approaches to understanding student experiences may not provide a reliable foundation for meaningful engagement with students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds" (Midgley, 2010, p. 182). This statement fills the gap left by Abdel Razek's and Heyn's (2013) studies in that it provides the complex understandings that they seem to have missed by drawing more general conclusions.

However, there are still limitations in Midgley's (2010) findings. These relate to the sample of participants he interviewed. He interviewed male participants only. I do not seek to stereotype Saudi females here and make presumptions that their experiences will be different from those of Saudi males just because they are females. Rather, Midgley (2010) himself makes presumptions about Saudi females because he discussed their engagement issues, not as a result of interviewing any of them, but through the lenses of their husbands whom he interviewed for his study. He points out that:

> it seems perfectly logical that in a cultural environment [Saudi Arabia] in which women are less independent, they must therefore be more dependent on someone. Isolated from their families and

> home communities as partners to international students living abroad, the wives of these Saudi men seem to have only their husbands to depend upon. (Midgley, 2010, p. 98)

In this extract, Midgley (2010) makes an essentialist assumption and presumes that in the "cultural environment" of Saudi Arabia women are "less independent" and need someone i.e., a man to depend on. Despite the complexity of the intercultural communication experiences of these Saudi international students that he tried to unravel, Midgley (2010) seems to have followed the neo-essentialism approach and thus created essentialist descriptions to what he refers to as the Saudi "cultural environment" in relation to women.

The final study that I attempt to review here was conducted by Alhazmi & Nyland (2013). Their research focuses on how Saudi students who had spent most of their lives in a segregated gender environment in Saudi Arabia experienced the transition to a mixed gender environment. Further, his research also focused on how this experience of transition to a mixed-sex environment influenced their 'cultural identity', as he calls it. He conducted seven in-depth interviews with five Saudi participants: three males and two females. His findings show that the new experience of being in a mixed-sex environment was challenging for both the male and female participants since they were not used to being in direct interactions with individuals from the opposite gender in Saudi Arabia because of the gender segregation there.

However, Alhazmi & Nyland (2013) use the term cultural identity, a term which is highly problematic because both the terms culture and identity are slippery (Dervin, 2013, 2012) as argued before. Furthermore, Alhazmi & Nyland (2013)

link gender segregation in Saudi Arabia, which is a result of the Saudi religious nationalism that I discussed earlier, to the concept of cultural identity and thus he calls gender segregation a "cultural practice" (p. 346). This cultural practice, as a result, influences the Saudi international students' intercultural experience with individuals from the opposite gender, as Alhazmi & Nyland (2013) add. Despite the efforts of Heyn (2012), Abdel Razek (2013), Midgley (2010), and Alhazmi & Nyland (2013) to collect qualitative data and provide more complex understanding for the Saudi international students' intercultural communication experience and avoid essentialist descriptions, they seem, nevertheless, to have adopted the neo-essentialist approach.

> While dominant in intercultural studies oppose essentialism, they remain neo-essentialist because they fall back on prescribed national cultural descriptions. These descriptions are seductive because they are convenient for theory building in the academy, and provide accountable solutions in intercultural communication training … An example of this is the individualism-collectivism distinctions which appears neutral but is in effect chauvinistic. (Holliday, 2011, p. 16)

Having reviewed the studies on Saudi international students, a number of issues emerge. First, a number of the studies on Saudi international students focused only on their academic adjustment, English language challenges, and financial problems with little reference to their intercultural communication experiences. Secondly, when studies did address the intercultural communication encounters of Saudi international students, they did not focus on the actual intercultural interaction and thus they drew general conclusions that reduced the complexities of the students' intercultural experiences. Thirdly, recent studies that paid more attention to the actual intercultural interaction either drew

general conclusions or produced essentialist analyses of the Saudi international students' intercultural communication encounters.

Therefore, the major shortcoming in the literature on Saudi international students is related to the essentialist analyses that studies to date have followed. This limitation in the literature includes the other essentialist paradigms of dominance and difference when the discussion is on Saudi women, and it also extends to the individualism and collectivism dimensions. Therefore, in an attempt to avoid these essentialist analyses and expand understandings, in my study I follow the mixed intersubjectivity approach advocated by Dervin (2013) as a theoretical framework for looking at the concept of identity (identification) in relation to Saudi international student sojourners. It is, therefore, important that the research questions which guide this study should avoid any essentialist characteristics that would, in turn, lead to essentialist answers and analysis. Thus, the general and overarching research question for this study is:

How do Saudi international students experience intercultural communication in the UK?

This question guides the overall research. The study, however, encompasses other more specific research questions that I attempt to answer throughout the study:

1. *How do Saudi international students experience friendship in the UK?*

The importance of addressing this question is to question the assumption that, as some studies argue (Garies, 2000; Kudo & Simkin, 2003), international students may encounter difficulties in forming friendship with individuals from around the world during their sojourns. Further, intercultural friendship provides rich

data for understanding intercultural communication because of the complexities in this type of relationship (Sias et al., 2008) and the ongoing construction of individuals' identities that occurs throughout the time of their friendship.

2. *How, if at all, do Saudi international students' gender worldviews and identifications influence their intercultural communication?*

Asking this question may appear unexpected given that I have deliberately sought to eschew those essentialist studies on Saudi men and women that prescribed certain and definite gender roles of Saudi individuals that directly influence their intercultural communication. However, in asking this question, I attempt to bring this essentialist assumption into question and to investigate whether there is an actual, definite, and direct link between Saudi gender worldview and intercultural communication. Therefore, by asking this question, I intend to consider every individual's gender identity and worldview separately rather than as a unified Saudi gender identity and worldview.

3. *What are the other experiences that may motivate or demotivate Saudi international students experience intercultural communication in the UK?*

The aim of this question is investigate the additional intercultural experiences that may motivate or demotivate Saudi international students to engage in intercultural communication encounters in the UK. These experiences may occur out of the students' interactions with their friends or out of their interactions with individuals from the opposite gender. The importance of addressing this question comes from the possibility that there could be some experiences that

may influence the intercultural communication encounters of Saudi international students during their sojourns in the UK.

4. *How, if at all, does the whole experience of being in the UK impact their worldview and their identifications of themselves?*

This question focuses on two main notions: self-identification and worldview. The first part of the question refers to how the study participants may —or may not — change the way they identify themselves (e.g., I am Saudi; I do not feel I am Saudi anymore; I am Muslim; I do not identify myself as Muslim anymore… etc.), or intersect other forms of self-identifications and thus create more than one way for them to identify themselves. The second part of the question seeks to examine any changes related to the components of that self-identification and what it means to be, for example, Saudi, Arab, or Muslim. For instance, some participants may have similar self-identifications such as being Muslims but with different outcomes. They may interpret and perceive the meaning of being Muslim differently (e.g., I am Muslim but I do not believe that the consumption of alcohol is strictly prohibited; I am Muslim and I believe in the strict prohibition on alcohol). Therefore, the second part of the question focuses on the changes that may, if at all, occur to the way the participants perceived and constructed the meanings of their self-identifications.

Although I draw on Dervin's (2013) concept of mixed intersubjectivity to guide my discussion on identity (identification), the concept does not seem to be sufficient to guide the study and answer the research questions. It does not focus on the intercultural interaction itself and, therefore, it needs to be combined with

another theoretical framework that pays more attention to the actual intercultural interaction. Therefore, in the next section, I review a number of intercultural communication theories in order to make a decision on which theory can most fruitfully be combined with the concept of mixed intersubjectivity in terms of guiding the study and answering the research questions.

2.3 Theoretical framework

According to Labaree (2013), every study needs to have a theoretical framework that guides it and connects the researcher to the existing knowledge. Furthermore, theoretical frameworks help researchers to move from simple descriptions to a deeper analysis of the studied phenomena (Labaree, 2013). Since I use Dervin's (2013) mixed intersubjectivity as a lens through which to view the concept of identity (identification), I also require an additional framework that focuses on the actual intercultural interaction. Therefore, in this section I review a number of intercultural communication theories in order to make a decision on which theory will best guide the study when married with the mixed intersubjectivity approach.

2.3.1 Intercultural communication theories

A number of theories and models have been developed with the intention of analysing the experiences of individuals when they are in involved in intercultural communication. Some models focus on the stages that individuals go through to develop their intercultural competence over a period of time (Bennett, 1986; King & Baxter Magolda's, 2005); other models focus on the

components that an individual needs to be interculturally competent (Deardorff, 2006; Howard Hamilton, Richardson, & Shuford, 1998; Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998); others pay attention to the individual's adaptation as the starting point for intercultural competence (Kim, 1988). Some theories pay more attention to the concept of identity than others do (Byram, 1997). Spitzberg and Changnon (2009) provide a useful summary for a number of intercultural communication theories and categorise them in five groups: compositional models, co-orientational models, developmental models, and adaptational models.

In the first group, compositional models such as Howard Hamilton et al.'s Intercultural Competence Model (1998), Deardorff's Intercultural Competence Model (2006) and Ting-Toomey and Kurogi's Facework-based Model of Intercultural Competence (1998) focus on the components, skills, and characteristics that are necessary for successful intercultural communication interactions. Spitzberg and Changnon (2009) provide a useful critique of the compositional models. First of all, these models and their components tend to be abstract. For example, "challenging discriminatory actions" in Howard Hamilton's model (1998, p. 11) represents a more specific and narrower range of actions than engaging in self-reflection. Spitzberg and Changnon (2009) add:

> compositional models and their measures also often mistake what constitutes an internal affective or cognitive factor, as opposed to a behavioral factor (i.e. skill). Thus, engaging in "self-reflection" and "taking multiple perspectives" are arguably internal information-processing activities and do not have obvious referents in the behavioral realm. (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009, p. 11)

This critique also applies to Deardorff's Intercultural Competence Model (2006). She argues "it would be possible for an individual to achieve the external

outcome of behaving and communicating appropriately and effectively in intercultural situations without having fully achieved the internal outcome of a shift in the frame of reference" (Deardorff, 2006, p. 257). The problem with this claim is the assumption that there is little or no obvious relationship between the individual's internal information-processing activities and his or her behaviour. Further, none of these models seems to pay enough attention to the concept of identity, which is an essential element in the current study.

The second group of intercultural communication theories comprises the developmental models, for example, King and Baxter Magolda's Intercultural Maturity Model (2005) and Bennett's Developmental Intercultural Competence Model (1986). In these models, the main assumption is that individuals develop their intercultural competence over time and through ongoing intercultural interaction (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009). Therefore, developmental models tend to identify progression stages of intercultural competence that develop over time toward more competent stages. Spitzberg and Changnon (2009) argue that although developmental models are strong in modelling systematic stages, they are "correspondingly weak in specifying the interpersonal and intercultural competence traits that facilitate or moderate the course of such evolution" (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009, p. 24). In other words, there is not enough emphasis on the complexity of the actual intercultural communication interaction that places individuals in such systematic stages. Similar to compositional models, developmental models do not pay enough attention to the concept of identity.

The third group of intercultural communication theories comprises adaptational models such as Kim's Intercultural Communicative Competence Model (1988). These models focus primarily on the process of adaptation and thus the more adapted the individual is, the more interculturally competent he or she is. Therefore, individuals move from ethnocentric perspectives, which do not pay attention to adaptation, to ethnorelative perspectives that consider adaptation as core to intercultural communication competence. Further, adaptation is a mutual process and required by both interlocutors. However, these models have been critiqued by Spitzberg (1993) who questions adaptation as the criterion of intercultural competence. Moreover, since adaptation is developmental in the adaptational models, these models need to explain the types of mutual adaptation that are necessary at various stages of development (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009). Although Kim (2009) pays more attention to the concept of identity in her proposed intercultural identity model (Kim, 2001, 2005, 2009) than is found in other models, she does not pay enough attention to the actual intercultural interaction. She assumes that once an individual achieves an intercultural identity he or she will become interculturally competent.

The fourth group of intercultural communication models that I attempt to review is the causal path models, for example, Arasarathnam's Model of Intercultural Competence (2006). In these models, intercultural competence is represented as a theoretical, linear system, which makes intercultural competence easy to test empirically (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009). Further, "Causal path models tend to conceive variables at a downstream location, which successively influence and are influenced by moderating or mediating variables that in turn influence

upstream variables" (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009, p. 29). For example, in Arasarathnam's (2008) model, cultural empathy facilitates intercultural competence directly and it also influences interaction involvement and global attitudes indirectly. At the same time, global attitudes are influenced by intercultural experiences. These variables influence motivation to interact, which as a result, influences intercultural competence. Spitzberg and Changnon (2009) point out that the advantage of causal paths models is that they are relatively easy to adapt to research purposes. Further, they provide easy explanations for the theory because of their linear system. However, these advantages may turn into a disadvantage since these models use too many feedback loops and too many arrows, which "reduce their value as guides to explicit theory testing through hypothesis verification of falsification" (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009, p. 33). Therefore, in the case of causal path models the advantage of being easy to comprehend may turn into a disadvantage in that they are more applicable for assessing intercultural communication than for guiding a research study. Further, like many other models, causal paths models do not pay enough attention to the identity concept.

The final group of intercultural communication theories considered by Spitzberg and Changnon (2009) encompasses coorientational models such as Fantini's Intercultural Interlocutor Competence Model (1995) and Byram's Intercultural Competence Model (1997). Spitzberg and Changnon (2009) define these models as follows:

> *Co-orientation* is a term that summarizes several cognate concepts relevant to comprehension outcomes of interactional processes,

> including understanding, overlapping perspectives, accuracy, directness, and clarity. (p. 15)

In these models, co-orientation is the central focus of intercultural competence. Therefore, mutual understanding between interlocutors and creating some shared level of worldviews are what initiates intercultural competence. This mutual understanding develops through intercultural interactions and it is crucial for intercultural competence (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009).

Rathje (2007), however, disagrees with this view and points out that the emphasis on mutual understanding oversimplifies the dialectics of cultures because much of the competent interaction depends on uncertainty, ambiguity, and misunderstanding that are "vital interactional resources for the ongoing maintenance of any relationships, perhaps especially intercultural relationships" (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009, p. 20). Therefore, individuals need to manage and balance such ambiguity and misunderstanding in order to maintain intercultural relationships. In response to Rathje's (2007) critique, Spitzberg and Changnon (2009) argue that co-orientation does not necessarily mean that individuals share common beliefs and values but that they produce common identities "without overly conforming the interactants to any particular hegemonic identity" (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009, p. 20). This notion of producing identities means that individuals go through an ongoing process of identity negotiation that influences and is influenced by their intercultural communication encounters (Byram, 1997, 2003). This notion is similar to the concept of mixed intersubjectivity in its way of looking at identity. Therefore, when individuals start negotiating their identities, they manage to mediate

between different intercultural communication situations, or they become "intercultural speakers" as Byram (1997, p. 38) puts it. This link between ongoing identity negotiation (identification*)* and the actual intercultural communication is what makes Byram's Intercultural Communication Competence Model a more applicable guide for this study than others models, as I show in the next section.

2.3.2 Byram's (1997) intercultural competence model

In his Intercultural Communication Competence Model (ICC), Byram (1997) introduces five *savoirs* as the components of his model and calls them "factors in intercultural communication" (Byram, 1997, p. 34).*Attitudes (savoir être)* form Byram's first factor. When writing about this factor, he says:

> They need to be attitudes of curiosity and openness, of readiness to suspend disbelief and judgement with respect to others' meanings, beliefs and behaviours. There also needs to be a willingness to suspend belief in one's own meanings and behaviours, and to analyse them from the viewpoint of the others with whom one is engaging. (1997, p. 34)

The curiosity and openness mentioned here also involve a "willingness to seek out or take up opportunities to engage with otherness in a relationship of equality…" (Byram, 1997, p. 50). Byram (1997) explains that individuals who seek to try new, unfamiliar experiences rather than familiar ones demonstrate this attitude. This attitude can be seen when individuals are interested in and curious to find out about other individuals from different backgrounds and to engage with them in their daily life. However, Byram makes an important distinction between engaging in unfamiliar situations just because they are exotic and seem ''interesting'' on the one hand, and engaging in unfamiliar

situations for a more real and deeper intercultural engagement. The first is what Byram (1997) calls the ''tourist approach'' when individuals experience unfamiliar contexts but at the same time distance themselves from the Other. On the other hand, the latter refers to the individual's intercultural engagement with the Other and having the "readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief about one's own" (Byram, 1997, p. 50). This suspension of one's own belief would result in relativising one's self and valuing others. The relationship between the attitudes factor and the other factors in the model is one of interdependence, as I shall show in the discussion on the other factors in the model.

The second factor in Byram's ICC model is *Knowledge (savoirs).* There are two categories of knowledge: knowledge about one's own culture and other individuals' cultures, and knowledge of the process of interactions at both the societal and individual level. The first knowledge is acquired through both primary and secondary socialisation and, therefore, it is always present to some degree in the interaction. However, the first category is not as fundamental for successful interaction as the second category. Byram (1997, p. 36) points out:

> If an individual knows about the ways in which their social identities have been acquired, how they are a prism through which other members of their group are perceived, and how they in turn perceive their interlocutors from another group, that awareness provides a basis for successful interaction.

As indicated earlier, the attitudes *(savoir être)* factor has an interdependent relationship with the other factors. Therefore, when it comes to the relationship between attitudes *(savoir être)* and *knowledge (savoirs),* it is easier for individuals to relativise their own meanings, behaviours, and beliefs when they

compare them to those of others. Further, Byram states that despite the importance of "knowledge *(savoirs),* it is not sufficient and thus it needs to be linked to the third factor in his ICC model, i.e., "*skills of interpreting and relating" (savoir comprendre).*

The third factor "*skills of interpreting and relating" (savoir comprendre)* can be defined as "The ability to interpret a document from one country for someone from another, or to identify relationships between documents from different countries, [it] is therefore dependent on knowledge of one's own and other environment" (Byram, 1997, p. 37). This factor is based on existing knowledge and, therefore, individuals try to discover dysfunctions, misunderstandings, and also similarities and common ground between their own cultures and those of others. An example of this type of skill may be interfaith dialogues where a group of different thinkers from different religions may discuss the similarities between their religions as well as the differences. In this case, their discussions have to draw upon existing knowledge of their own religions as well as those of others. This discussion does not have to involve interactions with other interlocutors, as it can also be done through documents, for example, writing an article about Christianity and Islam. Therefore, the individual is not restricted by limited time to respond. This element is what distinguishes this factor from the fourth factor in the ICC model, "*Skills of discovery and interaction" (savoir apprendre/faire).*

In the fourth factor, "*Skills of discovery and interaction" (savoir apprendre/faire),* the individual may be calling upon this skill in his or her own time or during social interaction.

> The skill of discovery comes into play where the individual has no, or only partial existing knowledge framework. It is the skill of building up specific knowledge as well as an understanding of the beliefs, meanings and behaviours which are inherent in particular phenomena, whether documents or interactions. (Byram, 1997, p. 37)

This skill is about discovering new phenomena and eliciting their meanings in a foreign environment. It is harder to employ this skill in environments that have least in common with the individual's own environment. However, the social media may have facilitated the communication between individuals and, therefore, the individual would be able to identify some phenomena, as Byram (1997) explains. Further, the relationship between attitudes *(savoirs)* and skills of discovery and interaction *(savoir apprendre/faire)* is that the more the individual has attitudes of openness and discovery, the easier it is for her or him to utilise the skills of discovery and interaction. Byram (1997, p. 38) summarises these skills and points out:

> The skill of interaction is above all the ability to manage these constraints in particular circumstances with specific interlocutors. The individual needs to draw upon their existing knowledge, have attitudes which sustain sensitivity to others with sometimes radically different origins and identities, and operate the skills of discovery and interpretation. In particular, the individual needs to manage dysfunctions which arise in the course of interaction, drawing upon existing knowledge and skills.

The model includes a fifth factor, "*Critical cultural awareness" (savoir s'engager).* Byram (1997, p. 53) defines this factor as "An ability to evaluate critically and on the basis of explicit criteria perspectives, practices and products in one's own

and other cultures and countries". This factor is linked to educational purposes in which students, for example, are encouraged to establish explicit and consistent judgements about their own environments and those of others. Further, they are also encouraged to establish common criteria for evaluating events and documents, and, when there are too many differences, they are able to negotiate these difference to reach agreement and manage conflicts. The relationship between Byram's critical cultural awareness *(savoir s'engager)* and attitudes *(savoirs)* relates to the idea that when an individual relativises his or her own meanings, behaviours, and values as well as those of others, he or she needs to reflect and critically challenge the ways these meanings and values have been formed and experienced.

All five of the factors in Byram's (1997) ICC model constitute the notion of being an "intercultural speaker" when they are possessed by an individual.

> [Individuals] may also be called upon not only to establish a relationship between their own social identities and those of their interlocutors, but also to act as mediator between people of different origins and identities. It is this function of establishing relationships, managing dysfunctions and mediating which distinguishes an 'intercultural speaker', and makes them different from a native speaker. (Byram, 1997, p. 38)

Byram and his colleagues (Byram, 1997; Byram, 2003; Byram, Nichols & Stevens, 2001) use the intercultural speaker concept to refer to individuals who can mediate between different cultures, and thus their identities are flexible. Therefore, the intercultural speaker is different from being bicultural in the sense that he or she may not entirely assimilate to a new 'culture'. Instead, the intercultural speaker offers explanations for cultural differences or conflicting

perspectives from his or her "third place perspective" (Byram, 2012b, p. 87).

Byram's concept of the "intercultural speaker" makes his ICC model (1997) more useful than other models to guide this study for two main reasons. First, it focuses on the actual intercultural interaction. Its five factors for intercultural competence pay high attention to the individual's openness and curiosity, knowledge, and skills, which are present in any intercultural interaction (Byram, 1997). Further, these factors are somehow interdependent and overlap with each other, which allows me as a researcher to look at the intercultural interaction as a whole experience that involves all of these factors, even though an individual may acquire these factors only in varying degrees only.

The second reason for choosing Byram's (1997) ICC model is related to the notion that it recognises identity as something fluid and flexible. The model presents the idea of an intercultural speaker who can mediate between different cultures and identities and interact in a space between cultures rather than conforming and assimilating to them. In this way the model has a similar concept of identity to that found in the mixed intersubjectivity approach, but with one major difference. As with mixed intersubjectivity, Byram (1997) emphasises the individuality of each interaction, and, therefore, he raises the question of whether there is a difference between intercultural and intracultural communication. However, he argues from a social psychological perspective influenced by Tajfel (1981) that individuals attribute characteristics and identities to each other and that one of the initial attributions is usually that of national identity along with other identities such as gender, age, social class, etc.

Therefore, Byram (1997) seems to argue that an individual may hold a number of identities –or multiple entities as Dervin (2013) puts it– about himself or herself, and that one of these identities is given more dominance depending on the context of the interaction.

> I conclude therefore that though sociologically speaking there is no difference in principle between inter- and intra-cultural communication, for the FL teacher the psychological analysis suggests that the difference is significant. The skills, attitudes and knowledge … are related to those involved in intra-cultural communication but are sufficiently different to warrant specific attention. (Byram, 1997, p. 41)

The discussion above would seem to point to two conclusions regarding Byram's (1997) analysis on identity. First, he seems to view identity as a "social identity" i.e., a group identity in which individuals are identified as members of a group. Second, Byram (1997) seems to view identity as being made up of a number of entities and that, although national identity is one of the initial identities of individuals, it is not the only one. Here again there seems to be some similarity with the transnational paradigm or the "*Façade identity",* as Dervin (2013) calls it:

> Though critical of MN [Methodological Nationalism], it became clear in our deconstruction of the concepts that even if they [Transnational Paradigm and Façade identity] seem to move beyond Nationalism, they still remain within static boundary-ful entities which pluralise the self and the other but still limit them to countable and even programmable identities. Façade Identity has not done enough to allow 'fluidity' in the expression, construction and enactment of identities to emerge fully. (Dervin, 2013, p. 20)

On the other hand, Dervin's (2013) mixed intersubjectivity concept views identity as a fluid notion, ever-changing and constructed by the individual himself or herself independently. For example, rather than using terms such as "the national identity of Saudi people" which is a group identity, the term

becomes “an identity of a self-identified Saudi individual”. This identity/self-identification is constructed by the individual who happened to hold Saudi citizenship and yet the individual may view his or her identity differently from that of other Saudi citizens, or quite possibly, may not view herself or himself as a Saudi citizen at all. Using the same example, this self-identified Saudi individual does not necessarily hold other multiple identities, such as Arab or Muslim, that come as a “package” in the stereotype of a Saudi citizen. Rather, he or she constructs an identity that is fluid, flexible, and ever-changing (Dervin, 2013).

For this reason, when I use Byram’s (1997) ICC model and its five factors to guide this study, I also view identity as a fluid concept that is constructed by the individual independently rather than by the group. Thus, in light of the discussion above, Byram’s ICC model (1997), complemented by Dervin’s (2013) mixed intersubjectivity approach, seems to be the most suitable model to guide this study.

Nevertheless, Byram’s intercultural competence model has been critiqued in various ways. First of all, Belz (2007) argues that Byram’s (1997) model used the words “culture” and “country” or “nation” synonymously, and that doing so ignores the internal diversity of some societies and thus oversimplifies their complexity. This critique would also apply when speaking about Saudi Arabia that has a number of diverse and heterogeneous societies, such as Shia and the cosmopolitan regions in Hijaz and Hasa, as discussed earlier in this chapter. In response, Byram and Doyé (1999) point out that there is a need for simplification for pedagogical purposes but without neglecting the complexity of

phenomena. Further, Byram (1997, p. 54-55) clarifies why he uses the term "country" in his model and points out:

> For the sake of clarity, I shall refer throughout to 'countries' when discussing inter-lingual and inter-cultural communication … I do not wish to imply by this that countries and nation-states are the inevitable entities of linguistic and cultural allegiance, but they are currently dominant and are the basis on which education systems are usually organised.

Therefore, because I do not intend to use the model for pedagogical purposes but as a guide for the study, I intend to avoid any use of terms such as "countries" to refer to intercultural communication. This decision also includes avoiding usage of the term "culture" that is mentioned in the model, unless I explain that I am using it to serve a specific purpose. As pointed out in the first chapter, I follow Byram's (1997) argument and try to avoid using the word 'culture' and substitute it with terms such as beliefs, meanings and behaviours.

The second critique of Byram's (1997) ICC model is raised by Kramsch (2009). From a poststructural point of view, she suggests that the five *savoirs* are presented as discrete elements and separable from one another because doing so facilitates assessment. Kramsch's (2009) main point is related to assessing intercultural competence via linguistic competence since the former cannot be tested with structuralist tools and should, therefore, be seen as the 'educational horizon' for the learner's achievement. She adds: "We should then measure what can legitimately be measured and refuse to measure the rest, even though it is essential that we teach it" (Kramsch, 2009, p. 119). Since I do not attempt to use Byram's (1997) ICC for any assessment purposes, I view the model from a poststructural perspective and I, therefore, intend to use the model as a guide for

study. As a result, I do not view the five factors as separable or independent from one another, but view them as a whole since they are present in most intercultural interactions (Byram, 1997).

The third criticism that Byram's (1997) ICC model received came from Risager (2007). She points out that:

> Generally speaking, it can be said that Byram (1997) keeps a low profile with regard to the relationship between language and culture. There is no hypothesis of the inseparability of the two, nor any analysis of what the relationship between them might be. Language and culture are treated as two separate entities – and here Byram's approach is completely different from that of Kramsch, as Kramsch underlines that linguistic practice is cultural in itself. (Risager, 2007, p. 121)

Risager (2006) argues that Byram (1997) views 'intercultural competence' separately from 'communicative competence', which is related to language teaching. Therefore, he treats the concepts of language and culture as two separate things without providing any hypothesis of the relationship between the two in the model. However, more recently, Byram (2012a) pays more attention to both concepts and deals with language awareness and intercultural competence. He concludes that "in the best cases, language and culture teaching produces, through the development of linguistic and intercultural competence, alternative conceptualisations of the world and contributes to the education/*Bildung* of the individual in society" (Byram, 2012a, p. 5). Byram (2008) also develops the idea that intercultural citizenship and involvement in the world could be taught through language teaching. Therefore, Byram (2008, 2012) did deal with the issue of the separation of both language and culture in his model at a later stage. Consequently, I intend to pay attention to language and its link to culture. For instance, the participants in this study may produce or

perceive terms (e.g., hijab, which is a complex term in itself) differently from the ways in which a non-Saudi individual may perceive that term. In summary, Byram's (1997) ICC has been critiqued for being essentialist in the way the model uses the term "culture" as a fixed object and then using the term "country" interchangeably with it, in addition to being criticised for being structuralist in the way it uses the five savoirs as separable elements.

In this section, I provided an overview of the most common theories on intercultural communication along with their main concepts and critiques. Then, I discussed Byram's (1997) ICC model, its components, concepts, and critiques and attempted to show why it is the most applicable framework to guide this study. Having reviewed the model and critiques of it, I have decided to use the model but with the proviso that identity is ever-changing and constructed by the individual himself or herself rather than seeing identity as a whole group's identity which reflects the way Byram's model views it. In the next chapter, the focus will be on the methodology that I used to conduct this study.

2.4 Summary for Chapter 2

This chapter began by critiquing the concept of the 'cultural identity' of a group of people and argued that such a concept seems essentialist since it combines two highly problematic terms: *culture* and *identity*. Then, I reviewed the essentialist approaches that considered the term 'cultural identity' and how it is necessary to use a different non-essentialist approach that gives the term more complexity, for example, mixed intersubjectivity that views identity as a "discursive phenomenon and by no means a given" (Dervin, 2013, p. 16). Next, I

viewed the studies on Saudi individuals and how the majority of those studies followed these essentialist approaches. I argued for deeper understanding when studying Saudi individuals' identities which are meant to influence their intercultural communication and a move away from essentialist descriptions. In the second part of this chapter I viewed the studies that have been conducted on Saudi international students and showed their limitations in terms of this study. Finally, I reviewed some intercultural communication models and showed how Byram's (1997) ICC model alongside Dervin's (2013) mixed intersubjectivity provide a useful theoretical foundation for guiding this study.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

In this chapter, I focus on the research methodology of this thesis, the theoretical and methodological frameworks I used to conduct this study, and the methods used for collecting the data. I begin by revisiting the purpose of this study; I then focus on phenomenology as the theoretical framework for this thesis; and, thereafter, provide the rationale for choosing a qualitative approach. Next, I discuss ethnography as the methodological framework that guides the research methods for collecting the data. In the section that follows, I present the pilot study that I carried out prior to conducting the main interviews. Finally, this chapter focuses on the research methods that I used for this study, including the data analysis and data collection methods, participants, and building trust with them. The final focus of the chapter is on issues related to the transferability, ethics, and reflexivity of this study.

3.1 Purpose of the study

As mentioned previously, according to the UK Council for International Students Affairs (UKCISA), the number of Saudi international students studying in the UK exceeded 9,000 in the year 2013-2014 (UKCISA, 2015). The majority of these students are sponsored by the KASP and they enroll in both undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. Although the main purpose of their coming to the UK is to get a degree, the aim of engaging in a cultural exchange also underpins the sponsoring of Saudi international students, since intercultural contact with other

students — whether British home students or international students — becomes inevitable. As outlined in chapter two, there is little literature about Saudi international students concerning their intercultural communication experiences abroad. Most of the studies that focused on Saudi international students either used quantitative studies or focused on other aspects such as financial or academic issues. Some of the more recent studies that did follow qualitative approaches provided either essentialist or neo-essentialist (Holliday, 2011) explanations that seem to have simplified Saudi students' intercultural communication experiences abroad. Therefore, this research attempts to enrich such simplistic explanations with a more complex and thorough understanding that shows the inconsistent identifications of Saudi international students and their diverse intercultural experiences.

In order to review the focus of this study, I highlight once again the research questions that were discussed in detail in both chapter one and chapter two.

1- How do Saudi international students experience friendship in the UK?
2- How, if at all, do Saudi international students' gender worldviews and identifications influence their intercultural communication with individuals from the opposite gender?
3- What are the experiences that may motivate or demotivate Saudi international students to experience intercultural communication in the UK?
4- How, if at all, does the whole experience of being in the UK impact Saudi students' worldviews and their identifications?

The methods used to collect and interpret the data, and the conclusions I reached in answering these research questions, are based on epistemological foundations and guided by my theoretical framework. This theoretical framework is based on the philosophy of phenomenology which I discuss in the next section.

3.2 Phenomenology

The focus of phenomenology is on the lived experiences of individuals and how they perceive and shape realities (Lichtman, 2010b; van Maanen, 1997). It has its roots in the early work of philosophers such as Husserl, Heidegger, and others (Lichtman, 2010b; Glendinning, 2007; Cerbone, 2006). In this section, I start with a preview of phenomenology and its roots in the work of Husserl and Heidegger. Then, I explain why I chose to use phenomenology as a theoretical framework for my research and its usefulness in enabling me to answer the research questions.

3.2.1 Husserl's phenomenology

Husserl has been referred to as the father of phenomenology (Cohen, 1987; Koch, 1996; Polkinghorne, 1983; Scruton, 1995). In his antinaturalism approach, Husserl criticised the use of natural scientific methods to explain the behaviours of individuals because they "are not simply reacting automatically to external stimuli, but rather are responding to their own perception of what these stimuli mean" (Laverty, 2003, p. 4). In Husserl's opinion, therefore, it is not possible as in the case of the natural sciences to separate out the world — as a different isolated reality — from either the individuals who 'live' in this world or from their perceptions of it (Valle, King, & Halling, 1989). In other words, the meanings of

one's world are made according to how one lives it (Polkinghorne, 1983). As Laverty (2003) puts it:

> Phenomenology is essentially the study of lived experience or the life world … The 'life world' is understood as what we experience pre-reflectively, without resorting to categorization or conceptualization, and quite often includes what is taken for granted or those things that are common sense … The study of these phenomena intends to return and re-examine these taken for granted experiences and perhaps uncover new and/or forgotten meanings. (Laverty, 2003, p. 4)

In this case, phenomenology assumes that, in order to avoid their biased beliefs about a given phenomenon and so see it clearly, individuals need to 'bracket' (Laverty, 2003) and isolate themselves from the outside world. Thus unlike Cartesian Dualism that sees reality as something that exists per se in the world (Jones, 1975; Koch, 1995), Husserl's phenomenology assumes that individuals create meanings about phenomena through their consciousness in a dialogue that is coconstituted between the individuals and the world (Valle et al., 1989). In this case, for Husserl, there are multiple, constructed realities rather than one, depending on how individuals interact with the world (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

3.2.2 Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology

Unlike Husserl's stance of understanding that individuals form their realities through their conscious interaction with the world, Heidegger argues that individuals cannot be separated from the past experiences and backgrounds that form their current realities of the world (Koch, 1995); "Historicality, a person's history or background, includes what a culture gives a person from birth and is handed down, presenting ways of understanding the world" (Laverty, 2003, p. 8). However, Heidegger also pointed out that individuals' past experiences and

histories "cannot be made completely explicit" (Laverty, 2003, p. 8). Rather, as Husserl noted, there is an interaction between individuals and their lived experiences. In this interaction, they try to understand the world and they do not accept everything passively i.e., take it for granted. Heidegger makes a similar argument, but in his view the previous backgrounds and histories of the individuals cannot be ''bracketed out'' (Laverty, 2003, p. 6). Therefore, there is an ongoing interaction between the past experiences and the historical backgrounds of individuals which forms their understandings of realities (Munhall, 1989). Forming these realities depends on the individuals' interpretations for their activities, how they view such activities as texts, and then give meanings to them (Kvale, 1996; Laverty, 2003).

> This interpretive process is achieved through a hermeneutic circle which moves from the parts of experience, to the whole of experience and back and forth again and again to increase the depth of engagement with and the understanding of texts. (Annells, 1996; Polkinghorne, 1983, as cited in Laverty, 2003, p. 9)

Therefore, the difference between Husserl's and Heidegger's phenomenology is that the former focuses on individuals' understanding of the world without any influence of their biases. The latter, on the other hand, argues that individuals' backgrounds and histories cannot be isolated from their understanding of the world around them, although these backgrounds and histories do not completely influence the individual's understandings. Therefore, unlike natural scientific researchers, phenomenologists do not claim to know the meanings that individuals they are studying ascribe to those meanings (Douglas, 1976). Rather, they argue that the studied individuals' lived experiences are what matter and need to be understood (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Geertz, 1973), and thus that

phenomenology starts with ''silence'' (Psathas, 1973, p. 13). This silence comes from the principle in phenomenology that it is the unique individual who creates and perceives meanings and realities, and thus, meanings and realities cannot be separated from the individual (Jones, 1975; Koch, 1995). Blumer (1980), therefore, argues that phenomenology does not adopt an idealism in which reality does not exist, but rather posits that each individual's reality is constructed and perceived differently (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992) since the relationship between this reality and individual's perceptions is not passive but active (Holstein & Gubrium, 2005). In other words, individuals participate actively in shaping their realities.

3.2.3 Phenomenology as a theoretical framework for my research

Since my research attempts to grasp the lived intercultural experiences of Saudi students in the UK, phenomenology in general, despite the different phenomenologies of Husserl and Heidegger, seems to offer an appropriate framework. In Husserl's phenomenology, individuals do not react automatically to external stimuli; rather, they respond according to what these stimuli mean to them (Laverty, 2003). As already mentioned, it is not possible to separate off the world as a different and isolated reality without any reference to the individuals of this world and how they perceive it (Valle et al., 1989). Furthermore, in terms of the individuals' perceptions, making sense of the world is made in accordance with how they live it (Polkinghorne, 1983).

It is important to point out that my use phenomenology is not a substitution for the theories of Byram (1997) and Dervin (2013). Rather, I use phenomenology

as an overarching theoretical framework that guides the process of analysing the data, while the theories of Byram (1997) and Dervin (2013) are more specific to comment on the participants' intercultural communication experiences in this study.

Laverty's (2003) theoretical understanding of phenomenology enables me to explore the uniquely individual intercultural experiences of Saudi international students. It is the diversity, and thus the complexity, of both the lived experiences and the Saudi individuals who live them which makes phenomenology applicable for the purpose of this research. Further, since I also attempt to explore how Saudi students' identifications are impacted as a result of their intercultural experiences, phenomenology seems to be applicable because it argues that realities and individuals cannot be separated from each other (Jones, 1975; Koch, 1995) and that thus multiple individually subjectively understood realities could exist rather than one reality (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Wheatley (2006, p. 29) points out:

> There is no objective reality; the environment we experience does not exist "out there". It is cocreated through our acts of observation, what we choose to notice and worry about. If we truly embraced this sensibility in our organizational life, we would no longer waste time arguing about the "objective" features of the environment. Conflicts about what's true and false would disappear in the exploration of multiple perceptions.

For this reason, I have decided to use a research methodology that embraces the view that lived reality results from the interactive and dynamic relationship between individuals and their experiences and that there is an absence of an absolute and objective reality. I decided to use a qualitative approach for two

reasons. First, because the aim of the study is to explore how the research participants experience their intercultural communication experiences and how these experiences impact their identifications as a result, and secondly, because the study involves a high degree of interactive, diverse, and subjective rather than objective experiences. I discuss the choice of a qualitative approach further in the next section.

3.2.4 Qualitative research

There are three reasons for choosing a qualitative approach in this study. First of all, qualitative research aligns with the principle of phenomenology in that individuals —both the researcher and the studied group— cannot be separated from the studied experiences and context, and thus it focuses on "the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 9).

The second reason for using a qualitative approach in this research is related to the "emic" strategies that show the complex understandings of individuals. Kottak (2008, p. 42-43) points out:

> An emic strategy investigates how natives think. How do they perceive and categorize the world? What are their shared rules for behavior and thought? What has meaning for them? How do they imagine and explain things? The anthropologist seeks the "native view-point" and relies on the culture bearers— the actors in a culture— to determine whether something they do, say, or think is significant.

Since the focus of qualitative research is on the studied participants' everyday life (Becker, 1996), the participants see the world as dynamic and changing and, therefore, their experiences reflect this dynamism.

The third reason for choosing a qualitative approach for this research is related to what Geertz (1973) refers to as "thick description" (p. 3). He argues that the difference between "thin description" and thick description is that the former provides a description of acts or events without giving any meanings to them. On the other hand, thick description ascribes meanings to such acts and how and why they are happening. Therefore, Geertz (1973) argues that meanings are perceived, produced, and interpreted, and so meet the objective of ethnography. Thus, since meanings are produced by the studied participants and interpreted by the researcher, a qualitative ethnographic approach is what is needed to achieve the purpose of this research. The following section will discuss ethnography as a methodology for this thesis.

3.2.5 Ethnography as methodological framework

Since this research attempts to explore the lived intercultural experiences of Saudi students in the UK, I argued above that a qualitative phenomenological and ethnographic approach is an appropriate method through which to achieve this goal. Ethnography has been widely employed in educational research since the 1980s (Lichtman, 2010a). As Hammersley (1998) points out, there are several definitions of ethnography. Fetterman (1998), for example, defines it as:

> The art and science of describing a group or culture … the task is much like the one taken on by an investigative reporter, who interviews relevant people, reviews records, weighs the credibility of one person's opinions against another's … and writes the story for a concerned public and for professional colleagues. (p. 1)

The features of ethnography as a methodology also provide a good fit with my research in three specific ways. First, as Atkinson and Hammersley (2007) state:

> People's actions and accounts are studied in everyday contexts, rather than under conditions created by the researcher — such as experimental setups or in highly structured interview situations. In other words, research takes place 'in the field'. (p. 3)

My research into the experiences of Saudi students was conducted in the field; in addition, as a Saudi international student, I too was a part of the field in that I shared the participants' everyday context and so was also involved in the field under investigation. Secondly, as Atkinson and Hammersley (2007) go on to say:

> Data are gathered from a range of sources, including documentary evidence of various kinds, but participant observation and/or relatively informal conversations are usually the main ones. (p. 3).

Although I did not use observation as a method of collecting the data, the participants' informal stories that they shared with me during the interview were important sources for data, even if these stories had not initially been part of the interview protocols. Further, some informal observations of the participants' appearances gave me some hints about the changes that they had introduced. For example, I noted that some female participants were wearing the headscarf (hijab) when I first interviewed them and how their ways of wearing it had changed by the time of the second interview. I did not use these informal observations to make judgements about the participants but as clues that helped me to understand their daily life experiences.

Thirdly,

> Data collection is, for the most part, relatively 'unstructured', in two senses. First, it does not involve following through a fixed and detailed research design specified at the start. Second, 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. (Atkinson & Hammersley, 2007, p. 3).

I used semistructured interviews (which will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter) because I did not intend to follow a fixed research design into which the data would be fitted. Rather, I intended to encourage the participants to speak about their experiences. Here my aim was to guide rather than control what stories they wanted to speak about. The main issue for me in terms of conducting the interviews is related to the power distance between the researcher and the studied group. As Kvale & Brinkmann (2009, p. 33) point out:

> … we should not regard a research interview as a completely and open and free dialogue between egalitarian partners…. The research interview is a specific professional conversation with a clear power asymmetry between the researcher and the subject.

I was aware of this power asymmetry between the studied participants and myself as a researcher. Therefore, building a relationship with them was one of my priorities, as I explain in more detail later in the chapter.

The fourth feature of ethnography that Atkinson and Hammersley (2007) highlight is that "The focus is usually on a few cases, generally fairly small-scale, perhaps a single setting or group of people. This is to facilitate in-depth study." (p. 3). I attempted to focus my research on a small number of participants in order to deepen the understanding of the participants' daily lived experiences. That research goal would have been difficult to achieve with a larger group of participants.

The fifth salient feature of ethnography is that:

> 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, and 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. (Atkinson & Hammersley, 2007, p. 3)

Analysing the data involved interpretations on my part as a researcher rather than any attempt to provide quantifications or statistics. However, my interpretations are highly subjective and it is this subjectivity which brings ethnography under criticism, as I discuss below in relation to its 'scientificity' (Hammersley, 1998).

The first critique of ethnography is the same one which is levelled at qualitative research in general, i.e., that ethnography does not meet the criteria of science. This lack of scientific rigour arises because approximation words such as 'often' or 'frequently' rather than precise numbers are usually used in ethnography. However, Hammersley (1998) argues that ethnography does not reject numbers and in many studies numbers have been used. Nevertheless, using numbers in ethnography is not always recommended due to the fact that numbers may lead to overprecision. According to Hammersley, (1998), "by insisting on precise quantitative measures we may produce figures that are more precise than we can justify given the nature of the data available, so the results are misleading" (p. 10).

Another critique of ethnography relates to its subjectivity and that the results, therefore, depend on the researcher's interpretations. Nonetheless, Hammersley (1998) refutes such claims when he argues that subjectivity can be found in

quantitative methods too. It happens because participants' responses to strict structures can be interpreted differently by different researchers. For instance, "the same question asked by an alternative interviewer at the same point in an interview may mean different things to different people if they have different perspectives" (Hammersley, 1998, p. 11). A further criticism of ethnography's not being scientific is that studying small groups makes it difficult for researchers to generalise the findings and the results. However, Hammersley also points out that ethnography provides deeper understanding at the expense of breadth, unlike quantitative research.

Ethnography has also, however, been criticised for being too scientific. Habermas 1987 (as cited in Hammersley, 1998) argues that ethnography has inherited what he called ''instrumental control'' (Hammersley, 1998, p. 15) from quantitative research. He points out that while instrumental control is appropriate in physical research, it is not appropriate when it comes to studying human behaviour. His argument suggests that ethnography describes things as they are without interference on the part of the researcher. However, this does not seem to be the case because ethnographers interpret and make judgements about the results and the findings that they have (Geertz, 1973). Taking Laverty's (2003) framework for understanding Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology, the individuals — whether the researcher or the studied individuals — and their histories and experiences influence the understanding of reality. Therefore, while ethnography is not about producing value-free realities, there is involvement from both the researcher and the studied individuals.

Graham 1983 (as cited in Hammersley, 1998) presents another argument which is that there is a power relationship involved in ethnography just as there is in quantitative research. For instance, when teachers, who are in higher positions than their students, study their student groups, a form of power is being imposed on the students by the teacher. Moreover, when some researchers interview participants in their native languages, and then report their findings in English, the participants may be willing to read the findings but may be unable to if they do not have the same English level as the researcher. This type of disparity increases the power distance between the researched and the researcher. Furthermore, even when there is an equal power balance between both the researcher and the studied group, eventually the researcher decides how he or she is going to report the results and the findings, which yet again gives the researcher another form of power.

One of the key issues in ethnography is the relationship between the researcher and the studied group and here too the issue of power distance plays an important part. The researcher has to be close enough to the studied group so they can contribute to the study safely and in a comfortable way. Ensuring participants feel safe and comfortable is one of the most crucial issues in research ethics (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004). When it comes to sharing ethnographic research findings and results, even a study which has been written up in English can be reported back to participants who do not understand English by writing the report in both English and their native language, in order to give the studied group access to the results. In this study, I asked the participants to check their answers in order to avoid any misunderstandings that

might have occurred on my part as a researcher. This technique is called member checking as it "provides participants with the opportunity to react to the findings and interpretations that emerged as a result of his or her participation" (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2006, p. 99) and also helps the researcher to verify the data (Talburt, 2004). However, I also understood that asking the participants to check the written analysis cannot be that simple. Therefore, I attempted to discuss my understandings of their findings during the interviews, as I discuss in more details in sections 3.4.8.2 and 3.4.9.

Since uncovering meanings is the main focus of phenomenological studies, "the participants' ability to authenticate the findings is the primary means for ensuring that the researcher understood and deepened the meaning of the experiences that represented the participants" (Jones et al., 2006, p. 99). Though there is no perfect solution that can eliminate the power distance between researchers and their studied groups, researchers can work on minimising that power distance as much as they can by maintaining a good relationship that is built on shared trust with their studied groups. Kvale (2006, p. 482) states:

> Creating trust through a personal relationship… serves as a means to efficiently obtain a disclosure of the interview subjects' world. The interviewer may, with a charming, gentle, and client-centered manner, create personal encounter where the subjects unveil their private worlds.

In section 3.3.1, I discuss how I built trust and a relationship with the participants.

Despite the drawbacks of ethnography and the criticisms it has received, it seems to offer the most useful way to achieve the purpose of this study, which is

to provide insights into the intercultural experience of Saudi students in the UK. Further, ethnography has a further dimension known as "native ethnography" (Wang, 2010, p. 109), a dimension which seemed to be advantageous when I analysed the data and wrote up the findings, given that I am a Saudi researcher studying Saudi participants.

3.2.5.1 Native ethnography

Traditional ethnographic studies are conducted by researchers who acquire new roles and "study new groups in unfamiliar settings" (Wang, 2010, p. 108; see also Brewer, 2000). In this study, I as a researcher share some similarities with the participants themselves, i.e., I too am a Saudi Arabian international student studying in the UK, and therefore, am familiar with the both group and the setting of the study, i.e., a UK university. This type of research falls into the category of native ethnography where natives study other natives (Wang, 2010). In this case, native researchers are more advantaged when conducting the research than nonnative ethnographers because they are familiar with the group, and the language, and the shared experiences may ease the communication between the researcher and the group.

Furthermore, although Kraidy (2002) argues that this familiarity enables native ethnographers to switch between both the cultural identifications of the studied group members and the host culture where they are studied, I do not view the participants' identifications and where they are residing as two separate cultures that I can switch between. Rather, my own experience of being a Saudi international student at a UK university that has contributed in shaping my ever-

changing self-identification may enable me to better understand the studied participants' experiences in that same context.

3.3 Pilot study

Kezar (2000) points out that pilot studies provide real world experiences with the issue studied "to enhance the research design, conceptualisation, interpretation of findings, and ultimately the results" (p. 385). Therefore, before conducting the main interviews for this study, I decided to conduct a pilot study in order to check the readiness of both the participants and myself to take part in the study. Further, this exercise was useful for me since it gave me the chance to revise the interview protocols and change or adjust them if needed (see Appendix 2; Pilot Study interview protocols). Therefore, I interviewed one male and one female participant. This preparation also gave me as a researcher confidence to conduct the rest of the interviews.

3.3.1 Methodology for conducting the pilot study

I chose a qualitative approach as a methodological framework in combination with phenomenology as a theoretical framework for the reasons discussed above because this approach serves the purpose of this study as a whole. Therefore, I used semistructured ethnographic interviews with the two participants who took part in the pilot study for a number of reasons. Brewer (2000) defines the interview as "a face-to-face encounter between researcher and respondent in which a subject responds to the questions posed by another" (p. 63). However, in ethnography, the interview process is more complex. First, interviews are "the

core of ethnographic fieldwork" as Agar (1996, p. 160) argues because they help researchers to collect more explicit data from the participants than could be provided by observations. Moreover, Warren (2001) points out that "qualitative interviewing is based on conversation with the emphasis on researchers asking questions and listening and respondents answering" (p. 83).

Warren (2001), however, also states that it is important to remember that the participants take part in interpreting the collected data and give their opinions about their answers, and so they too are meaning-makers. They are not just a source of data that pass their answers to the interviewer who is in charge of interpreting and understanding the data (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). This concept is one result of the postmodernism that has affected the methodology used by social scientists (Fontana, 2001, p. 162). The purpose of semistructured interviews is "to obtain descriptions of the life world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena" (Kvale, 1996, pp. 5-6). Further, interviews are flexible in a way that the researcher can follow up with relevant questions and thus the interview sheds light on other areas that may be of interest to the researcher (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2005).

3.3.2 Research methods

The pilot study gave me the opportunity to try out the proposed methodological framework discussed above, and to see how to understand my data using the theoretical framework of phenomenology. Here I discuss how I planned and carried out the pilot study, the emergent findings vis-à-vis my research questions, my evaluation for the proposed approach, and lessons learned.

3.3.2.1 *The pilot study participants:*

I interviewed two participants for the pilot study. The first participant was Zahir, a 24 year-old doing a taught postgraduate degree. Zahir grew up in Saudi Arabia. He went to school there and did his undergraduate degree in a Saudi university. The second participant, Raneem, was also 24 years old at the time of the interview and doing a taught postgraduate degree. Raneem spent her first 9 years in Saudi Arabia, before leaving the country with her family because of her father's work. She spent a few years in Greece before going to Italy to do her undergraduate degree. Raneem and Zahir are pseudonyms to ensure the participants' confidentiality.

I chose these particular participants for the pilot study for two reasons. First, both participants are Saudi students and share the same religion i.e., Islam and speak the same Arabic language. Further, I chose one male and one female because I wanted to explore whether any gender differences where intercultural contact is concerned (see RQ2). The second reason for choosing Zahir and Raneem relates to these participants' complex backgrounds. Although both seemed to share the same values of religion and family orientation, both of their past experiences were different in that Zahir lived in Saudi Arabia most of his life, while Raneem had lived abroad. These differences show the complexity of what it means to be Saudi, Arab, and Muslim and link with Heidegger's phenomenology in which individuals' histories and experiences affect how they perceive realities and create meanings.

As I needed to recruit Saudi international students to take part in the research, I told my friends about the study and asked for their help in finding participants to interview (I discuss identifying participants in more details later in section 3.4.1). While searching for Saudi international students I met Zahir at the mosque. I explained my research objectives to him and he showed interest in taking part in the study. Later, a friend of mine informed me that she had met with a Saudi international student, Raneem, who showed interest in taking part in my study too. Then, my next step was to build a relationship with the participants as discussed below.

3.3.2.2 *Building trust with the two participants:*

As argued before, the main concern I had regarding conducting the interviews with both participants related to what Brinkman and Kvale (2009) call the ‘‘asymmetrical power relation’’ (p. 33) between the studied participants and myself as a researcher. For this reason, before carrying out the interviews, I decided to build a warm and caring relationship between the participants and myself as a researcher. As a native ethnographer, I was able to decide what factors might help me to achieve that goal. First of all, I met regularly with Zahir in the mosque during and after the Friday prayers for some informal conversations about his course and stay in the UK. He also introduced me to his Saudi friends, whom I recruited to take part in the main interviews later on. These meetings did not take place only on Fridays but occurred almost every day. A considerable number of Saudi international students were going to the mosque every day since it was the month of Ramadan. In order to make my conversations with Zahir and his friends feel congenial, I prepared traditional

Arabic coffee, which is highly appreciated in Saudi Arabia according to Nydell (2005), and took that with me almost every day to the mosque. Some of them told me that it reminded them of spending Ramadan with their families in Saudi Arabia.

However, it was not possible to use the same technique with Raneem for two reasons. First, the mosque is gender-segregated and thus men and women could not mix with each other there. The second reason was that Raneem herself did not go to the mosque as she felt she was not religious enough to visit it. Therefore, I used another way to build trust with her. I met her with her friends and we engaged in informal conversations as a first step. Then, I invited her with one of her friends to my house to have a meal that I had prepared with both of them. This situation enabled us to discuss a range of different topics that were not necessarily related to studying but were meant to create some trust between us. Meetings with Raneem continued and sometimes I met her with her friends and sometimes alone.

The strategies I used with both participants were not strictly planned in advance but rather, they were a result of decisions I made depending on my own evaluation and understandings for the participants' likes and dislikes. They were very different individuals who had different interests, responses, and different ways of appreciating trust-building. If I had offered Raneem coffee and dates as I did in the case of Zahir, that strategy might not have had the same result, and vice versa. Therefore, it was my initial and then continuous evaluation of both

participants' interests and characters that directed my choice of strategies. They were not planned in advance, but they were not random either.

3.3.2.3 *Place of the interview:*

I asked both participants to choose where they would like to be interviewed. Both suggested anywhere, as long it was not in a public place or in their private accommodation. Their choice was in line with what most participants suggest, according to King & Horrocks (2009). However, I suggested we meet in an office in one of the university buildings. This venue seemed to be appropriate because it would be quieter than interviewing in a public area. Further, a university office seemed to offer a neutral and independent place that might reduce any power asymmetry between us.

3.3.2.4 *The interview duration and language:*

I first interviewed Zahir and the interview lasted approximately 48 minutes, while it took about twice that time when I interviewed Raneem afterwards (approx. 1 hour and 20 minutes). In the beginning, this disparity was a concern for me as I thought it was something to do with the interview protocols. However, after I listened to the transcripts of both interviews, I found that the reason behind the substantial difference in interview duration was related to the follow-up questions I had used with Raneem but not with Zahir. Therefore, when I interviewed Zahir at a later stage, I followed up with some questions which extended his answers and thus the interview duration.

I gave both participants the option to choose the language they preferred to be interviewed in, in order to eliminate any language pressure that might be encountered by either of them. Zahir chose to be interviewed in Arabic, while Raneem chose to be interviewed in English. She pointed out that she could express herself better in English because she had lived most of her life abroad and had not developed enough fluency in Arabic. Leaving the choice of which language to be interviewed in allowed the participants to decide what seemed most appropriate, as both were able to express themselves in the way that made them comfortable.

During the interview, I did not notice significant gender differences regarding both participants as some studies that I discussed in Chapter Two have suggested. In other words, Raneem, as a Saudi Arabian female was not introvert and less confident than Zahir, the Saudi male. Nevertheless, I assumed that Raneem's confidence may have been a result of her life abroad and that she, therefore, is not a 'typically Saudi' woman given that Saudi women are often portrayed as culturally subordinated and introverted.

3.3.2.5 *Data Analysis*

When analysing the data from this pilot study, I used thematic content analysis (Creswell, 2007). First, I immersed myself in the data as the starting point for the data analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Transcribing the interviews was a very effective way to familiarise myself as the researcher with the data (Kvale, 2007). Secondly, I started coding by selecting the data that I found interesting and relevant to the research questions and to the phenomenon under investigation

(Boyatzis, 1998). In the next step, I analysed my codes to form larger themes, as one theme could usually include different codes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In the fourth step of the data analysis, I reviewed the themes again, as it is not unlikely that the researcher will uncover either themes that could form one theme or other themes that may not be themes at all (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006). Then, I named and defined every theme by "identifying the 'essence' of what each theme is about … and determining what aspect of the data each theme captures" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 22). Therefore, I categorised the data under the following themes: Islamic identity, family, Saudi nationality, and intercultural engagement in the UK. Finally, I wrote up the findings and the analysis in a way that could be comprehended easily by the readers (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

3.3.2.6 *The findings*

When I analysed the data, a number of themes emerged related to the participants' Islamic identification, their family relationships, their Saudi national identification, and, finally, their intercultural experiences in the UK.

Theme one: The voice of religion

The Islamic identity theme presented itself in both participants' words, especially when speaking about issues related to their life in the UK. Zahir pointed out:

البوي فريند أو الشرب مثلا طبعا هذي مختلفة عنا وزنا عارف الشي هذا عنهم من أول أنا أعرف أن هذا بارت من الثقافة حقتهم ... قيرل فريند أو قو كلبينق في الويكند والشرب يعني أشياء موجودة عندهم

"I knew before I came to the UK that there would be a lot of differences between our cultures such as drinking and having girlfriends which is not the case in Saudi Arabia."

He further adds:

أنا حمدلله ما صادفت أحد غير أمين من غير السعوديين.. كلهم كويسين.. وأشوف فيهم صفات إسلامية بلا مبالغة، فيهم الأمانة والصدق وهم غير مسلمين

"Thank God I have only met nice and honest people even though they are not Muslims. In fact, I feel like they have Islamic morals and values even though they are not Muslims."

In both remarks, two main points emerge. The first relates to the difference between what he referred to as "our cultures". He pinpointed premarital relationships and the consumption of alcohol as two differences which emphasised the contrast he saw between the social groups that he identifies himself with, such as Saudi or Muslims, and others. His observation is an example of what Byram (1997) refers to as the type of knowledge that individuals refer to in order to differentiate their own social groups from those of others. The second point relates to similarities. Zahir seems to view other social groups i.e., non-Muslims as similar to his own social group, i.e., Muslims, because they are "nice" and "honest". Here he implies that being nice and honest are exclusively Islamic values and, so, he seems to be surprised that there were nice and honest non-Muslims.

Both the similarities and differences seem to indicate the in-group and out-group categories that Zahir was trying to establish whereby he praised his own social group and criticised others (Byram, 2013). In other words, based on his religious understanding, "they" are different from "us" since they consume alcohol and experience premarital relationships, which are not allowed in Saudi Arabia, but

"they" are similar to "us" in being nice and honest. Both these points of similarity i.e., honesty and differences in terms of engaging in premarital relationships and drinking alcohol seem to be based on Zahir's own understanding of religion.

The voice of religion was present in Raneem's statement too when speaking about alcohol:

> "… and obviously in our religion it's [alcohol] forbidden and ... yes I do it [avoiding alcohol] because of religion but ... I also like to control what I do."

Despite its prohibition in Islam, Raneem added an additional reason for not drinking alcohol; she said that she would prefer to be able to control her actions by not being drunk. This additional reason is based on her evaluation of alcohol and its effect and, therefore, has a more explicit criterion (Byram, 1997), rather than being a decision that is based only on religious grounds. This information, therefore, shows that there is a religious dimension in her self-identification.

Theme two: Negotiating the religious identification:

Despite the presence of religion in both participants' remarks, both Raneem and Zahir's religious identifications were challenged as a result of their intercultural contacts with non-Muslim students. Raneem's religious identification was challenged because she did not wear the headscarf which led her to receive criticism from her non-Muslim friend who called her a "hypocrite" since she follows some teachings of Islam (not drinking) but not others (wearing the headscarf). She pointed out:

> "… she [her non-Muslim friend] wants to push me to drinking and so on and I think that's very disrespectful ... and she calls me a hypocrite because I refer to myself as a Muslim and as a believer ... but she is, like, you don't wear the headscarf ... you hang out with guys or ... you dance or whatever ... but I'm, like, ... I don't know how to explain it to her … I'm also a human and I wanna do things because of my needs ... or yeah ... what I wanna do ... I try to balance it ... and we all try to be good people ... and for me .... Islam is just a way of life ... and I try to mix it together with my life ... you know ... I .... I .... I .... I don't know..."

The challenge is obvious in her words as she tries to act like a Muslim but at the same time enjoy her social life in the UK. Not drinking alcohol yet not wearing the headscarf at the same time and making male friends — which is forbidden in the Wahhabi version of Islam — seems to have left her with a confused identification, i.e., whether she is a Muslim and thus has to follow all the Islamic teachings, or a Muslim who follows none of them. The important point here is that this conclusion was forced upon her as a result of her intercultural communication with her non-Muslim friend in the UK. Otherwise, this tension would probably not have emerged in her consciousness. Further, Raneem seems to view religion as a way of identifying herself rather than as a doctrine whose teachings she must follow. This view explains her struggle to answer her friend's question about what seemed to both of them to be contradictions. From a phenomenological perspective, Raneem was making her own meanings of what it means to be a Muslim rather than accepting that identification as something that she inherits from her family, for example.

On the other hand, Zahir did not seem to encounter the same challenge as Raneem, even though he had female friends; such friendships would run counter to the Wahhabi Islamic teachings on gender interaction. However Raneem seems to experience more confusion than Zahir does for two reasons. The first relates to both participants' interpretation of Islamic teachings. Unlike Raneem, Zahir did not consider having female friends, for example, as a violation of Islamic teachings. He was, therefore, more confident and comfortable about making friends with females in the UK. On the other hand, Raneem considered friendship with other males as a violation of Islamic teachings and, therefore, she believed that she should not be making male friends. Both participants constructed their realities and meanings differently from each other, depending on their experiences and histories, which is what phenomenology attempts to explain (Laverty, 2003). Further, Byram (1997) explains that the psychological stress that Raneem, for example, had encountered results from engaging in experiences and events that conflict with one's beliefs.

The second reason relates to the additional restrictions that Saudi women have compared to Saudi males. Unlike Raneem, Zahir did not have to wear a headscarf that defines a Muslim woman's identification (Droogsma, 2007) and, therefore, he was less questioned or criticised by his non-Muslim friends about his behaviour and appearance than Raneem. Although he could have been questioned about forming friendships with women but not drinking alcohol, for example, he did not say that he had had any such experiences.

Thus, the voice of religion was present in both participants' remarks. Zahir viewed Islam as a synonym for honesty and being nice, while Raneem viewed it as a rational way of living by, for example, forbidding alcohol that causes people to be in less control of their consciousness. However, both participants had different ways of negotiating Islamic teachings on such issues when they were challenged and questioned by other non-Muslim friends, since Raneem encountered some confusion while Zahir did not. Therefore, the data from Zahir and Raneem lead to two conclusions. First, the worldview of the participants and their understanding of religion were essential to negotiating their Islamic identifications when they are in intercultural contact with non-Muslims. The second conclusion is related to the perceptions of Saudi or Muslim men and women and how they are perceived differently by non-Saudi and non-Muslim individuals. Phenomenology attempts to critique such oversimpifications of people as being mechanically created by their backgrounds (Laverty, 2003). Although the individual's histories may play a role in shaping his or her meanings and realities, these are not explicit, as argued before.

Theme three: Family

In addition to the voice of religion and challenges to Islamic identification, both participants also mentioned the powerful voice of family relationships. Zahir points out:

لي 24 سنة ما قضيت العيد عن أهلي ... هذي أول مرة فكان صعب بالمرة ... أنت عارف قربنا وعلاقاتنا في السعودية وحبنا لبعض ... فيع فرق لما تعيد مع أهلك أو مع ناس آخرين مهما كانوا طيبين ... يظل أهلك يختلفون

"It was difficult for me to spend the Eid [an Islamic celebration] in the UK away from my family. I missed my relatives and friends back in Saudi Arabia. Although

the Eid here in the UK was nice and [I] met different people, it is still not as nice as when you have your family and friends around you."

Raneem also talks about a similarly strong sense of family relationships even though her example is not related to any religious occasions:

> "… if go back to Saudi ... I have to see [my extended family] ... I just can't go to one of my uncles' houses ... I have to go to all of them … including my aunties ... and have a meal there."

This strong sense of family in the participants' remarks seemed to have led them to hold negative stereotypes about the family relationships in the UK when they compared both countries. Zahir points out:

أنا أحس البريطانيين فشلوا في الشي هذا ... في العلاقات الاجتماعية مثل الي عندنا هناك ... يعني الزيارات بين بعض والعلاقة يعني ما أحس مثل ماهو عندنا في الوطن العربي بشكل عام ... ما أقدر أعيش بدون الحميمية هذي في السعودية ... ما أقدر أعيش من حالي في شأني وفي عملي ... إلا ما أتواصل ويكون فيه ناس أحبهم ويحبوني ... ما أحس الأشياء هذي موجودة هنا

"I think the British have failed in maintaining good family relationships with each other unlike us in Saudi Arabia. I cannot live isolated from people without 'passionate' relationships and regular visits to our relatives. I want to have people whom I love and who love me and I care about them and they care about me. But as I mentioned earlier, it is not the case here."

Similarly, Raneem states:

> "… we have family … people here are not really connected to their families a lot ... you hear people haven't seen their mums for 5 years and they live just an hour [away]."

Both participants had negative assumptions about family relationships in the UK, criticising them, for example, for not being "passionate". They also believed the British families were not "really connected" or had even "failed", unlike the strongly connected "us" in Saudi Arabia. They seemed to be judging the family relationships of their UK counterparts on the basis of their own value judgements of what family means. Such negative assumptions may result in creating an exclusive and superior us compared to them (Holliday, Hyde, & Kullman, 2010), just as seen earlier when the concepts of being rational, honest, and nice were described as being synonymous with Islamic values and identification. Byram (2013) argues that this distinction between in-group and out-group categorisation attempts to increase the self-esteem by praising the Self in-group and criticising or even discriminating against the Other out-group. Such categories "underpinned ethnocentric perception, behavioral ingroup favoritism, and the existence of status hierarchies in society" (Abrams & Hogg, 2010, p. 180).

Both participants' remarks seemed to be based on personal experiences, for example, the individuals that Raneem referred to as living a short distance from their families rarely seeing them. Therefore, the participants generalised such issues and viewed them as the norms in the UK rather than personal behaviours that are based on differences in personalities that could also exist amongst individuals from the same social group i.e., Saudi individuals (Dovidio, Hewstone, Glick & Esses, 2010).

Establishing in one's mind an Other out-group who do not keep strong contacts with their families may influence the participants' intercultural communication experiences because, according to (Holliday, 2011), holding such stereotypes may work like physical barriers between individuals. Therefore, Zahir found making British friends challenging. However, he did explain that it was because there was a lack of opportunities to meet home students that he formed friendships with international students.

Similarly Raneem points out:

> "It's not that I don't socialise with British people but because you live in the UK and they have their own things .... they are home in a way even if it was 2 hours away or whatever ... but when you have Europeans they are away from [home] and I'm away from home so we find each other and we relate to each other in a way."

From her remark, it is clear that Raneem includes European students in her in-group category since they are international students like herself and they share some similar experiences. One of the similarities she mentioned in the interview is that European students have closer relationships with their families and are "friendlier" and they are like "us". Poynting (2009) found similar cases in his study on Muslim immigrants in Australia who had formed social groups with other Greek and Italian immigrants but not with the Other Australians. In his study, the participants explained that Italians and Greeks "care" (p. 377) more than Australians. In the case of the participants, they preferred socialising with other international students over socialising with home students. Their reasons

related to their shared experiences of being sojourners studying abroad as well as their shared understandings for what family relationships mean to them. Thus, in the case of both Zahir and Raneem their perceptions of how families ought to relate to each other became a distinctive feature that distinguished their in-group that consists of international students from the out-group that consists of British students. As a result, they initiated less intercultural interaction with the latter group.

Theme four: Saudi national identification:

The voice of both participants' Saudi national identification came across during the interviews. However, as with their religious identifications, both participants showed different perceptions of their national identification. For instance, Zahir feels that his duty, besides his studies, is to represent Saudi Arabia in the best positive way. He points out:

[أنا] أمثل دولتي بالشكل الي يرضيني ويرضي وطني فيه

"I want to be successful so I represent my country very well."

Such feelings of responsibility to represent Saudi Arabia were also reported in Baroni's (2007) study. There she found that her students felt proud to be Saudi Arabians. Further, Heyn (2013) reported similar findings when her Saudi participants felt the responsibility to act like "ambassadors" (p. 137) for Saudi Arabia in order to represent it in a positive way. On the other hand, the voice of the Saudi national identification is different when it comes to Raneem:

> "I'm very confused about my identity... I have a Saudi passport ... I've never lived really… I mean really in Saudi … I did mention I lived there

> when I was 5 [years old] and I was there last year ... and ... but when I was there last year I didn't know who I was ... I felt so lost ... I don't know ... my identity ... it's exhausting when I tell people where I lived ... I don't know what I am ... I am international."

Despite holding Saudi citizenship, Raneem does not feel that she identifies herself as a Saudi individual as a result of living abroad since her childhood. Therefore, holding a Saudi passport, but not feeling Saudi at the same time, led her to be confused about her national identification and thus she called herself "international". Being international is an inclusive term that Raneem uses when it comes to her national identification and thus being international meant that she did not conform to any in-group or out-group categories, as was seen when she spoke of the importance of the presence of family in her life. As was the case with her religious identification, Raneem felt confused about her Saudi identification. As argued before, her confusion about her religious identification comes from the fact that she does not wear the headscarf that defines Muslim women; while her confusion about her Saudi identification seems to come from her life in the West and not being brought up in Saudi Arabia.

Therefore, in both areas, what links her to Islam is "not drinking alcohol", for example, while what links her to her Saudi identification is just her passport and citizenship. Since it is only her passport which links her to Saudi Arabia, Raneem did not feel patriotic towards Saudi, which explains why she called herself international. However, she is linked to Islam by something more than a document and this difference explains the reason behind not drinking alcohol.

However, although she does not wear the headscarf, she does try to keep some links with Islam even if she cannot maintain all its links to her self-identification. Further, this also explains not using inclusive terms such as 'interfaithful' like the case with 'international'.

Thus, as with the religious identities of both participants, Raneem felt confused about her Saudi identification while Zahir did not. Conceiving of herself as international seems to allow Raneem to have eliminated the in-group and out-group categories and, therefore, to have a more inclusive identification which can be defined as international rather than simply national. On the other hand, Zahir feels a responsibility to represent Saudi Arabia positively and, therefore, he has to show more of his Saudi identification and display it in its best forms to non-Saudi individuals. Both participants' national identifications may play a role when it comes to their intercultural communication since individuals bring their identifications with them when they are in interactions (Byram, 1997). Just as in the case of religion and family that were discussed above, the more the participants have inclusive national identifications, the more they may be able to experience intercultural contacts.

3.3.2.6.5 ***Conclusions:***

The four themes emerging from this pilot study show the complex identities both participants have despite being Saudi, and Muslims who enjoy strong bonds with their families. Such identities reflected on both participants' intercultural experiences, from initiating intercultural contacts, to managing their relationships with other individuals from different backgrounds. Inclusive and

exclusive identifications, as well as in-group and out-group classifications, seemed important when it came to the participants' experiences with other individuals. The somewhat confused religious identifications of both participants came across in the interviews. Raneem's confusion came from issues related to her gender role and how she was expected, by other non-Muslim individuals, to behave as a Muslim female. Raneem's experience of having lived much of her life overseas rather than in Saudi Arabia weakened any feeling of responsibility to represent her country. Finally, both participants' bonds with their families were strong, and thus, they initiated in-groups and out-groups according to how much other non-Muslim, non-Saudi individuals appear to care for their families. This perception of others resulted in both participants having international friends because they saw them as having strong relationships with their families, unlike home students who were not perceived as having the same bonds in the eyes of the participants.

3.3.2.6.6 *The pilot study and the research questions:*

After evaluating the pilot study, I realised that focusing on identification, in comparison to focusing on the intercultural communication experiences, was significant. Further, although I had paid attention to exploring the gender issue, and whether it influences the intercultural interactions, it seemed that this aspect needed to have more of a focus in the interview protocol in order to answer the second research question. Therefore, two main points had to be adjusted for the following interviews. First, I needed to adjust some of the interview protocols so that they would focus more on the main research questions on identification, gender, and intercultural communication (see

Appendix 3; First interviews protocols). I asked more specifically about their experiences with individuals from the opposite gender in to the fourth interview question.

The second adjustment involved the way I carried out the interviews because the pilot study showed that more follow-up questions were needed. When I started interviewing the participants in the pilot study, I limited myself to following the interview protocol without asking following up questions (especially with Zahir) to explore more of their intercultural experiences. In effect, the planned interview seemed to be fully structured rather than semistructured. I learned that I, therefore, needed to encourage the participants to expand on their answers and stories in order to provide fuller answers, and thus, allow me to collect richer and more detailed data. With the exception of changing some of the interview procedures to address the gender aspect more clearly, I retained the same research methods used in the pilot study when conducting the interviews for my full investigation.

3.4 Research methods of the thesis

This section first details the research context, before addressing the participants and the data collection and data analysis methods. The discussion then turns to issues related to the transferability, trustworthiness, ethics, and reflexivity of this research.

3.4.1 Research context

I chose a UK university in the North East of England to be the research setting because there are a considerable number of Saudi students studying different disciplines on its campus. Further, I am a student at the same university, which made meeting the participants and conducting the interviews with them more manageable, especially when developing trust with them. Trust-building might have been more difficult if the research site had been a distant location. However, I had to find participants who would be willing to participate in the study. I chose snowball sampling for two main reasons. First, it was not easy to find participants who would be interested in taking part in the study and thus asking some participants to recruit their friends was an efficient strategy to get more participants into the study. The second reason concerns the need to build trust with the participants. If the early participants told their friends that they felt comfortable with me as a researcher I reckoned that they would feel happy about recruiting others into the project. In other words, building trust with one participant could lead to building trust with other potential participants.

Therefore, I contacted both the Islamic Society and the Saudi Society at the university and asked their members to circulate an email explaining the purpose of the research to ascertain if there were any Saudi participants who would be interested in taking part in the study. A number of students contacted me within a few days, but what was surprising was that I was contacted by more female students than male students. I had not expected this result given that Reinharz & Chase (2001) point out that in conservative societies like Saudi Arabia women are not expected to take part in such studies. Further, I asked the participants to recruit other students whom they knew to take part in the study. This technique

helped me to approach more participants and thus collect more data. In the end, I had to stop interviewing more participants and asked the new participants that I will contact them if I needed to conduct more.

3.4.2 The participants

I interviewed 15 Saudi students—seven males and eight females—who were studying for various degrees at the university and who came from different age groups and marital statuses. The aim behind including such a variety of students was to avoid categorising the students' intercultural experiences in terms of their being directly influenced by marital statuses, age, or areas of study, as was the case with many of the studies reviewed in the literature review. I also included a selection criterion based on the students' living arrangements since those who live in university accommodation may be more likely to interact with non-Saudi individuals. I used pseudonyms for the participants to keep their identities confidential. The participants' names which appear in the thesis are, therefore are not their real names.

Raneem: took part in the pilot study. She is a 24 year-old, single female who has lived most of her life abroad with her parents. She is doing a postgraduate degree and living at university accommodation.

Haleemah: is a 23 year-old, married female doing an undergraduate degree and living with her husband in private accommodation.

Khadijah: is a 35 year-old, married female doing a postgraduate degree and living with her children and husband in private accommodation.

Lubna, Sarah, and Hadeel: are all 19 year-old, single females, doing an undergraduate course and living in university accommodation.

Zainah: is 32 years old. She is a married female, doing a postgraduate course and living with her child in private accommodation while her spouse is in Saudi Arabia.

Aminah: is the last of the female participants. She is a 30 year-old, married female, doing a postgraduate degree and living with her children in private accommodation. Her husband is living in Saudi Arabia.

The male participants similarly are of various ages, doing different courses, and living in either private and university accommodation.

Zahir: is 24 years old. He is a single male, doing a postgraduate degree, and living in university accommodation.

Abdulaziz: Abdulaziz is a 24 year-old male studying for a postgraduate degree, and living in private accommodation.

Ahmed: is a 30 year-old, married, male and doing a postgraduate degree. He lives with his wife and children in private accommodation. At the time of the interview, he also was the head of the Islamic Society.

Abdul: is 19. He is a single male doing an undergraduate degree and living in private accommodation.

Yunos: is a 25 year-old, married male, doing a postgraduate degree, and living in private accommodation with his wife.

Mohammed: is a 30 year-old, married male, doing a postgraduate degree, and living with his wife and children in private accommodation.

Sameer: The last participant of the male group is Sameer. He is a 25 year-old, single male pursuing a postgraduate degree. He lives in university accommodation. He later became the president of the Islamic Society at the university.

Name	Age	Gender	Marital Status	Course	Accommodation
Raneem	24	Female	Single	Postgraduate	University Accommodation
Haleemah	24	Female	Married	Undergraduate	Private Accommodation
Khadijah	35	Female	Married	Postgraduate	Private Accommodation
Lubna	19	Female	Single	Undergraduate	University Accommodation
Hadeel	19	Female	Single	Undergraduate	University Accommodation
Sarah	20	Female	Single	Undergraduate	University Accommodation
Zainah	32	Female	Married	Postgraduate	University Accommodation
Aminah	30	Female	Married	Postgraduate	Private Accommodation
Zahir	24	Male	Single	Postgraduate	University

					Accommodation
Abdulaziz	24	Male	Single	Postgraduate	Private Accommodation
Ahmed	30	Male	Married	Postgraduate	Private Accommodation
Abdul	19	Male	Single	Undergraduate	Private Accommodation
Yunos	25	Male	Married	Postgraduate	Private Accommodation
Mohammed	30	Male	Married	Postgraduate	Private Accommodation
Sameer	25	Male	Single	Postgraduate	University Accommodation

3.4.3 Building trust with the participants

As I had done in the pilot study, I decided to build a relationship based on trust between the participants and me as the researcher. I used the same strategies that I used to build trust with Raneem and Zahir in the pilot study and through that process thus met a number of the male participants through the mosque. I was able to meet with many of the male participants in the mosque, especially during the month of Ramadan when I managed to meet them on an almost daily basis. One of the participants, Mohammed, invited me to his house to have a meal with two other participants, Abdul and Yunos. Kvale (1996) warns researchers about the issue of power distance that can arise between the researcher and the

researched and I found that that visit lessened the power distance between us and thus allowed us to develop a deeper understanding that helped the participants to feel relaxed with me during the interviews. The aim was to make the participants see me as another Saudi international student who is encountering similar experiences to theirs. This aim seemed to work with the participants in various degrees.

Alternative trust-building strategies were required when it came to meeting with the female participants. Because the mosque segregates men and women it was not possible to meet them there. Although Raneem had accepted my dinner invitation (as stated before in the pilot study), I invited the other female participants to meet me in public places like coffee shops so that we could have our informal conversations there. I made sure that the women came as a group so they outnumbered me and thus felt more confident and comfortable. This strategy had previously proved efficacious in other studies that dealt with Saudi students (Midgley, 2009a) and it was also effective in my case. Some participants such as Aminah and Khadijah, however, preferred not to meet with me before their formal interview due to their family commitments. Furthermore, as some of the male and female participants lived in the same university residence where I lived it was easy to have regular interactions with them. As argued above in relation to the pilot study, building trust with the participants was not strictly planned beforehand; rather, it was a dynamic process in which I aimed to interact casually with the participants and as often as possible before the scheduled data-gathering interviews. The timescale for building trust before conducting the interviews varied from participant to participant, since it was not

possible to accord each participant equal attention. Therefore, it took me between a month and 2 months to build this trust with the participants, through the daily meetings at the mosque with the male participants, or the on-going interactions with other participants in the university's student accommodation.

3.4.4 Data collection methods

Burgess (1984) argues that conversations are an efficient way to access reality. On that premise, therefore, I conducted semistructured interviews in order to gather valuable data that would help in understanding the lived intercultural experiences of the participants. The initial plan was to conduct two interviews with each participant. The fourth research question relates to the impact of their intercultural experiences on the participants' identifications and so the second interview was designed to reveal the extent to which the participants' worldview had changed or remained the same (see Appendix 4 Second interviews protocols). For this reason, I interviewed the participants soon after they first arrived to the UK and I interviewed them again after about 9 months. Since this is a qualitative study, it was not of my intention to measure the changes; my aim was to discover whether the participants' had been changed by their experiences or remained the same. Hence, the 9 months' period between the two interviews was the longest I could give the participants since some of them were doing one-year degrees.

Phenomenology and ethnography informed the interviews because both approaches use a combination of open-ended and structured questions and both search for meaning in the narratives (Maggs-Rapport, 2000). However, these two approaches differ in the sense that:

> [E]thnography concentrates on the individual views or the shared views and values of a particular culture and aims to describe the cultural knowledge of the participants; whilst interpretive phenomenology tries to uncover concealed meaning in the phenomenon, embedded in the words of the narrative. (Maggs-Rapport, 2000, p. 219)

In ethnography, the role of the researcher is to describe the experience while, in phenomenology, the researcher explains and interprets it (Lester, 1999). Herein lies the essential difference between the two approaches. The ethnographic researcher's role is to provide descriptions of the participants' experiences. By contrast, in phenomenology, the researcher does offer more of his or her perspectives and interpretations of the participants' experiences to the reader, and looks for underlying meanings.

Using a single approach—whether phenomenology or ethnography—may leave the research incomplete (Maggs-Rapport, 2000). Both ethnography and phenomenology, therefore, complete each other, because, as Holmes (1997) argues, data does not speak for itself; rather, it is the researcher who gives meaning to the data. At the same time, these meanings may be challenged by the reader. If the data are left uninterpreted or unexplained, the responsibility for guessing the meaning shifts entirely from the researcher to the reader (Maggs-Rapport, 2000). Combining both ethnography and phenomenology, therefore, enables me as a researcher to give my subjective explanation and interpretation of the data produced by the participants, while at the same time also allowing the reader to challenge these interpretations and give them different meaning from that arrived at from my understanding.

3.4.5 The interview venues

I gave the participants the freedom to decide where they wanted to be interviewed. None of the participants wanted to be interviewed in their own accommodation because they did not want to feel that their personal space had been invaded which, according to King & Horrocks (2009), is a common feeling during interviews. Therefore, some participants chose to be interviewed in a public place like a coffee shop. This choice, however, was not ideal because when listening to the recordings the background noise of other customers was audible. However, in the case of Aminah, one of the female participants, I did not have an option since she insisted on being interviewed in a public place where there would be a lot of people round. To ensure her comfort, I decided to accede to her request and managed to transcribe the interview afterwards despite some difficulties.

Some of the male participants chose the mosque for the interview and it seemed to be ideal because it offered a comfortable and quiet setting. As mentioned before, interviewing females in the mosque was not an option. On balance, the university office where I had conducted the pilot study proved to be the ideal place for interviewing most participants.

3.4.6 The language of the interview

In order to fulfill the purpose of this research, I gave the participants the choice of being interviewed in either Arabic, which is their mother tongue, or English, which was the language they were using in their studies as well as in their daily life in the UK. Some participants such as Raneem chose to be interviewed in

English rather than Arabic. She explained that she felt more comfortable expressing herself in English since she had been living in the West for a long time. Further, she mentioned that there are concepts that she cannot explain in Arabic such as when talking about things like pubs and boyfriends/girlfriends. Such words have no direct equivalent in Arabic and thus she used English to express her ideas fully.

By contrast, the majority of the other participants chose to be interviewed in Arabic. However, in some cases they had to use English when talking about their subject of study or when they could not find an Arabic equivalent for some concepts such as pub or boyfriend/girlfriend, as pointed out earlier. Since they were studying in English, using Arabic to talk about their studies seemed to require a translation on their part and thus they preferred using English when discussing the academic context.

3.4.7 Data analysis

In order to analyse the data, I used thematic content analysis (Creswell, 2007). Before undertaking the data analysis, I first immersed myself in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In fact, transcribing the interviews was a very effective way to familiarise myself as the researcher with the data (Kvale, 2007). However, transcribing was not a very easy task given that some participants had intermixed both English and Arabic in the interviews. In this case, I transcribed the English words in English and continued transcribing the rest of the interviews verbatim in Arabic. When reporting the findings, I translated everything from Arabic into English.

Secondly, I started the initial coding process (see Appendix 5; initial analysis codes) by selecting the data that I found interesting and relevant to the research questions and to the phenomena under investigation (Boyatzis, 1998). In the next step, I analysed my codes to create larger themes as usually one theme could include different codes (Braun & Clarke, 2006) (see Appendix 6; Coding the themes). In the fourth step of the data analysis, I reviewed the themes again because it is possible to uncover some themes that could form one theme, or other data strands may not be themes at all (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Boytzis, 1998). However, there were some data that seemed too important not to include in the study and thus it formed an additional theme that I had not anticipated at the outset of the research. This material led me to include an additional research question related to those things that motivated or demotivated the Saudi students from initiating intercultural contacts. As Holliday (2007) points out:

> research questions can also change as the research moves on from the initial concept. Initial questions lead the researcher to investigate in a certain direction; but within this process there will be unforeseen discoveries which raise further or different questions. In some cases the whole focus of the research may change. (p. 32)

Although the research was guided by the research questions, some important data emerged that led me to make some adjustments to the research questions. Therefore, I retained the original research questions concerning the participants' friendship experiences, their interactions with individuals from the opposite gender, and any ways in which the participants' overall intercultural experiences in the UK had influenced their identifications. I then added a new research question: What are the other experiences that may motivate or demotivate Saudi international students to experience intercultural communication in the UK?

This question seemed particularly important because it unravels some intercultural communication experiences that the participants had encountered but which were related to neither their friendships experiences nor their interactions with individuals from the opposite gender.

3.4.8 Trustworthiness criteria

The trustworthiness of qualitative research has been criticised by positivists since it does not address validity and reliability as is the case in quantitative studies (Shenton, 2004). However, Silverman (2001) argues that qualitative researchers can tackle the issues of validity and reliability, but by using different terms in order to distinguish themselves from the positivist paradigm (Shenton, 2004). For instance, Guba (1981) proposes the following criteria for qualitative research: transferability as an alternative for external validity and generalisability; credibility for internal validity; dependability for reliability; and, confirmability for objectivity. I discuss each of these criteria in more detail below.

3.4.8.1 *Transferability:*

When it comes to transferability, the focus shifts from validity to transferability (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Finlay, 2002; Hall & Stevens, 1991; Laverty, 2003). Achieving transferability in qualitative research suggests that the research findings can be transferred to another context. In order to do so, the researcher has to provide rich descriptions about the context of the study and it is the reader who decides whether the research is transferable to any context where they may want to apply it or not, and thus this decision requires careful reading

on the reader's part (Kuper, Lingard, & Levinson, 2008). This research, therefore, provides rich descriptions of Saudi international students' intercultural experiences in the UK and thus gives the readers enough data to judge whether the findings apply to their own contexts or not.

Since the research questions focus on the areas of intercultural communication, gender, and identifications of Saudi international students, the study provides rich detail on these that can be transferred when studying other Saudi international students abroad. However, as mentioned before, transferability is a matter of judgement. It is the reader's responsibility to transfer, but not generalise, the data. The findings are not probable facts that apply to all Saudi international students. Rather, readers can find the similarities of the contexts where they conduct their studies on the one hand, and the contexts of this study on the other.

3.4.8.2 *Credibility:*

When it comes to credibility, Guba (1981) suggests a number of methods to achieve it. The first method is through "prolonged engagement" (p. 84) in which the researcher has to establish a relationship built on trust, whether with the studied individuals or the organisations where the study is taking place (Morrow, 2005). In this study, there was no organisation or "gatekeepers" (Shenton, 2004, p. 65) that I had to build a relationship with. However, I built a relationship with the participants, as discussed above, before engaging in the interviews.

Another method for achieving credibility is member checks; these go to the heart of credibility (Guba, 1981). Member checks do not necessarily happen only through sending the transcripts to the participants (Morrow, 2005), but can also happen "on the spot" during the interview (Shenton, 2004, p. 68). I followed this approach during the interviews when I repeated from time to time phrases such as "so, do I understand that you are saying …" or "so I understand that …". This method was effective since some participants corrected some of what seemed to be a misunderstanding on my side, or they confirmed that I had already understood a point correctly. I also sent them my transcription of their interviews. However, some of them replied in a very short time with a one word email saying e.g., "approved". When I asked the one participant how she had managed to read her transcript so quickly, she answered that she trusted my transcription and was not willing to reread the whole interview again. This encouraged me to emphasise and check my understandings of the data during the interviews even more, since I was concerned that the other participants might also not read the transcriptions but would rely on me alone to represent them accurately. The third method for achieving credibility is persistent observation (Guba, 1981).

> Extended interaction with a situation or a milieu leads inquirers to an understanding of what is essential or characteristic of it. At the same time they learn to eliminate aspects that are irrelevant while continuing to attend to those that, while atypical, are nevertheless critical. (Guba, 1981, p. 85)

Since the context of the research is a UK university which I am a part of as a Saudi international student, there were some persistent interactions between the participants and myself, whether at the university, the mosque, or in the

Saudi Society that I visited a number of times. Although I did not use observation as a method for collecting the data, my informal observation of the participants as we interacted with one another did help me notice and observe any changes that had occurred in them, whether these changes were related to their appearances, behaviours, or even the lack of any significant changes at times.

Guba (1981) proposes other methods to achieve credibility such as peer debriefing, collection of referential adequacy materials, triangulation, and establishing referential adequacy. However, I did not use these methods because there were no materials or documents to work with and, therefore, collection of referential adequacy materials and establishing referential adequacy would not apply to my research. Further, although I used peer debriefing while discussing some of the findings with a colleague, these discussions were informal and, therefore, they were not formally documented. Nevertheless, this limited debriefing did help me to develop a further understanding of some of the data. When it comes to triangulation, rather than using different methods for collecting the data or different research teams to interpret the data, the member checks of the participants were used to provide me with their own interpretations for some of the data. This checking happened during the interviews or immediately afterwards, as mentioned above.

Although I chose not to use the above methods proposed in the above paragraph by Guba (1981), I did employ two different methods proposed by Shenton (2004). The first method suggested by Shenton is related to the choice of the sampling. Although I used snowballing sampling (whereby I asked some

participants to recruit friends who might be interested in taking part in the study), this sampling was random and, therefore, I did not set any criteria for the participants apart from being Saudi international students. This random sampling may have reduced any bias on my part as a researcher. Further, random sampling provides assurance that the selected group are representatives of a larger group (Bouma & Atkinson, 1995).

The second method proposed by Shenton (2004) that I used for achieving credibility is what he calls "tactics to help ensure honesty in informants" (Shenton, 2004, p. 66). To help ensure honest replies participants should be informed that there are no "right" or "wrong" answers and they should be encouraged to be frank when providing answers in the interviews. Further, the participants should be reassured that they are free to withdraw from the study at any time should they wish to, or to refuse to answer any question if they do not wish to do so. This method seemed effective in my study and, therefore, prior to starting each interview, I assured the participants of three things. First, they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time. Secondly, they had the right to refuse to answer any question, and finally I assured them that their identities would be concealed and that no one other than me would be allowed to listen to the tape recordings and hence that they could not be identified by their voices. Therefore, I used the methods above to achieve the greatest degree of credibility possible.

3.4.8.3 *Dependability:*

Dependability in qualitative research is concerned with providing similar results if the research were to be repeated in the same context, using the same methods, and the same participants (Shenton, 2004). However, because of the changing nature of phenomena in qualitative research, providing the same result is problematic (Fidel, 1993; Marshall & Rossman, 2010). Therefore, Lincoln & Guba (1985) argue that there are close ties between credibility and dependability since, if the former is achieved, then the latter will be achieved as a result. Guba (1981) suggests "overlap methods" (p. 86) to achieve dependability whereby the researcher uses two different methods for collecting the data. As argued before, I used informal observations while interacting with the participants as these helped me to compare some of their actual behaviours, for example, with what they had said in their interviews.

Guba (1981) further suggests what he calls "stepwise replication'' (p. 87) as another method to achieve dependability. This form of replication requires two teams split into two halves to work alongside each other to interpret the data; they then compare their results. As mentioned before in the credibility criterion, I used the participants themselves to check their answers and my understandings during the interviews. If their answers had changed in the second set of interviews, this change did not mean that the research was not dependable because the context for the second interview was different, since at least 9 months had passed between both interviews. From a phenomenological perspective, any shift in a participant's thinking is not unusual, since there is a transaction between the participants and the world as they constitute and are constituted by each other (Laverty, 2003).

3.4.8.4. *Confirmability:*

The final criterion of trustworthiness is confirmability, which is the equivalent of objectivity. Shenton (2004) argues that achieving objectivity in social research is a difficult task since even questionnaires and tests are designed by humans. Therefore, the goal of confirmability is to "ensure as far as possible that the work's findings are the result of the experiences and ideas of the informants, rather than the characteristics and preferences of the researcher" (Shenton, 2004, p. 72). To ensure confirmability, Guba (1981) suggests triangulation and arranging a confirmability audit whose job it is to certify that the available data is consistent with the interpretations that were offered by the participants. As I argued before, I used the participants' checking to ensure my understandings of the data during the interviews and, therefore, they were the agents who were certifying my interpretations.

Throughout the process of collecting and interpreting the data for this study, I tried to achieve the main four criteria of trustworthiness: transferability, credibility, dependability, and confirmability. The part played by the participants themselves in achieving these ends was important since many of the criteria often require seeking help from external inquirers such as colleagues. However, because I worked as a researcher independently, and it was thus not possible for me to call upon others, I used the participants to certify that my interpretations were accurate and consistent with the data they had provided during the interviews by talking to them about what I understood from their answers.

3.4.9 Reflexivity

One of the traditional reasons that leads policy makers and some researchers to consider qualitative research as less scientific is the involvement of the researcher's knowledge in interpreting the data (Lichtman, 2010b). However, as Ratner (2002) points out "The investigator's values are said to define the world that is studied. One never really sees or talks about the world, per se. One only sees and talks about what one's values dictate" (p. 2).

Harding (1986, 1991) points out that researchers' social and political locations constantly influence the research; "Our choice of research design, the research methodology, and the theoretical framework that informs our research are governed by our values and reciprocally, help to shape these values" (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004, p. 274). As a result, the researcher will also have an impact on how the data are interpreted and represented. As Guillemin and Gillam argue "reflexivity in research is thus a process of critical reflection both on the kind of knowledge produced from research and how that knowledge is generated" (p. 274).

Consequently, McGraw, Zvonkovic, and Walker (2000) define reflexivity as follows:

> Reflexivity is a process whereby researchers place themselves and their practices under scrutiny, acknowledging the ethical dilemmas that permeate the research process and impinge on the creation of knowledge. (p. 68)

In postmodern research, researchers have adopted more radical relativism since they embrace the social construction of reality (Finlay, 2002). Therefore, the

reflexivity of the researcher seems to be inevitable and thus will always be present. Further, reflexivity has become a defining feature of qualitative research (Banister, 1994). Through reflexivity, researchers "will try to make explicit how intersubjective elements impact on data collection and analysis in an effort to enhance the trustworthiness, transparency and accountability of their research" (Finlay, 2002, pp. 211-212). However, Finlay points out that the question is not about whether to engage the researcher's reflexivity or not anymore but is about how it is done.

Hertz (1997, p. viii) helps to provide guidance on answering the question of how reflexivity can be done. He argues that since researchers construct interpretations, they should ask the questions of "What do I know?" and "How do I know what I know?" In order to answer both questions, Bourdieu (as cited in Jenkins, 1992) maintains that researchers have to take two steps back. First, having collected their data, researchers have to step back to observe the research subject objectively, which gives answers to the epistemological question "What do I know?" In the second step back, researchers have to reflect on the observation itself, which gives answers to the question "How do I know what I know?" Guillemin and Gillam (2004) point out that "a reflexive researcher is one who is aware of all these potential influences and is able to step back and take a critical look at his or her own role in the research process" (p. 275).

Any non-Saudi researcher would have been able to follow the two steps back that Bourdieu calls for: looking at the data objectively, then reflecting on it. However, having been brought up and educated to university level in Saudi

Arabia and also having been a student in the UK since 2008, this education has given me a major advantage when it comes to the second stepping back. I could empathise with the students and interpret the data from the participants' perspectives since we are involved in the same experience and because researchers are active participants too (Lincoln & Denzin, 2000).

Therefore, after I analysed the data and decided upon the main themes of the study, I stepped back to see what the findings were. Then, giving meaning to the findings was the most challenging step. I reflected my own knowledge as a Saudi individual on the data itself, as I could see the data from a similar angle of the participants given that both the researcher and the researched are all Saudi international students. Nevertheless, as mentioned before, I used the member checking technique (Talburt, 2004) to ensure that the participants contributed to the meanings of the study (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2006). As a result, the study's meanings were coconstructed with the participants. To achieve this coconstruction I used the same two methods that I discussed above. First, during the interviews, I realised immediately that some data were relevant to the research questions and, therefore, I shared my understanding with the interviewees and asked whether my understanding was that they meant. One recurrent comment that I made during the interviews was "So I understand that you are saying that…." This allowed the participants to either confirm my understanding or to correct it. Secondly, I sent the participants the findings and shared these with them. They had the chance to look at them and to voice their opinions to me. Both methods secured the participants' engagement in the sense-making process alongside my own analysis.

3.4.10 Research ethics

The importance of research ethics runs deeper than the mere officiality of written and signed consent forms (see Appendix 1; Ethics form). The actual interactions between the researcher and the participants should ensure their dignity and autonomy and guarantee no harm comes to them (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004). Once the participants feel that their dignity, autonomy, and safety are assured, this feeling should motivate them to talk about their daily experiences (Christians, 2000). Further, researchers have to be aware of not falling into stereotyping their research participants, whether in the form of gender, class, or racial stereotyping (Denzin, 1997) as doing so influences the research both ethically and epistemologically.

When it comes to ethics in the social sciences, Christians (2011, p. 65) maintains that there are a number ethical guidelines for conducting any research. The first is what he calls informed consent. To give informed consent, the participants have to be made fully aware of the nature and purpose of the study that they will be involved in. In addition, the participants have to agree to take part in the study voluntarily and without any pressure. The second guideline covers the issue of deception; i.e., the deliberate misinterpretation of the data. According to Bulmer (1982), deception is "neither ethically justified, nor practically necessary, nor in the best interests of sociology as an academic pursuit" (p. 217). The next ethical guideline relates to accuracy. Christians (2011) argues, "Fabrications, fraudulent materials, omissions, and contrivances are both non-scientific and unethical" (p. 66). However, Bulmer (2008) and Punch (1998) argue that

omission is not considered as a form of deception since there will always be irrelevant data that should be left out.

For my research, I decided to maintain the ethics of the research and to avoid deception in any of its forms. However, I followed Bulmer (2008) and Punch (1998) and omitted some stories that were irrelevant to the research questions. For this reason, I did not mention them in the findings. Further, I ensured that the participants understood the purpose of the research before they signed the consent forms. Although the participants were happy to take part in the study, some seemed reluctant to sign the consent form because of its formality. They indicated that they felt uncomfortable with some points in the form itself that talked about the participant's responsibility toward the research. Although the form initially was designed to protect the participants' rights, I could see that the word responsibility when translated to the Arabic *masouliya* means that there would consequences eventually occur as a result of their involvement. Therefore, I had to explain to the participants that the purpose of the consent form was actually to ensure their rights at the outset. I also pointed out that the word responsibility in English does not have exactly the same meaning as it does in Arabic. This explanation encouraged the participants to overcome their fears and take part in the study.

The final guideline for ethics in the social sciences pointed out by Christians (2011) concerns the issue of privacy and confidentiality. Participants' identities and answers have to be confidential and "All personal data ought to be secured or concealed and made public only behind a shield of anonymity" (Christians,

2011, p. 66). I ensured the autonomy of both the participants' identities and the data. I kept the data recordings in a safe place in my room and, even when transcribing the interviews, I did not seek any help in order to ensure that only I could listen to the interviews. Further, I used pseudonyms for the participants, so when writing the findings no one would be able to ascertain their real identity.

In addition to the guidelines offered by Christians (2011), Skeggs (2001) points out that additional ethical issues have to be addressed when studying females. She calls these feminist ethics. These ethics have to be paid enough attention when interviewing female participants, since they are relevant to the power distance between both genders and thus this distance has to be equalised. Initially, I thought that this power imbalance would be an issue in this study, since I assumed that the female participants might have some concerns about being interviewed by a male Saudi student. This assumption was mainly based on the restricted interactions between men and women in Saudi Arabia and a belief that female participants might find interacting with me challenging. However, only a few female participants seemed to be concerned about being interviewed by me. They did express some concern about being seen with a male as it might create some gossip, especially amongst other Saudi individuals, if they were to be seen with me.

In order to overcome the concerns of the few female participants who did find being interviewed by me problematic, I devised strategies to ensure their comfort during the interviews. First, I worked on minimising any concerns by

maintaining a friendly, warm relationship with them. The fact that these particular participants and I shared a mutual female Saudi friend who joined me in our informal meetings and gatherings before conducting the interviews helped me to achieve this end. I wanted them to see how I interacted with our mutual female friend so that they would understand that that was how I interact normally with everyone. The more they had the chance to know me beforehand, the more they felt comfortable about interacting with me.

Some participants, however, did not have enough time to meet regularly before the interviews. Therefore, in order to eliminate any pressure on them, I suggested that we could have a focus group interview. Three of them seemed to appreciate the idea and, therefore, they agreed to take part in the study. It seemed that being in a group and outnumbering me made them feel more comfortable about being interviewed by a Saudi male researcher.

At the time of the interviews, I informed the participants about the purpose of the recording. I also informed them that the data would later be transcribed, and that no one other than I would listen to the recordings. In addition, the participants were told that the data would be destroyed once the study had been completed. During the interview, I called some of the participants by name, though these names most certainly did not appear in the transcripts. In their place, anonymous codes were used (Oliver, 2003). My major worry centred on the possibility that one or more of the participants might withdraw from the study for reasons related to the research itself, for example not feeling generally

comfortable during the interviews. However, this eventuality did not arise, as the participants were keen to continue the interviews.

3.5 Concluding remarks

The research for this doctoral thesis was carried out at a UK university where a number of Saudi students were studying for various degrees. Its purpose is to explore their intercultural experiences, how gender plays a role in their intercultural contacts, and finally how such experiences impacted their identifications. In order to achieve this purpose, I used ethnography as a methodological framework guided by phenomenology as a theoretical framework. I conducted semistructured interviews with the participants in order to reveal their various intercultural experiences and the multiple realities that they encountered.

As a Saudi male researcher, the experience was more complicated than simply recruiting participants for the study because I also needed to involve myself with the participants in order to establish a strong relationship built on shared trust with them. This task was both time- and effort-consuming. Nevertheless I decided to enjoy the research task fully and in the process I created lasting friendships with some of the participants.

Analysing the data and then defining the themes was the most challenging task. In the beginning I felt that the themes deviated from the research questions, but I tried to bring the focus of the analysis back to the purpose of the research and to answer its questions. Overall, the journey of meeting the participants, conducting

the interviews and then analysing the data was not very easy because finding Saudi international students in the area who were interested in taking part in the study was challenging.

3.6 Chapter summary

This chapter has focused on the methodology that is going to be used throughout this study. It started with a discussion on phenomenology to be an overarching framework to guide the methods as well as the analysis of the data. Next, the chapter has discussed the reasons for choosing qualitative research as the methodology for the study and how ethnographic interviews seem to be the most appropriate methods for collecting the data. Further, the chapter has presented the pilot study that helped in shaping the focus of some of the interviews protocols to be adjusted as necessary for the rest of the interviews in this study. Then, the chapter moved to discuss the research context, the interviews place, language, duration as well as the participants' profiles that I recruited for the study and built a relationship based on trust with them. Further, the chapter has also discussed the thematic content analysis (Braun & Clark, 2006) for analysing the data. Finally, the chapter discussed the trustworthiness criteria and the research ethics of the study.

Guided by the methodology discussed in this chapter, the next four chapters focus on the findings that emerged from the data and answer the research questions. Therefore, Chapter Four will attempt to answer RQ1 regarding experiencing friendship in the UK, Chapter Five will focus on answering RQ2 regarding interactions with individuals from the opposite gender, Chapter Six

will discuss the motivating and demotivating experiences to engage in intercultural communication to answer RQ3. Finally, in an attempt to answer RQ4, Chapter Seven attempts to discuss how the overall intercultural communication experiences in the UK had influenced the participants' identifications and worldviews.

CHAPTER FOUR

Experiencing Friendship in the UK

Introduction

In this chapter and the following three chapters, I introduce the findings that emerged from the data. In this first finding chapter, I discuss how the participants experienced friendship during their sojourns in the UK. The next findings chapter focuses on the interactions between the participants and individuals from the opposite gender, which is an experience that they do not encounter regularly in Saudi Arabia. In the third findings chapter, the focus will be on the incidents that motivated and demotivated the participants from engaging in intercultural communication. Finally, the final findings chapter discusses how the overall intercultural communication experiences in the UK had influenced the participants' identifications and worldviews.

Friendship emerged as one of the major themes in the data provided by the Saudi students with regard to their intercultural experiences in the UK. The term 'friendship' here refers to the relationships that the participants chose to form through socialising, and through which they thus became friends with certain individuals, irrespective of whether they were home students, international students, or individuals whom the participants perceived to be in-group members such as Saudi, Arab, or Muslim friends. The importance of addressing friendship as a theme comes from the assumption that, as some studies argue (e.g., Gareis, 2000; Kudo & Simkin, 2003), international students may encounter difficulties in forming friendships with individuals from around the world during

their overseas sojourns. Further, intercultural friendship provides rich data for understanding intercultural communication because of the complexities in this type of relationship (Sias et al., 2008).

Guided by phenomenology as an overarching theory, and also guided by Dervin's (2013) mixed intersubjectivity when looking at identification, the study draws upon Byram's Intercultural Competence Model (1997) to analyse the data. Therefore, the discussion of the findings in this chapter is guided by his *savoirs*: i.e., the attitudes (*savoir être*), knowledge (*savoir*), skills of interpreting and relating (*savoir comprendre*), skills of discovery and interaction (*savoir aprendre/faire*), and critical cultural awareness (*savoir s'engager*) that make up the main components of that model. In presenting the findings that emerged from the data, this chapter first looks at the assumptions and stereotypes that the participants held about the UK before and after their arrival. The focus then moves to highlighting the willingness of the participants to experience intercultural communication with other students whom they had perceived as out-group members, or whether they preferred to socialise with same-group members. It is important to address the participants' willingness to experience intercultural communication, because their assumptions and stereotypes about the UK relate to the attitudes dimension in Byram's (1997) model. Further, as Byram (1997) argues, attitudes are preconditions for successful intercultural communication and their relationship with the other savoirs is one of interdependence.

After looking at the participants' attitudes of openness and curiosity, as represented in their willingness to experience intercultural communication (section 4.1.2) and their assumptions and stereotypes about the UK (section 4.1.1), the discussion moves to exploring how the participants experienced intercultural communication with individuals whom they had initially perceived as out-group members, for example, home students and international students (sections 4.1.2.1 & 4.1.2.2). Guided by the knowledge, skills, and critical cultural awareness savoirs, the discussion will show how the attitudes savoir is also present during their intercultural communication experiences since, as argued above, its relationship with the other savoirs is one of interdependence.

Finally, as a result of the challenges that emerged from experiencing intercultural communication, the chapter will focus on the participants' willingness to change in terms of a preference for socialising with individuals whom they viewed as in-group members, such as Muslims, Arabs or Saudi students (section 4.1.3). The conclusion of this chapter argues that it is difficult to define the distinctions the participants make between in-group and out-group members. This finding supports Dervin's (2013) mixed intersubjectivity concept which maintains that individuals' identifications of themselves, as well as of others, are inconsistent and fluid. The conclusion also suggests that, in the case of the participants, there seem to be different types of knowledge *(savoir)* rather than one type that is shared by individuals from the same social group. Further, the participants reveal that other reasons motivated them to seek out opportunities to experience intercultural communication beyond the "tourist" and "commercial" approaches (Byram, 1997, p. 50). The final conclusion of this

chapter argues that the participants' awareness and understanding of religion — as individuals — seem to have hindered their intercultural communication, as I attempt to explain throughout this chapter.

4.1 Assumptions, stereotypes, and attitudes of willingness, openness, and curiosity

This section focuses on the participants' attitudes savoir, as defined by Byram (1997, p. 34):

> They need to be attitudes of curiosity and openness, of readiness to suspend disbelief and judgement with respect to others' meanings, beliefs and behaviours. There also needs to be a willingness to suspend belief in one's own meanings and behaviours, and to analyse them from the viewpoint of the others with whom one is engaging.

Byram further adds that attitudes include the "willingness to seek out or take up opportunities to engage with otherness in a relationship of equality; this should be distinguished from attitudes of seeking out the exotic or of seeking to profit from others" (1997, p. 50). The importance of discussing the participants' attitudes comes from Byram's (1997) argument that attitudes are a precondition for successful intercultural communication. Further, attitudes influence the other savoirs of knowledge, skills, and critical cultural awareness. Therefore, the first part of the discussion in this section centres on the assumptions and stereotypes that the participants held about the UK before their arrival and how some of their attitudes had changed these stereotypes during their sojourn. The second part will discuss the participants' willingness — or the lack of it — to experience intercultural communication with individuals whom they viewed as out-group members such as home students or other international students.

4.1.1 Assumptions and stereotypes about the UK

The participants reported that they had held some assumptions and stereotypes about the UK: i.e., the people and the daily life. Generally, the participants' assumptions and stereotypes mainly described people in the UK as conservative, reserved, arrogant, and unfriendly people. These assumptions came either from various interactions the participants had experienced before coming to the UK, or from different resources such as books, websites, or hearing about other people's experiences in the UK.

Zainah pointed out:

أنا فكرت وكنت أقرأ عن الناس في بريطانيا أنهم ناس باردين ولا يساعدون. العادة أن الإنجليز باردين

"Before I came to the UK I had created an impression from my readings about English people that they are too cold and do not provide help to others."

Sameer had a similar assumption:

المجتمع ياخذ بالمادة ومجتمع متحفظ شوي في علاقته مع الغريب

"I think the society in the UK is very reserved when dealing with other people."

Both participants did not seem to have ''explicit criteria'' (Byram, 1997, p. 63) that led them to hold such assumptions about British people being 'cold' or 'reserved', apart from the suggestion that they had heard or read the idea somewhere. On the other hand, Abdulaziz's reasoning for holding stereotypes about people in the UK comes from his previous experiences of interactions with British individuals:

ما كنت أحس أنهم [البريطانيين] بيكونون فريندلي ويكونوا متعاونين أو أي شي، بالعكس كانت النظرة أن الناس ممكن ما يكونوا متعاونين وحيكونوا واقفين ضدك ويكونوا عنصريين ... لأن الي شفتهم في جدة من البريطانيين تحس فيهم كذا جعاصة وشوفة النفس واستحقار للآخر ولو لم يقلها تحسها فيه

“Before I came to the UK, I thought [British] people would be unfriendly, looking down upon other people and also racists against anybody coming to their country … I got this impression from some British people in Jeddah.”

Other participants, such as Ahmed and Hadeel, added additional adjectives such as ‘punctual’ and ‘serious’ to describe people in the UK.

حقيقة ما قرأت كثير عن البريطانيين [لكن] هم أناس يعني عندهم احترام للمواعيد.. يعني حتى يقول لك موعد إنجليزي.. يعني كانت قضية الانضباط كانت هي السائدة في ذهني

“I have not read a lot about British people, but I think they are punctual … you know when we say ‘English punctuality’ [laughing] … this is what was in my mind about them.” (Ahmed)

أحس أنهم جادين بقوة ... يعني حتى لو ضحكنا أو شي أحس ماخذين الشي بجدية

“I do not like mixed classes with [British] postgraduate students … I think they are very serious people … even if we laugh [in the class] I feel they take [my behaviour] seriously.” (Hadeel)

Although Hadeel mentioned that she does not feel comfortable with postgraduates—who it might be argued would be more serious due to the level of their studies—the mention here of her feelings about them was made in the context of home students. Descriptions such as ‘punctual’ and ‘serious’ do not necessarily have positive connotations, and they could be seen as the opposite. Sosnizkij (2003) points out that being ‘serious’ could be a synonym for ‘unfriendliness’ when it comes to stereotypes, and being ‘punctual’ implies an ‘inflexible’ character (Neumann, 1998). This is the impression that was created by both participants’ statements, since Ahmed laughed in what sounded to be an ironic way when he mentioned ‘English punctuality’, whereas Hadeel showed her

annoyance about not being able to laugh or relax because of the UK students' seriousness.

This notion of seriousness as a synonym for unfriendliness becomes clearer in Aminah's remark when she compares people of the UK to those of the USA.

أكثر انطباع سائد عنهم [البريطانيين] أنهم ماهم مرة فريندلي، وأنهم مرة جادين.. يعني لما تقارنهم بالأمريكان أحس فيه فرق كبير بينهم..

"My main impression about British people was that they were unfriendly people and very serious … I mean when you compare them to American people, you will see a big difference between them." (Aminah)

Further, this idea of American people being friendlier than British people also appeared in some other participants' remarks. For example, Khadijah points out:

[قبل أجي هنا] كان الجميع يقول أن أمريكا أفضل لأن الناس فريندلي أكثر. التعامل مع الناس يكون صعب هن ومايقتبلون الآخرين بسرعة ... هذي كانت الفكرة"

"Before I came to the UK, many people had told me that it is better to go to the USA instead because people there are friendlier … dealing with people in the UK would be more difficult because they do not accept others quickly … that was my impression."

Zahir also pointed out:

نظرتي عن الشعب البريطاني من أول عنهم أنهم ناس، سمعته من ناس كانوا في بريطانيا، فخورين بأنفسهم ولديهم غرور وهذا بسبب تاريخهم وماهم فريندلي مثل الشعب الأمريكي أو الكندي

"My impression about British people before coming here was that they were unfriendly people, arrogant, and too proud of their history, unlike American and Canadian people."

Similar to Abdulaziz who described people in the UK people as unfriendly because of his personal experiences in Jeddah, both Aminah and Zahir had the

opposite experiences with some American people, which had led them to compare them to people in the UK and reach their conclusions that the latter are less friendly. Such assumptions and stereotypes about people in the UK as being unfriendly, arrogant or reserved show the variety of stereotypes that the participants had formed, and with the source of those stereotypes ranging from personal experiences, to readings that stereotyped British people, to mere assumptions they had read or heard somewhere. What constitutes unfriendly, arrogant or reserved comes from the participants' own understandings of these terms rather than from any attempt to understand whether British people intended to be arrogant or unfriendly. Therefore, the participants seem to have used their own criteria of meanings-making to judge other individuals rather than ''explicit criteria'' that have rational standpoints (Byram, 1997, p. 63).

Further, using adjectives such as arrogant, unfriendly, reserved, or serious to describe people in the UK implies that "we Saudis" are the opposite: friendly, outgoing, and humble. Therefore, the participants' understandings of these terms link their attitudes (stereotypes about people in the UK) to their knowledge of their own social group, which is meant to help them to relativise their own meanings and beliefs about themselves. Byram (1997, p. 35) argues:

> The relationship between attitudes and knowledge is not the simple cause and effect often assumed, i.e. that increased knowledge creates positive attitudes. Nonetheless, it is probably easier to relativise one's own meanings, beliefs and behaviours through comparison with others' than to attempt to decentre and distance oneself from what the processes of socialization have suggested is natural and unchangeable.

The participants' remarks, however, show that their readiness to suspend their disbeliefs about British people was not significant enough and, therefore, they did not attempt to analyse what they considered arrogant or unfriendly behaviours from the viewpoints of British people. Though the participants above seem to have expressed negative stereotypes about the UK, positive stereotypes can also lead to mutual misunderstanding (Byram, 1997).

After arriving in the UK, some of the participants' assumptions and stereotypes about the UK did change to various degrees, with some assumptions changing significantly while others changed to a lesser degree. For instance, Khadijah who thought of people in the UK as unfriendly before her arrival in the UK stated:

تغيرت فكرتي [عن بريطانيا] بنسبة 70%. يعني هم نظاميين، لكن مثل مافي بلدك أصلا تواجه ناس صعبين.. يعني صعب تقول عن الشعب كله أنه كذا. بصراحة أنا كنت متصورة أني ألقى الناس كلها نفس الطريقة، بالعكس غيرت فكرتي بشكل إيجابي. خصوصا هنا [في مدينتي] الناس كلهم فريندلي.. أنا ارتحت لأن الأساتذة كلهم حولي طيبين ... لي فترة هنا من سبتمبر

"My view has changed [about the UK] 70% since I came here last September … there are many friendly people and just like we have friendly and unfriendly people in our countries, here the same … we should not overgeneralise assumptions about people … I like this city; there are many friendly people including my teachers."

The same assumption of people in the UK being unfriendly changed after Abdulaziz's arrival in the UK. In his words:

يعني مثلا البنك أتعامل معاهم، أنا أجنبي وهم همهم في الحياة مو أنت أجنبي أو بريطاني ... يعني كيف الموظف يقابل الكلاينت بأحسن صورة ممكنة بغض النظر عن أي عرقية ينتمي لها أو دولة ما همهم ... مرة مؤدبين في التعامل ... حتى محلات المطاعم مثلا محترمين بالمرة... أنا ما تصورت أنهم كذا ... أنا تصورت أنه في كل مكان حشم ريحة العنصرية في كل مكان

"People here are very polite and helpful … when I go to the bank for instance, everybody is welcoming no matter where I come from … even when I go to shops or restaurants, the staff are very polite … I had a different idea before that they would be racists."

Both participants had changed their negative stereotype about the UK from describing it as an unfriendly or racist place to a friendly and welcoming one. As stated above, Byram (1997) argues that changing stereotypes from negative to positive ones does not necessarily lead to successful communication, since even positive stereotypes may hinder mutual understandings. Therefore, the participants need to suspend negative beliefs about others' meanings and relativise their own meanings if they want to experience intercultural communication. This point was clear in Khadijah's remark when she stated that one should not overgeneralise assumptions about other people and also pointed out that there are just as unfriendly people everywhere including 'our countries'. This shows the relationship between attitudes and knowledge whereby the participants found it easier to relativise their own meanings when they compared them to others'. Further, it shows the development of this knowledge since the participants now seem to have "awareness of how one's 'natural' ways of interacting with other people are the 'naturalised' product of socialisation, and how parallel but different modes of interaction can be expected in other cultures" (Byram, 1997, p. 52).

Mohammed expressed similar attitudes and knowledge in what seem to be misreadings of other groups' meanings, but his remark differed from Khadijah's:

ماهي عنصرية أو أنهم متعالين، ولكن ثقافتهم تربوا عليها أنهم ما يتعاملون مع الغريب على عكسنا حنا نكرم الضيف ونقدم له كل التسهيلات لكن هنا تجد الشخص الغريب ما تقدر تعرفه أو أنك تفتح معه قنوات تواصل لأنه يجهلك ولا يعرفك، يعني لو ننظر للتعليم تجده يحث على عدم الحديث مع الغرباء فكانوا ماشين على هذا المبدأ فنبدأ ننظر على أنه تعالي أو شي مثل كذا

"I do not think they [British people] are arrogant … this is just their culture; they do not talk to strangers, unlike us who welcome other people and we are generous with guests even if we do not know them properly … it is just different."

Although Mohammed acknowledges the different cultural ways of interacting, he does not seem to view them as 'parallel' (i.e., different but equally valid) modes of interaction — unlike Khadijah — since he states that people in his culture are generous and welcoming, unlike in the UK. Using such adjectives indicates approval of his culture and disapproval of the 'culture' — his words — in the UK and, therefore, he seems to view his modes of interaction as being 'natural' while not seeing the interaction of others as being 'parallel'.

This notion becomes clearer in Zahir's statement:

ما أحس أي شي تغير … بالعكس أنا صرت أقدر الثقافة السعودية أكثر، يعني لما أرجع هناك أحس بالفخر وأفرح به.. لكن يوم جيت هنا حبيت السعودية أكثر.. يعني عملت مقارنات.. يعني في السعودية أشوف الكرم غير هنا

"I have not changed my mind [about the UK] … In fact I started appreciating the Saudi culture even more … I have made comparisons between Saudi Arabia and the UK; we are more generous people."

Both Mohammed and Zahir are similar in the way they view their culture as 'natural', and hold to the idea that other people's cultures are not only different but also not parallel. The difference between both participants lies only in the

way they expressed their views, as Mohammed implied the nonparallel contrast between Saudi Arabia and the UK, while Zahir expressed his views explicitly.

The data in this section demonstrate how the participants had mixed assumptions and stereotypes, which formed part of their attitudes, about the UK before their arrival, and how some of these stereotypes had changed during the course of their stay in the UK. Although these stereotypes varied amongst the participants to varying degrees, the importance of these attitudes that influence their knowledge lies in the need for the participants to suspend their misconceptions and judgments about other individuals' beliefs, meanings, and behaviours, and relativise their own meanings, values, and behaviours if they wish to experience successful intercultural communication. Some participants seem to do so, while others do so to a lesser degree. The next section will focus on the second aspect of attitudes in Byram's (1997) model, that is, the participants' willingness — or the lack of it — to experience intercultural communication with individuals whom they view as out-group members.

4.1.2 The participants' willingness and attitudes of openness and curiosity to experience intercultural communication

This section focuses on the second component of attitudes in Byram's (1997) model, i.e., the willingness to seek out opportunities to experience intercultural communication with otherness. Therefore, I discuss the participants' willingness — or even the lack of it — to experience intercultural communication through friendship with individuals whom they view as out-group members, for example, domestic students and other international students. During the discussions of

the participants' willingness to experience intercultural communication, I also focus on the influence their attitudes have on their skills, knowledge, and critical cultural awareness. In order to do so, I first start with the participants' willingness to experience intercultural communication with home students and challenges they encountered that hindered their intercultural interactions. The discussion then moves to the participants' willingness to engage in intercultural communication interactions with other international students and the challenges the participants encountered during their intercultural interactions with them.

4.1.2.1 Experiencing friendship with home students

When it comes to experiencing intercultural communication with home students, some participants expressed their willingness to do so but indicated that they found the experience challenging for two reasons. The first relates to the lack of opportunities to meet home students because few of them took the same courses as the participants, or because their accommodation arrangements restricted the participants from meeting them. The second reason relates to the home students themselves, since some participants pointed out that they were reserved and showed less willingness to interact with them. Both these reasons are explored in more detail below.

4.1.2.1.1 The lack of opportunities to meet UK students

Some participants expressed some frustration because of the lack of opportunities to meet UK students because of the courses the participants were enrolled in or their living arrangements. For instance, Abdulaziz explained that his classmates were mainly Arab students as well as a few other international

students and that the nature of this course make-up limited his chances to meet UK students:

[ما أقدر أصاحب بريطانيين لأن] في الكلاس الي معي كلهم عرب، وكل القروب عرب..

"I do not have any British friends mainly because the course I am doing consists mostly of Arabs."

A similar remark was made by Zainah:

ما صار أني أدرس في مكان فيه بريطانيين.. لو كان فيه بريطانيين كان أتوقع يصير عندي أصدقاء بريطانيين لكن كورسي كله عرب، ما عدا تايوانية

"I would like to make British friends but I am afraid I did not have the chance because of the nature of my course …. Most of them are Arabs, apart from the Taiwanese girl."

Both Abdulaziz and Zainah's courses seem to have been barriers to their making friends with domestic UK students, a situation which had caused them some frustration. Sameer too showed this same willingness to befriend UK students. He tried to find a way to make friends with home students by participating in a language exchange course:

كنت أدور على قضايا ممكن أفيدهم [البريطانيين] فيها، فكانت اللغة العربية في موضوع برنامج التاندوم، وبصراحة بنيت علاقات أكثر مما أحتاج، أنا هدفي كان أني يكون لدي أصدقاء بريطانيين، ولدي الآن ثلاثة إلى أربعة

"I was looking for any shared interests with British students to be friends with them, so I used the tandem language course, in which I teach them Arabic, as a way to meet with some of them … I already have made more friends than I actually needed … I always wanted to have British friends and now I have three or four of them."

The exchange — or tandem — language programme that Sameer joined is a programme that twins two students speaking two different languages; they meet

regularly and discuss various topics in both languages in order to enhance each other's language skills. Although language seems to be the main purpose of this programme, Sameer used it as a way of meeting UK students, as he later stated in the interview.

Shabeeb (1996) attempted to discover if there is a relationship between Saudi international students and their courses of study. He concluded from his study that Saudi international students who studied social sciences were less adjusted than those who studied natural sciences. However, the findings above show that the reasons for not being able to initiate intercultural communication were merely related to the fact that some participants had few or sometimes no home students in their courses. The lack of opportunities to form friendships with home students was also reported by Hechanova-Alampay, Beehr, Christiansen, and Van Horn (2002) who argue that few international students managed to experience intercultural communication with domestic students due to lack of opportunity.

There were other participants who did not have the chance to make contact with home students but in this case the reasons related to their accommodation. For instance, Zahrani stated:

الي يحدد العلاقات هو الكورس الي أنا فيه أكثرهم عرب ... وغير كذا البلوك الي ساكن فيه تقريبا بلوك كامل فيه 14 غرفة.. 13 غرفة كلهم صينيين ما عدا أنا غير صيني.. كان ودي فيه من ثقافات أخرى بريطاني أو غير بريطاني ما فرقت معي.. يعني مو مشكلة أنا بتعرف بالعكس شي أحب يكون فيه أكثر من ثقافة

"My college corridor is full of Chinese students … I live on a corridor which has 14 rooms, all of them are Chinese students apart from me … I would have loved to have a mixture of different cultures such as British students."

Haleemah who lived with her husband alone in private accommodation raised a similar point when she remarked:

المشكلة الي أنا حاليا أواجهها وواجهتها في السنة الأولى أنهم [الطلاب البريطانيين] يعيشون في الكوليج فعلاقتهم تتوطد أكثر مع بعض ... يعني خلاص دخلاتهم طلعاتهم كلها سوا ومع بعض.. لو أني عشت في الكوليج وصار بيني وبينهم اختلاط يومي يعني لو اختلطت فيهم أكثر كان ممكن العلاقات تصير بشكل أكثر

"The problem is that I cannot see many British students … they live in college accommodation[s] and, therefore, their relationships get stronger with one another … If I had lived in college accommodation, I think things would have been very different … I would have developed a very good relationship with them and would have made new friends."

Ahmed who also lived with his wife and children in private accommodation added:

فيه ظروفي تمنهني يعني وجودي مع أسرة وهمومي اليومية ما تتيح لي مع أني بالعكس أظنه شيء مهم يكون عندك أصدقاء من خارج يعني من البريطانيين أنفسهم.. يعني هذا أقصر طريق للتعرف على المجتمع يعني ... تكون لديك أصدقاء حقيقيين من هذا المجتمع ... يعني تكونون أصدقاء حقيقيين ... يعني يكون بينكم تواصل دائم يعني تجي عنده ويجي عندك يعني صداقة حقيقية.. لكن للأسف أنا شخصيا لا يوجد عندي، فقط علاقات لا تصل لدرجة الصداقة

"My personal issues and being with my family do not allow me to meet British students although I think it is very important to have British friends … it is the shortest way to know the society here … you need to have friends from this place … I mean real friends who you visit and they visit you … personally, I do not have [any], I am afraid."

The three remarks above show the lack of opportunity to meet home British students because they tend to reside elsewhere. Further, in contrast to Shabeeb's (1996) study which reported that married international Saudi students with families were better adjusted, Haleemah's and Ahmed's remarks show that living

with their families minimised their opportunities to experience intercultural communication encounters.

These findings show that the participants had the willingness to initiate intercultural communication with students in the UK, but that they had limited opportunities to do so. Therefore, while individuals may have the attitudes of willingness and curiosity to initiate intercultural communication, the lack of opportunity itself may work as a barrier to doing so.

4.1.2.1.2 "They are so reserved"

Some of the participants found experiencing intercultural communication with UK students challenging, even though they, unlike the previous group of participants, did have the opportunity to do so in the classroom or in their student accommodation. They pointed out that they found home students difficult to socialise with. For instance, Lubna, who lived in a college hall of residence and did a degree where there were a number of home students in her course, pointed out:

أول ما وصلت تعرفت على لوكال لكن معظم صداقاتنا كانت هاي وش إخبارك وصباح الخير لكن مافيه أكثر... يعني ما توصل أننا نطلع أو نروح ونجي ... ماعرف يمكن لأن كلنا [الطلاب الإنترناشنال] كلنا في غربة وكان عندنا أسبوع كامل أن كل الإنترناشنال كلنا نروح سوا ونجي سوا فتعرفنا على بعض

"... when I first arrived, I met some home students but for a short time, but I felt we did not get along very well ... I do not know why ... maybe the reason is that we as international students share the same experience of being here and have homesickness, unlike UK students."

Nora shared the same view:

السنة الي فاتت كانت كلها طلاب انترناشنال فما كان فيه أي تفاعل مع طلاب بريطانيين، أما الحين بما أنه فيه طلاب بريطانيين ففيه فرصة للتفاعل أكثر معهم، ولكن ما زلت أمضي أكثر وقتي مع الإنترناشنال

"… last year I spent my time with international students because it was a foundation course, but even now I have the chance to meet UK students, I still spend most of my time with international students."

Despite the opportunities to meet home students, both participants preferred socialising with international students. International students seem to share common issues related to the feelings of homesickness and culture shock and face difficulties fitting into the lifestyle of socially established home students (Ballard & Clanchy, 1991). These factors led both Lubna and Nora to socialise with other international students because such issues unified them as one international group (Brown & Holloway, 2008). A similar finding was reported in Poynting's (2009) study about immigrant Muslim girls socialising with other international immigrants such as Greeks and Italians more than with local people. The Muslim girls reported that they had more in common with each other such as feelings of empathy and homesickness, feelings which they did not share with Australian people.

In this case, the participants viewed other international students as in-group members who form a group of international students. Therefore, unlike Byram's (1997) argument that views otherness as individuals who have different meanings, beliefs, and behaviours, the participants may not have had shared meanings and beliefs with other international. Rather, it may have been their shared experiences of being international students away from home that united them.

Other participants argued that they did not socialise with UK students because they — the domestic students — were 'conservative' and 'reserved' and thus tended to socialise with the participants only when necessary. Hadeel stated:

أحس لو رحت لأمريكا كان كونت صداقات أكثر، الناس هنا شوي متحفظين ومو متفتحين

"I think if I had gone to the USA instead I would have made more friends … people here are very conservative."

Sameer raised a similar point about UK students:

مهما كان لابد أن يكون هناك شيء مشترك مثل اللغة أو الدين حتى أنك تبني علاقة مع بريطاني.. أنا أتصور أني حاولت أني أبني علاقة مع بريطانيين وما استطعت، فربما أن المجتمع متحفظ ...[هذا لا يشمل المسلمين] لأن بيننا أخوة دينية

"I do not have any British friends … I think they are so reserved and do not want to be your friend unless there is a shared benefit … this does not include British Muslims as we share religious brotherhood with each other."

The two participants felt that home students were not willing enough to socialise with them — since they viewed those students as conservative and reserved — unless, according to Sameer, there were some shared 'benefits' other than for the sake of being friends. Andrade (2006) reported a similar issue when she studied a number of international students in the USA and also noted that the participants in her study found few opportunities to form friendships with established — or domestic as she calls them — students. Further, the participants in her study described domestic students as not "responsive" (p. 143), even though the international students showed interest in forming friendships with them. Jon (2012, p. 433) makes a similar point and argues, "International students often commented on the difficulty in making friends with domestic

students due to the language barrier, cultural differences, and preformed friendship groups among domestic students." In the case of the participants in this study, language did not seem to be a barrier to forming friendship with home students, since Sameer excludes British Muslims — who speak English — from other non-Muslim British people and mentions that he is able to be make friends with them. Further, what Jon (2012) calls "cultural differences" (p. 443) does not explain some participants' success in forming friendships with other international students. Therefore, the issue regarding forming friendship with UK students seems to be the friendships they make amongst themselves, as Jon (2012) argues.

The data in this section show that the participants had the attitudes of openness and curiosity to experience intercultural communication with home students. However, the study participants did not manage to do so because of the lack of opportunities to meet domestic students, or because some participants viewed them as reserved and conservative and as not sharing the same willingness to be friends with them. This inability and lack of opportunity to make friends with domestic students led the participants to shift their willingness to experience intercultural communication through friendship away from home students and towards other international students. This shift shows that, although the participants viewed international students as in-group members who shared similar experiences of being abroad, they also viewed them as out-group members with whom they had the potential to experience intercultural communication. This change shows the participants' inconsistent and shifting identifications of themselves as well as of others rather than maintaining

consistent identifications of one's own social group and others' social groups that Dervin's (2013) mixed intersubjectivity attempts to explain.

Finally, having explored the attitudes that are essential for successful intercultural communication and that influence knowledge, skills, and critical cultural awareness, the discussion in the next section moves to consideration of the participants' friendships with international students. The participants' willingness to experience intercultural communication through forming friendships remain the same; however, since it did not prove possible for some of them to form friendships with home students, they instead turned their intercultural communication efforts towards engaging with other international students.

4.1.2.2 Experiencing friendship with international students

As argued in the previous section, some participants expressed their attitudes of willingness and curiosity to experience intercultural communication with home students. However, they could not do so for reasons related to the lack of opportunities to meet them, and the feeling that home students did not show interest in socialising with them. Nevertheless, some participants maintained what seemed to be attitudes of willingness and curiosity to experience intercultural communication, but this time they decided to do so with international students.

أنا دائما ممكن يكون عندي فضول في شخصيتي.. يعني بالعكس ممكن أطلع مع سعوديين في النادي السعودي في عيد أو شي مثل كذا، لكن في الغالب ما أفضل أني أحتك بالسعوديين لأسباب منها أني أبي أمارس اللغة والشي الثاني أني حابة أشوف عادات وثقافات جديدة

“I have a curious character … yes I go out sometimes with Saudi international students to celebrate some religious occasions such as Eid, but usually I do not prefer to socialise with them for two reasons … First, I want to practise my English … secondly, I want to explore new cultures.” (Aminah)

Ahmed shows a similar attitude of willingness and curiosity and explains why one should explore different ‘cultures’ as he calls them:

لما تختلط بثقافات مختلفة يعطيك مجال كبير أنك تناقش وتفهم الناس الآخرين …

“Mixing with people from other cultures gives you the opportunity to discuss and understand them.”

Both participants seem to show some willingness and curiosity to experience intercultural communication. Byram (1997), however, distinguishes this type of attitude from what he refers to “the tourist approach” and “the commercial approach” (p. 50). He points out:

> I also want to distinguish this kind of engagement with otherness from the tourist approach where the interest is in collecting experiences of the exotic, and from the commercial approach where the interest is in a business arrangement and the making of a profit. Both of these have a rightful place in international relations, but they are not conducive to developing intercultural competence. (Byram, 1997, p. 50)

It is unlikely that the participants would take the commercial approach since their context has little to do with commerce. However, it is still possible that their attitudes of openness and curiosity may have followed the tourist approach. Consequently, only their actual intercultural communication interactions with other international students will reveal what type of approach they followed. These interactions are, therefore, the focus of the next section.

Before discussing the participants' intercultural communication interactions with international students, it is important to point out some of the other types of attitudes that emerged from the data. For example, Yonus pointed out:

لو تصاحب شخص من ديانة مختلفة فهذا يعطيه صورة وانطباع جيد عن داينتك.. والإسلام حاليا الناس يتجهون له، فالناس تتعرف عليه وتعرف أنه هو دين الحق

"I think making friends with people from different religions is a great opportunity to give them a good impression about your religion … people then will know what Islam is and they will also know that it is the right religion."

Haleemah offered a similar remark:

أنا عندي قابلية أني أجلس معاهم [طلاب الإنترناشنال] ... وأتكلم معاهم وأسمع لهم ... عندي فضول أني أعرف عنهم أكثر ... أعرف عن ثقافتهم أعرف عن طريقة تفكيرهم ... وأرجع أقول لك لما توريهم أنك ممكن تتقبل الآخر ... أنا إنسانة طبيعية مثلي مثلكم.. أنا أضحك وأزعل وأبكي وكل الأشياء هذي أسويها ...

"I like sitting with international students, I speak and listen to them … I have curiosity to know more about them … I want to know about their cultures and the way they think … when we show them this attitude they will understand that we accept other people … I am a normal person just like them … I laugh, cry, and get upset just like anyone else."

Both participants seem to aim at giving positive impressions about the social group with which they wanted to be identified i.e., being Muslim. However, both participants had different agendas since Yunos attempts to project a positive impression of Islam so that non-Muslims know that "it is the right religion" and, possibly, convert to it. Haleemah, on the other hand, attempts to change the negative image that other international students may have had about her Muslim background since she experienced being ridiculed by her international classmates for being a Muslim woman who may be introverted and timid, as she states in another part of the interview. Therefore, she attempted to change this

negative image by showing her international classmates that she is “a normal person” who laughs, cries and gets upset and does everything they do. Here there seems to be some similarity with Peek’s (2003) study in which he conducted interviews with Muslim individuals in New York City in order investigate whether they had introduced new changes in their lives after the events of 9/11. His findings show that a number of his participants made extra efforts to socialise with non-Muslims in order to change the negative image that had been attached to Islam after the events.

Giving a positive impression was also apparent in Ahmed’s remark, but this time about Saudi Arabia:

أنا أقول لك حاجة ... طريقة إدارتي للجمعية الإسلامية جعلت كثير من الناس يسألوني: أنت فعلا سعودي؟؟ يعني لأنهم يظنون أن العقلية السعودية عقلية واحدة ومتشددة ولا يمكن أن تتقبل الآخر ... فبالتالي لا يمكن أن يتصوروا أن السعودي ممكن يتقل الآخر أصلا ... فبالتالي فعلا السعوديين لا يتقبلون الثقافات الأخرى.. أتوقع أننا ساهمنا كثير ... ساهم فيها كثير من الناس.. يعني كثير من السغوديين لما يجي هنا يكون منغلق على نفسه ولو توسع فإنه يتوسع في بيئته السعودية الطلابية الضيقة جدا.. لأنه ما دخل في المجتمع أصلا ...

“Let me tell you something … the way I run the Islamic Society made some people ask me in surprise: are you really from Saudi Arabia? ! They think Saudi people are the same and they never accept different views from theirs … they cannot believe that Saudi people can accept other cultures … I must say we as Saudis contributed to creating this negative image … many Saudi students come to the UK and limit their socialisations to only other Saudi students … they never mix with other people.”

Similar to Yunos and Haleemah, Ahmed also attempts to give a positive image about the social group that he identifies himself with, which is Saudi Arabia in this case. Heyn (2013) who studied a number of Saudi international students found that a number of the participants that she had interviewed felt the

responsibility to act as “ambassadors” (p. 137) of their country and to represent it in a positive way. This feeling of responsibility to represent Saudi Arabia was also present in Zahir’s remark when he was talking about his feeling of success:

[أنا] أمثل دولتي بالشكل الي يرضيني ويرضي وطني فيه

“I represent my country in the way it makes it proud of me.”

Zahir links his success in his studies to also presenting Saudi Arabia in a positive way, which shows the same concept of giving a positive impression about a social group — such as Saudi Arabia or Muslims — that the participants identify themselves with most. The participants’ comments show the knowledge that the participants have about their social groupings — such as following Islam or coming from Saudi Arabia — and how they are perceived as Muslims or Saudi Arabians by international students or non-Muslim individuals.

Therefore, the data in this section show that, although some participants such as Aminah and Ahmed were willing and curious to experience intercultural communication with international students, others had a different type of attitude which is related to giving a positive impression about the social entities to which they belong such as Islam or Saudi Arabia. Although Byram (1997) argues that the tourist as well as the commercial approaches are not conducive to developing intercultural competence, the positive impression or representation approaches that the above participants expressed may not be conducive to developing intercultural competence either. The reason resides in the fact that the participants in this case are not seeking full engagement in experiences that are unfamiliar to them and to suspend their beliefs and

judgements about their own meanings, values, and behaviours as well as those of others. Rather, they seem to be willing to experience intercultural communication experiences in order to create a positive impression so that non-Muslims may know that Islam is 'the right religion', as Yunos states. Haleemah attempts to show her international classmates that she is not different from them, while Ahmed attempts to change the negative impression that non-Saudi individuals may have about Saudi international students, i.e., that they do not accept other views.

The above discussion indicates the types of attitudes integrated with the knowledge that the participants have about their own perceptions of themselves as, for example, Muslims or Saudi Arabians, as well as those of others. Of itself, this knowledge is not sufficient and it needs to be complemented by the skills which refer to the individual's ability to act and respond in specific circumstances (Byram, 1997). These skills will be the focus of the next section.

4.1.2.3 The participants' intercultural communication with international students in action

Although some participants did show a willingness to initiate intercultural communication with international students, whether to give a more positive impression or prompted by an attitude of genuine curiosity and openness, some had also encountered challenges during their interactions with international students. These challenges were related to two main issues and they seemed to centre around the participants' understandings of religion. It is important to point out that I deliberately choose to refer to the concept of 'the participants'

understandings of religion' rather than simply the word 'religion' i.e., Islam per se because Islam encompasses various interpretations of Islam and its sacred texts such as the Qur'an (Ramadan, 2009). The first issue that some participants seem to have found challenging concerned halal food and the consumption of alcohol. The second issue involved some incidents when international students had questioned participants about their religious practices; this questioning made the participants feel uncomfortable or offended, as discussed later.

4.1.2.3.1 Halal food and the consumption of alcohol

The first challenge some participants had to face was the issue of the consumption of alcohol and non-halal food. According to some Islamic texts, drinking alcohol causes serious social issues and thus people have to avoid it (Qur'an, 5:90-92). Moreover, some Islamic texts also forbid specific types of food such as pork, dead animals, blood, or any animal that was slaughtered in the name of the non-Abrahamic God i.e., non-halal food (Qur'an, 5:3). Halal food refers to food which is accepted by Muslim law as fit for eating. Therefore, halal food is a name that many self-identified Muslims use to describe animals that are slaughtered in the Islamic way, with the exception of animals that are slaughtered by Jews or Christians, or as the Qur'an calls them "the Family of the Book".

This section will discuss how the participants dealt with both non-halal food and the consumption of alcohol while interacting with their international friends. For example, Aminah found the presence of alcohol at a party to be a barrier to engaging in intercultural communication with her international classmates:

في البارتي في الترم الماضي أنا قلت لهم [الطلاب الإنترناشنال] ترا هاه مافيه واين وكذا، وبالفعل استجابوا... باستثناء إيطالية ما عرفت وجابت واين، فخلاص طلع الموضوع من يدي.. ديني ما يسمح لي أجلس في نفس المكان فيه واين ... يعني أنا كنت أجاهد أنهم ما يجيبون في الحفلة ... لكن لما صار ما سويت إزعاج ولا شي.. يعني خلاص اضطريت أني أجلس في مكان معين وتركته

"... last term we had a party with my international classmates and I already had told them that I would prefer if they did not bring any wine ... they did not bring any apart from an Italian girl who did not know about what I'd said ... in this case it was out of my hands ... my religion does not allow me to sit in a place where there is wine ... I did my best, but when it happened, I stayed far away from it."

Hannah was another participant who faced a similar challenge:

مرة في نهاية الاندكشن، قالوا [الطلاب الانترناشنال ومشرفتي] بيروحون الحانة.. وأنا استحالة أدخل الحانة بحجابي.. هي [مشرفتي] لو أنها مثلا عرفت المنطق هذا، يعني أنا مسلمة وأدخل الحانة بحجابي يعني لو أحد يمر ويشوفني يعني ماهي حلوة.. يعني كوفي ليه لا؟ ... فما فكرت حتى ولا مرت في بالي أروح أو لا.. خلاص طلعت على طول

"At the end of the induction week, my supervisor, as well as my international classmates, decided to go to the pub ... I will never go to the pub with my headscarf ... it does not look right ... what if someone saw me? And my supervisor did not understand that I am Muslim and I do not go to pubs ... why did not she take us to a coffee shop? So I refused to go with them."

The presence of alcohol seemed to create a barrier for both participants to engaging in intercultural interaction with their international friends. Midgley (2009b) reported a similar finding when some of his Saudi students considered that drinking alcohol was a part of the Australian culture. They, therefore, believed that drinking alcohol would have been an effective way to meet other people in places such as bars and pubs. However, his participants preferred not to drink alcohol, a choice which had limited their opportunities to experience intercultural communication, according to Midgley (2009b).

Mohammed was another participant who had a strong opinion about alcohol:

في الحانة مثلا، أنا ثقافتي الإسلامية ما تسمح لي أني أجلس على طاولة عليها مشروب..

"I will never go to a pub — for example — because my Islamic culture does not permit me to do so or even sit at a table that has alcoholic drink on it."

However, in the second interview he mentioned an incident that occurred when he was invited for dinner:

مرة أذكر عزمت على طاولة وكان عليها خمر.. فلمت نفسي كثير يعني هذا شيء كبير.. وجدت نفسي أمام أمر الواقع، يعني جاملتهم وجلست. ففعلا كانت المرة الوحيد فأخذت درس أني أكون حذر والطعام كان نباتي عادي ولكن وضع الطاولة ما كان مريح

"… one day I was invited to dinner and there was alcohol on the table … it was very awkward … I blamed myself although I could not do anything about it … it is forbidden to sit at a table has alcohol on it."

In the first extract he expressed a strong opinion about being in a place where there is alcohol but in the second extract he felt that he had to compromise even though he felt uncomfortable. Abdulaziz was another participant who struggled to engage with his international friends because of their consumption of alcohol and other behaviours that he did not approve:

هذولا [طلاب إنترناشنال] أول مرة جلست معهم بعدها طلعنا نلعب بلياردو فكان بصراحة تصرفات غريبة منهم يعني ديني وعقيدتي تمنعني أسوي شي مثل كذا.. يسبوا بعض وأحد يكب على الثاني خمرة.. يعني حركات مخلة بالآداب ويسويها قدامك، ما فرقت معاه …

"… [one day] I went out with some international friends, they had some behaviours that go against my religion such as swearing and drinking alcohol … these are bad manners but they still do it in front of you …"

When it comes to the second challenge — of non-halal food — some participants expressed similar concerns to those they had about alcohol. Sameer expressed his opinion about non-halal food as follows:

أول ما جيت هنا كنت أقول لحم من أهل الكتاب ... لكن مع الوقت عرفت أنه مو لحم أهل الكتاب وإنما الذين يعملون هناك أهل كتاب وغيرهم.. يعني أنا توقفت عن شراء لحم من المتاجر لأنها غير حلال.. أو آكل لحم بحري..

"When I first came to the UK, I used to buy meat from the store because I thought it was slaughtered by the people of the book [Jews and Christians] … but, with time, I realised that not all meat is slaughtered by them … therefore it is not halal and I stopped buying meat, unless it is seafood."

Similar to the participants who refused to consume or be in contact with alcohol, Sameer stopped purchasing food from stores after learning that meat on sale in them might not have been slaughtered by 'the people of the book'. Sameer did not mention if he had experienced being provided with non-halal food and how he would react. However, Zainah talked about her experience of being given with non-halal food:

يعني مثلا حنا ما ناكل شي ذبحه غير مسلم أو كتابي.. فعزمتني [صديقتي المسيحية] على كيكة بنتها، وعملنا لها عيد ميلاد.. فالكيكة صديقتها عملتها وهي هندوسية وما بغيت أحرجهم.. فأكلت حتى ما أحرجهم...

"I do not consume any type of food that is not prepared by Muslims or the family of the book … one day my Christian American friend invited me to her daughter's birthday party, but the food was prepared by her Hindu friend … I had to eat with them … I did not want to make it awkward."

Zainah and Mohammed both felt uncomfortable about being offered alcohol and non-halal food. The participants' remarks in this section show their struggle to operate the interaction skills that Byram (1997, p. 38) links to both knowledge and attitudes*:*

> The skill of interaction is above all the ability to manage these constraints [of time and mutual perceptions] in particular circumstances with specific interlocutors. The individual needs to draw upon their existing knowledge, have attitudes which sustain sensitivity to others with sometimes radically different origins and identities …. In particular, the individual needs to manage dysfunctions which arise in the course of interaction, drawing upon existing knowledge and skills.

Byram (1997) argues that when the individuals have attitudes along with existing knowledge of meanings, beliefs, and behaviours in their own social groups as well as those of others' social groups, they will be more able to operate their skills of interaction. The participants seem to have struggled with their skills of interaction when they were under the constraints of real-time communication and interaction. This difficulty arose because the knowledge about their own social groups, i.e., Muslims who do not wish to consume alcohol and non-halal food, seems to have hindered their intercultural communication interaction when it was not accompanied by the attitudes of openness and curiosity. Therefore, Hannah, Abdulaziz, and Aminah avoided experiencing intercultural communication interactions with their international classmates and friends. On the other hand, Zainah and Mohammed tried to manage the dysfunction that arose from the interaction and to tolerate the presence of alcohol as well as non-halal food. They attempted to "negotiate an appropriate use of [processes of interactions] in specific circumstances" (Byram, 1997, p. 53). However, they experienced psychological stress because they were unable to decentre or relativise their own meanings, beliefs, and behaviours about the consumption of alcohol and non-halal food. Therefore, their tolerance for the presence of alcohol and non-halal food was merely to avoid any awkwardness with their hosts.

Further, Byram (1997, p. 54) points out in reference to critical cultural awareness that "the intercultural speaker brings to the experiences of their own and other cultures a rational and explicit standpoint from which to evaluate [the experience]". Then he adds that one of the objectives of critical cultural awareness is to:

> make an evaluative analysis of the documents and events which refers to an explicit perspective and criteria … The intercultural speaker is aware of their own ideological perspectives and values ('human rights'; socialist; liberal; Moslem; Christian etc.) and evaluates documents or events with explicit reference to them. (Byram, 1997, p. 64)

The data in this section show that the participants did use their own ideological perspectives as Muslims, which Byram (1997) calls 'explicit criteria' and a 'rational standpoint', and, therefore, they did not wish to consume alcohol or non-halal food, which raises the question of what the explicit criteria and rational standpoints actually are. Further, the data also question whether religion counts as a rational standpoint and explicit criteria' or not, since the participants' perceptions of religion hindered their intercultural communication experiences.

Some of the participants, however, did not consider the presence of alcohol or the consumption of non-halal food as an issue that might hinder them from experiencing intercultural communication. When it comes to non-halal food, Yunos stated:

من أول ما جيت وآكل أكل أهل الكتاب جائز... يعني عادي لكن مو خنزير

"I do not mind non-halal food because it is from *The Family of the Book* so we can have it."

When it comes to alcohol, there were participants who did not mind its presence since, unlike the previous group of participants, they believed that its presence is not against Islamic teachings. Haleemah, for example, states:

مثلا موضوع الشرب ... لما أروح المطعم مع صديقاتي كيف طيب نطلب نشرب؟ طلبت بير مثلا أشربها مع الغداء، يعني أنا صراحة ما أعرف الحكم الشرعي هل يجوز أجلس معهم أو لا... بس أنا استفتيت قلبي وطالما أني ما أشرب ولا آكل من الشي هذا ولا أقرب منه ولا أدفع فيعني ما تقدر تحكم ... ما تقدر تقول لا ما تجيبي الشي هذا على السفرة الي أنا فيها

"When it comes to the presence or the consumption of alcohol, I do not mind when my friends order it as long as I am not having any of it or paying for it … I do not know whether it is permitted in Islam to sit with them while they have alcohol or not, but I asked my heart and I hope it is ok."

Khadijah shared a similar view:

الإيطالية كانت مسيحية وكانت تسوي أشياء أنا ما أسويها، عندها بوي فريند وتشرب وأنا مالي دخل فيها.. يعني كانت قريبة من تصرفاتي.. يعني لما تعزمني مستحيل تقول لي طيب جربي اشربي

"I had a Christian Italian friend who did things I would not do myself such as having a boyfriend and drinking alcohol … but we were very close."

Unlike Mohammed and Aminah, who felt uncomfortable about the presence of alcohol, Haleemah and Khadijah did not mind the presence of alcohol as long as they did not consume it. Therefore, they were not under the constraints of real-time communication and interaction that required them to either take an action in the situation where alcohol was present, or remain uncomfortably silent, as in the case of Mohammed and Aminah. Further, Abdul was another example of a participant who did not mind the presence of alcohol at a birthday party but he

did refuse to consume it and, therefore, he was under the constraints of real-time communication and interaction:

في حفلة عيد ميلاد واحد من أصحابي رحنا بيتهم ... أمهم جابت بيرة فكلهم راحوا يشربون فقلت لها معليش أنا ما أشرب ... فسألتني قالت يعني حتى في المناسبات وكذا؟ فقلت لا ما أقدر.. فراح صاحبي وشرح لها وقال لها هو مسلم ... فقالت أوكي.. فقلت لها عندك عصير تفاح؟ فقالت ايه.. فأخذته وهو يشبه البيرة فخضيت العصير وصار كأنه بيرة فشربت ... لا سيما أن فيه ناس ما أعرفهم فما بغيت أخرب عليهم جوهم ... يعني جالس مكاني وأشرب العصير ... يعني جلست أشرب عصير التفاح والباقي تمثيل في تمثيل

"I went to my friend's birthday party and his mother brought cans of beer … everybody started drinking but I told them that I do not drink … my friend explained to his mother that I am Muslim so she understood … but I asked her if I can have apple juice … then I started shaking the apple juice bottle to create a fizzy appearance so it looked like beer … I only did it because there were other guests whom I met for the first time, so I was not sure how they would feel about me not drinking … I also pretended to be under the influence of alcohol to get on with everyone."

Similar to Haleemah and Khadijah, Abdul did not mind the presence of alcohol as long as he did not consume it. The difference between him and Haleemah and Khadijah is that he was under time constraints and, therefore, he took an action to manage the dysfunction that arose from the interaction and drew upon his knowledge of his friends' processes of interaction and skills. Therefore, he continued socialising with everyone at the birthday party and played the apple juice and drunken appearance trick. On the other hand, Haleemah and Khadijah did not find the presence of alcohol to be an issue that might hinder their intercultural interaction as was the case other participants (Abdulaziz, Aminah, Hannah, and Mohammed). Therefore, Haleemah, Khadijah and Abdul did not experience the psychological stress that the other participants had experienced.

Byram (1997) argues that this psychological stress is likely to happen if the individual does not show enough of the attitudes of openness and curiosity. Although Abdul, Khadijah, and Haleemah did not experience this psychological stress, their failure to do so was not because they showed attitudes of openness and curiosity when it comes to alcohol. Rather, they avoided such stress because of their knowledge about their own beliefs when it comes to alcohol, as they did not perceive its presence to be prohibited in their religion as did the other group of participants. This discussion leads to the second recurring point from the data related to what Byram (1997) calls knowledge about social groups and their cultures, beliefs, values, and meanings in one's own country. The participants had different knowledges about the presence of alcohol and the consumption of non-halal food even though they come from the same country. The participants' remarks show that their identifications as Muslims and Saudis — and the meanings of these identifications — were inconsistent and different from one another, a notion that Dervin's (2013) mixed intersubjectivity (2013) emphasises.

To summarise the findings of this section, the first group of participants found the presence of alcohol and the consumption of non-halal food hindered their intercultural communication experiences. When some of them remained silent about the presence of alcohol or consumed non-halal food in order to manage the dysfunction that arose from their interaction, they experienced psychological stress because they did not show attitudes of openness and curiosity alongside their skills of interaction.

The second group of participants did not consider the presence of alcohol or the consumption of non-halal food to be barriers to experiencing intercultural communication. Therefore, they did not experience the psychological stress that Byram (1997) points to when individuals do not show attitudes of curiosity and openness. However, not experiencing psychological stress did not seem to be a result of showing attitudes of openness and curiosity. Rather, this absence of stress came from their knowledge about themselves as independent Muslim individuals who may construct their inconsistent identifications, values, and beliefs differently from one another rather than as a social group, a (re)construction of the self that Byram (1997) seems to argue for.

In the next section, the discussion moves to focusing on the second type of challenge that confronted some participants when communicating with international students and which may have hindered their intercultural communication experiences. It is related to questioning or sometimes ridiculing the participants' religion or religious practices on the part of their international friends.

4.1.2.3.2 Questioning the participants about Islam

The second issue that challenged the participants' experiences of intercultural communication relates to questioning their religion. Some participants were asked by their international friends about Islam and their religious practices, which seemed to cause them some awkwardness. Haleemah pointed out:

يعني لأني مسلمة فكانت أسئلة كثيرة تدور في روسهم ... ليه أنتي ما تصافحين؟ ليه تسووا كذا تقولوا كذا وليه تلبسوا كذا ووو ... أنا نشأت في دولة مسلمة وفي أسرة مسلمة، يعني تمسكت بالدين هذ واقتنعت فيه.. بعضهم

عنده فضول ولكن بعضهم أنا حسيت فيهم استهزاء ... لكن الشي الي أتجنب أني أتحدث فيه أنهم لما يبدؤوا لما يسيؤوا مثلا للرسول عليه الصلاة والسلام... فأقول لا ... إذا المحادثة بتروح بالطريقة هذي أنا ما أبغى أتكلم

"As a Muslim woman, my international classmates had so many questions to ask about Islam … they asked me about the headscarf and why I do not shake hands with men … I was brought up in a Muslim family so this is my upbringing and I am happy with it … some of them kept asking because they were curious while others were being sarcastic … when some started talking about the Prophet in a sarcastic way. I stopped them … if the conversation is going to be this way then I do not want to talk to them."

Hanna raised a similar point with her remark:

حنا في الكلاس ما نتكلم في الدين كثير.. يعني تحس أنهم سامعين أشياء عن الإسلام أشياء يعني ماهي مهمة.. يعني فيه أشياء حلوة في الإسلام وهم ما يعرفونها.. يعني فيه صينية سألتني عن علاقة البنت مع الولد وش ممكن يصير وبعد الزواج وش يصير ووو... فهي كانت تسأل هل تلبسين الحجاب في البيت؟ فأقول لها لا عادي نعيش حياتنا.. فهم كل قضاياهم عن الحجاب، ما يتكلمون عن الصلاة لأنهم ما يعرفون الأشياء هذي أو علاقة الإنسان مع ربه

"We do not speak about religion in the class because I feel my classmates have heard unimportant things about Islam. For example, a Chinese girl asked me about the headscarf and whether I wear in at home or not … she also asked me about the relationships between men and women … every time they talk about Islam they mention the headscarf … they do not talk about the prayers because they do not know about the relationship between the person and God."

Hadeel also faced a similar issue:

فيه بنت يونانية عندها كثير عن الأديان وعن الإسلام ... وعارفة عن الطوائف فهي تسأل ... يعني فيه أشياء ماهي مقتنعة وفيه أشياء مقتنعة فيها ... يعني مثلا تقول لنا أن الفكرة الحين لو خلعتوا الحجاب بتكونون أحلى ... يعني تقول ليه ما تطلعين شعرك ... يمكن ماهي عارفة الفكرة من الحجاب أصلا ... صديقتي سعودية قالت أنها لو فتحت الموضوع مرة ثانية أحس أنها ما تبي تكلمها

"There is a Greek girl who knows about religions and Islam … there are things she does not approve of in religion. For example, she said that we would look more beautiful if we take off the headscarf … she asked why we would not show

our hair … I do not think she knows the idea of the headscarf … my Saudi friend said she is not going to speak to her anymore if she brings up this topic again."

These three participants seem to have found dealing with their international friends' questions about Islam challenging, especially when some of them were sarcastic about Islam. When the participants did not adopt attitudes that would enable them to sufficiently suspend their beliefs about their own meanings and behaviours and to analyse them from the point of view of those with whom they were interacting, the participants felt uncomfortable or refused to be friends with these students, as illustrated in the case of Haleemah and Hadeel. The international students who asked these questions, or perhaps showed sarcasm, did not seem to give the same significance to religion that the participants gave to it. Therefore, if the participants had tried to understand the viewpoints of their international classmates, they might have been more willing to experience intercultural communication with them. This conclusion supports Byram's (1997) argument that attitudes are a precondition for successful intercultural interaction and also play an important part in reducing any psychological stress that may arise from the intercultural interaction. Without these attitudes, participants such as Haleemah and Hannah felt uncomfortable about being asked questions about their headscarves. The same thing happened with Lubna who points out:

إذا الناس ما احترموني بالشكل الي أنا فيه يعني ما أحتاجهم … مع احترامي لهم.. لأن هذي أنا الي ما يتقبلني كشخصي ما أبيه

"If people do not respect me as I am and how I look, then I do not need them … this is how I am and whoever does not accept me, I do not want to be friends with them."

She seems to refer to her headscarf when talking about how she looks. Therefore, as seen in the comments of Haleemah and Hannah, being questioned about her religious practices and beliefs seems to have put her under some stress and also led her to be less willing to experience intercultural communication with their international friends. A similar experience happened to Abdulaziz who states:

تضايقت بس ما وريتهم أني متضايق.. تضايقت نفسيا وقلت ما راح أرجع وأجلس معاهم...

"I was upset because of their behaviours [drinking alcohol] but I did not show them that I was upset … but I decided not to go out or socialise with them anymore."

He talked explicitly about the stress that he had experienced with his international friends' consumption of alcohol and how their behaviour made him less willing to socialise with them. A similar point was raised by Mohammed:

لما جيت هنا كنت مرة فريندلي مع الجميع ومنفتح بشكل عالي مع الجميع ولكني وجدت أني ما أكون ساذج ولازم أكون رسمي بشكل أكبر وهذا شي لازم يكون في شخصيتي حتى أغادر بريطانيا

"When I first arrived in the UK I was very friendly with everyone and open for different experiences but now Ihave decided to be more professional with people until I leave the UK."

Being 'professional' seems to refer to engaging with other individuals only on a distant level rather than being friends with them. The individuals he refers to seem to be people whom he views as members of an out-group, such as international or home students, since his professional behaviour is only going to last until he leaves the UK. All of these experiences show the importance of attitudes of openness and curiosity and suspending disbeliefs about others'

meanings and behaviours as well as suspending the beliefs in one's own meanings and behaviours.

Thus far, this section has shown that alcohol, non-halal food, and questioning the participants about their religious beliefs and practices seem to have hindered some of them from experiencing intercultural communication. As a result, the willingness of some of the participants to experience intercultural communication with international students had decreased. A number of conclusions can be drawn from this section. First, when the participants were not able to experience intercultural communication with home students — whether because of the lack of opportunities or because the latter showed less interest in forming a friendship with them — they viewed international students as in-group members who share similar experiences. At the same time, they also viewed international students as out-group members but with whom the participants were willing to experience intercultural communication. This behaviour shows that the difference between in-groups and out-groups, or one's own social groups and others' social groups — as Byram (1997) puts it — may be difficult to identify. The participants showed inconsistent identifications of themselves as well as of others as regards who is considered to be in-group members, out-group members, or even both at the same time. Here the findings of this study provide support for Dervin's (2013) mixed intersubjectivity argument that identifications of the self as well as of the others are not easily explained by what social groups individuals come from, but rather by inconsistent and fluid identifications.

Secondly, during the intercultural interactions, some participants experienced psychological stress — such as when in the presence of alcohol or the consumption of non-halal food — because their attitudes were insufficiently in line with their skills of interaction, a finding which supports Byram's (1997) argument. However, some participants did not experience this psychological stress, not because they showed attitudes of openness and curiosity, but because their knowledge about their own meanings and behaviours did not contradict with the situation of being in the presence of alcohol or the consumption of non-halal food. This finding shows that the participants held different "knowledges" rather than one type of knowledge about their social group (Byram, 1997). This finding also explains why I use the term 'understanding of religion' rather than 'religion' per se since the participants had differing knowledges or understandings of their religion despite coming, supposedly, from the same social group. This evidence that people coming from ostensibly the social group have different and alternate views also supports the use and value of mixed intersubjectivity (Dervin, 2013) in the way I view the participants' self-identifications and their understandings of them.

Thirdly, in intercultural interaction, one participant, Abdul, managed to resolve the problem of consuming alcohol by pretending that the apple juice he was drinking was actually beer. This ruse enabled him to manage the situation because he appeared to be behaving in the same way as everyone else. Here it can be seen that Abdul's attitudes of openness and curiosity about unfamiliar experiences did not mean that he had to go against his beliefs; rather, these

attitudes allowed him to find a way to interact with people whose social activities involve drinking but without having to consume alcohol himself.

Finally, after experiencing intercultural communication with international students who had meanings and behaviours that some participants did not approve of, e.g., drinking alcohol or questioning the participants' religious practices, some participants decided not to socialise with them anymore. Their decisions seem to have resulted from the stress that they had experienced when they were unable to call upon attitudes of openness and curiosity. Therefore, this finding supports Byram's (1997) argument that attitudes are preconditions for successful intercultural communication. As a result of their experiences with other international students, some participants had decided to socialise with individuals whom they view as in-group members, such as Muslims, Arabs, or other Saudi international students. This preference for in-group over out-group social interactions may have exerted less pressure on them and also may have reduced the stress that they had experienced with their international friends. This area is the focus of the next section.

4.1.3 The participants' friendship with same-group members

As stated above, some participants found experiencing intercultural communication with international friends challenging and, therefore, they decided to socialise with individuals whom they viewed as in-group members. In-group members were mainly Muslim, Arab, or other Saudi students. Abdulaziz points out:

أغلب أصدقائي عرب وسعوديين بالأصح ... حسيت أن العربي بيفهمني أكثر من باقي الجنسيات ... أنا أتقبل الناس لكن هل الي قدامي حيفهمني وإلا ما يفهمني ... فهذا الشي يخلي العرب مثلا فاهميني فأنا أكون مرتاح معهم أكثر ... آخذ راحتي وأتكلم وما أكون متحفظ كثير

"Most of my friends are Arabs and Saudis ... I think Arab people understand me more than people from different nationalities ... I accept all people but I also wonder if they will understand me or not ... this [is] what made feel more comfortable with Arabs more than non-Arabs ... I can say whatever I want in front of them without worrying of being misunderstood."

In the beginning, I assumed that the misunderstanding that Abdulaziz was worried about is related to language proficiency and the ability to have an intelligible conversation with non-Arabic speakers. However, in another part of the interview he states:

يعني احنا لو تشوف أخلاقنا كعرب ومسلمين فما هي [شرب الكحول] كويس ... يعني هم ما فرقت معهم أن الواحد يشرب ويسكر ويلبس لبس فاحش ... ما فرقت معهم من الأساس ...

"Our beliefs as Arabs and Muslims do not approve of what people do here [in the UK] such as drinking alcohol or not dressing up properly."

This remark shows that his choice to form friendships and socialise with Arabs was not related to his English language ability as he also included Muslims — who may not speak Arabic — in his in-group. Therefore, Abdulaziz's preference for socialising with Arabs seems to be related to viewing them as in-group members. With them he may experience fewer dysfunctions than may arise from intercultural interactions, as was the case with his international friends, because he did not approve of their consumption of alcohol. Lubna provides another example when she points out:

من أول كنت أقفل على نفسي وأبكي، يعني صارت أمس قمت أبكي واتصلت على صديقتي وجاتني ... وهي مسلمة برضوه يعني أحس بارتياح أكثر لأنها تفهمني أكثر ... لأنها تفهمني والناس المسلمين يعرفون كيف ممكن

الدين يتملكك في أشياء. يعني لو كانت صديقتي اليونانية راح تتفهم ولكن ما راح تفهم تماما لأنها ما راح تكون مقتنعة

"Whenever I feel lonely, I lock myself in my room and start crying … it actually happened yesterday … I phoned my Muslim friend who understands me … you know, Muslims understand me because they know how religion is important in my life … if I had called my Greek friend, she would have tried to help but she would not have been able to understand my feelings."

I did not ask Lubna why she felt upset because she did not seem to be willing to talk about her personal problems. However, I guessed that it has something to do with religion and its practices such as wearing the headscarf, given I knew that some international students had already asked her about it, as explained in the previous section. Therefore, she believed that another Muslim person whom she viewed as part of her in-group would be more understanding than her non-Muslim Greek friend. Both Abdulaziz and Lubna were looking to form friendships with individuals who would have similar understandings for their meanings and behaviours. In this case, they viewed Muslims and Arabs as in-groups members. Another participant who has more in-group friends, such as Saudis, than friends in any other groups said:

فيه طبعا [صديقات] لازم من السعودية.. لازم يكون على الأقل ثنتين أو ثلاث يعني أقابلهم بمعدل يومي

"I have at least two or three friends from Saudi Arabia that I meet every day."

Further, Yunos and Mohammed are frequent visitors and active members of the Saudi Society, where I first met them. These participants' preferences to form friendship with individuals whom they view as in-group members, or "co-nationals" as Hechanova-Alampay et al. (2002, p. 136) calls them, or those who are "co-cultural" as Al-Sharideh and Goe (1998, p. 705) refers to in-groups, is a

common phenomenon amongst international students (Andrade, 2006) because engaging with those who are in some ways like oneself limits any issues or dysfunctions that may arise from the intercultural interaction, since they are meant to share similar meanings, beliefs, and behaviours.

Nevertheless, two participants raised important points concerning the Saudi Society. Sameer points out:

حصل موقف أول ما جيت [النادي السعودي] أني كنت في قائمة البريد فصارت فيه قبلية وكلام عنصري... يعني فيه شخص أعرفه تمت إهانته قبليا

"I used to be on the Saudi Society mailing list, and an incident happened when people started raising tribal remarks and discriminating against those who do not come from tribal backgrounds … I know someone who was discriminated against."

Haleemah too remarked:

يعني لو تروح النادي السعودي تشوف صدقني الناس متحزبين يعني أهل الرياض مع بعض والجنوب مع بعض يعني فيه مناطقية حتى هنا ... يعني كلنا واحد يا جماعة.. يعني يتكلمون أنتي ما تعرفي فخذك يعني أنتي ما أنتي مننا

"If you go to the Saudi Society, believe me you will see Saudi people are grouping themselves according to what part of the country they come from … so the people who come from Riyadh will sit together, and those who come from the south sit together … they still ask about your tribal backgrounds."

Both remarks show that even though Saudi international students are meant to share similar meanings, beliefs, behaviours, religion, language, and national identity, they still formed distinct in-groups of their own. These groups were formed on the basis of the individuals' tribal backgrounds or even the regions in Saudi Arabia from which they came. Therefore, this example shows that shared

religious beliefs, meanings, behaviours and nationalities, which according to Byram (1997) are among the initial attributions people make on first meeting , do not necessarily unite individuals as in-group members. Therefore, the participants' identifications of themselves as well as of others are inconsistent (Dervin, 2013). The participants may come from mixed backgrounds, for example, having a similar tribal background but coming from different regions in Saudi Arabia, or vice versa, and, therefore, their self-identifications will be fluid, inconsistent, and hard to define.

There was one participant who raised an important point:

أنا كانت عندي فكرة أني أخرج من نظامنا يعني بجلس معهم [السعوديين] وبنتكلم في أمور البلد وفي نفس الإطار الفكري وكل شي نفسه ... ولكن مع مسلمين أو مع عرب أو بريطانيين مسلمين تبدأ تظهر نظرة مختلفة

"When I came to the UK, I had the intention of not socialising with Saudi students … I just want to try new experiences with Arabs, Muslims, or even British Muslims." (Sameer)

Sameer seemed to be interested in experiencing intercultural communication and, therefore, he decided not spend his time with other Saudi international students who, for him, are in-group members. However, this desire to have new experiences does not mean that he prefers socialising with non-Muslim home students or with all other types of international students, since he views them as out-group members who may have meanings and behaviours that he does not approve of such as consuming non-halal food, as mentioned in the previous section. Therefore, the group of friends that he prefers to socialise and be friends with has to be out-group members with whom he can experience intercultural communication, but also in-group members with whom he may not experience

intercultural communication misunderstandings. Hence, his choice was Muslims, Arabs, and British Muslims, but not Saudis, because they are too familiar to him and socialising with them may restrict him from experiencing intercultural communication.

The data in this section supports, once again, Byram's (1997) claim that attitudes savoir is essential for successful intercultural communication. The participants' remarks above show that their preferences for socialising with in-group members may have been a result of not having enough readiness to suspend their beliefs about their own meanings and behaviours as well as those of others. Further, the data supports the conclusion from the previous section that finding the borders between in-group and out-group members may be difficult since some participants (such as Sameer and Lubna) considered any Muslim or Arab to be an in-group member, while others (such as Abdulaziz, Mohammed, and Yunos) focused on Saudi individuals in particular as in-group members with whom they want to be friends. Therefore, the participants had different and inconsistent identifications of themselves as well as of others (Dervin, 2013) rather than having a social grouping merely based on their country or religion, which is an argument that is used by the methodological nationalism and the transnational paradigms.

4.2- Chapter conclusions

A number of conclusions can be drawn from this chapter. First of all, there seem to be two types of attitudes*:* the first is related to the willingness to seek out opportunities to experience intercultural communication, and the second is the

suspension of one's disbelief about others' meanings, behaviours, and beliefs as well as a similar suspension about one's own, within those interactions. Although Byram (1997) makes an important distinction between the attitudes of suspending the one's beliefs and disbeliefs about the self and others on one hand and the tourist approach and the commercial approach on the other hand, neither of those two approaches explains the willingness of some participants to experience intercultural communication, since they sought opportunities to experience intercultural communication for neither exotic, tourist, nor commercial purposes. Rather, their willingness was related to the desire to give more positive impressions about the group that they wanted to be identified with such as being Muslims or Saudis. Therefore, the findings reveal another reason, beyond the tourist or commercial purposes, that motivated the participants to experience intercultural communication. Nevertheless, irrespective of the reasoning behind their desire to experience intercultural communication, their willingness alone may not be effective if it is not accompanied with a suspension of their disbeliefs about others' meanings, beliefs, and behaviours and a relativising of their own.

Secondly, the participants viewed home students as out-group members and they wanted to experience intercultural communication through forming friendships with them. When this experience proved impossible, they explored interaction with other international students whom they viewed as in-group members and with whom they shared similar experiences of being sojourners who are studying abroad because forming friendship with them seemed easier. At the same time, they also viewed international students as out-group members

with whom they could experience intercultural communication. This duality in their thinking shows that what defined in-group members was not only shared cultural meanings, beliefs, and behaviours, as Byram (1997) seems to argue, but also shared experiences of being abroad. It was this commonality of experience which united the participants and their international friends. Further, although the participants viewed their international friends as in-group members who share similar experiences, at the same time, they also viewed them as out-group members with whom they could experience not just friendships but also intercultural communication, and thus Byram's (1997. P.34) definitions of "different" or otherness as those who have different cultural meanings, beliefs and behaviours makes sense here. However, this conclusion shows that the boundaries between in-group and out-group members may be difficult to identify. Here too the study offers support for the notion of mixed intersubjectivity (Dervin, 2013), which suggests that self-identifications, as well as identifications of others, are fluid, shifting, and inconsistent, rather than constant in the interactions with one's own social group and others (Byram, 1997).

Further, Byram's (1997) distinction between one's own social group who share similar meanings, beliefs, and values, and groups of others applies to the participants who decided to form friendships with individuals whom they perceived as in-group members such as Muslims, Arabs, and Saudi international students. In this case, the participants' identifications of these in-group members may have been based on shared meanings, beliefs, and behaviours that may reduce any dysfunctions arising from intercultural communication. Nevertheless,

some participants still reported that even within the Saudi Society, for example, whose members are meant to share national, religious, and ethnic identifications, some groupings (i.e., in-groups and out-groups) were formed by the society members themselves. Once again, this finding supports Dervin's (2013) mixed intersubjectivity argument that self-identifications and identifications of others are not simply explained by shared meanings, beliefs, and behaviours, but that they are inconsistent and ever-changing processes.

Thirdly, when it comes to knowledge, the participants had different types of knowledge as Byram (1997) calls it of their social groups, even though those groups are meant to share similar religious beliefs. For example, the presence of alcohol or non-halal food was perceived by individual participants differently. Therefore, knowledge about social groups may constitute knowledge of one's own individual understanding rather than knowledge of a specific group Byram, 1997). Once again, this finding supports the theory of mixed intersubjectivity (Dervin, 2013) in which the individual's self-identifications and the meaning of this identification cannot be explained by the collective meanings, beliefs, and behaviours of a whole group but by individuals as independent agents.

Finally, Byram (1997, p. 64) seems to refer to religion as "ideological perspectives" when he talks about the critical cultural awareness that individuals use as rational and explicit standpoints for evaluating events. However, the participants' understandings of religion — as individuals — seems to have hindered some of them from experiencing intercultural communication, and, to a lesser degree, impacted the experience of others. Therefore, religions

may not be used as a rational standpoint because, for many people, their religious beliefs have to be obeyed, even if there is no rationale beyond that obedience for doing so.

4.3- Chapter summary

This chapter has focused on the participants' intercultural experiences through forming friendships with individuals whom they viewed as out-group members such as home students and international students. It appears that the participants had the attitudes of willingness to seek out opportunities to engage with otherness. However, some of them did not show enough readiness to suspend their disbeliefs about others' meanings, beliefs, and behaviours on the one hand, and did not show similar suspensions about their own meanings, beliefs, and behaviours on the other. Therefore, this imbalance caused some dysfunctions to arise in their intercultural communication experiences, and thus led some of them to form friendships with individuals whom they viewed as in-group members such as Muslim, Arabs, and other Saudi international students. Nevertheless, the participants established in-group and out-group formations amongst their Saudi friends. Therefore, this supports Dervin's (2013) claim of mixed intersubjectivity in which individuals form inconsistent identifications rather than their identifications are identified by their countries of origin (Byram, 1997).

CHAPTER FIVE

Gender and Intercultural Communication

Introduction

The previous chapter focused on how the participants experienced intercultural communication through forming friendship with individuals whom they viewed as out-group members. This chapter continues to explore the participants' intercultural and also intracultural communication experiences, but with the opposite gender. It is important to clarify that the term "individuals from the opposite gender" does not include close relatives such as husbands, wives, fathers, mothers, siblings, aunts or uncles, or any close family members. Rather, the term denotes nonrelated individuals such as classmates or individuals whom the participants had met in public places. The reason for focusing in this chapter on the interactions between members of the opposite gender who are not related to each other comes from the restricted interactions between men and women in Saudi Arabia (Al-Rasheed, 2013), as these may lead Saudi international students to view individuals from the opposite gender as examples of *otherness*.

As pointed out in chapter two, some studies have depicted Saudi men as exerting power over women in Saudi Arabia (Kabasakal & Bodur, 2002) as a result of strict Wahhabi teachings and tribal traditions (El-Fadl, 2001; Doumato, 1992, 2000, 2001, 2003; Mackey, 2002; Zanti, 2001). Therefore, according to Alhazmi & Nyland (2013), both Saudi male and female international students experience

difficulties when interacting with individuals from the opposite gender during their studies abroad. However, in this chapter I attempt to investigate Saudi international students' interactions with individuals from the opposite gender further, and argue that, although there are clear gender divisions in Saudi Arabia, Saudi students' experiences of interactions with individuals from the opposite gender are not identical. I attempt not to follow simplistic descriptions that depict Saudi men as having dominance over Saudi women, a picture which portrays Saudi female international students as dependents of their male relatives when abroad (Midgley, 2010).

I continue to use Byram's (1997) model to analyse the data. Although the model focuses on communications between the individual and otherness i.e., communication with individuals who have different beliefs, meanings, and behaviours, I use the model to analyse the communication between individuals from different genders. As argued above, the restricted communication between men and women in Saudi Arabia may make them view each other as different, as the "Other". My argument, therefore, begins by discussing the participants' attitude of willingness to seek out opportunities to engage in interactions with individuals from the opposite gender. At the same time, I discuss the participants' knowledge, which I refer to as their 'gender worldview' (i.e., what it means to be a Saudi man or woman and how a Saudi citizen is supposed to interact with individuals from the opposite gender).

Secondly, drawing upon these attitudes and knowledge, I discuss the participants' skills when they are in actual interactions with individuals of the

opposite gender. I divide this discussion of their skills into two categories: the first category considers interactions with non-Saudi individuals from the opposite gender, and the second examines interactions with Saudi individuals from the opposite gender. The reason for making this distinction relates to the fact that some of the participants reported that they acted differently when the interlocutor was Saudi or non-Saudi. In both cases, the participants needed to draw upon knowledge and have attitudes that would allow them to employ the skills they needed to manage any dysfunctions that might arise from their communication with individuals of the opposite gender.

5.1 Knowledge and attitudes of willingness to interact with the opposite gender

In this section, I first discuss the participants' willingness to seek out or take up opportunities to engage in a relationship with otherness (Byram, 1997). In the case of the participants, otherness here can be defined as members of the opposite sex (to whom one is not related) because of the restricted contact that is allowed between such individuals in Saudi Arabia (Al-Rasheed, 2013). Therefore, I investigate how the participants viewed interactions with individuals from the opposite gender and whether they had the willingness to engage in interactions with them, or if they refuse to do so because of what Alhazmi & Nyland (2013) terms the "Saudi cultural identity". Throughout the discussion, I also discuss the participants' knowledge as represented in their gender worldview (i.e., their understandings of what it means to be a Saudi male or a female interacting with individuals from the opposite gender), and how they acquired this knowledge differently one from another. This acquisition of

knowledge stems from a number of sources: from their understandings of the ways in which their religion views interactions between men and women, from their families, from their upbringing, and from their previous experiences, as I discuss later.

5.1.1 Knowledge and attitudes of willingness to experience interactions with the opposite gender

The participants' attitudes of willingness to engage in interactions with the opposite gender varied and ranged from willingness to experience this kind of interaction on the one hand, to resisting any occasion that might lead to experiencing interactions with the opposite gender on the other. I begin by offering the findings on participants who said that they had friends of the opposite gender, and the various and differing views that they expressed. For example, Zahir points out:

حتى قبل أجي بريطانيا، يعني أشوفه [الاختلاط بين الرجال والنساء] عادي رجل وامرأة في مكان واحد أنا أشوفه عادي حتى لما رحت للكلاس كان عندي وجدا طبيعي ولا حسيت شي بالعكس... أنا ما عندي أي مشكلة أني أتعرف على أي شخص مهما كانت خلفيته

"Even before I came to the UK, I always found interactions between men and women to be a normal thing … even when I went to the class and there were female classmates, it was very normal to me … I do not have any problem to meet anyone from any background."

Khadijah also makes a similar remark:

أنا ما عندي صديق لكن ما عندي مشكلة في التعامل مع الرجال بشكل عام.. مافيه مانع أني أتواصل معهم وأكلمهم وأرسل لهم، لكن أنا أعرف حدودي طبعا.. يعني أنا أقدر حدودي معهم.. ما عندي مشكلة يعني بنت أو ولد

"I do not have male friends, but I do not have any problem making male friends … I communicate with them normally … but, of course, I know my boundaries."

Haleemah also states:

أنا ما عندي مشكلة [في التعرف على الرجال أو النساء] سواء ذكور أو إناث... يعني أنا ما عندي مشكلة يعني حنا في بيئة تعليمية، وأرجع أقول لك أنا رقيبة نفسي وأعرف أنا ما أسمح لأحد أنه يتعدى النطاق التعليمي... يعني فيه هذا الولد وهو كبير عمر من أيام الفاونديشن فتعرفت عليه وكان يعني لما خلص الترم الأول هو صار في الترم الثاني والثالث يتكلم ويجلس معاي وصرنا أصدقاء حمدلله.. ويحترم ديني ويحترم حريني الشخصية... ما عمري حسيت منه أنه سوا سلوك خلاني أنفر منه

"I do not have any problems in knowing males or females … I do not have a problem because I am at university so it is a professional context … for example there is this mature man that I met during the foundation course … we have become friends … he respects me, respects my religion, and respects my personal freedom … this is why we have become friends now …. but I have to say that I know my boundaries that I will not cross and will not allow anyone to cross them."

Both Haleemah's and Khadijah's stipulations that they set conditions of "respect" and "boundaries" when initiating relationships with men show that they view men as otherness with whom they wish to experience interactions. Further, what identifies "boundaries" in their case seems to be the willingness to keep their communication professional in order to avoid any intimate relationships. This thought explains Khadijah's other remark:

ما يجيني شاب مثلا يقول لي وش رايك بالحب أو غيره ويسيؤون فهمي.. يعني فيه ناس يعجبوني ويفكروني معجبة فيهم وأفكر بشي ثاني فإذا حسيت أنهم لما يسوون كذا خلاص أتركهم، لكن لما أحس أنه يحترمني ممكن أكمل معرفتي به

"I would not like a man to ask me what I think of issues like love or relationships… there are men whom I like — their mentalities — but they misunderstand me and think I am attracted to them … once I feel they do that I just stop being friends with them … but if they respect me, I continue my relationships with them."

Therefore, the forming of intimate relationships with men constitutes a boundary line that neither female participant wished to cross. Further, both participants mentioned the word respect. Respect is about recognising individuals as persons (Buss, 1999) as well as recognising values and actions (Dillon, 2007) that may seem different from our own (Buriel, 1993). Bhabha (1996) claims that, during intercultural interactions, respect is about acknowledging "equal cultural worth" (p. 56). Therefore, Haleemah and Khadijah want their ways of interacting with men—ways that may seem to be different to some individuals—to be recognised in the sense that they do not wish their interactions with men to develop into anything beyond mere acquaintanceship. In this case, both participants use 'boundaries' and 'respect' as synonyms, and thus, they wish the 'boundaries' that separate acquaintanceship from more intimate relationship to be 'respected'.

When it comes to Zahir, he makes no mention of concepts such as respect or boundaries in connection to having female friends. Some studies, for example, Alhazmi & Nyland (2013), AMunajjed (1997), and Kabaskal and Bodur (2002), would account for the absence of the need for boundaries and respect in Zahir's remark by relating it to the "Saudi cultural identity" that restricts women more than men from initiating relationships with individuals from the opposite gender and the idea, therefore, that Zahir is not as concerned as Haleemah and Khadijah about forming friendships with females. That said, some of the male participants did not show attitudes of willingness to experience interactions with female individuals, while, at the same time, there were female participants who did not reject the idea. Lubna is one example:

في البداية كانت بالنسبة لي شي مو مرة هممم ما فكرت فيه صراحة لكن كنت أحس أنه ممكن يكون تجربة جديدة.. ماعرف لأن الاحتكاك مع الرجال

"Socialising with male individuals was not a big issue for me, although interactions between men and women are fewer in Saudi Arabia."

Her remark shows that despite being a Saudi female, she does not reject interacting with men. By contrast, some male participants such as Yusof did not wish to experience interactions with females. This point is illustrated by Yusof who states:

زوجتي أولى بكل شي... يعني وقت الفراغ معها ولكن لما يكون عندنا بريك فيكونون أصدقائي رجال وحتى لو ما كانوا مسلمين... يعني الشباب الي معي من جنسيات مختلفة فيه روسي وأذربيجاني وأمريكي وبريطانيووو ونادرا ما تجي معنا بنت... وسبحان الله نتوفق نتناقش في مواضيع.. فهذولا هم أصحابي وكلهم أصحابي في الكورس، لا سيما أني أتجنب الحديث مع البنات

"My wife is my best friend … when I have classes and during the break I go out with my male classmates, even though they are not Muslims … I have male classmates from different countries such as Russia, USA, UK and others … we manage to spend good time together and rarely we have girls coming with us … I try to avoid them anyway."

Similarly, Mohammed talks about his views on interactions with female individuals:

بالنسبة لي أنا كان عندي حاجز نفسي وكل شي فعلا يعني ما أعطي أي فرصة أني أكلم أي بنت... طبعا أكلمهم لكن بطريقة لبقة يعني ما أفتح مجالات للحديث... يعني أنا درست اللغة هنا كنت أتحاشى الجلوس مع البنات ويعني كان فيه طالبات سعوديات فكنت مقتصد جدا في الحديث... لأننا بشر يعني ممكن يكون فيه عاطفة تتكون، فبمجرد أنك تبتعد عن الأشياء هذي تضمن نفسك... لا شك أنه يفصلك عن التواصل مع الجنس الآخر إلا في المشروع وإلا غير ذلك فهو مخالف... والشي الثاني لو بالغت في التواصل قد يوقعك في حب ويؤثر سلبيات على دراستك...

"For me, I always try not to give any opportunity to start a conversation with a girl … of course, I speak to them politely when necessary but I try to keep the conversations short … I studied language here and tried to avoid sitting next to

girls … this is because we are humans with feelings and we may develop some feelings for other girls, which is going to impact on our studies negatively."

Both Yusof and Mohammed try to avoid any form of interaction with female individuals since they fear developing intimate feelings within these relationships, as was also seen in the cases of Haleemah and Khadijah that were discussed above. Therefore, Yusof and Mohammed did not wish to experience interactions with female individuals, while Lubna did not reject the idea, although she is a Saudi female. These examples show that being a Saudi woman does not necessarily mean less confident to interact with other men, as Alhazmi & Nyland (2013) seem to argue.

Further, there are examples of participants, such as Ahmed, who, while they do not wish to form friendships with female individuals, are not averse to interacting with them.

بالنسبة لي أنا أفضل يكون من نفس الجنس كصداقة وأنا لا أقصد العلاقة العامة كأن يجمعكم شيء معين... لكن بشكل عام أنا لا الصداقة بمفهومي ألا تكون إلا بين رجل ورجل.. لكن ما أقصد الصداقة العامة يعني ممكن تكون بين الجنسين، بالعكس أنا عندي بعض الأخوات مثل أصدقاء في الإطار العام... علاقة جيد ونجلس مع بعض ونتكلم...

"For me, I prefer to have male friends … I do not believe men and women can be friends … I do not mean normal interactions between both men and women, as I have sisters whom I interact with, but they are not friends." (Ahmed)

Ahmed does not completely reject interacting with female individuals, as was the case with Mohammed and Yunos, but he prefers not to form friendships with them either. His use of the word sisters indicates that the nature of the relationship that he has with other female individuals is a nonintimate and a platonic one only, since someone cannot be intimate with one's sisters.

The same applies to Hannah who prefers not to form friendships with men:

بالنسبة للذكور صعبة شوي.. أكيد أسباب دينية أولا، مادري ماحس أنها حلوة أني أجلس مع واحد رجل ويصير صديقي... ماحس صراحة... يعني أحس البنت غير.. نفس التفكير وحتى أساسا الرجل نفسه وطريقة استماعه وأشياء كثيرة ماهو مؤهل يصير صديق للمرأة... يعني المرأة تتكلم على طول والرجل ما يحب يسمع كثير

"I find forming friendships with men very difficult … it is for religious reasons, of course, but also I do not think it is appropriate to have a male friend … in fact men are different as they are not good listeners."

Hannah rejects forming friendships with male individuals for religious reasons, as she states. However, the participants who formed friendships and interacted with individuals from the opposite gender, for example, Zahir, Haleemah, Khadijah and Lubna, are also self-identified Muslims; nevertheless, they did not reject forming friendships with individuals from the opposite gender on the grounds of religion. This observation shows that the participants have different gender worldviews in terms what it means to be a Saudi or Muslim man or woman interacting with individuals from the opposite gender. Furthermore, it shows the different types of knowledge that they hold about their social groups. The findings here do not support Alhazmi & Nyland's (2013) argument, as all of these diverse responses to experiencing interactions with the opposite gender show that Saudi international students struggle to communicate with individuals from the opposite gender, and that Saudi women in particular who are, according to Midgley (2010), dependent on their men relatives do so. The data in this study indicate that the participants, whether men or women, hold different types of knowledge and attitudes regarding interactions with individuals from the opposite gender.

Some participants point out that what shapes their knowledge (i.e., their gender worldviews) and attitudes toward experiencing interactions with individuals from the opposite gender reflects their understanding of the stance of their religion on the interactions between men and women, their family upbringing, and previous experiences. For example, Ahmed's understanding of religion does not prohibit him from interacting with female individuals as he points out.

يعني أنا لي فهمي الديني الخاص يعني مسألة الاختلاط ليست كبيرة عندي...

"I have my own understanding of religion and I do not consider interacting with females to be against its teachings." (Ahmed)

On the other hand, Abdul who used to interact with females said that he had changed his gender worldview and now believed that Islam forbids interactions between men and women.

فيه وحدة جات وقالت لي أنت تغيرت وما صرت مثل أول.. يعني من أول أجلس جنبك لكن الحين لما تجلس جنبي أتحرك وأجعل أحد في النص يعني من الآن أبدأ أتغير حتى ما تصير عادة فيك.. ففيه وحدة زعلت فشرحت لها أن هذا من الدين الإسلام والي ساعدني وجود بنت مسلمة شرحت لهم.. علمتهم كيف سلوك المرأة في الإسلام والجميع فهم باستثناء بنت ما تقبلت الكلام وفكرت أن مافيه فرق بيننا

"There was a girl who said to me that I have changed … I used to sit with her but if she wants to sit next to me, I try to move or leave a space between me and her … she was upset although I tried to explain to her that Islam forbids interactions between men and women, and what helped me was a Muslim girl who tried to explain to her that is not personal but it is the teaching of religion." (Abdul)

Despite being Saudi men, both Ahmed and Abdul had different understandings of the position of religion on interactions between men and women. This finding does not only support the argument that there are different types of knowledge about one's own social group, but also supports the proposition that this knowledge is constantly reconstructed, as seen in the case of Abdul.

Further, when it comes to family upbringing, Lubna points out:

يعتمد على العائلة وكيف العادات حقتها... هل ممكن البنات يخالطون أو لا.. إذا البنت اجتماعية من ناحية التطوع وتطلع وتجي في مشاركات وأحداث.. يعنكي يعتمد على الوالدين ومدى يسمحون لك تخالطين ناس حتى مو من عائلتك وين رحتي وجيتي.. يعني فيه صديقاتي ما يعرفون كيف يعاملون بائع المحل... يعني حتى الأب والأخ يروح يشتري مع أخته... يعني يعتمد على الأب والأم كيف يخلون عيالهم يطلعون أو لا...

"It [interactions with individuals from the opposite gender] depends on the family and their traditions … do they allow their daughters to do voluntary work or not? ... some of my [female] friends do not even know how to deal with shopkeepers because their parents restrict them from interacting with men … it all depends on the family."

Hannah made a similar remark regarding the influence of the family:

يمكن علشان عائلتنا نروح ونسافر كثير فما أحس أن الموضوع [التعامل مع الرجال] شي كبير.. ما فكرت فيه أصلا... أبوي ماهو من النوع المتشدد يعني من طلعت على الدنيا كل شي نقضيه بنفسنا.. لأن عددنا بنات كثير يمكن هذا ساهم...

"I did not find interacting with men to be challenging maybe because we have been travelling abroad since we were children … also my father is not conservative so since we were children he raised us to depend on ourselves."

The same point about the family was raised by Abdulaziz:

كنت عارف أن الموضوع حيكون اختلاط لكني ما كنت خايف منه ولا شايل همه لأن عائلتنا غير.. في الأعياد مثلا والزواجات يكون فيها اختلاط بسيط... فيه نوع من الحرية يخلي الشخص يحس أنه مو مكبوت إذا كلم بنت وإلا حاجة... أنا شفت مثلا أصحابي سعوديين يتكلم مع بنت في حاجة عادية يحس أنه عمل شي غلط كبير

"I knew I will be interacting with females in the UK and it was not a problem for me because my family is different … we [males and females] celebrate occasions together … so we have some freedom unlike some of my Saudi friends who find interacting with girls challenging … they cannot initiate a normal conversation with girls."

These remarks show how these participants acquired their gender worldviews (knowledge) from their primary socialisation in the family (Byram, 1997).

Further, previous experiences also play a role in shaping this knowledge. Lubna points out:

لكن في السنة الي فاتت قبل نجي هنا كان عندنا مدرسين رجال يدرسونا مما قلل عملية الخوف أو الرهبة في التعامل مع الأولاد من ناحية التعليم.. فكان بإمكاني أني أخالط المدرس وأحس براحة وأسأل مافيه مشكلة... فما صار شي غريب

"Before I came to the UK, I had male teachers, which made me get used to dealing with other men … it was not strange to me at all."

Khadijah made a similar remark:

أنا أساسا أشتغل في مجتمع مختلط في السعودية ويعني لو كنت معلمة مثلا أشتغل في مدرسة بنات ومكان فقط بنات كان ممكن تفرق بالنسبة لي... أنا تفرق معي كثير.. يعني المجتمع ومكان العمل الي أنا فيه مختلط... يعني الاختلاط ماهو مشكلة بالنسبة لي

"I worked in a place where there were a lot of interactions between men and women in Saudi Arabia … if I had worked in an environment where there are women only then it would have been difficult for me to interact with men, but for me it is not a problem at all."

These examples show that despite the restricted interactions between men and women in Saudi Arabia, the views of these participants on these interactions cannot be simply explained away by a "Saudi cultural identity" (Alhazmi & Nyland, 2013). Rather, their ongoing understandings of religion that are constantly being reconstructed, their past experiences of interactions with individuals from the opposite gender, and their family upbringings are what shaped the participants' knowledge and, therefore, attitudes of willingness to experience interacting with individuals from the opposite gender. Drawing on the participants' knowledge and attitudes, the next section will discuss their skills when they are in interactions with individuals from the opposite gender.

5.2 Interactions with the opposite gender in action

There were some occasions when interactions with individuals from the opposite gender were inevitable in places such as in the classroom or public places, and where the participants found themselves under time constraints when reacting. In order to discuss these experiences, I divide this section into two parts: the first focuses on the participants' experiences of interaction with non-Saudi individuals from the opposite gender, while the second part focuses on similar experiences, but with Saudi individuals. As pointed out earlier, the reason behind this division is related to the fact that some of the participants had remarked that they acted differently when they were interacting with Saudi or non-Saudi individuals from the opposite gender.

5.2.1 Interactions with non-Saudi individuals from the opposite gender

Drawing upon their diverse knowledge and attitudes, the participants employed their skills when they interacted with individuals from the opposite gender differently. In order to investigate their experiences, I divide this section into two subsections. The first subsection focuses on the skills that the participants used during their interactions in the classroom. The second subsection focuses on their skills outside the classroom such as in public places. As the participants state, most of these interactions took place with non-Saudi individuals.

5.2.1.1 Interactions with the opposite gender inside the classroom

Both men and women in Saudi Arabia study in separate classrooms where their segregation is ensured; however, this is not the case when they study at UK universities. Therefore, interactions with individuals from the opposite gender

are more likely to happen. In this subsection, I discuss how the participants managed their skills when they encountered these kinds of interactions.

Aminah points out:

> علشان أقدر أنخرط في الجو الأكاديمي، وما يصير شي يؤثر على قناعاتي فأحاول أني يعني مثلا أنا عندي صديقاتي فأحاول أني أجلس بينهم... وبصراحة الأولاد الي معي جدا محترمين وفاهمين هذا الشي. وحتى لو اضطريت أني أجلس مع رجل دائما يتركون مسافة بيننا

"In order to focus on studying, and to avoid anything that may change my beliefs, I try to sit with female students only in the classroom … but even if I am sat next to a male student, they [the males] leave a [physical] distance between us … they respect me."

Similar to Khadijah and Haleemah in the previous section, Aminah uses the word respect as an indication that she wishes her relationship with male individuals to be professional and not to develop into anything intimate. This point becomes clearer in her next quote about her male classmates:

> عادي أجلس في دائرة... ممكن هذا الشي راجع لشخصيتي يعني أنا الشغل شغل... يعني.. هممم يعني أنا جاية أدرس ومعروفة بريطانيا ما راح يخصصون لي فصل بلحالي... فأحاول أني أتعامل مع الوضع بحيث أني ما أؤثر على معتقداتي... يعني أتعامل معهم باحترام وتقدير

"I sit in a circle with other students [including male ones] … it is a work environment and nothing should disturb that … I deal with the situation in a way that nothing should affect my beliefs … I deal with everyone with respect."

Aminah uses the word respect again to emphasise the professional distance and thus boundaries that she maintains with her male classmates when she interacts with them. Further, in both remarks, she mentions that she does not wish anything to change her beliefs. It seems that the 'beliefs' that she refers to are her religious views that advise that the interactions between men and women that should be kept to a minimum and engaged in only where necessary, for example,

interacting in the classroom. Therefore, she seems to prefer to keep her religious views on this type of interaction unchanged. In this case, if Aminah could not find a place to sit next to a female student, she called upon a skill such as leaving a physical distance between her and the male student next to her, in order to make it clear that she wishes her interactions with her male classmates to be minimal and that she will engage with them only when necessary such as in academic discussions. As a result, her behaviour led her male classmates to leave a physical distance whenever they are sat next to her.

Yunos operated a similar skill and points out:

فلما يحطونك في قروب يصير غصب تتواصل معهم [البنات] ولكن أقلل التواصل إلا في حدود المطلوب.. لكن العلاقات وكذا كلها أصحابي رجال... يعني تحاول تحط حد فلو بنت سألتك أي شي تجاوب باختصار شديد... بحيث توصل لها رسالة أنك منت مرتاح فما نفتح مجال

“I try to be in a group of male students … but if I am put in a group of girls, I try to keep discussion very brief … I just do not want to give them the chance to talk to me and hope they will understand that I do not feel comfortable; then they stop it.”

Yunos has similar concerns to Aminah in terms of preferring to keep his interactions with his female classmates to a minimum. Therefore, he operated his skills by keeping his conversations very brief so they understand that he is not willing to interact with them. Another example is Sameer who talks about his young female teacher:

أول ما جيت كان الكورس الي أنا فيه في اللغة لوحدي وكانت المعلمة في أواخر العشرينات وكنا لوحدي معها... فكان فيه تحفظ عندي... فهي تفهمت وصارت تدرك أني متحفظ وصارت تطلب من معلمة ثانية أنها تجي معها

“When I first arrived at the university, I was the only student in the English language class and the teacher was a female in her late twenties … I felt

uncomfortable about being alone with her in the same class … she noticed my discomfort so she started bringing another teacher with her in the class."

Feeling uncomfortable about being in a room with a young female teacher shows Sameer's concerns about developing intimate relationships beyond the professional level. He seems to follow the Islamic religious view that if a man and a woman are alone in one place, the devil will be present with them (Islamic Online University, 2013), Here the metaphor is used to indicate that the man and woman may develop an intimate relationship and commit adultery. Although Sameer did not mention how he communicated his discomfort to her, it seems that his discomfort was so obvious to the teacher that it led her to take the action of bringing another teacher into the room with them. Therefore, the intimacy that Sameer fears could develop has a lesser chance of occurring when a third person is present. All of these concerns in Aminah's, Sameer's and Yunos' remarks about developing intimacy seem to be related to the religious teachings they follow that prohibit them from interacting with individuals from the opposite gender. Therefore, the skills that they operated when interacting with individuals from the opposite gender make clear the discomfort they experienced when they had to engage in these types of interactions.

Although Haleemah had a male friend who respects the boundaries between them, as discussed in the previous section, she talked about how she felt when she first arrived in the UK and experienced interactions with her male classmates. She comments:

كانت [تجربة الاختلاط] رهبة بصراحة... بسبب الاختلاط وبسبب أنه حيكون رجل أمامي يدرسني... احنا عادة الجامعات عندنا عن طريق التلفزيون ويعني ما كنت أتوقع... يعني حظينا بمدرسين خاصين في مرحلة الثانوية

هذا بيجي ساعة في اليوم أو كل أسبوع مرة بحضور والدك أو بحضور أخوك.. فما بالك لما تكوني بمعدل يومي وكم ساعة في اليوم أنتي حتختلطي بهذا الإنسان وحيكون بينك وبينه كونكشن أكثر من مجرد مدرس خاص... يعني أكون صادقة في البداية كنت جدا خايفة

"When I first arrived in the UK, I was scared by the idea of being taught by a male teacher … teaching in Saudi universities happens via closed circuit TV, while in the UK there will be daily communication with a male teacher ... I was stressed out."

Then she adds:

يعني أنا كنت أستصعب جدا أني أجلس جنب أحد أو أحد يجي فجأة ويجلس جنبي... وفي نفس الوقت لما يجي واحد متأخر ويجلس جنبك ما تقدر تقول له معليش أنا ما أجلس جنب ذكور..

"I had fears over sitting next to my male classmates … I could not accept the idea of some of them sitting next to me, but when one of them arrives late and sits next to me, I would find it difficult to ask him to leave."

Unlike Aminah and Sameer, Haleemah did not seem to be able to make her discomfort obvious to her male classmates because she seems to have judged it inappropriate to ask a male student to leave his place because he was sat next to her. Her fears and stress relate to the psychological stress that individuals experience when they have to employ their skills in interactions, but without having the attitudes of openness and curiosity (Byram, 1997). Further, unlike Hannah, Khadijah, and Lubna, Haleemah had not experienced interactions with male individuals in Saudi Arabia, whether in the family or at university, which made it more difficult for her to operate her interaction skills. Byram (1997) argues that skills are "more difficult to operate in those [environments] which have least in common with the individual's country of origin" (p. 38). However, although all of the participants come from the same country of origin, Saudi Arabia, nevertheless, their experiences and exposure to interaction with

individuals from the opposite gender varied depending on their understandings of religion, their family upbringing, and their previous of experiences. This finding supports the earlier argument that the participants possess different types of knowledge about their social groups (e.g., whether Islam permits or prohibits interactions between men and women). Further, this finding supports Dervin's (2013) mixed intersubjectivity approach which claims that it is not people's country of origin that explains their behaviours, but rather their different, unique, shifting, and ever-changing worldviews that result from their various experiences.

These shifts and ever-changing worldviews were experienced by Haleemah throughout the time of her study in the UK. She states:

يعني مع الوقت تبدأ تتودد العلاقة وتصير مور فريندلي... يعني لأني شفت طريقة تعاملهم مع غيري من الجنسيات والبنات يعني مع المحجبة وغير المحجبة والمنقبة وغير المنقبة يعني أنا قيمت... يعني أنا وقفت خارج الصورة وجلست أراقب كيف يتعاملون مع الناس وهل هذا الشي معي أنا وحدي أو مع الكل... وقتها تقدر تقول أنها بيئة تعليمية والشي الي يسووه معاك يسووه مع غيرك... فلو أنتي فضلتي تحطي نفسك في قوقعة ما تبي تخرجي منها أنتي ما تستفيدي يعني هذا شي ما بيكون في صالحك.. حيكون ضدك... يعني علشان كذا تبدي تطلعي نفسك شوي شوي لكن في الأخيز أنتي رقيب نفسك

"You know, your relationship with your classmates [including male classmates] becomes more friendly with time … I observed how my male classmates were behaving with other girls in the classroom … they were polite with everyone … they did not make a distinction between a veiled girl and nonveiled girls … it is also an academic place so it is professional … so if a girl preferred to isolate herself from the rest of the people then she will not achieve a lot … we need to get used to dealing with different people."

This remark shows how Haleemah developed skills of interpreting and relating through which the individual is able to "discover both [knowledge of one's own

and the other environment] common grounds … and lacunae or dysfunctions, including mutually contradictory meanings" (Byram, 1997, p. 37). This is what Haleemah attempted to do when she observed how her male classmates were behaving with other female students in class and, thereby, she managed to discover common ground by seeing that these interactions were for educational and professional purposes.

Although the participants above operated their skills differently from one another, their interactions in the classroom took place on a daily basis. Therefore, they became familiar with the individuals with whom they are interacting, some of whom, in return, understood that certain participants were willing to maintain only minimal interactions. In this case, the participants were able to determine their own timescale for discovering common grounds and interpretations without being constrained by the demands of social interactions (Byram, 1997). These demands of social interactions which are constrained by time are more likely to happen in places outside the classroom where the participants may encounter interactions with individuals from the opposite gender whom they meet for the first time, unlike the situation with their classmates. In this case, the participants are not able to determine their own timescale for interpretations, as in the classroom, and need to act immediately. This type of interaction is the focus of the second subsection below.

5.2.1.2 Interactions with the opposite gender outside the classroom

In this section, I focus on the participants' experiences of interactions with individuals from the opposite gender outside the classroom. The main theme

emerging from this data relates to the physical contact between the participants and individuals from the opposite gender. The most common physical contact that the participants reported was related to shaking hands, an action which is prohibited between men and women by some Islamic sects (Gieling, Thijs & Verkuyten, 2010). For example, Haleemah states:

أنا مستحيل أمد يدي وأصافح ولو مديت يدك ما أقدر أصافحك... لكن إذا كنت في موقف اجتماعي يحتك عليك تصافح يعني لازم تسويها... بصراحة فيه مواقف اضطريت فيها أني أصافح... مثلا كان مرة عندنا اندكشن دي وكان البني آدم رئيس القسم يسلم عليك، ينادي اسمك ويعطيك بكيج ثم يصافحك... وأمام هول من الطلبة.. فصعبة يعني... أنا كنت في موقف صعب جدا يعني ما قدرت حسيت أني لازم أصافح... بس بعدين طبعا يعني بعد كذا في مواقف اجتماعية أقل ممكن الواحد يبادر يعني أنا عن نفسي على طول أوريه أني ما أصافح يعني الطريقة الي ألجأ لها أني أشغل يديني في شي أو أحطها في جيبي، فخلاص هو يفهم أني ما أصافح... فمثل ما قلت فيه مواقف ما تقدر مثلا

"I never shake hands with a male individual even if he wants to … but sometimes in some difficult situations you feel like you have to shake hands … for example we had an induction day in the department, and the head of the department was calling out the students' names to hand them a welcoming package then shaking their hands … he called out my name so I had to shake his hand … it was too awkward not to especially in front of many students … I felt bad … but in less serious situations, if a man wants to shake my hands, I try to make it clear that I do not shake hands by pretending to be busy carrying something in my hands, or by putting my hands in my pocket … then he understands that I do not shake hands with men."

This experience shows the difference between Haleemah's experience of interacting with men in the classroom and outside the classroom. In the classroom, she operated her skills of interpreting and relating over time and came to the understanding that her interactions with her male classmates were merely for academic and professional purposes. In the second experience, however, she was constrained by the demands of social interactions in which she

had to act immediately. She was, for example, confronted with the choice of whether to shake hands with the head of the department and feel guilty, or to avoid shaking his hand and make things awkward in front of everyone. Furthermore, when she did shake his hand, she experienced psychological stress because her skills were not supported by the attitudes of openness and curiosity (Byram, 1997). Therefore, in order to avoid this psychological stress in the future, she came up with strategies such as pretending to be carrying something in her hands or by putting her hands in her pocket in order to avoid physical contact with a man.

Another example is provided by Zainah who points out:

> سلمت مرة لأني انحرجت وجلست طول الليل ما أنام... يعني واحد في الكاثيدرل مد يده وسلم علينا أنا وأختي فحسيت أنك تنحط في موقف لازم تسلم... زمليلي السوداني مثلا سلم علي في المكتبة بعدين أفكر وأقول المفروض أني ما سلمت... حسيت أني سويت ذنب

"There are situations where you cannot refuse shaking hands with [other] men … For example, there was a man in the cathedral who shook hands with me … I felt too embarrassed to refuse his hand shaking … my [male] classmate also shook hands with me in the library … I felt guilty … I could not sleep at night."

Similarly to Haleemah, Zainah felt guilty for shaking hands with men when she was in a situation where she felt that it would have been inappropriate if she had refused to do so. The difference between them is that, unlike Haleemah, Zainah did not operate skills to manage the dysfunction that arose from the interactions nor did she show attitudes of openness and curiosity about shaking hands with a male individual, an act which caused her so much psychological stress that it even stopped her from sleeping at night. Both examples support Byram's (1997)

argument that individuals experience psychological stress if they do not show attitudes of openness and curiosity alongside their skills.

Hannah offers another example related to handshaking with individuals from the opposite gender, but in her case we see that she operated some skills and, therefore, invented a new way of greeting. She states:

هذا جارنا شايب أول ما سكنا جاء ويبي يصافح فحطيت يدي على صدري يعني أرحب فيه بابتسامة، فقلت لأختي [تدرس دراسات إسلامية] بعدين، وأنا كنت زعلانة أنه متضايق يعني ممكن هو فهمني شي ثاني.. فاختي قالت ليه هو شايب سلمي عليه... يعني مرة أنا رحمته مسكين فالمرة الثانية صرت أمد يدي له وأصافحه

"When I moved with my family to our house in the UK, our old neighbour visited us to welcome us to the neighborhood and he wanted to shake my hands … but I refused to do so … I felt bad because I hoped that he did not misunderstand me … I told my sister [who has specialised in Islamic studies] and she told me that it is ok to shake his hands because he is an old man … so every time I saw him I shook his hands."

Sameer raised a similar point and remarked:

يعني مثلا امرأة كبيرة في السن أصافحها مافي مشكلة ولكن عندما تكون شابة وأخشى على نفسي أني أشوفها جذابة فممكن لا... فلما يفعلونها أنا أحط يدي على صدري ولكن خوفي أنهم كيف يفسرون هذا السلوك.. يعني خل هو أنه عنصري ضد المرأة؟ في الإطار الإسلامي المسألة ليست عنصرية ضد أحد ولكنها حماية للشخص نفسه يعني حتى ما تتطور لشيء آخر... يعني الشخص ممكن تحفزه يعمل شيء آخر... يعني المصافحة ممكن تكون دافع ليعمل هذا الشيء... يعني هذا الي أفهمه من حرمة المصافحة.

"I could shake hands with an elderly lady, but I could not do so with a young, beautiful woman because I fear that she and I may develop some feelings for one another … therefore, I would put my hand on my chest instead … my only concern is that I do not want them to misunderstand my behaviour and think that Islam discriminates against women … it is not about discrimination against anybody … it is just a way to protect ourselves from developing intimacy with each other … you know, things start with a handshake then may develop to

something else … this is what I understand from the prohibition on shaking hands between men and women."

Sameer explicitly expresses the reasons why he refuses to shake hands with women as doing so may lead to the development of intimacy. However, he and Hannah exclude elderly people since intimacy is less likely to develop with them. This is a view which was introduced by some Islamic thinkers (Bouhdiba, 2013). It is the ideas of such thinkers that had led Hannah's sister — who is a specialist in Islamic studies — to tell Hannah that she could shake hands with her neighbour because intimacy is less likely to develop in this case. This Islamic view was already known to Sameer and, therefore, he did not experience the same awkwardness with elderly people that Hannah had encountered. These examples, therefore, show that they drew upon their knowledge of Islamic views on handshaking with elderly people and operated their skills accordingly. Further, these incidents show that both Sameer and Hannah drew upon some "explicit criteria" (Byram, 1997, p. 64) in which they showed understanding of the fact that their refusal to shake hands is related to their fears of intimacy rather than merely to religious teachings that do not have a clear rationale.

This was not the case, however, with Zainah who points out:

مرة واحد من الي يبيعون مجلات كل ما يشوفني يسلم وهو شايب كبير ومرة أخيرة سلم علي وكان لازم قفاز فقلت حمدلله ما لمست يده.. تعرف هو حرام

"Once there was an elderly man selling newspapers in the street … he decided to shake my hand, so I did, only because he was wearing gloves … thanks to God I did not get to touch his skin … you know, it is prohibited in Islam."

Although the person that Zainah was talking about was an elderly man, she did not wish to shake his hand in the same way that Hannah and Sameer were able to do in a similar context. She seems to take the prohibition on shaking hands with individuals from the opposite gender literally, and the only reason that encouraged her to shake the old man's hand was that he was wearing gloves. When comparing this experience to her earlier one in the cathedral, she indicated that she did not experience the same psychological stress that she had encountered before, because she did not feel that she had done something that went against her understanding of religion.

Nevertheless, Aminah does not distinguish between skin-to-skin contacts, like in shaking hands, and any other physical contacts and, therefore, she avoids both of them. She points out:

مرة كنا في باص وكان جدا مزدحم.. فكان فيه رجل كبير سن وجدا مسن فوق الثمانين فجا وجلس جنبي.. فأنا تركت مسافة بيني وبينه يعني وش أسوي غصبني.. فحسيت أنه غير لطيف أقول له قم من هنا

"Once I was on the bus and there was a senior citizen in his 80s who got on the bus and sat next to me … I felt uncomfortable but I could not do anything about it … it would not have been nice to ask him to leave … so I tried to leave some space between me and him."

Despite being a senior citizen in his 80s and, consequently, someone with whom she is unlikely to develop intimacy, Aminah did not wish to be in close physical proximity to the elderly man. She seems to see any physical contact between men and women as being prohibited in her religion without questioning the reasons behind this injunction, as Hannah and Sameer did, even if no actual contact is possible because of a physical barrier such as clothes (e.g., gloves) as

seen in the case of Zainah. Therefore, having to sit next to the elderly man made her feel uncomfortable even when she left some physical distance between herself and the man.

Not all of the participants, however, felt the need to avoid physical contact with individuals from the opposite gender that the above participants showed. Yunos, for example, tries to maintain his interactions with female individuals. He stated:

المصافحة عادي مجرد أضطر إذا صافحوا لكن تقبيل أو لا ما أقدر... يعني اولاحد الحاجات الي تمنعه قناعاته ودينه...من ناحيتي الحمدلله مافيه شيء تجاوزته خارج الحدود... يعني لو الواحد عمل علاقات مع نساء حتى لو كانت شريفة يعني ممكن تعزمك على عشاء فتصير خلوة بينكم

"I may shake hands with [other] women if I have to, but will never kiss on the cheeks or hug … religion forbids me from doing so … thanks to God I have not done anything that goes against religion … even if we think our relationships with other women are platonic, they may invite you for dinner then you develop your relationship to something more intimate."

The fears of intimacy are a recurring theme that the participants are concerned about. However, despite stating that religion prohibits him from kissing women or having more intimate relationships with them, Yunos, unlike the other participants mentioned above, does not mind shaking hands with them. He maintains that by shaking hands with women he has not done anything that goes against religion, which is an indication that he is convinced that religion does not prohibit shaking hands between men and women, or that at least he does not view it as a major problem.

The diverse examples shown so far demonstrate that the participants operated different skills that drew upon their different attitudes and knowledge. They

showed different gender worldviews that seem to be based mainly on their religious worldviews. However, it can be argued that each participant's interaction was predicated on different and differing knowledge. Here, once again, we can see that, despite their self-identifications of being Muslim individuals coming from the same country of origin (Byram, 1997), all the participants hold different types of knowledge about the social groups to which they ostensibly belong. This finding supports Dervin's (2013) concept of mixed intersubjectivity in which individuals' behaviours cannot be explained by their pre-existing identities and their countries of origin. Rather, it is their inconsistent, shifting, and ever-changing self-identifications and the worldviews that these identifications carry that explain their behaviours.

Thus far, the focus of this section has been on the skills that the participants used when they drew upon their existing knowledge and attitudes and employed them during their interactions with individuals from the opposite gender. The data have shown that the participants' gender worldviews (knowledge*)*, while mainly based on their religious worldviews, also varied depending on their understandings of that religion. Therefore, when they were in the classroom and had the opportunity, over time, to observe and discover common ground through their daily communication with their classmates, the participants operated skills of interpreting and relating. These skills, in turn, enabled them to reach the conclusion that their interactions with the opposite gender were acceptable because they were clearly for academic, educational, and professional purposes.

On the other hand, when outside the classroom the participants experienced interactions with individuals from the opposite gender and whom they were meeting for the first time, they were constrained by the demands of the social interactions. We see that in these situations the participants responded differently when operating their skills of interactions. When their skills were not accompanied by the attitudes of openness and curiosity, some experienced psychological stress (Byram, 1997). Although all the participants in this study identified themselves as being Saudis and Muslims, these commonalities did not led them all to respond to situations in exactly the same way or with the same skills. These differing self-conceptions support Dervin's (2013) concept of mixed intersubjectivity. The focus of this section has been on the participants' experiences with mainly non-Saudi individuals. In the next section, the discussion moves to a consideration of the participants' experiences with Saudi individuals from the opposite gender, since some participants reported that they had experienced different types of interactions with Saudi individuals.

5.2.2 Interactions with Saudi individuals from the opposite gender

The majority of the participants whose experiences are reported in this section said that they found interacting with Saudi individuals from the opposite gender to be challenging for two main reasons. The first is related to the lack of communication between men and women in Saudi Arabia, and the second is related to the expectations imposed on them by their in-group members.

One of the participants who found interacting with individuals from the opposite gender difficult is Hannah who points out:

معنا [في الكلاس] سعوديين فيحطون في بالهم أنه ما يكلمها [أي بنت] ويحاول قدر ما يقدر أنه ما يصير معها في قروب... يعني ممكن يكون مع البنات الصينيات لكن مع السعوديات لا... ليه النظرة هذي، يعني حنا جالسين زملاء في الفصل يعني لازم ليه تفصل ... هم المشكلة ما يفصلون يعني هم بمجرد ما تكلم بنت يعني فيه شي ثاني، هذي مشكلتهم ... بالعكس عادي حنا جالسين في كلاس مو مشكلة جالسين نتناقش في شي بحثي لكن هم ما يتقبلونه ... والله بالنسبة لي أنا مابي أكلمهم لأنهم هم نفسهم أعطوني الشعور أني أصير قليلة أدب لو أكلمهم ...

"There are some [male] Saudi students in my class and, for some reason, they try not to be with me or with any other Saudi girl in the group … they do not mind being in the same group with Chinese female students, for example, but not with Saudi female students … I do not understand why … I think they think that if a Saudi girl speaks to them then she wants 'something else' [an intimate relationship] with them … but, come on, we are classmates, we should be professional … now I do not want to speak to them because they have given me the impression that I would not be well-mannered if I speak to them."

Sameer raised a similar point when he remarked:

هذا الكورس كان كله بنات صينيات لكن في المستوى الآخر كان فيه سعوديات وفيه صينيات.. يعني طبيعة العلاقات غريبة... يعني أقدر أتكلم مع صينيات بسهولة لكن مع السعوديات كان فيه تحفظ.. أنا ما أقدر أحدد من يبدأ لكن لما شفتهم جالسين جنب بعض وبعيدين عنا، كانت فكرتي أن الواحد لازم يختلط قدر الإمكان خصوصا لما تتعامل في إطار الدراسة، هم كانوا متحفظين من البداية... يعني بعيد عني ... يعني أحيانا أشوفها لو تبي تسأل سؤال فهي تسأل أحد غير، فكنت أسأل فأشوفها تتردد... فكانت سهلة مع الصينيات وصعبة مع السعوديات.. ما أقدر أحدد من هو هل أنا أم هم...

"My course has many Saudi female and Chinese female students … my relationship with the Saudi female classmates was strange … I could not speak to them … I could speak with the Chinese [female] classmates much easier … the Saudi [female] students sit with each other and do not speak to me … it is a professional and an educational place, I do not know why they do that … they looked reserved from the beginning … if one of them [the Saudi female classmates] wanted to ask a question, she would ask anybody [including non-Saudi male classmates] but not me or any other Saudi male student … I am not sure who started this type of relationship, me or them."

Zahir is another participant who experienced a similar challenge when interacting with Saudi women, as illustrated in the following statement:

كنا في الكلاس نصفين: نصف بنات [سعوديات] ونصف رجال [سعوديين] وكنا نجلس في زاويتين مختلفتين. هم يجلسلون سوا وحنا لما نشوفهم كذا ما نجلس معهم... يعني لو أشوفها برا الشارع ما أسلم.. بعضهم يعني ما تبي تكلم أحد بالمرة يعني جاية من السعودية وتكلم رجال ممكن يخليه صعب شوي.. صارت كذا مرة وتقابلنا [في الشارع] ولكن يتجنبوني وأنا برضوه كأني ما شفتهم لأني حسيتهم ما يبون نفس الشي فخلاص تركتهم

"In the classroom we [Saudi students] are divided into two groups: Saudi men and Saudi women … we sit in two different corners … when we [Saudi men] see them [the Saudi female classmates] sitting with each other, we avoid sitting with them … even if I see them outside the classroom like in the street, I do not stop to say hi … I just think they do not want to speak to me because I am a man … I met some of them in the street but they avoided me, so I avoided even looking at them … I just decided to leave them alone."

Further, Abdulaziz talks about his observation of similar situations and points out:

سعودي معنا في القروب يجيلي يسلم على البنات في القروب وما يردوا عليه السلام على حد تعبيره لكني أعرف أن الولد هذا ماهو كذاب ... هو يقول ما يردوا علي فمرة انكسف وما عاد عارف يتعامل معهم ... أنا شايف التناقض بعينه لأني أتعامل معاهم بطريقة كويسة ويرسلون لي رسائل على الإيميل وكذا وعلى الفيسبوك في تواصل مرة رائع، ولما نجي وجه لوجه ما عندي مشاكل معهم، لكن أصحابي السعوديين يقولون لي حنا عندنا مشاكل في التعامل معهم ...

"My [male] Saudi classmate told me that when he says hi to the Saudi female students in our classroom they do not respond to him … I know he is telling the truth … so he stopped greeting them … I find this interaction confusing because I interact with them via emails and on Facebook, and when I meet them face-to-face, our interaction is very normal."

With the exception of Abdulaziz, all of the above participants were able to manage their interactions with non-Saudi individuals of the opposite gender. However, they find interacting with Saudi individuals from the opposite gender

challenging. Since they state that there is an interaction between Saudi males and non-Saudi females such as Chinese students in the classroom, it would appear further reasons, beyond the idea that the participants' are disinclined to interact with the opposite gender, are at play here.

The first reason for this unwillingness to interact with each other may arise from the fact that the participants were habituated to a lack of communication between Saudi men and women in Saudi Arabia, a situation which created a sense of otherness between them. This strict demarcation between the sexes is a result of the laws of the country that restrict interactions between men and women. It may also be attributable to the gender worldviews (i.e., knowledge*)* that they had acquired in Saudi Arabia in a number of areas, for example, through their primary socialisation in the family, or through their secondary socialisation in formal education such as at school, or even through informal religious education at mosques. This form of socialisation led to an increase in the number of religious statements that prohibited interactions between men and women and to their introduction into formal education at school as well as into informal education at mosques (Al-Rasheed, 2013). Therefore, the lack of interaction between men and women in Saudi Arabia seems to have created an otherness between the sexes which does not apply to non-Saudi individuals from the opposite gender because the participants managed to interact with them whilst abroad, for example. The only exception among the participants mentioned above is Abdulaziz because, as pointed out earlier in this chapter, he interacts with women in Saudi Arabia because his family is not conservative in this aspect. Therefore, he did not view Saudi women in terms of 'others' with

whom he rarely experienced interactions, as was the case for the other participants.

The second reason that may explain the lack of communication between Saudi men and women is related to their fears of being judged by other Saudi individuals in terms of whether they dressed or behaved properly. For example, Zainah points out:

يعني لما زملائي يجلسون على الأرض أجلس معهم ... لكن صراحة مهب مع السعوديين الشباب ... يمكن لأن عندنا فكرة سيئة عن البنت لمتفتحة مع أني ما أحس أني سويت شي غلط ... لما جيت هنا سافرت من الرياض، ركبت في الطيارة، بعض البنات خلعوا حجابهم هناك ... لكن بالنسبة لي كنت لابسة مثل كذا الحين

"I sit with my male and female classmates on the floor, but I do not do it with my male Saudi classmates … they may have the wrong impression about me if I did so, although I do not think that I did something wrong … Let me tell you something, I took the plane from Riyadh to come here to the UK, and there were so many Saudi girls who took off their headscarves once the plane took off … as for me, I was dressed like how I am dressed now."

Zainah seems to worry that she would have been judged by her male Saudi classmates if she had sat with them on the floor and interacted with them. Further, her example of Saudi women taking off their headscarves once they took off from Riyadh may explain that those women were concerned that they would be judged by other Saudi individuals in Riyadh if they were not dressed 'properly'. Although there might have been some Saudi passengers on the plane who might have judged their behaviour of taking off their headscarves, this possibility may not have made a significant difference for those women because their identities are unknown to those passengers, unlike in Riyadh where they could have met someone they know in the street. Therefore, those women may

have had a smaller chance of being faced with 'community gossips' (Bilge, 2010). The following comic picture depicts this type of interaction and shows two Saudi women uncovering their faces in front of two "western" men, but covering their faces when they faced a male from their social group.



Zainah's observation on the behaviour of her fellow passengers illustrates the expectations that are imposed on individuals by their in-group members (Collier, 2009; Haw, 2010).

When the participants in this section interacted with non-Saudi individuals from the opposite gender, they operated their skills by drawing upon their knowledge and attitudes, as discussed in the earlier sections of this chapter. However, those skills that were also based on their knowledge changed when they interacted with Saudi individuals from the opposite gender. The reason for this change lies in the fact that they had different types of knowledge of the social groups with whom they were interacting, e.g., they knew that non-Saudi individuals from the opposite gender would not be as judgmental as other Saudis would be.

Therefore, this knowledge influences their skills of interactions differently when interacting with members of each social group.

Further, this discussion shows that what defines otherness — in the case of the participants in this section — is neither individuals who have different beliefs, meanings, and behaviours, nor individuals from the opposite gender. Rather, what constitutes otherness here is other Saudi individuals from the opposite gender with whom the participants had restricted interactions in Saudi Arabia. In other words, those participants — such as Zahir — whose families were less conservative and allowed them to interact with individuals from the opposite gender, or those participants who had had previous experiences of this type of interaction whenever they travelled abroad — as in the case of Hannah — still found interacting with Saudi individuals from the opposite gender challenging. Therefore, despite sharing the same religion, language, country of origin, and, therefore, sharing beliefs, meanings, and behaviours, the participants in this section identified Saudi individuals from the opposite gender as otherness because of the limited interactions between the genders in Saudi Arabia. All of these experiences show the inconsistencies of the participants' identifications with regard to their concepts of in-group and out-groups (Dervin, 2013). These distinctions cannot be simply explained by the sharing of beliefs, meanings, and behaviours (Byram, 1997).

5.3 Conclusions

This chapter has focused on the participants' experiences of interactions with individuals from the opposite gender during their sojourn in the UK. The

importance of this focus lies in the restrictions on the interactions between men and women in Saudi Arabia. In contrast to Alhazmi & Nyland's (2013) argument that Saudi international students struggle when they interact with individuals from the opposite gender when abroad because of what he refers to as "Saudi cultural identity", this chapter has shown that Saudi internationals' experiences of interactions are diverse. Some participants' found that their gender worldviews — as in what it means to be a Saudi man or woman, and how someone is supposed to interact with individuals from the opposite gender — were tested in these types of interactions and that they found them challenging, while others did not. These gender worldviews were shaped by the participants' understandings of the teachings of Islam regarding interactions between men and women, by their family upbringing, by their previous experiences, and by whether they had experienced this type of interaction before or not.

Having established their knowledge of their own gender worldviews, the participants utilised skills that drew upon their existing knowledge and attitudes. As a result, each participant managed his or her interactions differently. In addition, some participants reported that the interactions they experienced with non-Saudi individuals from the opposite gender differed from those they had with other Saudis. It was also seen that even those who managed their interactions with individuals from the opposite gender — whether inside or outside the classroom — reported that they found this type of interaction challenging when those with whom they had to engage were also Saudi individuals.

There are three conclusions that can be drawn from this chapter. First, a 'Saudi cultural identity', as Alhazmi & Nyland (2013) call it, that restricts interactions between men and women does not explain the participants' diverse understandings of the position taken by their religion on this type of interactions, nor does it explain the fact that the family upbringing of some of the participants had permitted them to interact with individuals from the opposite gender. Therefore, while the participants' gender worldviews are shaped by a variety of different influences, sharing a notional Saudi cultural identity (Alhazmi & Nyland, 2013) does not seem to be one of them.

Secondly, the participants hold diverse gender worldviews (i.e., knowledge*)* even though they come from the same country of origin, and may be thought to share the same language, religion, beliefs, meanings, and behaviours. This conclusion supports Dervin's (2013) argument that an individual's behaviours cannot be explained by pre-existing identities such as countries of origin, but by their ever-changing, inconsistent, and shifting identifications.

This point leads to the third conclusion which is related to the participants' identifications of themselves as well as of otherness. These identifications were not related to the similarities or differences in beliefs, meanings, and behaviours with other individuals (Byram, 1997), nor were they related to shared experiences, as I argued in the previous chapter. Rather, they were related to whether they share the same gender with the individual with whom they were interacting. Nevertheless, even those who managed their interactions with individuals who exemplified this otherness, i.e., individuals from the opposite

gender, reported that they struggled with this type of interaction when the other interactants were Saudi individuals. The reason for their difficulties in interaction are, therefore, related to the lack of communication between men and women in Saudi Arabia, a gendered segregation which makes each gender look upon its opposite as the Other. The issue is further compounded by reasons related to the in-group expectations imposed on both male and female Saudis. The findings in this chapter, therefore, continue to support the argument of the previous chapter that the differences between in-group and out-group members are difficult to identify because of the inconsistent, shifting and ever-changing identifications of the Self as well as Others (Dervin, 2013).

5.4- Chapter summary

This chapter has focused on the participants' interactions with individuals from the opposite gender whether inside or outside the classroom. The findings have shown that the participants showed different behaviours when they interacted with individuals from the opposite gender depending on their families' upbringing, previous experiences and their understandings of religion. However, the findings have shown that even the participants who managed their interactions with the opposite gender, their interactions struggled when they their interlocutors were Saudi individuals because of the lack of interactions between men and women in Saudi Arabia and also because of the fears of being judged. These examples illustrate that Saudi international students have different and inconsistent views on interactions with the opposite gender, as some find such interactions challenging while others may not.

CHAPTER SIX

Motivating and Demotivating Experiences for Intercultural Communication

Introduction

The previous two chapters focused on friendship. Chapter four examined how the participants experienced intercultural communication in the friendships they formed during their sojourns in the UK with either home students, other international students, or other Saudi, Arab, or Muslim students whom the participants considered as in-group members. The discussion then moved in chapter five to considering the participants' interactions with individuals from the opposite gender, and showed how gender created some degree of "otherness" for some participants but not for others.

As argued in the previous two chapters, the participants' experiences of friendship, as well as their experiences of interactions with individuals from the opposite gender, varied from one another for a variety of reasons such as their diverse understandings of religion, their family upbringing, or their previous experiences of this type of interactions. This chapter builds upon these earlier chapters and focuses more specifically on the experiences that the participants encountered during their time in the UK which may have motivated or demotivated them from experiencing intercultural communication.

These experiences recounted in this chapter did not happen during the participants' interactions with their friends, nor did they happen during their interactions with individuals from the opposite gender. Rather, they took place

in various situations such as in an airport, public places, the mosque, or even in the street. Although many participants did not explicitly state that these experiences motivated or demotivated them from experiencing intercultural communication in the UK, these experiences may have influenced their decisions to do so. Since I use Byram's (1997) model in analysing the data, the experiences in this chapter may have influenced the participants' attitudes of openness and curiosity as well as their willingness to seek out and take up opportunities to experience engagement in a relationship with others (Byram, 1997). Further, these experiences may also have influenced their knowledge of their own social groups as well as of others i.e., individuals in the UK.

Therefore, I divide this chapter into two main sections: the first focuses on experiences that the participants had encountered and which may have influenced their attitudes and knowledge and which may, as a result, have demotivated them from experiencing intercultural communication. In some cases, these experiences were negative and thus they indicate some of the difficulties that the participants experienced, on the one hand. In some cases, on the other hand, while the participants perceived their experiences as positive ones they, nevertheless, seem to have demotivated them from experiencing intercultural communication.

In the second section, I focus on the experiences that influenced the participants' attitudes and knowledge and, therefore, may have motivated them to experience intercultural communication. Here issues such as religious tolerance, equality, and the freedom that they had experienced in the UK are discussed. Alongside

the previous two chapters, this chapter serves the purpose of this study because it provides further understanding of the intercultural experiences of Saudi international students in the UK. It does so by focusing on attitudes and knowledge that may have been affected by various experiences that did not occur during the participants' interactions with their friends or with individuals from the opposite gender.

6.1 Experiences that demotivated the participants from experiencing intercultural communication

In this section, I explore experiences that may have demotivated the participants from engaging in intercultural communication. I divide this section into three main parts. The first part deals with negative experiences, particularly in official contexts; the second looks at nonofficial contexts, e.g., in public places; while the third area concerns engagement with others in the Islamic Society at the university. I shall discuss these three different areas in separate sections below.

6.1.1 Demotivating experiences (in the official context)

Some participants experienced negative encounters that they believed had demotivated them from engaging in intercultural communication. These experiences took place in official places such as at the airport when they first arrived in the UK or at the university. For example, Aminah faced an issue with the immigration officer at the airport when she first arrived in the UK:

> في المطار حرس الهجرة مزعجين ... فلما وقت تدقيق الوثائق صراحة المرأة الي استقبلتنا كانت فظة جدا ... كان أسلوبها فظ وكان بيكون بينها مشكلة وبين زوجي ... جسلت مستاءة أسبوعين من الحدث

"The immigration officer in the airport was very rude to both my husband and myself and this left a lot of bad impressions with me for the next two weeks."

Aminah felt the immigration officer who checked her documents was rude to her and her husband and showed some angry attitudes. I assumed in the beginning that she was unlucky to have her documents checked by an unhelpful officer. Therefore, I asked Aminah why she thought the immigration officer behaved in this way and she answered that her husband had requested a female officer to check Aminah's documents and passport, as he did not want male officers to see her face, a request which may —or may not— have provoked a reaction from the staff.

It is difficult to pinpoint the exact reason behind Aminah's unpleasant experience. It may have been difficult for the immigration officer to deal with an individual who is covering her face, since wearing a veil that hides facial expressions may influence the quality and the content of what the individual is saying, as Kirk (2013) argues. However, this answer does not explain why in other cases many Muslim women who wear the veil in the UK's airports managed to complete the customs procedures without any difficulties (Khiabany & Williamson, 2008). It is also possible that the immigration officer found Aminah's husband's request to provide a female officer to interview his wife inconvenient and thus it was this request which provoked the negative reaction.

However, the interview data revealed that Aminah was not the only participant who felt mistreated in the airport when they first arrived. Abdulziz, a male, points out:

لما رحت المطار ورجعت كانوا يقولون احنا نشيك بشكل عشوائي وكانوا يعملوا لي دبل شيك ... وكانوا يفحصون اللابتوب وكذا.. علشان أنا ملامحي عربية ... فأنا وش سويت يوم ما كنت أسافر الكريسمس كنت واصل قبل الرحلة بكثير، فوقفت أتفرج على جنب من العشوائي المسكين الي حيتمسك وينشاف، طلع واحد سعودي.. قلت يمكن صدفة ... فكملت واقف فطلع 5 أشخاص انعمل لهم تفتيش وكلهم سعوديين وعرب ... فهذي الفكرة (العنصرية) ما أزيلت من بالي

"When I arrived in the airport, I was stopped for a personal security search … they [the security staff] told me it was a random security check … but I think they stopped me because of my Arab appearance … I decided to step aside and observe the other passengers who were going to be stopped for what they said was a random security check … and it was a Saudi passenger who was stopped … I thought it might have been a coincidence, but everybody who was stopped came from Saudi Arabia or looked Middle Eastern … This confirmed to me that racism exists here."

Abdulziz felt that he had been targeted for a personal security search because of his appearance. He further considers the search as a "racist" act since he noticed that the same thing happened to every individual who looked Middle Eastern. Marginson et al., (2010) argues that such experiences are encountered by most international students, but Hanassab (2006) argues that Middle Eastern students encounter such experiences more than others. The practice seems to be a result of specific stereotypes related to terrorism, especially after the events of 9/11 that led to increased security checks at airports (Abu-Raiya, Pargament & Mahoney, 2011; Abu-Ras & Saurez, 2009; Bilici, 2010; Doosje, Zimmermann, Küpper, Zick, & Meertens, 2010; Franz, 2007; Harcourt, 2006).

Being pulled aside and questioned in front of other passengers or for personal security checks may result in feelings of humiliation and embarrassment. Further, the problem goes beyond a temporary embarrassment or some inconvenient delay as it appears to impose a specific identity on the individual as being a 'suspect' who needs to be interrogated (Blackwood, Hopkins, & Reicher, 2013). In this case, the individual loses his or her autonomy and agency and has to take up the position (i.e., terrorist suspect) that has been imposed on them by others which denies their self-identification, e.g., as someone who is against terrorism (Blackwood et al., 2013). This assigning of an inappropriate identity may result in serious consequences because:

> identity is not simply important as a way of looking at oneself and looking at the world. It also has real consequences for what we can do. To be denied an identity is to be denied a position from which one can act upon the world. (Blackwood et al., 2013, p. 1101)

Although Abdulaziz felt that he was denied his self-identification of being an ordinary passenger who does not have anything to do with issues such as terrorism, others (i.e., officers in the airport) appeared to imply distrust simply because of his appearance. Collier (2009) calls this process "ascribed identities" (p. 289) in which people form stereotypes about an individual based on his or her physical appearance, ethnic connotation, or any other stereotypical forms. This experience may have left Abdulaziz with the negative impression that he was unequal to other passengers, and this experience may in turn have influenced his attitudes of willingness to engage with otherness in a relationship of equality.

Negative experiences did not occur in the airport only but also took place at the university. Haleemah explains:

> واجهنا اضطهاد كثير حتى من الستاف نفسه ... يعني أنا كنت المحجبة الوحيدة، يعني كان معي سعوديات لكن مو محجبات ولكن أنا الوحيدة ... فصدقا صدقا، يعني كنت أحيانا أجلس 10 دقايق أطلب من المُعلمة أنها تستجيب لي ولكن ما تستجيب
>
> "When I first arrived at the university, I felt discriminated against even by the staff … I was the only student wearing the headscarf in the class … sometimes I spent 10 minutes asking the teacher a question, but she was ignoring my questions and comments."

Unlike Aminah, Haleemah was wearing a hijab, not a niqab, and thus her facial expressions were visible and, therefore, her appearance was less likely to influence the quality or the content of her communication with her classmates than if she had been fully veiled, as Kirk (2013) seems to argue. Nevertheless, she felt that the university staff, including the teacher, treated her differently and thus she felt discriminated against. Although wearing the headscarf is not uncommon these days, it has still caused controversies in countries such as France (Brems, Vrielink, & Chaib, 2013) as well as in the UK. Tufail and Poynting (2013), for example, studied a group of British Muslims in the UK and how they felt about the way non-Muslims perceived them. Their findings show that some of the female interviewees experienced feelings similar to those that Haleemah had experienced in the classroom. One case in particular reported by 31-year-old British-born lawyer of Yemeni parentage was very similar to Haleemah's case:

> When you wear a scarf in the UK, it is very noticeable how different people are toward you. Even people that you talk to on a daily basis like your colleagues, they treat you differently … because of this impression that's given in the media that anyone that wears a hijab is militant almost. (Tufail & Poynting, 2013, p. 49)

This example shows that people can still be treated differently, or have identities imposed upon them (Blackwood et al., 2013) because of their appearances. While I thought that Haleemah may have been reading too much into this experience, her feelings of being discriminated against, which were echoed by Aminah and Abdulaziz, may have discouraged her from experiencing intercultural communication, if she did indeed feel her relationship was not built on equality with other individuals (Byram, 1997).

6.1.2 Demotivating experiences (in a nonofficial context)

Along the same lines as the negative experiences that some participants had encountered in the airport or at the university, other participants met with unpleasant intercultural contact at a nonofficial level such as in the street. Hannah and Haleemah describe being threatened by teenagers in the street:

التينيجرز حقينهم مرة قليلين أدب.. يعني مرة يصارخون في وجهي أو شي مثل كذا أو يمسك جاكيتي ويرفعه ... يعني حركاتهم قليلين أدب

"I do not like teenagers here [in the UK]; they screamed in my face and tried to pull my jacket … they are not well-behaved." (Hannah)

كنت في موقف إلا الله كانوا بيضربوني ... لو ما الله جاب رجال فكني من يدهم كان أنا انضربت ... هم عارفين أنك تتجنبهم فيحاولوا يخوفونك ... يوقفوا في وجهك.. يصرخوا في وجهك ... يحاولوا يسحبوا شنطتك حتى يشوفوا ردة فعلك ... أتا رحت الشرطة أتكلم، فقوا لي أنهم غير بالغين وما نقدر نسوي شي

"I faced a lot of troubles mainly from teenagers … they know that you are trying to avoid them so they try to scare you … they scream at you … they tried to pull my handbag … one day I would've been beaten up if I hadn't been helped by a male pedestrian … I told the police but they informed me that they are teenagers and underage and, therefore, nothing can be done about it." (Haleemah)

Although both participants seem to have been perceived as Arabs or Muslims because of the headscarf that they were wearing which functions as a visual identifier for Muslim and Arab females (Kulwicki, Khalifa & Moore, 2008; Sheridan, 2006), Abdulaziz, a male student, had a similar experience:

الأولاد الطائشين المراهقين قالوا لي بن لادن بس كانت زلة لسات منه قالها ووقف وتسمر مكانه وجلس يعتذر لي ... رغم أن العنصرية موجودة لكن ما يظهرونها

"Some teenagers called me Bin Laden ... I must say they apologised after they said that … [I think] racism exists here but they hide it."

Calling him Bin Laden in the street seems to be another way of labelling him as a terrorist. The way these participants were treated may be a reflection of Islamophobic behaviours that have increased since the events of the September 11, 2001 (Ali & Bagheri, 2009; Frost, 2008; Hendricks, Ortiz, Sugie, & Miller, Singh, 2007). This event seems to have influenced the way Muslims are perceived by non-Muslims, and it reveals how many have come to associate Muslims with terrorism, since the attackers had extreme religious motivations. Similar to his experience in the airport, Abdulaziz uses the word "racism" again to describe what happened to him, even though the teenage who called him Bin Laden offered his apology. Abdulaziz's having a long beard seems to be a visual identifier in marking him out as Arab or Muslim (Abbas, 2004; Marranci, 2004). Although having a beard is not exclusive to Muslims, his foreign looks along with his beard may have identified him as an Arab or Muslim (Zebiri, 2008).

What makes these experiences different from the previous ones in the airport or at the university is that the latter incidents take place in the street and are thus

more difficult to control or monitor. For example, if an individual feels that he or she has been discriminated against in the airport, he or she has the right to write an official complaint about it and to have the issue investigated. However, this is not the case in the street, since even when Haleemah complained to the police, they told her that they could not provide further help because the abusers were underage.

According to a report conducted by Githens-Mazer and Lambert (2010) who investigated Islamophobia and hate crimes against Muslims in the UK, the number of teenagers committing these crimes against Muslims was significant. As Githens-Mazer and Lambert (2010) report, some attacks were perpetrated against Muslim university students, some against religious clerics in London's Central Mosque, some in the Greenwich Islamic Centre, and some in the street, while other attacks took the form of death threats or even murder in some cases. In fact, one of the female interviewees in their report pointed out that her perception of the UK as an accepting place for all backgrounds had changed to a negative one after her son was physically attacked on his way to the mosque, an assault which left him with serious injuries.

These examples illustrate how the participants felt threatened in public places such as the street. Marginson et al., (2010) point out that the security of international students is a serious issue that needs to be addressed in the UK given that it is a popular destination for international students to pursue their degrees (Marginson, 2006). If not addressed, such unpleasant incidents may persist and thus influence international students' attitudes of willingness to

experience intercultural communication on the one hand, and also negatively influence the impression international students have of the UK on the other (Byram, 1997).

6.1.3 Demotivating experiences (on a religious level)

Other experiences, although not necessarily as negative as those encountered by the participants mentioned above, may also have influenced the participants' attitudes and, therefore, may have played a role in demotivating the participants from engaging in intercultural communication. Experiences such as these occurred mainly in the mosque, which is where the university in this study's Islamic Society is situated. The Islamic Society is one of the many faith societies that universities establish to provide students with venues such as a prayer room or a mosque where they can practise their faith and prayers (Dowd-Gailey, 2004). This social context, which I refer to as "the mosque" assisted in creating an in-group/out-group division between those who come to the mosque, primarily self-identified Muslims, and those who do not i.e., non-Muslims.

Further, within the walls of the mosque itself, three other in-group/out-group divisions were created amongst those who visited the mosque regularly, despite their being self-identified Muslims. The first of the three in-group and out-group divisions concerns Muslim students who follow different sects of Islam; the second is related to Muslim students who speak Arabic and those who do not; and, the final division is that between men and women. I do not attempt to impose identifications such as Muslims, Sunnis, Shias or Arabs. Rather, I look at the participants' interview extracts and from them elicit how they identify

themselves in relation to other individuals, and how their self-identifications influenced their attitudes of willingness to initiate intercultural communication with those whom the study participants viewed as out-group members.

6.1.3.1 In-group and out-group divisions based on self-identified Muslims and non-Muslims

The first division encompasses self-identified Muslims in the mosque and non-Muslims outside of it. Two students talked about regular visits to the mosque that helped them to overcome their homesickness.

الهوم سيكنس كان غالب علي كثير، لكن يوم كنت أجي المسجد كنت أحس أن يلا حتكيف فكان فيه بصيص أمل ... في المسجد كان فيه ناس كثير يجتمعون ... ذولا ساعدوني لكن ما تغلبت على الموضوع ... بفضل الله أن فيه إخوة مسلمين في المسجد، فأي واحد يحس بحيرة أو شي فالمسجد يخففه عليه ... يعني أنا أنصح كل شخص سافر أنه يلاقي أصحاب في المسجد

"Whenever I felt homesick in the beginning, I went to the mosque where I met very nice people who helped me a lot to overcome my homesickness … there are individuals in the mosque with whom I share brotherhood in Islam … I advise anyone travelling abroad to search for friends in the mosque." (Abdulaziz)

أنا لاحظت ما يخفف عنك الهوم سيكنس إلا الاحتكاك بناس مثل الباك قراوند بغض النظر كونهم سعوديين أو لا... يعني الساعة الي كنا نقضيها في المسجد كانت تحفف عني كثير ... فأنا في رمضان الهوم سيكنس كان في أوجه لأن أول مرة أقضيه بعيد عن العائلة ... بس فترة التراويح كانت فترة تخفف عني الكثير وكنت أتحراها

"When I first arrived here [in the UK], my homesickness was at its peak especially during the month of Ramadan … it was the first time in my life I had spent Ramadan without my family … I noticed that meeting people from the same background, whether Saudis or not, helps a lot to overcome homesickness … I was looking forward to going to the mosque every day." (Zahir)

Both participants visited the mosque regularly to meet other self-identified Muslims and socialise with them; here they formed one social group regardless of the countries of origin of those individuals. This camaraderie helped both participants to overcome their feelings of homesickness because of the similar beliefs, meanings, and behaviours that they share with other self-identified Muslims in the mosque (Poynting, 2009). This finding supports Byram's (1997) argument that one of the characteristics of a social group is its shared beliefs, meanings, and behaviours.

Although the Islamic Society and any other organisations are meant to help their members to overcome any issues they may encounter (Abdel Razek, 2012), the mosque may also become a barrier that reduces the opportunities of self-identified Muslims to meet those who are perceived as out-group members i.e., non-Muslims in this case (Nielsen, 1991). Moreover, in some cases, imams of mosques may discourage Muslims from engaging in intercultural communication with non-Muslim individuals (Ozyurt, 2010). Dowd-Gailey (2004) reports that some imams in Islamic organisations at some American universities encouraged Muslim students to reject what Dowd-Gailey (2004) refers to as "American values" of democracy. This study shows how the mosque, though perceived as a positive experience that helped both Abdulaziz and Zahir to overcome their homesickness, may also create in-group/out-group divisions and thus it may function as a barrier that demotivates Saudi international students from experiencing intercultural communication with non-Muslim individuals. For this reason, Geaves (2008) calls for professional training for imams of mosques in order to encourage Muslim individuals to engage in intercultural communication

rather than avoid it. Otherwise, religious institutions such as the mosque may create in-group and out-group divisions and in turn may influence an individual's attitudes of willingness to seek out opportunities to engage in intercultural communication.

6.1.3.2 In-group and out-group divisions within the mosque based on sect, language, and gender

Within the mosque itself it was seen that three in-group and out-group divisions were created. The first division is related to the followers of different sects of Islam in the mosque. Zainah is a self-identified Shia and she pointed out:

أنا أروح كثير للكاثيدرال، يفرحون لما يشوفوني ورحبوا فيني لأني كنت هناك ...أنا أصلا المسجد ما أدري وينه... لأني شيعية ما يتقبلوني في المسجد لأنه سني

"I have been to the cathedral many times but not to the mosque … I even do not know where the mosque is … I assume nobody will accept me in there because I am Shia."

Although Zainah did not mention any experience that stopped her from going to the mosque, she presumed that she would not be accepted in what she seems to have thought of as a Sunni-majority mosque because of her Shia background. In the beginning, I assumed that her presumption was a result of the subordination of Shia in Saudi Arabia (Al-Rasheed, 1998; Ibrahim, 2006) as well as some religious statements by strict Wahhabi scholars that discourage Sunni individuals from initiating friendship with Shia individuals (Al-Fawzan, 2004). However, the next story by Ahmed showed that Zainah's concern for not being accepted in the mosque may not have been completely without justification.

مرة كان فيه شخص كان يتكلم كلام عام ثم ذكر بإشارات لأسامة بن لادن ... ففيه ناس صاروا يعلقون أثناء الخطبة يعني ركز على الخطبة، بعد الخطبة فيه ناس وقفت ووجهوا كلامهم له وبصوت عالي بأن الشخص

لو جاء هذا المسجد فأنا ما راح أجي مرة ثانية ... فجاء شخص آخر يدافع عن الشخص الأول، فصار كلاش كبير ... طبعا أنا اضطريت في هذي الحالة أني أستوعب الموقف وأبين أن ما حدث ما يمثلنا كجمعية طلابية، لكن للأسف هذا خلاني يعني أؤكد أنه للأسف الناس ما تتقبل الرأي الآخر

"Once we appointed someone to deliver the Friday sermon … then he started talking about controversial issues such as the killing of Bin Laden … some people interrupted his speech and asked him to focus on the [religious aspect of] the sermon … some people shouted in the mosque that they would not come back again … others were defending the imam's point of view … it was chaos." (Ahmed)

This situation seems to have emerged as a result of the different views about what should be included in Friday sermons. For example, the imam seems to have followed the view that Friday sermons should discuss politics (Mandaville, 1999) and thus he discussed the death of Bin Laden. On the other hand, some of the other Muslim individuals in that same mosque did not seem to follow the same view and, therefore, they asked him to "focus on the sermon" itself, which indicates that they do not follow the imam's religious views on discussing politics during Friday sermons. This incident shows how followers of different sects of Islam may interpret Islam differently from one another. Further, it also shows how they consider other followers of different sects as out-group members and thus arguments emerge as a result of their different views. In this case, although the role of the mosque is supposed to be supporting Muslim students, it also functioned as a divisive factor that caused confrontation amongst Muslim students themselves.

This discussion leads to the second division that the mosque seems to have created, and it is based on Arabic language. Some individuals in the mosque

divided themselves into two groups: those who speak Arabic and those who do not speak it. Byram (2013) argues that language unites individuals and forms them into one social group, i.e., an in-group, and functions as a social identifier that distinguishes them from other social groups i.e., out-groups. Similarly, Kramsch (1998, p. 35) points out:

> It is widely believed that there is a natural connection between the language spoken by members of a social group and that group's identity. By their accent, their vocabulary, their discourse patterns speakers identify themselves and are identified as members if this or that speech or discourse community.

When applying this idea to the mosque, it can be seen that a similar division, amongst those who spoke Arabic and those who did not, emerged. This language division did not emerge directly from the interviews with the participants about the mosque, but it was something that I noticed whenever I went to the mosque during the stage of building a relationship with the participants or even when I interviewed some of them in the mosque later on. I noticed that the participants and their friends had formed a group of their own and were speaking in Arabic all the time, while the rest of the non-Arabic speakers were gathered in another part of the mosque. Many Arabic speakers view themselves as having a shared and united identity amongst themselves, which emerged after Arabs rose up against the Ottoman Empire (Kumaraswamy, 2006; Khalidi, 1991). This shared identity, which was later called "Arab Nationalism" (Dawisha, 2009, p. 1), continued to exist during the 1950s and 1960s and to depict Arabic-speaking nations as one entity (Dawisha, 2009). Therefore, this shared history makes Arabic speakers view themselves as having one united identity that goes beyond simply understanding the Arabic language.

Further, since the Qur'an is written in standard Arabic, most Friday sermons are also delivered in standard Arabic. There is the belief that Arabic is the language that is spoken in Paradise (Chejne, 1969), and that Arabic speakers may have some "privilege" over others (Ab Rahman, Jusoh, Abdullah, & Zin, 2013, p. 520). As a result, nonspeakers of Arabic — for example, Muslims who speak other languages such as Hindi, Urdu, Malay, and others — may feel the distance that has been created between them and those who speak Arabic, a separation which results in the formation of in-group and out-group categories. As a result, they also created their own in-group of non-Arabic speakers who come from different language backgrounds and communicate in English.

The complex creation of in- and out-groups seen here exhibits some similarities with what certain participants experienced when they established friendship with other international students — as discussed in chapter four — and felt that they formed an in-group with other international students. They felt this sense of commonality with other international students because they shared similar experiences of being international students with them, unlike the "privileged" home students who do not have the need to engage in intercultural communication. Similarly, the mosque seems to have contributed to creating in-group and out-group categories based on the Arabic language, since it provided religious grounds that may privilege the Arabic language over others. As a result, some participants created their own groups to socialise with in the mosque.

The third division that the mosque seems to have created relates to the separation between men and women within the mosque itself. Segregation

between both sexes in the mosque is a common practice in most mosques (Gilliat-Ray, 2010). Further, Lee (2010, p. 149) points out:

> gender segregation is implemented because when a Muslim comes to the mosque to pray, he or she must focus entirely on his or her sacred conversation with Allah, or God, and separating the sexes removes the potential distractions or 'impure' thoughts that may impede intimate conversation with Allah [God].

The main reason for the segregation of men and women in the mosque is to eliminate any possibilities of distractions that may occur between men and women while praying. However, both men and women are not equally segregated in the mosque. Usually, "Many mosques relegate women to small, dingy, secluded, airless, and segregated quarters with their children" (Safi, 2005, p. 151). This arrangement marginalises their participation in the life of the mosque and subordinates them compared to men. For this reason, two of the participants in this study were reluctant to go to the mosque because of a fear of not fulfilling the image of a "Muslim woman".

> "I [would] face a lot of problems, being not accepted and prejudged [by Saudis, Arabs, or Muslims], and I don't like to be ... obviously no-one wants to be judged but people judge how I look or how I act with people because they grew up in Saudi Arabia." (Raneem)

Raneem, an extrovert individual who does not wear the headscarf and socialises with male individuals as well as females, would not be comfortable with having to accept a subordinate role in the mosque or being in a small prayer room where the female section is accommodated. For this reason, she expresses her concerns that she would not be accepted in the mosque if she tried to engage in communication with male individuals or tried to take a further role in the

mosque. This is not to say that she would not be allowed to take a leadership role in the Islamic Society if she decided to, since gender equality is a core value in most university organisations. However, she fears other Saudi individuals' judgements about her and her behaviour, which shows the social pressures that individuals encounter when they do not fit a certain image created by members of their society (Campbell, 2000).

Khadijah makes a similar point:

هي طالبة منقبة فيمكن هي ما تقبلتني أني أكون مختلفة عنها.. فشافتني بشكل مختلف وكان يصير بيننا أشياء ضايقتني.. يعني تقول لي أنتي عطرك قوي وغيره.. يعني أشياء مالها دخل فيها... تقول أن الناس سألوها عني وغيره فسوت لي توتر كثير

"I experienced a lot of stressful times with a female classmate from Saudi Arabia … she wears the niqab [which covers her face] and she could not accept me as different from her [not wearing niqab or a headscarf] … she told me that my perfume is too strong [seductive] … she intervened in my personal matters all the time … she said that [Saudi] people were asking about me … she stressed me out."
[Khadijah]

Since Khadijah does not have the "appearance of a Muslim woman" in that she neither wears a niqab nor hijab, her Saudi female classmate criticised her for not doing so. Although Khadijah mentioned in the interview that she cannot go out very often because of her children, it is quite possible that she would have met with similar people to her classmate in the mosque if she had visited it without wearing the headscarf or niqab. Further, since she has male friends like Raneem, she may face difficulties if she tries to engage in communication with other men in the mosque because of the gender segregation there. Therefore, this shows that the mosque may create in-group and out-group categories based on gender.

Although the Islamic Society (the mosque) is meant to help Muslim students to cope in the UK, it seems that it also created in-group and out-group categories by demotivating Muslim students from engaging in intercultural communication with non-Muslims. Moreover, it created in-group and out-group categories amongst Muslim students themselves because it had no clear framework for what Friday sermons might include, privileged Arabic speakers over others, and separated men from women.

These in-group and out-group categories created by the mosque between Muslim and non-Muslim, or even amongst the Muslim individuals themselves inside the mosque, highlight the difficulty of identifying the differences between in-group and out-group members. Some participants, such as Abdulaziz and Zahir, saw Muslims individuals as in-group members regardless of their countries of origin, while Ahmed reported that there were divisions between the followers of different sects even though they all were self-identified Muslims. Further, the division amongst those who speak Arabic and those who do not shows that the in-group and out-group categories could not be explained by shared beliefs, meanings, and behaviours in this case, but rather by language. Finally, gender played a dividing role between men and women which created in-group and out-group categories in the mosque, despite some of these individuals sharing the same Islamic sect and language. Therefore, these examples show that self-identifications, as well as identifications of others, are inconsistent, shifting, and ever-changing (Dervin, 2013) rather than based

merely on shared beliefs, meanings, and behaviours (Byram, 1997), even though they do contribute to the shaping of those identifications.

In this section, I have attempted to discuss the experiences that influenced the participants' attitudes of willingness to experience intercultural communication and which, therefore, may have demotivated some of them from doing so. These experiences took place in official, unofficial, and religious contexts. The Saudi students' experiences ranged from feelings of being discriminated against on arrival in the UK, in the university, and in the street. Other demotivating experiences took place in the mosque where in-groups and out-groups were established whether between the mosque attendees amongst themselves, or between them and those who do not attend it. In the next section, I focus on the experiences that motivated the participants to initiate intercultural communication. Usually, the participants perceived these experiences in a positive way that increased their willingness to explore different experiences while in the UK.

6.2 Experiences that motivated the participants to engage in intercultural communication

In contrast to the previous experiences that may to have influenced the participants' attitudes and, therefore, demotivated them from engaging in intercultural communication in the UK, the participants recounted a number of experiences that do seem to have motivated them to do so. These experiences ranged from their first impressions when they first arrived in the airport, to experiencing things such as equality, religious tolerance, and freedom

throughout their sojourn in the UK. Therefore, in this section, I start the discussion with the instances of religious tolerance that some participants experienced either when they first flew into the UK or at a later stage. Then, I focus on experiences of equality and freedom that the participants seemed to have enjoyed during their sojourn.

6.2.1 Experiences of religious tolerance

Although some had had unhappy experiences on arrival in a UK airport and felt they were purposely targeted for extra security checks or because of their request to be dealt with by female officers, others experienced more tolerant behaviour. Mohammed talks about his first experience when he arrived in the airport:

وكذلك في ثقافتنا المرأة تكون محجبة فأحيانا يكون الحجاب غطاء كامل للوجه... فلما نجي للكيو
في الجوازات طبعا يحترمون شخصيتها فتكشف وجهها لامرأة أخرى وهذا شي موجود ومتفهم
... فهذا شي يعطيك الاطمئنان أنك تمارس دينك باطمئنان

"In our culture women have to cover their faces, so when we arrived in the UK airport, they respected that, so my wife had a female officer to check her passport, as they understood that she wanted her face to remain covered." (Mohammed)

Unlike Aminah's experience in the airport, Mohammed's experience was more positive. His wife's official papers were checked by a female officer without causing any difficulties as we saw previously in Amianh's case. Therefore, the respectful treatment of Mohammed's wife shows that the veil is not always a barrier to communication at the airport (Khiabany & Williamson, 2008), but, rather, relates more to the understanding of the customs officers who were sensitive to the needs of a veiled woman and appreciated that she might want

her face to remain covered. Ahmed and his wife also were also met with positive attitudes when going through customs:

> أبدا أنا ما لمست على المستوى الرسمي أو الناس لم ألمس أي عنصرية ... بالعكس وجدت المجتمع البريطاني يتعامل بشكل جيد وخاصة المدن الكبيرة مثل لندن قبالتالي المسلمين والمحجبات في كل مكان ... يعني حتى ما أحسست في الناس العاديين بتمييز أو عنصرية ضدي أنا أو زوجتي كونها محجبة إلا في أضيق الحدود طبع ا... وما كانت على المستوى الرسمي ... ما كانت في مؤسسات حكومية مثلا أو مؤسسات عامة كالمطارات

"My wife, who wears the headscarf, and I never experienced any forms of discrimination or racism whether in official places such as airports or even during interaction with British people … I actually found British society very tolerant of other people, especially in big cities like London … unpleasant incidents are extremely rare and never in official places." (Ahmed)

In contrast to Abdulaziz and Haleemah's who had had unhappy experiences, Ahmed and his wife seemed to have enjoyed positive experiences that left them with positive impressions about the UK. This finding illustrates that intercultural communication is a mutual process and, that it, therefore, requires both interlocutors (the Saudi participants and the customs officers, for example) to manage their intercultural interactions. Therefore, the claim that individuals who look Middle Eastern are targeted for extra security checks (Hanassab, 2006) may not always be accurate. These experiences recounted above show how the level of tolerance for religious practices such as wearing the headscarf or the veil left the participants with a positive impression when they first arrived.

The participants' positive experiences of religious tolerance were also related to their impression that their identifications were acknowledged. For example, in addition to the positive experience of his wife's papers being checked by a female

officer, Mohammed also appreciated the availability of a prayer room in the airport:

بمجرد أنك تؤدي فريضة وهناك [في المطار] غرفة مخصصة للصلاة فهذا شي يعطيك اطمئنان...

"Once you know that there is a prayer room in the airport to say your prayers, you immediately feel comfortable." (Mohammed)

Prayer rooms in UK airports are usually designed to be multi-faith prayer rooms that can include different types of faiths. This inclusion is what gave Mohammed comfortable feelings when he first arrived in the UK as he felt that his faith was recognised and, that arrangements such as building a prayer room have been made to accommodate his religious needs and practices. Further, this feeling of recognition was also evident in Mohammed and Abdul's statements when they talked about being greeted for Eid by non-Muslims:

تتلكم مع الناس الثانين وتقول لهم عن الأعياد الأضحى والفطر وتفاجأت أنهم يعرفون العيد ويقولون لي عيد مبارك.. [شعرت] بسعادة لأنه يعرف ثقافتي ويدرك.. أحس سعيد أنه يعرف عن الإسلام

"I felt happy when people sent me greetings for Eid … it means that they know about my culture … it means that they know about Islam." (Mohammed)

أحس أنه يعني اعترف فيك فأنا سعيد

"[When non-Muslims send me greetings for Eid] I feel happy … it means they recognise me." (Abdul)

Both Mohammed and Abdul were pleased that their religious identifications were recognised and acknowledged when non-Muslims sent them Eid greetings as this gesture increased their esteem, something that central to the individual's rights (Douzinas, 2002). When an individual's rights are maintained, he or she is more likely to have a willingness to engage in intercultural communication because such communication is built on equality (Byram, 1997).

Zainah provides another example of religious tolerance when it comes to dietary requirements:

صديقتي الأمريكية شافتني في السكن وعزمتني في الايستر وعملت لحم خنزير ولكن خلته بعيد.. يعني تحترمني وتسألني لو كنت آكل بيض أو لا.. عندهم تسامح ولكن عندنا نعمل صلاة وتعبد فقط

"My American friend invited me for Easter dinner and made sure to keep pork away from me … she asked me if I eat eggs or not … they have tolerance, unlike us; we only pray [but we do not have tolerance]." (Zainah)

Using pronouns such as "they" to refer to her American friend, and "us" to refer to herself and other Muslims shows the in-group and out-group categories that are based on religion. The experience with her friend who paid attention to her religious food requirement had left Zainah with a positive feeling. Further, she went on to criticise her own in-group i.e., Muslims for not being tolerant, which shows her criticality and judgements of her own group and others. Therefore, the religious tolerance that some participants experienced in the UK, whether in the airport when they first arrived or throughout their stay, seems to have given them the feeling of being accepted by other individuals. As a result, such experiences may influence their attitudes of willingness to engage in intercultural communication.

6.2.2 Experience of Equality

The second experience that influenced some participants positively and which may have contributed to motivating them to initiate intercultural communication is related to feelings of equality. Mohammed points out:

في بريطانيا يطبقون القانون على الجميع وفيه عدل ومساواة … لكن صارت حادثة قتل مسلم وهو خارج من المسجد، يعني حدثت صدامات من أول … في السعودية عندنا عنصرية مثل معاملة البنغالي والتنزاني والنيجيري، يعني صرنا الآن نفكر ونعطيه حقه … خاصة أننا هنا في مكانهم ونرى النظرات من الناس

“Everybody in the UK is equal under the law, but there are some incidents such as the one of a Muslim man who was killed outside a mosque … sadly in Saudi Arabia we have racism against labourers [from Asia or Africa] but now because we are in a similar situation [not being in our home country], we have empathy and we know how they feel.” (Mohammed)

Echoing Mohammed’s comment, Yunos states:

لكن حقوق الإنسان أكبر هنا.. مع أنها غير مثالية.. لكن القانون يطبق على الجميع سواء وزير أو غيره... الجميع سواسية.. يعني ممكن غير مثالية لكن الأكيد أن فيه حقوق

“But human rights in the UK have paid more attention [in comparison to Saudi Arabia] paid to them … maybe, it is not perfect but everyone is equal under the law, whether a minister or not … everyone is equal.”

Although Mohammed mentions that the murder case that took place outside the mosque had anti-Muslim motivations, he still managed to connect the idea with similar cases — though not cases of murder — in Saudi Arabia where the migrant labourers encounter what he refers to as racism throughout the years they spend in the country. In this case, he seems to imply that both Saudi Arabia and the UK are similar in the sense that out-group members (i.e., the labourer in Saudi Arabia and the Muslim individual in the UK, according to him) encounter similar experiences of mistreatment. However, Yunos goes further to argue that the law in the UK does not tolerate such incidents, in comparison to Saudi Arabia which does. He uses the word “minister” to refer to influential individuals who might be able to avoid the consequences of their actions even if they were convicted of breaking the law, which Yunos implies happens in Saudi Arabia. Abdulaziz also made a similar comment:

يعني العنصرية [في السعودية] واضحة بشكل علني.. يعني الأولاد السعوديين الصغار لما يشوفوا واحد أجنبي ماشي أو عامل بلدية أو حاجة بدون أدنى سبب ممكن يرميه بحجر أو يؤذيه بكلمة أو كلمتين... هنا أنا ما لا لاحظته

“I see visible racism [in Saudi Arabia] … I mean young teenagers may assault any foreign labourer whether physically or verbally … I did not notice this here [in the UK].”

Although Abdulaziz had experienced a verbal assault when some teenagers called him “Bin Laden” [they had apologised afterwards, as discussed in the previous chapter] it seems that Abdulaziz considers what happened to him to be less extreme when compared to what happens to foreign labourers in Saudi Arabia. He was not assaulted physically and on top of that he was offered an apology, which seems to have left him with a positive impression compared to when he first arrived.

These remarks show that these participants had reflected empathetically on the situation of labourers who come to work in Saudi Arabia. Johnson (2010) studied a number of Muslim Filipinos who worked in Saudi Arabia and their relationships with local people. His findings show that amongst those studied there was a widespread feeling of racism even though they were Muslims themselves. Haleemah talked about the same subject and points out:

للأمانة عندنا في السعودية شي ممكن ما نسميها عنصرية لكن عندنا نظرتنا للأجنبي حتى لو كان من دولة عربية أخرى نظل نطلق عليه لفظ أجنبي ونحاول أننا يعني هذولا مصريين وهذولا سوريين ووو فأنا حسيت الي هم يحسوه في السعودية [منذ أتيت إلى بريطانيا] فصرت أنظر لهم نظرة ثانية تمام.. يعني أنا حسيت يا ربي لما كنت أنا هنا وكانوا [البريطانيين] بالفعل ما يتكلموا معي وحاولوا يتجنبوني ناهيك لو كنتي مسلمة ... لكن كونك من دولة أخرى غير أوروبية يعني ما راح نجلس معك، فأنا فكرت يا ربي هذا كنا نسويه في السعودية احنا كنا مثلا الطالبة المصرية وإلا غيرها بالفعل تلقاها مسكينة جالسة لحالها

“In all honesty, I think in Saudi Arabia we have some sense of racism against foreigners, even if they were Egyptians or Syrians, they are still foreigners, as long as they are not Saudis. But since I have been in the UK, I have changed my mind about the way I look at non-Saudi individuals in Saudi Arabia … when

people ignored me in the beginning because I was different from them; this is exactly how people do it in Saudi Arabia to other people." (Haleemah)

She argues that no matter whether the individuals are Arabs or Muslims, they will be "othered" and considered to be an out-group member because they are not Saudis. Therefore, her experience of equality increased both her attitudes and knowledge, as she compared the notion of equality in the UK with the same notion in Saudi Arabia. Johnson (2010) argues that Saudis are not "truer" Muslims than those labourers; however, it seems that their lavish wealth was an important aspect that made them feel 'superior' to other workers who come to seek jobs in the country. Bradley (2006) goes further to argue that racism in Saudi Arabia is not only against workers from less wealthy countries but that it also exists amongst Saudis themselves depending on their family lineage. Although Abdel Razek (2012) argues that Saudi Arabia lacks what he refers to as an "individualistic culture" (p. 38) which aims at creating equality amongst individuals (Caldwell-Harris & Aycicegi, 2006; Oyserman et al., 2002), the idea that this factor may explain the participants' remarks about the lack of equality in Saudi Arabia seems simplistic. This explanation is flawed because some Islamic scripts which Saudi Arabia adopts as a source of law support equality amongst individuals (Kamali, 2002). This notion was present in Raneem's remark on equality:

"In Saudi Arabia we claim to be Muslims and to behave in an Islamic way … but we do not treat them [non-Saudi labourers] equally … it is [similar to] slavery … it makes me so angry." (Raneem)

She links equality to what she calls the "Islamic way" indicating that Islam, which is the official religion of Saudi Arabia, supports equality, unlike Caldwell-Harris & Aycicegi (2006) and Oyserman et al. (2002) who seem to link it to individualism. Further, Raneem is different from the other participants in that she has lived her life abroad. Therefore, when she arrived in the UK she did not consider equality in the UK as a new thing to her since she had experienced it before in other countries. Yet, she mentioned in the interview that she had heard or read about — rather than witnessed — how labourers are mistreated in Saudi Arabia which, apparently, makes her feel angry. Therefore, unlike the other participants, she seems to have had some awareness and criticality of Saudi Arabia even before her arrival in the UK.

Regardless of the reasons behind these observations that racism exists in Saudi Arabia and that there is a lack of equality in the country, some of the participants mentioned above seemed to be aware of racism and to have taken note of it, especially after their arrival in the UK, and compared the situation in the UK to that in Saudi Arabia, whilst others like Raneem had always been aware of it while living abroad. These findings on equality show that throughout their stay in the UK experiencing and observing aspects of equality, the participants developed some awareness and some critical cultural awareness of their own societies and others' (Byram, 1997). Heyn (2013) reports a similar finding about the Saudi participants that she studied in the USA. She points out that some of the participants appreciated the equality that people enjoy in the USA, which is not the case in Saudi Arabia, according to her participants. These examples illustrate how the participants' attitudes of being open to suspending their beliefs about

Saudi Arabia, which in turn influenced their knowledge about it when they compared it to the UK, have increased (Byram, 1997). Therefore, this increased critical cultural awareness may have motivated them to seek out opportunities to engage in intercultural communication.

6.2.3 Freedom

The final experience that seems to have motivated some participants to engage in intercultural communication in the UK is the feeling of freedom. For example, Zainah talks about her experience of freedom in the UK:

ما أبي أجع [للسعودية] ... أحس أني حرة هنا.. المشكلة أني مهب من النوع الي زوجي بيوقفني يعني أنا مو في سجن ولكن هنا أي مكان أروح آخذ الباص وأمشي يعني ما أفكر عندي محرم أو لا ... نروح مطعم أو سينما ... يعني ممكن ماهي بذيك الشدة في القطيف ولكن ما زال تتصل على السواق وتعال وفيه أحد يبي لكن هنا أكون بنفسي

"I do not want to go back [to Saudi Arabia] because I feel free here ... although my husband does not control my movements in Saudi Arabia, I still have more freedom in the UK ... I can use public transport, I do not need a male guardian to go out with me … I do not need a driver to take me where I want [to go]… I can go to the cinema or go out whenever I like, unlike in Saudi Arabia." (Zainah)

Similarly, Raneem talks about her freedom as an independent woman in the UK:

"I've been living alone here and I feel I'm free and I do what I want ... in Saudi Arabia there are a lot of restrictions ... but here I can leave [home] whenever I want ... I don't need a driver here, so it's more difficult [in Saudi Arabia].." (Raneem)

A final remark by a female participant, Hadeel, states:

أحب الحرية هنا لأني لما أفكر في الحب مثلا في السعودية ما نقدر نتقابل أنا وهو ولكن هنا أقدر أشوفه [الحبيب] في أي وقت

"I like the freedom here in the UK, I can love and I like and I can meet my boyfriend whenever I like without feeling worried like in Saudi Arabia." (Hadeel)

These female participants' perceptions of freedom seem to relate to three issues that women struggle with in Saudi Arabia: women having the independence to rely on themselves rather than on males; driving their own cars; and, the freedom to engage in premarital relationships. The first of these issues concerns the male guardian system in Saudi Arabia where women are required to seek permission to do something from a close male relative such as a father, a brother, or a husband whose task is to make critical decisions on their behalf (Doumato, 1992, 1999; Human Rights Watch, 2008).

> Adult women generally must obtain permission from a guardian to work, travel, study, or marry. Saudi women are similarly denied the rights to make even the most trivial decisions on behalf of their children. (Human Rights Watch, 2008, p. 2)

Furthermore, the male guardian system can have serious implications on Saudi women's lives such as their health. According to a report by Mobaraki and Soderfeldt (2010), Saudi women are not admitted to state hospitals without their male guardians, even if they give their consent for a medical procedure; this lack of personal freedom increases the risk of being abused by their male guardians in some cases. This lack of freedom in Saudi Arabia explains why the participants' experience of freedom in the UK where the male guardianship system is not introduced is a positive one.

The second issue that Saudi women struggle with in Saudi Arabia is the ongoing issue over driving. Similar to the male guardianship system, the government of Saudi Arabia has enforced restrictions on women driving (Al-Rasheed, 2013; Arebi, 1994; Doumato; 1991). A number of petitions have asked the King to lift the ban on driving (Okruhlik, 2004) without, as yet, any positive results. This ban on driving has led Saudi women to hire private male drivers, who require a substantial monthly salary, or to rely heavily on taxi services in order to perform their simple daily tasks (Al-Rasheed, 2013). Since women are allowed to drive their cars in the UK, and move freely without any restrictions, the participants seem to have appreciated this type of freedom in the UK.

The third form of freedom that the female participants enjoyed in the UK is related to the ability to have a boyfriend. Hadeel started dating her boyfriend and managed to see him without being concerned about being judged or perhaps — in some cases — prosecuted, which would have been the case in Saudi Arabia. Both men and women in Saudi Arabia are strictly segregated and the government has established the Commission for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice — or simply, the religious police — to ensure that men and women have minimal contact and interaction (Clarke, 2007; Wagner, 2012). Although both men and women are affected by the strict laws of segregation in Saudi Arabia, Alhazmi & Nyland (2013) argue that women face more consequences than men if they break the rules because their families' reputation and honour depend on their chastity. Although it seems an essentialist claim by Alhazmi & Nyland (2013), there are some Saudi individuals who would follow this belief. For example, Lubna talks about the difficulties that she faces as a

Saudi girl if she decides to date a man, in comparison to a Saudi male dating a female:

هنا [في بريطانيا] لو طلعت مع الشاب ماراح تصير مشاكل مثل الي في السعودية لكن مازلنا نخاف لو أحد شافني ... البنت أصعب، يعني بنت أسهر برا راح الشباب يتكلمون عني للأبد، لكن لو هم سهروا هم أولاد عادي ما يعيبهم شي

"If I go on a date in the UK, it is a normal thing … it will not be a problem like Saudi Arabia … it [dating men] is more difficult for girls … if I spend a night out clubbing [or dating] then guys will talk about me [negatively] forever, even though they may do the same thing … but because they are boys, they carry no shame with them [family's honour and reputation]." (Lubna)

Her remark shows that there is still — at least amongst some female participants — a belief that they are responsible for their family's honour and reputation. Although the participants did not state how intimate their relationships were with their boyfriends, both Lubna and Hadeel seem to have enjoyed the freedom of having premarital relationships in the UK without being misjudged by others.

Consequently, the restrictions imposed on women in Saudi Arabia by the male guardianship system, the ban on women driving, and the prohibition on engaging in premarital relationships led the female participants to appreciate the freedom they had in the UK. In addition, this feeling of freedom led them to feel equal to men. This finding shows how intercultural communication goes beyond interactions to promote social justice (Byram, 2008; Sorrells, 2012). Although the participants did not explicitly state that these experiences motivated them to experience intercultural communication in the UK, they [the experiences] may have left them with positive impressions that influenced their attitudes of willingness to engage with otherness in a relationship of equality. Further, this

examples show how the female participants suspended their beliefs about their own country, Saudi Arabia, which increased their knowledge and ability to relativise their own beliefs, meanings, and behaviours when they compared their lives in Saudi Arabia to their lives in the UK.

The male participants, on the other hand, had a different way of viewing freedom in the UK. Zahir, for instance, states:

مرة سوينا التجمع في لندن لأجل سوريا... عملنا مظاهرات وما أحد يقول لنا شي... برضوه شفت ناس في شارع حيوي في لندن وفي شفت ناس تشتكي من الحكومة في نيوكاسل ففيه حرية.. يا ليت نسوي مثلهم هنا

"One day we protested in London for Syrian people … I saw people protesting against the government, so there is freedom of speech … I wish we had a similar thing in Saud Arabia." (Zahir)

Zahir perceives freedom in the UK differently from the ways in which the female participants perceived it. He talks about political freedom and the freedom of expression that is denied in Saudi Arabia (Sharansky & Dermer, 2009). Therefore, he seems to appreciate this concept in the UK. A similar case was reported by Heyn (2013) in her study about Saudi international students in the USA where a male participant mentioned that people in the USA enjoy freedom of expression unlike in Saudi Arabia. This appreciation of freedom shows how individuals may perceive freedom according to what they already struggle with or lack. As Saudi males, Zahir and the other Saudi male in Heyn's (2013) did not talk about issues such as the male guardianship system or women driving because such laws do not affect them directly. What affects them, however, is their willingness to express their political opinions, but they are not able to do so.

Further, freedom was a concept that received mixed views from the male participants, as their responses were neither completely in favour of it nor against it. For instance, Yunos points out:

غالبية الناس تفكر في الحرية الدينية للأسف فقط ... يعني النساء يكشفون الحجاب والرجل يشرب ويفعل المنكرات وهذه الحرية وماحد يحاسبك ... ولكن للأسف هذي ماهي حرية. هذي انعدام أخلاق ... من وجهة نظري الخاصة أن الحرية يجب أن تكون وفق نطاق الدين ... يعني داحل الدين ... لكن الحرية التي وجدتها هنا هي حرية المعلومات ... لكن في السعودية كثير صفحات مقفلة يعني مافيه ... محجوب!"

"Most people, unfortunately, think of freedom of religion only ... I mean their concept of freedom is related to women not dressing properly or people starting to drink alcohol ... this is not freedom ... our freedom should be within religion ... but I like the freedom of speech and access to information, unlike in Saudi Arabia." (Yunos)

Abdul shares a similar view:

لو علي أنا بقول الحرية العاطفية، يعني ما عندي قيود ... يعني كلمة الحب والصحبة والشي الي قلبي أقدر أقوله يعني ما عندي قيود ... يعني الحين أعطي الناس حضن وما أفكر أن أحد كيف يفكر، يعني خلاص حريتي أضحك أو إبكي وأقول لأحد أحبك أو لا، كل شي بكيفي الحين ... [لكن] الحرية الاجتماعية يعني ما أصاحب بنت أو أشرب معاهم يعمي مافيه حرية كذا، أهم شي في إطار الإسلام ... يعني خطوط وحدود دينية ... يعني لما تجاوزت هذي الحدود تخاف أنك تضيع لو تجاوزته

"I like freedom here as I can do whatever I want ... I have freedom in expressing my feelings to people, hugging them, expressing my love for them, I can laugh and cry as I like [without fears of being misjudged by others for being e.g., emotional] ... I can say whatever I want ... of course, as long as it is within Islam ... so I would not go out with girls or start drinking alcohol ... if I cross these lines I'll be lost [gone astray from the correct path of God]." (Abdul)

Mohammed also emphasises religion as the framework for one's behaviours:

الحرية يجب أن تكون داخل إطار الإسلام لأنه قيم وآداب ... التزامي بها يجعلني أشعر أني حر ... يعني هنا تجدها مختلفة جدا ... يعني قد تصل إلى قلة الأدب ... يعني هناك أو هنا يجب الحرية أن تكون في نطاق الدين

ويعني الحرية الي كانت عندي في السعودية أجدها هنا ... يعني أصلي وأروح المسجد، يعني منظور إسلامي ... نعم الحمدلله، ما وراء إطار الإسلام ما أقدره ولا أحبه ... لا نريد أن نتجاوز الصندوق أو الإطار هذا

"When I speak about freedom, it has to be within Islamic values … being restricted by Islam makes me feel free … freedom here [in the UK] is very different … in fact it could be inappropriate [in reference to the consumption of alcohol and premarital relationships] … The freedom that I want to find here in the UK is the freedom of practicing Islam and going to the mosque, just like in Saudi Arabia … whether here [in the UK] or there [in Saudi Arabia], freedom should be within religion … we should not go beyond this 'box' [religion] … anything else beyond it, I do not like it or appreciate it." (Mohammed)

Andul, Yunos, and Mohammed distinguish between two types of freedom: freedom of expression — including freedom to practise one's religion — and freedom of choice, whereby individuals can practise any behaviour, such as consuming alcohol, as long as they do not break the law. Similar to Zahir, Abdul and Yunos appreciate the freedom of expression and the access to information in the UK which are not available to them in Saudi Arabia where many websites are censored for political reasons (Hofheinz, 2005). However, they — as well as Mohammed — do not appreciate the freedom that individuals have in the UK where they can consume alcohol, engage in premarital relationships, or where women "do not dress properly" to use Yunos' words. They do not accept this form of freedom because it goes against their understandings of religion. Therefore, they perceive religion as a framework whose teachings they should act within and, therefore, they understand their religion as prohibiting the consumption of alcohol as well as defining what a modest dress code looks like. The reason behind their distinctions between both types of freedom seems to be related to the emphasis on the religious prohibition of alcohol in Saudi Arabia

(Michalak & Trocki, 2006). This prohibition may be taught in the family or even at schools, where religious education plays a significant part in the national curriculum compared to other subjects (Prokop, 2003).

Further, this religious education also influences the notion of modesty, where female clothing is a symbol of Islamic traditions, a notion which is reinforced by the government in Saudi Arabia (Starrett & Doumato, 2007). Therefore, remarks such as Yunos' "women do not dress properly", or Mohammed's describing freedom in the UK as "inappropriate" do not indicate why these behaviours are "inappropriate" apart from the fact that these judgements reflect these participants' own values which are based on their religious beliefs. Byram (1997) points out that in order to mediate between cultures and achieve successful communication, individuals need to go beyond their own socially constructed realities, such as religious values, and provide a rationale based on explicit criteria. In other words, if the participants wish to experience intercultural communication in the UK, they may need to bring to the experiences of their own cultures, as well as to those of others, a rational and explicit standpoint from which to evaluate them (Byram, 1997).

However, the participants do not seem to provide such a rationale for their disapproval of certain practices in the UK such as consuming alcohol and inappropriate female dress. Rather, their only rationale seems to be based on their own perceptions of religion, and thus fails to provide the type of criticality which is based on "explicit criteria" that Byram (1997) calls for. This lack of criticality seems to be evident in remarks such as "we should not go beyond this

'box' [religion]", "our freedom should be within religion", and Abdul's statement, "I'll be lost" if his freedom goes beyond his perception of what is permissible within the teachings of Islam.

These participants' examples demonstrate the relationship between attitudes and knowledge in which it is easier for individuals to relativise their own beliefs, meanings, and values if they are viewed through the lens of comparisons with others' beliefs, meanings, and behaviours (Byram, 1997). Therefore, when the participants did not show attitudes of curiosity and openness to relativise their beliefs, meanings, and behaviours, and to suspend their disbeliefs about others' (such as freedom of choice when it comes to consuming alcohol or engaging in premarital relationships), they struggled to relativise their understandings of freedom and to suspend their disbeliefs about how individuals in the UK view it. Although the participants did not explicitly say that the kinds of freedom that they approved or disapproved of encouraged or discouraged them from experiencing intercultural communication in the UK, their approval or disapproval may have influenced their intercultural encounters because they did not seem to have shown the openness and curiosity that could also have influenced their knowledge of their own social groups as well as of others' groups.

The experience of freedom in the UK varied amongst the male and female participants. The findings indicate that each demands the freedom that they already lack in Saudi Arabia. The female participants enjoyed the freedom to move without restrictions by their male guardians, the freedom to drive, and the

freedom to try out premarital relationships. The male participants, on the other hand, enjoyed the freedom of expression that they currently lack in Saudi Arabia. Nevertheless, they did not appreciate the kinds of freedom that go against their own perception of religion, for example, the consumption of alcohol as well as their perception of female modesty. Therefore, the findings in this section show the difficulties that arose around the concept of freedom, as it can be categorised as both a motivating and a demotivating factor in the context of initiating intercultural communication.

6.3 Conclusion

This chapter has focused on various experiences that the participants encountered beyond their interactions with their friends or with individuals from the opposite gender. Although the participants did not explicitly state that these experiences motivated or demotivated them from experiencing intercultural communication, there is evidence that these experiences did influence their knowledge and their attitudes of willingness to take up opportunities to experience intercultural communication, whether perceived as negative or positive.

Consequently, a number of conclusions that can be drawn from the discussions in this chapter. First of all, the first discussion revealed that when it comes to the unpleasant experiences that took place at both the official and nonofficial levels, some participants felt that they were purposely mistreated because of their Muslim background or their appearance e.g., wearing the headscarf or sporting a long beard. It is argued that experiences such as these may have negatively

influenced the participants' willingness to take up opportunities to engage with otherness in a relationship of equality (Byram, 1997) because they did not feel that they were treated as equal to other individuals in these cases. Further, although some participants perceived the mosque to be a positive experience that helped them to overcome issues such as feelings of homesickness, it seems that it also negatively influenced their attitudes of willingness to engage in intercultural communication. Because the mosque facilitated meetings with individuals whom the participants considered to be in-group members (i.e., other Muslims) they, therefore, did not seem to be motivated to have openness and curiosity to engage in a relationship with otherness.

The second conclusion also relates to the role and influence of the mosque. Despite being perceived as a positive experience that enables participants to gather together with other Muslims, in-group and out-group divisions were created within the mosque itself, based on each Muslim's sect, language, and gender. Although the individuals who go to the mosque are self-identified Muslims who are meant to share the same religious beliefs, meanings, and behaviours, they still formed in-group and out-group divisions amongst themselves. Therefore, this finding supports Dervin's (2013) argument that identifications of the self as well as of others, and the worldviews that these identifications carry, are inconsistent and cannot be simply explained by shared beliefs, meanings, and behaviours alone. Further, this conclusion shows that the differences between in-group and out-group members can be very difficult to identify because, although the mosque-goers formed an in-group of fellow

Muslims, they also formed out-groups based on different sects, language, and gender.

The third conclusion that can be drawn here is related to what seem to have been positive experiences of religious tolerance, equality, and freedom in the UK. Some participants perceived the religious tolerance and equality that they encountered in the UK positively and this perception seems to have increased their willingness (attitudes) to form a positive impression of the UK. This is not to say that positive attitudes contribute to successful intercultural competence since, as Byram (1997) contends, they also could hinder mutual understandings. However, some participants questioned any negative impressions they may have had held about the UK and some went further by comparing the concepts and practice of equality and religious tolerance in Saudi Arabia and in the UK.

When it comes to the concept of freedom, the male and female participants perceived it differently since each gender appreciated the freedom that it lacks in Saudi Arabia. Despite perceiving freedom in the UK as a positive experience, some participants did not appreciate freedoms that conflict with their understandings of religion. Therefore, despite being self-identified Muslims and coming from the same country of origin and thus ostensibly sharing similar beliefs, meanings, and behaviours, the participants had different perceptions of freedoms that they either approved or disapproved of. This finding supports the ongoing argument of Dervin (2013) that individuals' self-identifications and the worldviews that these identifications carry are inconsistent despite the individuals' countries of origin.

6.4 Chapter summary

This chapter had focused on the experiences that may have motivated or demotivated the participants from engaging in intercultural communication. The findings have shown that the participants encountered different experiences from one another starting from their first arrival in the airport and throughout their sojourns in the UK. The unpleasant experiences that some participants encountered in the airport or in the street seemed to have demotivated some of them from engaging in intercultural communication, while those who encountered more positive experiences seemed more willing to do so. Further, although was perceived by the participants as a positive experience, it functioned as a demotivating factor to engage in intercultural communication with individuals who do not attend it. Finally, some positive experiences such as equality and freedom led the participants to reflect on their views on Saudi Arabia when they compared to the UK.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Worldviews, Identifications, and Intercultural Communication

Introduction

The last three chapters have attempted to explore how Saudi international students experience friendship in the UK, communicate with the opposite sex, and, finally, how some of the motivating and demotivating experiences they encountered influenced their intercultural communication experiences in the UK. I have shown a variety of the experiences that the participants encountered and dealt with in their own different ways. This chapter attempts to explore how the overall experience of being international students in the UK has influenced the participants' practices, worldviews, and identifications.

In order to do so, this chapter considers the shifts that the some of the participants made to some of their worldviews and religious practices. The subsequent section's discussion then moves to an examination of those changes which the participants brought to their practices and worldviews, but which they did not perceive as contradicting their religion. Some of the students who participated in this study, however, did not seem to be interested in introducing any changes, whether related to religion or not, and so the discussion of those students is presented in the third section of this chapter. Although the majority of the participants identified themselves as "Muslims", the changes that were wrought in their behaviours and worldviews intersected with other forms of self-identifications, a topic which will be discussed in the fourth section. The final

section will focus on the participants' feelings about going back to Saudi Arabia as a result of their intercultural communication experiences in the UK.

7.1 Changes related to religion

This section focuses on the changes that the participants introduced in their religious practices; these are discussed in the first subsection. The second subsection then discusses the changes in the participants' religious worldviews brought about by their intercultural communication experiences.

7.1.1 Changes in religious practices

The data show the emergence of three changes to some of the participants' practices concerning religion. These were changes related to how they wore the headscarf, daily prayers, and the consumption of alcohol. When it comes to the changes related to the headscarf, Lubna points out:

"بالنسبة للحجاب أنا بالنسبة لي لبسته بشكل غير ... الحين صديقاتي [من السعودية] يقولون لي أن شكلي الحين يختلف وأحسن وأسمع عبارات من الناس يقولون أني جميلة الآن ... وأنا حسيت الناس يتعاملون معي بشكل أسهل من أول ... صحيح فيه شعور بالذنب لأنه مو الحجاب الصحيح لكنه خفف علي أعباء كثيرة يعني ساهدني أني أختلط مع الناس أكثر"

"I have changed the way I wear the headscarf because my Saudi female friends told me to try the new style … in fact I feel it is easier to deal with people now … I also heard people saying I look beautiful … I feel a bit guilty because I should be wearing the headscarf in a proper way, but I have to say this way now has helped me to get to know people more … it has made my life easier"

The second change in her practice concerning religion is related to daily prayer:

بالنسبة للصلاة.. من أول كنت أصلي كل وقت والآن صرت أجمعها وهذا شيء أثر علي...

"I used to pray on time but not anymore, I delay my prayers now which influenced me [negatively]."

After asking her about why she feels guilty about these changes she said:

طبعا مذنبة لأن لو صلح الدين صلح كل شيء، يعني لو ما صليت أحس نفسيتي تتغير

"Of course I feel guilty because once religion is done in the right way, everything will be right as a result … when I do not pray I feel my mood changes [negatively]."

Lubna's remarks show that the changes she made to both the way she wears the headscarf and also to her daily prayers happened over time during her stay in the UK as an international student. However, the change she adopted in how she wears the headscarf seems to be for pragmatic reasons. She mentions that the new way of wearing of her headscarf, saying it now covers her hair and ears but not her the neck as the traditional headscarf does, has made it easier for her to communicate with other individuals. Peek (2003) too reported this new style of hijab when he studied a number of American Muslims in the USA and how they changed the way they wore the headscarf to look "less 'Arab' or Muslim" (p. 276) and more 'liberal' in order to avoid any of the confrontations that some Muslim individuals had encountered after the 9/11 events.

The idea of embracing a more modern style of the traditional head covering is not unique to Muslim women but is also seen in the way Jewish women too dress. Milligan (2014) points out that some Jewish women wear hats or wigs in preference to the traditional *tichels,* which may seem old-fashioned, in order to present a more secular and modern appearance. They try to find a compromise between following the religious teachings with regard to covering their natural hair on the one hand, and the desire not to look traditional or old-fashioned on

the other. Similarly, by changing from wearing her headscarf in a more traditional way, Lubna's new headscarf style may give her a more modern appearance. Therefore, she mentioned that she received complements on her new style that made her feel confident to initiate communication with other individuals. This alteration illustrates that the new headscarf style created a positive impact and increased her self-esteem since, as she points out, she felt "beautiful". At the same time, the new style seems to have had a positive impact on other interlocutors as they perceived Lubna as being "beautiful", or perhaps, in other words, not old-fashioned.

The third change to some of the participants' practices concerning religion is related to the consumption of alcohol. Raneem points out:
"The only thing has changed in me is drinking [alcohol] I would say … I felt bad about it [drinking alcohol] ... but I'm just thinking like we should have fun and enjoy and we live once and we should do something challenging at least once … but I still pray and do the same things I've been doing." (Raneem)

Raneem seems to follow a similar approach of Lubna in which she started negotiating her options about some religious practices. Therefore, she started consuming alcohol in order to "have fun" and "enjoy". Her decision seems to come from her willingness to socialise with her non-Muslim friends. They consume alcohol and, therefore, she does not want to appear "different" from them. Midgley (2010) points out a similar case in his study on Saudi international students in Australia and how some of them found it difficult to socialise with their non-Muslim friends without consuming alcohol. The reason

seems to lie within the non-Muslim individuals around them who may perceive the Saudi international students as devoted practitioners of their religion and thus as different i.e., 'others'. Both Lubna and Raneem negotiated the 'visible' religious practices such as wearing the headscarf and the consumption of alcohol that distinguish Muslims and which may result in 'othering' them. As a result, looking "more beautiful" and not "old-fashioned" had helped Lubna to experience intercultural communication, while Raneem came across as someone who would like to "have fun", "enjoy" and consume alcohol like everyone else and thus appear less "different" and not as the "other". These modifications show their skills of interactions where individuals draw on "skills of interpreting, discovering, relating different assumptions and presuppositions or connotations in order to ensure understandings and avoid dysfunction" (Byram, 1997, p. 63).

However, operating these skills did not seem to come easily to Lubna and Raneem since they both expressed their feelings of guilt for not wearing the headscarf properly, not praying on time as they had always done before, and for consuming alcohol. Here we see illustrations of the type of psychological stress that individuals may go through when they operate skills of discovery and interaction, but with less curiosity and openness (Byram, 1997). This is not to say that Lubna and Raneem do not have the attitudes of willingness to seek out opportunities to engage in intercultural communication. Rather, they did not seem to show the attitudes of openness and curiosity involved in relativising their own beliefs, meanings, and behaviours and suspending their disbeliefs about others.

Therefore, their trying out of new and unfamiliar experiences was done for merely pragmatic reasons that enabled them to manage their intercultural communication, while, at the same time, admitting that they not approve of these altered behaviours (i.e., adopting the new style of the headscarf and the consumption of alcohol). This conflict explains the feelings of guilt that accompanied their skills. This willingness to modify their behaviour while in the UK may be related to the tourist, or commercial approaches that Byram (1997) does not include, or even to the desire to give a positive impression about their social group (i.e., Muslims or Saudis), as was discussed in chapter four.

7.1.2 Changes in religious worldviews

A number of other participants mentioned changes concerning religion but, unlike Raneem and Lubna's changes, these changes are related to their religious worldviews rather than their religious practices. These changes concerned the participants' acceptance of views on religion that are different from theirs. For example, Zainah points out:

من أول لو أحد قال أنا ما أؤمن بالله كنت أحاول أقنعهم أن الله موجود... لكن الحين ما صرت أتهاوش {حول الموضوع} ولكن أفكر كيف أقنع بشكل مختلف

"In the past whenever anybody said to me they that they do not believe in God I used to get angry and argue about it to prove that God exists … I do not do it anymore." (Zainah)

Her remark shows a substantial change that occurred in her when it comes to others questioning the existence of God, when compared to how she would have reacted when she first arrived in the UK. She was not the only participant who expressed a similar change since Hadeel also states:

فيه تغيير جديد.. صرت أتقبل الحين أن الناس تنتقد ديننا وأنا الحين أسمع وأحاول أرد لكن ما يزعلني.. الحين صرت أسمع للناس. لازم تسمع وجهة النظر الثانية

"I have changed … I feel that I'm more accepting of people criticising my religion unlike before … I think we have to listen to other people's point of view and what they think." (Hadeel)

Unlike Lubna and Raneem who made changes in their religious practices rather than questioning the beliefs behind their practices, Zainah and Hadeel seem to show a measure of criticality which they did not possess when they first arrived in the UK. They seem to have cultivated the attitudes of suspending their beliefs about God in order to be able to explore the different explanations and views on God and religion given by other people. Therefore, they seem to have developed a "willingness to question the values and presuppositions in cultural practices and products in one's own environment" (Byram, 1997, p. 58). For this reason, they do not seem to experience the same psychological stress and the feelings of guilt that both Raneem and Lubna experienced; rather, they seem to be more accepting of different views.

Despite their openness to having their religious worldviews questioned, both Zainah and Hadeel continued their religious practices such as wearing the headscarf in the traditional way and avoiding the consumption of alcohol, unlike Lubna and Raneem. In some cases, their religious beliefs became even stronger. For example, Zainah mentions that her faith in God has become stronger since her arrival in the UK:

أحس أن الله موجود معي، وأنه منتبه لي طول الوقت، هنا أحس أنه مختلف لأني محتاجته أكثر... فأحس بوجوده... دعيت رب العالمين استجاب دعائي

“I feel that God is with me, he is looking after me all the time … I need him here and I feel he is with me … whenever I pray he answers my prayers.” (Zainah)

Byram (1997) argues “When individuals interact, they bring to the situation their own identities and cultures” (p. 39). However, the data above show that this is not always the case, since the changes in practices concerning religion do not necessarily lead the participants to question the religious beliefs themselves and vice versa. Having changed their religious practices, Raneem and Lubna did not show significant changes in their religious worldviews, while the changes in Hadeel and Zainah’s religious worldviews did not result in changing practices. Although Hadeel and Zainah maintained their religious practices, they became more capable of supporting their religious practices with more rational explanations rather than adhering to a practice or a belief that is taken for granted. This capacity shows their critical cultural awareness. Zainah states:

من أول وأنا أسأل لكن الفرق اليوم أني أقدر أجاوب

“I always questioned [religion] but today I am able to provide answers [for her religious beliefs].” (Zainah)

Byram refers to critical cultural awareness as one characteristic of the intercultural speaker:

> The intercultural speaker is aware of their own ideological perspectives and values (‘human rights’; socialist; liberal; Moslem; Christian etc.) and evaluates documents or events with explicit reference to them. (Byram, 1997, p. 64)

He also points out:

> The important point here is that the intercultural speaker brings to the experiences of their own and other cultures a rational and explicit standpoint from which to evaluate. (Byram, 1997, p. 54)

Byram seems to argue that intercultural speakers are aware of their religious perspectives for example, as well as of those of others, and are able to provide an explicit and rational judgment when they evaluate documents and events. The limitation of this analysis seems to lie in the fact that it may be difficult to make a "rational" judgment on certain ideological issues — such as religion — since, in many cases, religions may not be based on rationales but on beliefs (Grayling, 2013). Therefore, followers of any given religion may claim that their own religion is "rational" (i.e., reasonable) but not others' (Grayling, 2013).

Drawing on Zainah's remark above, she managed to provide answers for any questions related to her religious beliefs, but she used religion as a reference for her answers. For example, she provides an explanation for her religious spirituality:

[لما رحت الكاثيدرل] فيه شخص مدفون هناك [فحسيت بالروحانية] ... يمكن الناس ما تحس بالروحانية لكن فيه هناك ... مرة كانت أختي تحس بالأشخاص المؤمنين في مكان ما.. فهي ما تعرف عن قصة الكاثيدرل لكن مع هذا حست أن فيه أحد هنا من إيمانها فيه ... يعني هم مثلنا مثل الشيعة يعتقدون بالناس الطيبين المدفونين ... هم عندهم مثلنا

"When I went to the cathedral, I felt spiritual because there was a shrine to a saint … some people may not believe in spirituality but it exists … my sister felt spiritual even though she did not know about the shrine … they [Christians] are like us [Shia], we believe in spirituality and shrines." (Zainah)

Although her explanation that shrines are a source of religious spirituality may seem "rational" to her, it may not seem so for other individuals who do not believe in shrines or spirituality. Further, Zainah did not shake hands with a man, as mentioned in chapter five, and did not provide any rational judgment apart from her religious belief for not doing so. This contradiction shows that the

concept of “rational” judgments may have some limitations when it comes to ideological perspectives such as religion.

7.1.3 Changes in both religious worldviews and practices

Another group of participants introduced changes in their religious worldviews and, as a result, altered their practices concerning religion. For example, Zahir points out:

الأكل الحلال مثلا، كان من أول أركز عليه ولكن الآن عادي، باستثناء الخنزير طبعا ... يعني أولا المشايخ أفتوا بالضرورة وغير هذا صعب أني ألقى الحلال فصارت أسهل ... يعني هذي الأشياء سألت فيعا ما جبتها من نفسي، يعني سألت مثل الحلال وقالوا لي أنه يجوز

“I used to require halal food in the past, but now I am more flexible, except pork of course. First, it is hard to find halal food easily, and secondly, there have been a number of religious statements from religious clerics permitting people to eat nonhalal food … I followed these religious statements.” (Zahir)

Zahir shows some flexibility in both his belief and practice concerning halal food compared to when he first arrived. Some intercultural communication models, for example, King and Baxter Magolda (2005) and Bennett (1986) take the view that this type of development evolves naturally over time as a result of the individual’s intercultural communication experiences. However, Zahir’s flexibility is also supported by his belief that some clerics permit individuals to have non-halal food. Zahir is, therefore, not really suspending of his own beliefs concerning non-halal food nor do his changes concerning halal food necessarily reflect attitudes of openness and curiosity since he was still acting within his understandings of Islam.

Further, although time seems to be the factor that led Zahir to show some flexibility concerning halal food, it is not always the case that individuals develop intercultural competence with time. For example, Abdul states:

أنا تغير علي موضوع البنات.. يعني لما تكون مع {أصدقاء} متزوجين يقولون لك لما تتزوج في المستقبل لازم يكون عندي نفس الفكرة وهي أن زوجتي هي الوحيدة فلازم يكون عندي حدود في التعامل مع البنات.. يعني أحط خط.. زوجتي {المستقبلية} هي الوحيدة الي أتعامل معها... يعني أنا أجهزنفسي من الآن فرصت أحط حاجز مع {علاقة} البنات

"The thing that has changed in me is making friends with girls … because I've been socialising with Saudi married guys, they have told me that when I get married in the future, my wife has to be the only woman who I can socialise with, so I'm preparing myself from now." (Abdul)

He talks about an experience he had with a female friend who noticed the changes in his character:

فيه وحدة جات وقالت لي أنت تغيرت وما صرت مثل أول.. يعني من أول تجلس جنبك الجين الحين لما تجلس جنبي أتحرك وأجعل أحد في النص يعني من الآن أبدأ أني أتغير حتى ما تصير عادة فيك... ففيه وحدة زعلت فشرحت لها أن هذا من الدين الإسلام

"There was a female friend who said to me that I changed and am not the same as before … they used to sit next to me but now when they do I change my place or find someone [a male friend] to sit between us … she felt upset but I explained to her that this is our religion, Islam."

In the first interview, Abdul mentioned that he had mixed groups of friends from different backgrounds, including both genders. In the second interview, however, he mentioned that he had stopped socialising with any female friends since his new group of Saudi friends had convinced him that religion prohibits any male-female interactions (apart from those with direct female relatives such as wives, mothers, sisters, and aunts). This prohibition is supported by some *fatwas* i.e., religious statements established by certain Muslims scholars who claim that any

male-female interaction may result in more intimate relationships (Bouhdiba, 2013; Noble, 2007).

Although Abdul's ceasing to socialise with female individuals is related to his perception of religion, these changes also seem to be linked to his sense of having "lost" his Saudi identification which had developed as a result of his socialisation with non-Saudi individuals:

المشكلة وأنا في السعودية ما كنت مصاحب سعوديين لأن أكثر أصحابي كانوا حضارم، سوريين أو لبنانيين ... يعني ما عرفت سعوديين ... لكن لما تجي هنا وتصاحب سعوديين أحس أنهم غير ما أحس أني سعودي مثلهم ... يعني مثلا عندهم مصطلحات أو عندهم جلسة شباب أنا ما أعرفها لكن كل سعودي يعرفها ... يعني فيه أشياء متشابهين فيها ... يعني أنا سعودي لكن ما عندي شي مثلهم ... يعني جيت وقابلتهم فحسيت أني أبي أعرف أكثر ... يعني غريبة ... احتقرت نفسي أني ما أعرف أشياء كثيرة عن الشباب السعودي ... يعني كيف!!

"When I was in Saudi Arabia, I did not have Saudi friends … most of my friends were Yeminis, Syrians, or Lebanese … but when I came here and got to know some Saudi friends, I did not feel I was Saudi like them … they have terms that all Saudis should know but I did not … although I am Saudi, I still do not know … so when I came here I felt like I want to know more … it is strange … how come I do not know about Saudi Arabia! I despised myself for that." (Abdul)

His lack of understanding of certain terms that "all Saudis know", according to Abdul, made him feel anxious and "despise himself" for being Saudi but not "fully Saudi". Bauman (2004) argues that an individual's identification is fluid and flexible and only becomes inflexible and solid when it is threatened and contested. Therefore, Abdul's Saudi national identification seems to have been contested when he felt that he did not know some aspects of his own country of origin. As a result, he made the decision to socialise more with his Saudi friends in order to make up for his lack of "Saudiness". Further, since Saudi Arabia adopts as the collective identity for the country (Al-Rasheed, 2013) a religious

nationalism that is based on Wahhabi teachings that forbid interactions between men and women, Abdul felt more Saudi when he did not socialise with females. This case supports Byram's (1997) argument that individuals may pay more attention to certain types of knowledge that differentiate them from other groups and have their origins in their history and religion, as seen with Abdul.

A number of points can be drawn from Abdul's and Zahir's cases. First of all, unlike Zahir, Abdul's case shows that individuals do not necessarily become more interculturally competent over time, but may in fact become less so. Secondly, both Zahir and Abdul brought their knowledge about their own religious values to their interactions, but with different outcomes (Zahir expressed more flexibility regarding halal food, whereas Abdul expressed less flexibility concerning interaction with females). These examples show that even though individuals may have similar self-identifications (e.g., Muslims in the case of Zahir and Abdul), they perceive their religious worldviews differently from one another and not as a single social group as suggested in Byram's model (Byram, 1997). Here we see the inconsistency of people's self-identifications (Dervin, 2013) which do not automatically correlate with certain, expected behaviours or beliefs from social groups such as Muslims.

Finally, Byram (1997) seems to use the term Otherness in reference to individuals who come from different countries or share different values, meanings, and behaviours from one's own. However, that was not the case with Abdul since in his case otherness was represented by Saudi individuals to whom he felt a "stranger" even though he is a self-identified Muslim and a Saudi citizen.

Therefore, Abdul's self-identification and identifications of others were not explained by having shared beliefs, meanings, and behaviours with the Saudi group. Rather, they were explained by his affiliation and self-identification with the Saudi group despite his limited understanding of what being Saudi Arabian actually entails. This type of inconsistency over one's self-identification is what mixed intersubjectivity (Dervin, 2013) attempts to highlight.

In this section, I have attempted to discuss the changes related to religion that took place within some participants as a result of their intercultural communication experiences in the UK. Some participants changed practices related to religion without changing their religious worldviews, while others changed their religious worldviews but without changing their practices. Yet others participants changed both their religious worldviews and practices.

Therefore, from the data above, two conclusions can be drawn. First of all, although individuals may change or adapt some of their practices or behaviours, they may do so in order to manage their intercultural interaction rather than as a result of actual changes in their worldviews i.e., introducing attitudes that enable them to suspend their beliefs about themselves and disbeliefs about others. In this case, individuals may encounter difficulties in adapting their behaviours and practices since their behaviours may contradict with their worldviews; such conflict would result in psychological stress, as Byram (1997) argues. Therefore, this psychological stress is less likely to eventuate if the participants show attitudes of openness and curiosity alongside their skills (Byram, 1997).

Secondly, Abdul's case shows his self-identifications with Saudi individuals and his viewing them as in-group members were not explained by his shared beliefs, meanings, and behaviours with them. Rather, he formed identifications of himself and of other Saudis because he had the least in common with them and, therefore, he set out to ensure that his Saudiness was maintained by socialising more with Saudi individuals and making the effort to adopt their beliefs, meanings, and behaviours.

The findings show the inconsistency of the participants' religious identifications and worldviews since they behave in a number of distinctly different ways. Some introduced changes to some of their religious beliefs; others changed their religious practices, while yet others introduced changes to both their religious beliefs and practices. Byram (1997) argues that individuals bring their identities and cultures to the situation when they interact. However, the findings above show the inconsistency of the participants' identifications that mixed intersubjectivity attempts to explain (Dervin, 2013) whereby the participants do not have well-identified identifications such as "Islamic identities" that determine their behaviours. Therefore, the participants construct and reconstruct their identifications inconsistently depending on the situation and also differently from one another as independent individuals rather than a cohesive and collective social group.

7.2 Changes that do not contradict with religion

Some participants underwent changes in their practices, or worldviews, as a result of their intercultural communication experiences in the UK. However, the

changes in question do not contradict with the participants' perceptions of their religion, for example, wearing the headscarf or consuming alcohol. Sameer provides an example of this type of change when he points out:

بالنسبة لي الدين هو الخط الأحمر الذي لا أتجاوزه، لكن العادات أنا مرن فيها، أتخلى عنها ممكن طالما أنها لا تمس الدين.. يعني مثلا حبيت أجرب الطبخ، الأن صرت أطبخ واشتريت كتب طبخ.. يعني لو تزوجت ممكن زوجتي تطبخ يوم وأنا يوم

"Religion is the line that I never cross, but I am flexible when it comes to other habits … I may change my habits as long as these changes are not related to religion … I, for example, started cooking for myself and I liked it … now I have bought cookery books … perhaps when I get married someday I will cook with my wife [laughing]." (Sameer)

In this remark Sameer emphasises that any changes that he may introduce must not contradict his perception of religion, since religion is the "line" that he will not cross. Therefore, his remark about acquiring culinary skills and helping his future wife in the kitchen indicates that he does not perceive these changes as going against his religious beliefs but as changes to his daily "habits" as he calls them. As a result, these changes seem to be related to his beliefs about gender roles and how being a male for him now means participating in domestic chores with his future wife (Greenstein, 1996). Further, Sameer goes on to argue that not only do these changes accord with religion, but he also claims that they have religious foundations in Islam:

يعني نحن نتكلم عن قيم قوية في الدين ولكن ما نفعلها، يعني الرسول كان يخيط ثيابه ويصلح نعاله

"We are talking about religious values [in reference to domestic labour] ... the Prophet [Mohammed] used to sew his clothes and repair his shoes."

Another participant who views religion as a framework for his life is Yunos who points out:

الواحد {يجب أن} عقيدته وإيمانه تحكمه وتصرفاته.

"Someone's religion should direct him or her in the way they behave."

Therefore, the changes that he had introduced did not contradict with religion:

لاحظت شي أني بديت أهتم في الوقت ... يعني تطور الآن ... يعني لو فيه موعد أو لقاء كنت أصل متأخر دقيقتين أو خمس دقايق، لكن الآن أصل قبل الموعد يعني الواحد صار عنده اهتمام في الوقت بحيث أنه ما يتأخر ويلتزم بالمواعيد

"I noticed that I have changed when it comes to punctuality … I am more punctual now … when I have an appointment with somebody I have to arrive on time … in the past I used to be two or five minutes late, but now I've started arriving a few minutes before the appointment … a person needs to be punctual and stick to time" (Yunos)

Similar to Sameer, Yunos had introduced new changes related to punctuality. Further, he takes a similar argument to the one offered by Sameer when he points out that punctuality is a part of Islam:

في ديننا مفروض أننا أفضل ناس في الوقت لا سيما عندنا خمس صلوات يوميا وفي أوقات محددة، لكن {للأسف} ما اعتدنا على الالتزام بالوقت

"Because of our religion, we should be the most punctual people … we have five prayers a day at specific times, but unfortunately we are still not used to being punctual." (Yunos)

Mohammed made a similar remark:

ديننا دعانا لاحترام الوقت، يعني يجب أن نكون قدوة {في هذا الأمر}

"Our religion encourages us to be examples of punctuality for all people." (Mohammed)

Both participants claim that punctuality is a part of religion, which is similar to Sameer's claim that domestic labour is a part of religion too. However, they are different from Sameer in the sense that both Yunos and Mohammed had previously had the belief that religion encourages them to be punctual, whereas Sameer had acquired this belief over time. Therefore, Yunos and Mohammed had become punctual in terms of practice, while Sameer had become more accepting of domestic labour as both a practice and a belief that it is related to religion.

Although these changes may seem positive — or are at least be perceived positively by the participants — they may not be as effective if religion is always used as the reference for such changes. Byram (1997) points out that individuals need to have the attitudes of readiness to try different stages of adaptations and interactions with unfamiliar "cultures". If the participants think of a change in the way they view things such as domestic labour or punctuality that they had introduced as initially being part of religion, then these changes may not be a real indicator of their attitudes of engaging in a relationship with otherness because they already perceive these changes as religious values that they ought to acquire. For example, Hannah points out:

يعني مثل الكريسمس بارتي والأشياء هذي عندهم ... يعني بنتي تجيني وتقول سانتا كلوز بيجيب لي هدية وتصحى من النوم وتقول هل جاب لي هدية أو لا ... صراحة أستاء، يعني مبسوطة من بنتي وتحب تروح وكل الي معها أجانب وصارت الحين تكتسب اللغة ... لكن النقطة هذي ماهي حلوة.. يعني فيه أشياء يسوونها أطفالهم فصارت مثلهم ... حتى طريقتها في الأكل ...

"When my daughter wakes up during Christmas time, she asks if Father Christmas has brought her a present or not … it does not make me feel happy … I am pleased that my daughter is learning English quickly because all of her friends speak English in the kindergarten, but I still do not appreciate the

cultural aspects such as Christmas … She's become like them … even the way she eats" (Hannah)

The tradition of Christmas seems to be unfamiliar to Hannah and, therefore, she was not willing for her four- year-old daughter to engage with it even though she is pleased that her daughter has learnt English quickly. After probing her about the reasons behind her discomfort, she said:

بالنسبة لي أنها ثقافية عادي لكن عقائدية ماهي حلوة.. يعني يوم رحت أنا وأبوها لحفلة الكريسمس يعني هو كله حول ميلاد اليسوع، يعني حتى الأطفال كانوا مبلبسينهم لباس عربي..وأن هذا اليسوع في المهد ويغنون فكلها أغاني حافظتها بنتي للأسف. وقاعدة تغني معهم،، فحنا نفكر هل هذا الي تسويه صح أو خطأ،، قلقي عقدي ديني..

"I do not mind cultural practices, but not the religious ones … when I went with my husband to the Christmas party at the kindergarten, it was all about the birth of Jesus … the children were dressed up in what seemed to be Middle Eastern ancient costumes … they sang hymns about Jesus that my daughter sadly had memorised, and she was singing with them … my husband and I were thinking: are we doing the right or the wrong thing? My concerns are purely religious."

Hannah seems to distinguish between what she refers to as "cultural practices" and "religious practices". Similar to Mohammed, Sameer, and Yunos, she does not seem to mind introducing new changes in her practices as long as they do not run counter to her understanding of her religion. Since Christmas is an occasion that is linked to Christianity, it seems that Hannah is paying more attention to the type of knowledge that distinguishes her social group from others (Byram, 1997) and, therefore, she considers Christmas as a Christian occasion that distinguishes her as a Muslim from the Christian Other.

However, Hannah had introduced changes related to her gender worldview that did not contradict with her perception of religion:

صحيح أن عندنا مبالغة في السعودية أنك أنت الجوهرة المصونة ومن ذا الكلام الي لاعبين علينا فيه، لكن هنا لا .. هنا المرأة مبهذلة.. من جد يعني، أتابع التلفزيون وأشوف الوثائقية... يعني أحس مساكين ضايعة.. معرف كيف.. يعني صعبة أنها تتزوج وتنجب عيال لكن ما تعيش عادي.. هي لازم تطلع وتشتغل وتكرف مثلها مثل الرجل.

"Although women in Saudi Arabia are lied to [by religious scholars] with words such as "precious diamonds" in order to keep us at home, I still believe that women here [in the UK] also go through difficulties … they look after their children and have a full-time job just like men … I think this is really hard."

Although Hannah does not accept being subordinated in Saudi Arabia, she does not accept the situation of women in the UK either. Her judgment on the lifestyle of women in the UK seems to be based on the explicit criteria that she thinks it is difficult to be a mother and a full-time employee at the same time, rather than on no criteria, or criteria that are based on religion or the way she was brought up in Saudi Arabia. Therefore, she showed some critical cultural awareness about her own status as a Saudi woman as well as the status of women in the UK.

There are several themes emerging in this section. First, similar to the participants in the previous section, the participants in this section introduced changes in their practices. However, these changes had to comply with their perceptions of religion and, therefore, they showed willingness to introduce changes related to domestic labour and punctuality. In some cases, the participants considered such changes as a part of religion rather than only "neutral" changes that do not conflict with it, which shows their self-identifications as Muslims and the willingness to maintain their religious

identifications intact. Unlike the participants in the previous section who showed inconsistent religious identifications, the participants in this section showed more consistent religious identifications since they displayed behaviours that comply with their perceptions of Islam even though they had different perceptions of what behaviour is considered to be consistent with or contrary to Islam. This finding supports Byram's (1997) argument that individuals bring to the situation their identities and cultures, but does not support the inconsistent identifications that mixed intersubjectivity (Dervin, 2013) attempts to explain.

Secondly, some participants introduced changes in their gender worldviews but not to their religious beliefs. Therefore, issues such as domestic work being the exclusive domain of women, and the image of a "precious diamond" to describe women in Saudi Arabia, and that of a "free woman" who had a full-time job and looked after her children being used to describe women in the UK were questioned. Here we see the willingness of some participants to maintain consistent religious identifications even though they may conceive of what it means to be Muslim differently from one another.

Therefore, the findings in this section support Byram's (1997) argument that individuals bring their identities to the situation. Further, although the participants identified themselves as Muslims and showed a willingness to maintain their behaviour within what being Muslim means to each of them, the participants' knowledge about their social groups (i.e., what it means to be Muslim) varies depending on the different primary socialisation that they received. Therefore, unlike Byram's (1997) argument that individuals have

knowledge about their own social groups and cultures in their own countries, the participants in this case have different "knowledges" even though they all identified themselves as Muslims.

7.3 No changes were introduced

Unlike the participants in the previous two sections who introduced some changes, this section focuses on the participants who did not seem to be willing to introduce any changes whether related to religion or not. Abdulaziz was the only participant who did not show willingness to change any practices or worldviews. He points out:

لازم أحافظ على ديني ولازم ما أنغمس مثل الناس ذول الكيرلس عن دينهم... بالعكس الي تربيت عليه لازم أكمله... لازم ما أتغير، لازم الناس لما أرجع على جدة ما يشوفوا تغير في العادات والتقاليد... يمكن فكريا إيه يعني يكون فيه نمو فكري يعني أن الشخص هذا متعلم. بالعكس هذي أنا شايف أنها تكون إيجابية إذا الناس حسوا فيها. لكن إذا حسوا الناس أتي تارك ديني وتارك تقاليدي مثلا فهذا آخر شي ممكن أسمعه

"I must maintain my religion and never be like other people who forget about it … I must continue whatever I was brought up to believe in … I must not change … when I go back to Jeddah [in Saudi Arabia] I do not want people to see that I have changed … maybe intellectual changes, then that is fine … that is positive when someone becomes educated … but the last thing I want to hear is people saying that I have changed in my religion and values."

The only changes that Abdulaziz considers "positive" are what he refers to as "intellectual changes". What he means here by "intellectual" is the academic qualifications since he used the word "educated" to describe the intellectual changes that he talks about. Further, the "intellectual" changes that he refers to must be kept separate from his religious beliefs and values. With reference to foreign language teaching, Byram (1997) argues that in the Arab Gulf States, including Saudi Arabia, there is some fear of being influenced by "Western"

values through English language learning (p. 24). Further, Byram (1997) states "The underlying theme is that FLT should provide opportunities for interaction with people from other countries but should not threaten or undermine the Arab and Islamic identity of learners themselves." (p. 24). Although Byram (1997) refers to FLT in particular in his statement, Abdulaziz's remark above shows that his fears are linked to any values that may change him.

Moreover, Abdulaziz raises an important point when it comes to people's perceptions of him. He seems to be anxious that any changes he may introduce would result in some negative response from other people. This comment demonstrates the social pressure represented in the family at home or friends that individuals may experience when they introduce changes in their practices (Campbell, 2000). Therefore, he made the decision that he should not exhibit any changes in his practices or worldviews in order to avoid people's remarks.

Although Abdulaziz was the only participant who did not show significant changes in his worldviews or practices, there were other participants who talked about their Saudi friends. Although I did not interview their friends, I thought those experiences reported by the participants are worth mentioning. The first of these participants is Hannah who talks about her Saudi friends:

{بعض السعوديات} جاو هنا وجلسوا... ما طلعت وما شافت وش السوبرماركت وش فيه ممكن... زوجها يقضي لها مدري صراحة شي غريب. حتى عندهم نفس الصحون ولازم نفس الأكل الي في السعودية يكون هنا... حتى أني أعرف ناس جابوا تعرف المساند حقتنا والمراكي وتخيل عملوا جلسة كاملة. يعني أنا والله جلست معهم وشفتهم يعني هي جات هنا وتبي تكون نفس الشي... بيتها وعيالها نفس الشي... زوجها يروح ويطلع ويدرس ويرجع

"Most Saudi women come to the UK but they are not willing to go out and experience the life here … they do not do the shopping themselves but their husbands do it … they want the same food in Saudi Arabia to be here, the same plates, even some brought the same Saudi pillows [to sit on the floor like in Saudi Arabia] … I have seen that myself … they look after the children, do the house work, while the husband is studying or goes out then comes back home."

Ahmed is another participant who talked about his Saudi friends and how they did not show willingness to introduce any changes in their lives when they arrived in the UK:

كثير من الشباب السعودي يروح {بريطانيا} ويرجع بالشهادة فقط... واحد من الإخوان قال لي أن كثير من الشباب السعودي يروح وياخد الدرجة العلمية ويلتقي مع المشرف ومع النادي السعودي وحتى في التلفزيون يعني عنده قنوات سعودية أو عربية فبالتالي لا يخرج من هذا الإطار.. إطاره ما زال... يعني ربما اختلاف الوجوه في الشارع لكن الممارسات والعلاقات نفسها... فيه ناس عندهم فكرة أي تغيير هو سلبي يعني عندما تتغير عما كنت عليه فهذا سلبي وهذه فرضية خاطئة جدا... بالعكس التغيير ربما يكون للأحست مهب شرط للأسوأ

"Many Saudis come to the UK, study, then go back to Saudi Arabia with only the academic qualifications … they spend most of their time in the Saudi Society … even the TV channels that they watch are Saudi or in Arabic and, therefore, they don't leave their bubble … their social relations, friendship, and practices are the same … some people consider any changes as a negative thing and I think this is wrong … change might be for the better, not necessarily for the worse."

Similar to Hannah, Ahmed seems to show the opposite attitudes of Abdulaziz's and criticises the idea that some Saudi international students are not willing to introduce any changes into their lives. He adds that they prefer to cling to their in-groups such as other Saudi international students. He further tries to explain the reasons behind the lack of their intercultural interactions and points out:

وأنا كذلك أتصور أن من الأسباب التي أدت للانعزال هي وجود الأسر مع الطلاب... وهذي من أهم العوامل التي رسخت الانعزال... يعني الشخص ملتهي أصلا بالعائلة وبالتالي تعاطيه يقل مع المجتمع الخارجي... ولو قلنا أنه يتعاطى فسيظل محدود جدا... ليس مثل الشخص الي مثلا حر منطلق ما عنده التزامات أسرية مثلا

"I think one of the reasons that led them [Saudi international students] to isolate themselves from initiating intercultural communication and clinging to their groups is the fact that they have their families with them … therefore, the individual is busy with his or her family and, therefore, their interactions become less … and if they did interact, their interaction is very limited, unlike single students who feel free and don't have any family commitments."

The concept that having a family in the UK restricts Saudi international students from interactions was also reported by Midgley (2009b). He states that some of the Saudi international students that he interviewed had to answer their wives' phone calls even when they were in the classroom. They felt a responsibility to look after their families abroad since there were no other relatives that could provide any assistance if needed. Therefore, the Saudi international students in Midgley's (2009b) study had limited time to initiate intercultural interactions abroad, which seems compatible with Ahmed's explanation.

However, this idea that Saudi international students experience less intercultural communication because of their families does not explain two points. First, Ahmed points out that the Saudi international students that he referred to chose to socialise with other Saudi students in the Saudi Society. Therefore, having a family did not restrict their ability to socialise, but instead they chose to use this time to interact with other Saudi international students rather than engage with non-Saudi individuals.

The issue of students being either with or without their family in the UK is related to the second point, which is illustrated in the case of Abdulaziz. He was a single student at the time of the interview and had no family with him to look after in the UK. Nevertheless, he still preferred not to socialise with non-Saudi individuals or introduce any changes in his practices. In fact, he preferred to do precisely what Ahmed was referring to when he said that some Saudi international students go back to Saudi Arabia with only their academic qualifications but with no other changes. This evidence shows that some of the participants, as well as other Saudi international students, preferred not to introduce any changes whether in their worldviews, practices, or even social interactions. It is also evidence that having a family in the UK may not be a barrier that limits introducing any changes in their lives.

The Saudi international students that I have discussed in this section did not express any interest in introducing changes into their worldviews and practices, whether religious or not. However, if they are interested in experiencing intercultural communication with individuals whom they view as out-group members such as non-Saudi students, then they may need to go beyond their interest in only gaining academic qualifications without threatening what Byram (1997) refers to as their Arab and Islamic identities. They may need to have the attitudes and "willingness to seek out or take up opportunities to engage with otherness in a relationship of equality, distinct from seeking out the exotic or the profitable" (Byram, 1997, p. 57). Without this willingness to engage with otherness, they may end up restricting their group of individuals with whom they socialise to their in-group members.

The data in this section support Byram's (1997) argument that the relationship between attitudes and the other factors in his model is one of interdependence. The Saudi international students above did appear to have no interest in suspending their disbeliefs and judgments about beliefs, values, and meanings of those whom they perceived as different, since they preferred to maintain their beliefs, values, and Saudi lifestyle. Therefore, this attitude influenced their knowledge because they had no other meanings against which to relativise their own meanings, beliefs, and behaviours by comparing them with those of others. Their disinclination to explore otherness also influenced their skills as these would have been easier to operate if the Saudi international students above had had the attitudes of openness and curiosity. Finally, their lack of openness and curiosity had also influenced these Saudi students' critical cultural awareness since relativising one's own meanings, values, and behaviours and valuing those of others does not happen without "a reflective and analytical challenge to the ways in which they have been formed and the complex of social forces within which they are experienced" (Byram, 1997, p. 35). As a result, this group of participants restricted their socialisation and engaged only with in-group individuals such as other Saudi international students. In some cases they even tried to recreate a replica of their Saudi lifestyle in the UK.

When considered from the perspective of mixed intersubjectivity (Dervin, 2013), the data from the participants above show their willingness to exhibit a solid identification of being "Saudi". They did not show the fluid identifications that Dervin (2013) argues that individuals have. Rather, they made the decision to be

"Saudi" — regardless what being Saudi actually entails. They, therefore, intentionally did not introduce changes to their worldviews, restricted their socialising to other Saudi individuals, watched Saudi TV channels, and brought cooking equipment and furniture from Saudi Arabia in order to insulate themselves from experiencing any lifestyle that was different from that in their home country.

Thus far, we have seen that the data provided findings on three different groups of participants in terms of the changes that they introduced, or deliberately did not introduce, in their daily life while living in the UK. The first group introduced changes related to their religious practices or worldviews. The second group introduced changes in their lives but they did not see these changes as being related to or against their religion. The third group of participants — as well some other Saudi international students whom some of the study participants had observed — did not seem to be interested in introducing any changes into their lives.

When comparing the three groups of participants, it appears that they all perceived themselves as Muslims. However, the difference between them lies in their religious worldview and whether or not it accords with their practices. When the participants in the first section introduced new practices that contradicted with their religious beliefs, they experienced some psychological stress. Only those who questioned their religious beliefs experienced less stress. The participants in the second section, on the other hand, did not introduce practices that they believed to be contradicting religion, nor did they introduce

changes in their religious beliefs because they already believe that the changes that they introduced have their origins in religion and also that their sojourn in the UK gave them the first opportunity to practise those beliefs. Therefore, they experienced less psychological stress as a result. The third group of participants seem to have more than just religious beliefs that they did not want to go against; they also experienced societal pressure from family or friends which made them reluctant to introduce any changes. Therefore, they did not report any noticeable changes in their lives.

The three groups of participants that I have discussed in this section show the differences amongst Saudi international students even though they come from the same country. They prioritised the ways they wanted to be identified differently from one another since some preferred to be identified as "Muslims" while others conceived of themselves as "Saudis" and they brought the meanings and values that each identification entails to their interactions (Byram, 1997). However, even those who prioritised their "Muslim identity", they did not bring identical meanings and values to that identification, so we see that being Muslim means different things to different individuals. Therefore, this mixed intersubjectivity (Dervin, 2013) shows how the participants brought to the interaction various types of meanings and values even though they may have seen themselves as belonging to a specific group such as Muslims. Both Byram's (1997) model and Dervin's (2013) mixed intersubjectivity complement each other in understanding data in which some participants emphasised their identifications and brought these to interactions, while other had inconsistent identifications.

7.4 Intersecting identities

The previous sections showed how some participants introduced new changes in their worldviews, whether religious or nonreligious, while others introduced new changes in their practices as a result of their intercultural communication. Nevertheless, all of these participants identified themselves as Muslims despite the changes that they had introduced to their worldviews or practices. However, the participants did not identify themselves as only "Islamic" because it can be seen that their Islamic identifications were intersected with other forms of identification which resulted from their intercultural communication experiences in the UK. Some participants claimed more inclusive identifications, some claimed regional identifications, while others felt stronger about their original identifications such as their Islamic or Saudi national identification. In this section, I discuss how the participants expressed their new ways of identifying themselves, or in some cases, expressed their willingness to maintain their self-identifications unchanged.

Some participants introduced more inclusive identifications as a result of their intercultural communication experiences in the UK. For example, Sameer points out:

في ديني التعامل بالقسط والخير والمعروف وهذا شيء من الدين.. وهم نفس الوقت عندهم نفس الفروق ولكن كلنا بشر في الأخير.. لدينا أخوة إنسانية.. يعني فيه فروق وليس في الأديان فقط يعني حتى على مستوى الجنسيات.. يعني الفرق التي تظهره الجنسيات أشد من الديانات

"Dealing with [all] people in a nice way is a part of my religion [Islam], even here [in the UK] people have differences amongst each other … but in the end we are all humans … we have human brotherhood … there are differences between us as people, if not in religions, then in nationalities … in fact nationalities show more differences than religions."

He further talks about his opposition to eliminating differences between people:

أنا أقول إلغاء الهويات مثل الفكر الشيوعي وتلغي تماما كل الفروق بين الناس هذا مستحيل عمليا.. الشيء الثاني الناس ما تعرفها إلا عن التصنيف.. وحتى لو افترضنا لو كن عندنا سوشلست أو كومينست بالكامل يعني مافيه فروق، سنصنع فرق بين يعمل عليه القانون... الفروقات موجودة

"I think eliminating people's identities — as communism tried to do — is impossible … people need categories so they identify one another … and let us assume that we have socialist or communist societies that eliminate all differences between people, we still will make differences … differences [between people] will remain."

Sameer's remarks show that he is acknowledging the differences between individuals and yet accepting of them as he uses terms such as "human brotherhood" and "differences will remain". Here we see an example of what Byram (1997) refers to as becoming an "intercultural speaker" or embracing "intercultural citizenship" where individuals "must be able to 'enter' into the form of life of other people, to understand but not necessarily accept their values, whilst always being aware that some values are 'beyond the pale' of being human and have to be condemned" (Byram, 2008, p. 127).

However, Haleemah seems to go further and states:

في البداية أنا كنت أفكر أن الناس هنا بتروح النار كما علمونا في السعودية لكننا ما نعرف هذا الشي عن الناس، نحن مو رب العالمين.. يعني مثل ما قلت لك بديت أحس في هويتي أنني آدمي،، كلنا أوادم.. يعني لا فرق بين عربي ولا مسلم ولا غيره.. يعني هوية إنسانية.. يعني لا نريد أن نصنف أنفسنا

"When I first arrived here, I thought all people here [non-Muslims] are going to hell as they taught us in Saudi Arabia … but how do we know that? We are not God … now I feel my identity as a human … we all are humans … there is no difference between Arabs and non-Arabs, Muslims or non-Muslims … I mean a human's identity … we should not categorise ourselves and others."

Haleemah seems to reject the tendency to categorise herself or other individuals as in-groups or out-groups by initiating a new, inclusive identity called "humans". The term does not make distinctions between individuals based on their religions, languages, or nationalities. On the other hand, Raneem takes a stance between both Sameer's and Haleemah's and points out:

"When you see different students from different parts of the world, and when we talk about the West as Europe and the USA but you still see so many differences between them … there's something [they] don't understand about us, I feel Europeans know more about us, but they don't understand my culture … but Americans don't … though they all are so different."

In this remark, Raneem echoes Sameer as she acknowledges the differences within what she refers to as the "West" — Europe and the USA — and yet she views people in these countries as an out-group who are different from her and thus she states they do not understand her culture. At the same time, she splits this out-group into two separate groups: Europeans who understand more about "us" and Americans whom she refers to as "they". Making this distinction between individuals who come from or live in Europe and the USA seems to give her the opportunity to view the former as an in-group. Then she adds:

"I think although my parents are Saudis, I still feel I'm sometimes Western."

Now Raneem views herself as "Western", which implies being "European" — but not American — since, in her opinion, individuals from Europe know more about her "culture". Raneem's thinking seems to reflect her mixed intersubjectivity (Dervin, 2013) because her statements seem to be inconsistent due to her

upbringing in Europe and her struggle to identify herself as "Saudi", "Western", or "European". Dervin points out:

> Through the analysis of such *mixed intersubjectivity,* the researcher can note shifts and inconsistencies and thus identification — not to find the 'truth' — but to highlight the complexity of human experience and the strategies used to construct it". (2013, p. 19)

However, in many cases, the individual is not aware of this consistency, as Ewing points out:

> At any particular moment a person usually experiences his or her articulated self as a symbolic, timeless whole, but this self may quickly be displaced by another, quite different 'self', which is based on a different definition of the situation. The person will often be unaware of these shifts and inconsistencies and may experience wholeness and continuity despite their presence. (1990, p. 251)

This idea seems to apply to Raneem's case who does not seem to be aware of this inconsistency. Therefore, she decided to create what she refers to as her "own identity":

"My identity is fluid I wanna create my own identity rather than restricted to a certain group or the colour of my passport … I wanna have the freedom to be who I want. I understand the political reasons but we can't generalise or stereotype or whatever."

Here the "colour of my passport" is a synonym for "nationality", which is a concept that Raneem rejects being identified with as it may result in creating certain stereotypes about nationalities. She mentions an experience in which she did not fit the stereotype of what a Saudi woman "should" look like:

"… like this Chinese guy who embarrassed me on the bus he was asking me how come I'm not wearing the headscarf, how come I smoke, and he asked how come you have curly hair … so he had some fixed ideas and he wanted to prove it."

This remark shows the embarrassment that Raneem felt when she did not fit a specific stereotype of a Saudi woman as the Chinese individual seems to have perceived it, i.e., as someone who is supposed to wear the headscarf and does not smoke. As a result, this exchange created some confusion for Raneem because, although she refuses to be identified by her nationality, she can see that others perceive her as a Saudi national and ascribe their stereotypes to her. Further, identifying herself as having her "own identity" did not seem to answer the question "*Where are you from?"* when she is asked that by others. Therefore, she chose to identify herself with her region in Saudi Arabia:

"Now I'm defining myself as Hijazi rather than Saudi … although I really don't like it because I don't like making barriers with other people, as Najdi and Hijazi, but I still can see it because in my culture we're so friendly."

Raneem expresses explicitly her refusal to be identified as "Saudi" and chooses to be identified as "Hijazi" i.e., coming from Hijaz which is a geographical region in the west of Saudi Arabia. Further, she contrasts her Hijazi identification to Najdi identification — Najdi is a geographical area in central Saudi Arabia — and claims that what she refers to as Hijazi "culture" is friendly compared with, for example, Najdi culture.

Yamani (2000) reported a similar case of two Saudi women from Hijaz who indicated the differences between Hijaz and Najd, especially when it comes to the situation of women. They described Hijaz as more liberal and progressive, unlike Najd. This contrast between regions serves to leave positive feelings about the self in comparison to the other. Byram (2013, p. 48) argues that "group membership works to help our self-esteem, but also that our self-esteem can

depend on contrast with, and sometimes denigration or criticism of other groups so that we feel good about our own."

Another reason behind Raneem's choice to identify herself with Hijaz may be related to the Hijazi regional nationalism that developed in the early twentieth century (Al-Rasheed, 2013).

> The Hijazi Arab nationalism that was endorsed by local Hijazis and other Arabs residing in the Hijaz was, however, different from the secular Arab nationalism or the same of later historical periods … From the very beginning, Hijazi Arab nationalism was anchored in Islam, given the sacred status of the region and role of the Hashemites in its endorsement and propagation. (Al-Rasheed, 2013, p. 10)

This remark shows how the form of nationalism that existed in Hijaz at the beginning of the last century may have resulted in creating some sense of shared identity for the people of Hijaz.

Zainah is another participant who chose to be identified with her geographical region rather than Saudi Arabia as a whole:

ترسخت عندي فكرة أني قطيفية أكثر من أنني سعودية

"I have become more certain that I am Qatifi rather than Saudi."

She further adds:

ما زالت القطيف تختلف {عن غيرها من المناطق} أنها ماهي مكان بدوي... يعني مو بدو وحطوهم في هجر.. يعني الرياض مثلا بدو وحطوهم في هجرة.. فهم عقلية بدو.. لكن القطيف من زمن الرسول وهي مدينة فيها صيادين ومزارعين وليسوا رحالة.. وبعدين من أول وهم منفتحين.. يعني أشطر الطلاب في المدارس من القطيف

"Qatif is different from other regions in Saudi Arabia … it is not a place populated by nomads, unlike Riyadh which is home to nomads who have not changed their traditions … but Qatif has been an urban city since the time of the Prophet … there are fishermen and farmers in Qatif, not travellers … they have

always been open to the world … the best students [in Saudi Arabia] come from Qatif."

Similar to Raneem, Zainah refuses to be identified as "Saudi" and choses a regional identification. Further, she also contrasts Qatif to Riyadh, which is the capital city of Saudi Arabia and a part of Najd, and explains how Qatif has been urban and open to the world, unlike Riyadh. This example shows the self-esteem that Byram (2013) points out when individuals denigrate or criticise others in order to "feel good" (p. 48) about their own identity. Further, since Raneem has been othered by non-Saudis for not looking "Saudi" and Zainah has been othered by Saudis for being a self-identified Shia, both participants seem to claim a more specific identification that gives them a feeling of worth and value. Therefore, they chose to be identified according to their regional identification which is stronger than a more generalised, stereotypical national i.e., Saudi identification to which they do not belong.

Moreover, linking Qatif to "the time of the Prophet" gives Zainah's regional identification a sense of religiousness, in the same way that Hijaz nationalism was anchored in Islam because it has the two holy sites of Mecca and Medina. In addition, since the majority of the residents of Qatif follow the Shia sect of Islam, this adds another reason, in addition to the regional reason, for identifying themselves as one united community.

> Evidently, al-Qatif region is overwhelmingly inhabited by the Shi'is. Very few Sunni communities live there, most of them being concentrated in their own distinct areas… many Shi'is of al-Hasa [an area in the Eastern Province in Saudi Arabia] migrated from the villages to the towns … while Shi'is in al-Qatif clung to their ghetto … In addition, the Shi'is in al-Hasa, unlike their co-religionists in al-

> Qatif, are not politically motivated. For the Shi'is in al-Hasa, religion is separable from business, from politics and from the public domain, whereas the insistence on the synthesis between these polarities is a big issue for the Shi'is in al-Qatif. (Ibrahim, 2006, p. 52)

This quote from Ibrahim (2006) shows that both the geographical region and the Shia religious sect have united the residents of Qatif to form their own collective identification, which added an additional reason to Zainah's willingness to be identified as Shia.

On the other hand, some participants identified themselves as having become "more Saudi" than they were before coming to the UK. Apart from Abdul who was more interested in exhibiting his "Saudiness" than when he first arrived [as discussed earlier in this chapter], Zahir is another participant who points out:

> أنا صرت أقدر الثقافة السعودية أكثر، يعني لما أرجع هناك أحس بالفخر وأفرح به.. لكن يوم جيت هنا حبيت السعودية أكثر.. يعني عملت مقارنات. يعني لما أشوف الزواجات في السعودية أشوف الكرم غير هنا

"I appreciate the Saudi culture even more now … when I go to Saudi Arabia I feel proud and happy … but when I came here [to the UK], I loved Saudi Arabia more … I made comparisons [between Saudi Arabia and the UK] … for example, when I compare weddings in Saudi Arabia, we are so generous compared to weddings here in the UK."

Unlike the other participants whose intercultural communication experiences have influenced the way they identify themselves, Zahir's self-identification of being Saudi has become stronger over time. He uses Saudi weddings that, according to Bahry (1982) used to cost up to $40000, to contrast what he considers as Saudi generosity with generosity in the UK. However, Zahir did not mention the source of his information about wedding costs in the UK, apart from its appearing to be an impression or a stereotype he had. Further, generosity

seems to be an abstract concept since it is hard to decide what is generous and what is not, and according to whom. For example, what may appear to be generous to Zahir may appear, to others, to be a waste of money. Later in the interview, Zahir seemed to have noticed this point and added:

يعني عندنا في السعودية الزواج فطور وغدا وعشا.. يعني أحس فيه تبذير أحيانا.. يعني حتى لو فيه بوفيه يكون الناس يرمون أكل أحيانا.. هذي عادة مضروبة في مجتمعنا بقوة لكن إن شاء الله تخف.. وإن شاء الله نطبق أن كل أحد ياخذ الي يكفيه

"In Saudi Arabia, we serve breakfasts, lunches, then dinners at weddings … I sometimes feel it is a waste … sometimes people throw the food away … it is a strong habit in our society but I hope it will stop … I hope we introduce the habit of everyone taking a sufficient portion only, not more."

Now Zahir seems to present the opposite point of view to his previous remark and in so doing shows some critical cultural awareness and condemns his own traditions in weddings where food is wasted. There seemed to be some inconsistency in his judgments as he first said that he did not like what he saw as the lack of generosity in the UK, but at the same time he condemns the waste of food at Saudi weddings. Later on, Zahir offered what seemed to be an explanation for his negative impression about the UK and his willingness to cling more to being identified as Saudi:

بعد سنة هنا {في بريطانيا} ما أحس أني أبيها تنعاد.. يعني ما حبيتها.. يعني أنا جيت {المدينة} علشان التخصص وأنا كنت أبي أمريكا ولكن مو مشكلة.. قدر الله أني أجي هنا وإن شاء الله ما أرجع.. ولا أتصور بنظر لهذي المدينة حتى من نافذة القطار

"After spending a year here in the UK, I would not like to repeat the experience of being here … I came to this city to study my subject although I wanted to go to the USA … but it is ok … it is God's will to be here, but I will never come back … even if I pass by this city on the train, I would not even give it a look."

After asking him about the reasons behind his conclusion, he added:

يعني بسبب التصور عنها قبل كذا.. يعني قبل أجي هنا الفيديو في اليوتيوب كانوا يصفونها وكأنها جنة.. ولكن الواقع شيء آخر.. ما شفنا أي شيء.. يعني الخدمات في الإعلانات شي مختلف والواقع شيء ثاني

"It is because of the expectations that I had had about the place …. Before I came here I saw videos about this university and city and they were describing it as a paradise … but in reality, it is totally different … the services that I watched in the advertisements are different from reality."

This remark shows the disappointment that Zahir experienced, which resulted from the mismatch between the expectations that he had about the city and the university and the image that he had drawn in his mind. Therefore, he generalised his judgment to include the whole of the UK and viewed it as a one entity.

After asking him to be more specific about the aspects that made him appreciate Saudi Arabia more than the UK, he stated:

صحيح ولكني أنا أقصد أشياء ثانية مثل السلام والألفة والمحبة والملابس السعودية

"I meant other things such as greetings, friendliness, love, and Saudi costumes."

Zahir seems to consider Saudi Arabia a friendlier place in comparison to the UK. For example, modes of greetings in Saudi Arabia, where people hug each other or kiss each other on the cheeks (Midgley, 2010), seem to be "friendlier" and show more "love" in comparison to greetings in the UK. Comparisons such as the ones Zahir makes between Saudi Arabia and the UK help to relativise one's own behaviours and beliefs in relation to others' rather than attempting "to decentre and distance oneself from what the processes of socialisation have suggested is natural and unchangeable" (Byram, 1997, p. 35). However, in Zahir's case, this relativisation did not seem to help him to relativise his behaviour and beliefs

when it comes to the modes of greetings and friendliness, but made him cling even more to what "natural" friendliness and modes of greetings should be i.e., done in the Saudi way. Therefore, Zahir seems to have struggled with having the skills to use his existing knowledge about the modes of greetings or the notion of friendliness in Saudi Arabia and to relate them to comparable but different modes of greetings and notions of friendliness in the UK.

The participants in this section showed different forms of self-identifications that are linked to intercultural communication (Dervin, 2012) and arguably influence individuals' intercultural encounters (Hecht et al., 2005; Hortobágyi, 2009). Some of the participants developed more inclusive identifications; other participants developed regional identities; while others clung ever more closely to their national Saudi identification. This variation shows how identifications are ever-changing, constructed by the individual, and inconsistent, rather than being given and pre-fixed, which mixed intersubjectivity attempts to explain (Dervin, 2013). Further, unlike Byram's (1997) argument that individuals, as members of a social group, bring their own cultures and identities to interactions, the data in this section show that Saudi international students bring different and individual identifications to them. Therefore, although some studies on Saudi international students (e.g., Abdel Razek, 2012; Alhazmi & Nyland, 2013; Heyn, 2013; Midgley, 2010) used either essentialist or neoessentialist explanations to describe Saudi international students' identifications, the data in this section show that the existence of a single "Saudi identification" is questionable and somewhat inaccurate.

7.5 Going back to Saudi Arabia

A few participants expressed their feelings about going back to Saudi Arabia after they finish their course of study. Their responses varied. Zainah, for example, said:

كان فيه أحد يعطي برزنتيشن عن سوريا، فاختاروا طالب يعطي برزنتيشن عن سوريا فأنا تكلمت عن البحرين، فقال أنهم مجموعة من الإرهابيين.. المشكلة أني أنا قلت شي وعلقت عليه ففكرت بروح السجن لأن أحد السعوديين علم عني.. يعني جلست أفكر ماذا لو أحد خبر عني؟ ممكن يسجنوني، ممكن ما يكون له مبرر.. لكن ما قدرت أنام ولا آكل بسبب الخوف.. لأني خايفة عندي طفل. مابي أرجع أحس أني حرة هنا

"There was a Saudi student giving a presentation on Syria, while my presentation was on the political issue in Bahrain …the problem is that I got scared that I might go to prison in Saudi Arabia [because of the controversial opinion] … I could not eat or sleep because of fears … I have a baby to look after… I do not want to go back to Saudi Arabia … I feel I am free here"

This remark shows how Zainah is scared of going back to Saudi Arabia because of a political opinion she expressed. Here it may be helpful to provide some brief background on the situation of Bahrain. In 2011, Saudi Arabia sent troops to Bahrain in order to put down the uprising that had started in that small kingdom. Since the majority of the protestors were Shia, Zainah, as a self-identified Shia, seems to have shown her support for the Shia in Bahrain and their uprising. However, she was worried that she could be prosecuted once she goes back to Saudi Arabia for expressing an opinion that may be seen to go against the Saudi government, if someone reported what she had said in her presentation. Further, she fears for her child and her fears affected her ability to eat and sleep.

Another participant who expressed unhappiness about going back to Saudi Arabia is Raneem who states:

“I told my friend that I wanna do some volunteering somewhere, but I'm not sure how my parents will see that … because I found a volunteer position in Kenya and my dad doesn't want me to go there because he wants to me to be at home and have a job. I don't know, I think it'll be a good experience ... but also it could be a reason not to go back to Saudi Arabia … I’m nervous about my future.”

Although Raneem states that volunteering in Kenya would be a “good experience”, the real reason for wishing to go there seems to be that she does not want to go back to Saudi Arabia. Her reasoning seems to come from the restrictions imposed on Saudi women by the government, as she makes this point in another part of the interview:

“In Saudi I can go out and do whatever but there are other things we can't do ... and can you imagine that we can't leave the country without a guardian?”

Having lived most of her life abroad, Raneem worries that her freedom of movement will be significantly restricted once she goes to Saudi Arabia, as she will need a male guardian to accompany her on her travels. Both Zainah and Raneem seem to have something in common: appreciating the freedom that they both experienced abroad. This appreciation is not, however, voiced in the case with Zahir who expressed the opposite feeling:

المرة هذي أحس أني متحمس أرجع للسعودية... بسبب العائلة وروابط العائلة عندنا كثيرة، ولما تخلص وترجع يعتبر هذا إنجاز

“I am really excited to go back to Saudi Arabia because of the strong family relationships we have … also I have finished my studies and this is an achievement on its own.”

Zahir’s comment shows that he reacts quite differently to Zainah and Raneem about going back to Saudi Arabia, as he is excited to go back. Although the constraints on the freedom of expression in Saudi Arabia pertain to both men

and women, Zahir had no reason to be worried since he had not expressed any political views, unlike Zainah. Further, as a male, he has no restrictions on his movements, unlike Saudi women, and, therefore, he did not show any concerns on that count.

The participants' feelings about going back to Saudi Arabia varied in the same way that their intercultural experiences, worldviews, and self-identifications had varied. Each participant's response was constructed by his or her own experiences; each was individual and unique to the participant. Since Zahir was disappointed in the university and the city where he resided, he did not consider people in the UK to be as friendly as people of Saudi Arabia, and as a result did not enjoy his stay in the UK. It is, therefore, not surprising perhaps that he was looking forward to going back to Saudi Arabia. Raneem and Zainah, on the other hand, who experienced the freedom that they lack in Saudi Arabia, were more willing to stay in the UK.

7.6 Conclusions

This chapter focused on the changes in both practices and worldviews that the participants had introduced as a result of their intercultural experiences in the UK. Some of the changes were on a religious level, while other changes were not perceived being connected with religion. These changes varied and, therefore, there was no consensus amongst the participants on whether a certain practice or worldview related to religion or not. Despite these differences, the majority of the participants identified themselves as Muslims, even if they introduced changes into practices or worldviews that they might have perceived as going

against Islam. Those who questioned the core beliefs of some of their religious worldviews or practices did not seem to experience psychological stress, unlike those who did not. We also saw that a number of participants seemed to be uninterested in introducing any changes, whether these changes were related to religion or not, for reasons related to social pressure.

Further, changes occurred not only in the participants' practices or worldviews but also in their self-identifications. Their self-identifications became more complicated after their intercultural communication experience in the UK. New and different ways of identifying themselves intersected with their identities. For example, some chose to conceive of themselves in terms of their common humanity with others rather than through narrower identifications based on nationality, religious affiliation etc., while others chose more exclusive identifies such as being "Saudis", an identification which was at times accompanied by a growing feeling of patriotism. On the other hand, some participants chose to adopt more regional identities for themselves such as describing themselves as Qatifi or Hijazi. Overall, the participants' responses to the idea of returning to Saudi Arabia also varied according to their experiences. Here the data seemed to indicate an inverse relationship, as those who had a positive impression about their intercultural experiences in the UK showed less interest in going back to Saudi Arabia than those who had not. On the other hand, those who had a negative impression about their intercultural experiences in the UK were looking forward to going back to Saudi Arabia.

Therefore, two conclusions can be drawn from the findings in this chapter. First of all, the participants' experiences show that there is a level of diversity amongst Saudi international students that has been ignored or oversimplified in some studies (e.g., Abdel Razek, 2012; Alhazmi, 2012; Heyn, 2013; Jammaz, 1981; Midgley, 2010; Shabeeb, 1996). The changes the participants in this study introduced in their worldviews and identifications are varied and unique to the individual rather than homogeneous and uniform. Therefore, this diversity illustrates the different types of knowledge that they hold about themselves and their social groups.

Secondly, these participants' experiences show how individuals perceive, interact with, and construct their identifications according to their very own experiences, rather than identifications that are given to them in advance and which they bring to the interaction (Byram, 1997), which in turn supports Dervin's (2013) mixed intersubjectivity argument. This self-identification even demotivated some participants from returning to Saudi Arabia, while others were more motivated to go back home. Therefore, this chapter illustrates how the participants' ever changing self-identifications that resulted from their intercultural communication experiences manifested itself, at times, in major changes in their beliefs, meanings, and behaviours (Byram, 1997).

Chapter summary

This chapter had focused on how the overall intercultural communication experiences in the UK had influenced the participants' worldviews, practices and identifications. The findings have shown that some participants introduced

changes in their religious practices but without changing their religious worldviews, other participants changed their worldviews but did not change their religious practices, whereas some participants introduced changes in both of their religious practices and worldviews. On the other hand, some participants introduced various changes in their daily practices, as long as these changes did not contradict with religion, while some participants did not prefer introducing any changes whether these changes contradicted religion or not.

Furthermore, although the participants are self-identified Muslims, some of them intersected other forms of inclusive identifications such as being 'humans' and 'internationals', while other participants clung to a more exclusive regional identification of the areas that they come from in Saudi Arabia, or clung to a national identification of being Saudi nationals. These diverse experiences influenced the participants' willingness to go back to Saudi Arabia. The female participants were not looking forward to going back because of the freedom that they enjoyed in the UK in comparison to Saudi Arabia and therefore they viewed their experiences in the UK to be positive. On the other hand, those who did not perceive their experience in the UK seemed to be more enthusiastic to go back to Saudi Arabia once they finish their studies.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Conclusions

This study has focused on the socially constructed intercultural communication experiences of Saudi international students in the UK, for example, their friendship experiences, interactions with individuals from the opposite gender, incidents that motivated or demotivated them from engaging in intercultural communication, and ways in which the overall experience of being in the UK influenced their identifications and worldviews. In this concluding chapter, I first present the major findings that emerged from this study and show how they have informed the research questions. Next, I discuss the theoretical, methodological, social, and educational implications and contributions of this study. Finally, I address the limitations of the study before suggesting directions for future research.

8.1Summary of the main study

The main, overarching aim of the study was to investigate the intercultural communication experiences of Saudi international students in the UK. I used qualitative research and ethnographic interviews to collect the data. The major findings that emerged were presented across four findings chapters. The first of these chapters, Chapter Four, focused on the friendship experiences of Saudi international students in the UK. Chapter Five centred on the interactions between the participants and individuals from the opposite gender, an area which Alhazmi and Nyland (2013) described as challenging for Saudi international students. The third findings chapter, Chapter Six, explored

incidents that may have motivated or demotivated the participants from experiencing intercultural communication. Finally, Chapter Seven shed light on how the influence of the overall intercultural experience of being in the UK had impacted the participants' identifications, practices, and worldviews. I next discuss how these research findings have informed the research questions.

8.2 The contributions of the study

I now return to the research questions and show how they have been addressed in the study.

RQ1: How do Saudi international students experience friendship in the UK?

The first findings chapter (Chapter Four) explored how the participants experienced friendships with domestic students, international students, and those whom the participants perceived as in-group members, for example, Muslim, Arab, or Saudi individuals. Here we see how Chapter Four illustrates the difficulties of drawing the boundaries between in-group and out-group members and shows that these groupings may not be simply explained, as Byram (1997) argues, in terms of shared meanings, beliefs, and behaviours, or by their country of origin.

At first, the participants viewed domestic students as out-group members with whom they were willing to engage in intercultural communication through forming friendships with them. However, when some of the participants found that they could not form friendship with home students—whether because of the lack of opportunities to meet them, or because home students were not willing to

befriend them (Andrade, 2006) —the participants turned to international students in order to experience intercultural communication with them. The participants thus seemed to view other international students as in-group members because each group shared similar experiences of being abroad (Poynting, 2009). At the same time, however, and despite wishing to engage in intercultural communication with them, the Saudi students who participated in this study viewed other international students as out-group members who had different beliefs, meanings, and behaviours from themselves.

This inconsistency of identification in terms of the Self and Others (i.e., who to consider as in-group or out-group members) adds support to Dervin's (2013) claim for mixed intersubjectivity whereby individuals constantly (re)construct their identificationsrather than adhere to identifications that are defined by shared beliefs, meanings, and behaviours or their countries of origin (Byram, 1997). Further, the participants' inconsistent identification of international students as both in-group and out-group members also supports Laverty's (2003) understanding of phenomenology which suggests that posits that individuals construct their interpretations of their experiences simultaneously while living the moment.

The same analysis applies to the participants' friendship experiences with their Saudi friends. Although they come from the same country of origin, and are likely to share similar meanings, beliefs, and behaviours (Byram, 1997), some participants reported that in-group and out-group categories were more narrowly formed amongst the Saudi attendees in the Saudi Society, and that

these groupings were dependent on the individuals' tribal backgrounds and the region from which they come in Saudi Arabia. Therefore, Chapter Four showed that the boundaries between in-group and out-group categories are difficult to identify and that identification of the Self and Others is (re)constructed within the moment of the lived experience (Laverty, 2003).

RQ2: How, if at all, do Saudi international students' gender worldviews and identifications influence their intercultural communication with individuals from the opposite gender?

The findings from Chapter Five showed that the participants viewed individuals from the opposite gender as out-group members because the segregation of men and women in Saudi Arabia that resulted in restricted interactions between them (Al-Rasheed, 2013). Unlike the study of Alhazmi and Nyland (2013) which argues that Saudi international students find interacting with individuals from the opposite gender challenging, the participants in this study had diverse views on their interactions with individuals from the opposite gender. Some participants did not consider this type of interaction to be a major issue and, therefore, they were open to taking part in these types of interactions, while other participants were also open to being involved in interactions with individuals from the opposite gender as long as some boundaries (i.e., no intimacy and only professional interactions) were maintained between them.

When interacting with individuals from the opposite gender, the participants interacted with their Saudi interlocutors differently than when interacting with non-Saudis. When they interacted with non-Saudi individuals in places such as

the classroom, where interactions with individuals from the opposite gender was almost inevitable, some participants maintained only minimal contact and tried to work only with same-gender individuals. Others interacted with individuals from the opposite gender but engaged in professional interaction that related to work or studying only, and without going beyond that through informal conversation. From a phenomenological perspective, the participants simultaneously (re)constructed different interpretations of their experiences while engaging in the experiences at the same time (Laverty, 2003).

Further, the participants' interactions with Saudi individuals from the opposite gender seemed different. Even those who were open to interacting with individuals from the opposite gender seemed reluctant to interact when those interlocutors were Saudi because of the lack of interactions between men and women in Saudi Arabia, and also for fear of being judged by other Saudi international students (Bilge, 2010). Therefore, despite coming from the same country of origin, and being more likely to share similar meanings, beliefs, and behaviours (Byram, 1997), the participants found interactions with their opposite gender Saudi peers challenging.

RQ3: What are the other experiences that may motivate or demotivate Saudi international students to experience intercultural communication in the UK?

The findings from Chapter 6 focused on experiences that seemed either to have motivated or demotivated the participants from experiencing intercultural communication in the UK. Although the participants did not explicitly state that these experiences motivated or demotivated them from experiencing

intercultural communication, these experiences may have done so because they influenced their perceptions, curiosity, openness, and their willingness to seek out opportunities to engage in intercultural communication with others (Byram, 1997).

When it comes to the demotivating experiences, some participants experienced what they perceived as mistreatment from staff in places such the airport or at the university, while others experienced ill-treatments in the street. Further, not all demotivating experiences were perceived in the same way. The mosque, for example, which is meant to help its attendees to practise their prayers (Dowd-Gailey, 2004), and which was perceived positively by many of the participants, seemed to have demotivated or discouraged some participants who attended it from experiencing intercultural communication outside of the mosque and, therefore, created in-group and out-group divisions. Moreover, the findings also show that the in-group and out-group divisions that the mosque had created between people who attended the mosque and those who did not also occurred within the mosque itself. Despite sharing meanings, beliefs, and behaviours, the mosque attendees—including the participants—had formed divisions based on the sect that they follow, the ability to speak Arabic or not, and finally on a division between men and women. These in-group and out-group categories in the mosque support the ongoing claim that the boundaries between in-groups and out-groups are difficult to identify and cannot be simply explained by shared meanings, beliefs, and behaviours, as Byram (1997) claims.

When it comes to experiences that may have motivated the participants to experience intercultural communication, some participants reported that they experienced religious tolerance in the UK, for example, at airports when they found that there was a designated area for prayers and that their requests to have a female officer check their wives' passports were honoured. One other motivating experience seemed to relate to the experiencing of equality, as some participants felt that they were treated equally in places such as e banks or even in the street. This experience of being treated equally led some to reflect on the situation of labourers or foreigners in Saudi Arabia who are mistreated (Johnson, 2010). The final experience that may have motivated the participants to engage in intercultural communication is related to their experience of freedom in the UK. The male participants reported that they appreciated the freedom of expression, while the female participants reported that they appreciated the freedom of mobility, the freedom to drive their cars, and the freedom to have a boyfriend or girlfriend. Both the male and female participants seemed to appreciate the freedom that they lacked in Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, they appreciated freedom differently one from another and so emphasising the role of one's own history in understanding the world and interpreting the experience, as phenomenology explains (Laverty, 2003).

The findings from Chapter Six did not provide explicit and direct answers for RQ3 because the participants did not state unequivocally that the experiences discussed had either motivated or demotivated them from experiencing intercultural communication. However, these experiences may have influenced the participants' impressions and also their willingness to engage in intercultural

communication from the time of their arrival in the UK and throughout their stay. Further, Chapter Six provides important findings in relation to the roles of faith societies—in this case the university Islamic Society—in encouraging intercultural communication between self-identified Muslim attendees and those who do not attend these societies because they may not subscribe to the same faith. The chapter also provides important findings in relation to the diverse and different religious views that Muslims have about Islam, even though they all identify themselves as Muslims. Therefore, providing a designated place for Muslim students does not, of itself, necessarily lead to successful interactions amongst Muslim students because Muslim students carry different identities based, for example, on their sects e.g., Sunnis and Shias (Al-Rasheed, 1998; Ibrahim, 2006), their gender (Gilliat-Ray, 2010; Lee, 2010; Safi, 2005), and their ability to understand Arabic (Dawisha, 2009; Khalidi, 1991; Kumaraswamy, 2006). As pointed out in Chapter Six, Byram (2013) and Kramsch (1998) argue that individuals who share the same language tend to identify themselves as members of the same social group, which was the case for those who spoke Arabic in the mosque and formed a group of their own.

RQ4: How, if at all does the whole experience of being in the UK impact their worldviews and their identifications?

The findings from Chapter Seven show the impact that the overall experience of being in the UK had on the participants' worldviews and identifications. When it comes to the participants' worldviews a variety of adaptations were evident as some participants introduced some changes related to their religious practices. For example, it was seen that some female participants changed the way in

which they chose to wearthe headscarf, while other Saudi sojourners moved towards accepting the consumption of alcohol. However, these changes did not involve fundamental changes in the participants' religious worldviews, nor result in psychological stress (Byram, 1997). By contrast, some participants introduced changes related to their religious worldviews but not to their practices, while yet others made religious changes related to both their practices and worldviews such as accepting the consumption of non-halal food. From a phenomenological perspective (Laverty, 2003), these examples show the (re)constructed interpretations of the lived experiences that happen at the moment and are influenced by the participants' historical backgrounds (e.g., their family upbringing, or previous experiences).

Further, there were participants who were interested in introducing changes to some of their practices and worldviews as long as these changes did not contradict with their understandings of religion; they, for example, modified their perceptions towards punctuality and domestic work. When it came to making some changes which some participants perceived as contradicting their understandings of religion—such as celebrating Christmas—they preferred not to introduce such changes. In this case, religion functioned as a source of identification that distinguished the participants, as self-identified Muslims, from non-Muslims and, therefore, acted to highlight any practices that distinguished them from others (Byram, 1997).

As regards the participants' identifications and how they had changed as a result of their overall intercultural experiences in the UK, some participants introduced

inclusive identifications such as 'human' and 'international'. Some participants choose to identify themselves in terms of more regional identifications such as 'Hijazi' and 'Qatifi' rather than the broader identification of being Saudi, while other participants clung more to their national Saudi identification. As a result of these identifications, some participants—especially those who showed more national Saudi identification—were looking forward to going back to Saudi Arabia, while some other participants were not as enthusiastic. In this case, the participants' identifications were not as inconsistent as Dervin's (2013) mixed intersubjectivity claims but were tied to a more fixed regional or national identification. Those who identified themselves with regional identifications (i.e., Raneem and Zainah) preferred not to be identified as Saudi nationals because of the history of their regions in Saudi Arabia (i.e., Hijaz and Qatif) and their having been historically independent from the rest of the Saudi state (Al-Rasheed, 2013; Ibrahim, 2006; Steinberg, 2005). Therefore, and as Bauman (2004) points out, when their identifications were overwhelmed by the Saudi state (Steinberg, 2005), their identifications became less fluid.

8.3 Theoretical implications

The findings in this study contribute to Byram's (1997) intercultural communication model in a number of ways. First of all, Byram (1997) defines the attitudes element of the model in terms of "the curiosity and wonder expressed in constant questions and wide-eyed observations, in the willingness to try anything new rather than cling to the familiar" (p. 50). However, he does not include "the tourist" approach where individuals are seeking exotic experience, nor "the commercial" approaches (p. 50) where the main goal is arranging

business and the making of profits. The findings from Chapter Four add a further approach which I refer to as the 'positive impression' approach. In this approach, main interest in and willingness of the participants to engage in intercultural communication was not related to curiosity and 'wide-eyed' observations. Rather, their goal of engagement was to project a positive impression about the social group to such they belonged, for example, identifying themselves as Muslims or Saudis. As with the 'tourist' and 'commercial' approaches, however, the 'positive impression' approach may not lead to successful intercultural communication because, in this case, the participants did not engage with curiosity and openness and a readiness to relativise their own meanings and behaviours as well as suspend their disbeliefs with respect to those of others.

The second area in which the findings contribute to Byram's (1997) model related to its knowledge dimension which focuses on the meanings, beliefs, and behaviours that members of a given social group bring to their interaction with members of another social group. Byram (1997) emphasises that these meanings, beliefs, and behaviours change over time and are not static. However, the findings from Chapter Four and Chapter Five have shown that the different beliefs, meanings, and behaviours that the participants brought to their intercultural communication interaction did not necessarily result from their sojourn in the UK. Rather, they stemmed from the participants' diverse religious and gender worldviews constructed through their socialisation in Saudi Arabia. For example, some participants did not accept being in a place where alcohol was being served, even though they did not consume it themselves, while others were able to accept its presence as long as they did not consume it. Further, the

participants demonstrated different views on what constituted halal and non-halal food and whether to consume it or not.

Moreover, the participants brought different types of meanings, beliefs, and behaviours to their interactions with individuals from the opposite gender. For instance, some participants preferred not to shake handsas a mode of greeting with individuals from the opposite gender, whereas some accepted it as long as the mode of greetingdid not involve hugging or kissing. Some participants went further and refused to have any physical contact with members of the opposite sex even if they were, for instance, senior citizens sitting next to them on a bus.

These examples do not suggest that time had no impact on changing the participants' beliefs, meanings, and behaviours as Byram (1997) argues, since there were some participants who had introduced changes over time, as evidenced in their acceptance of sitting next to individuals from the opposite gender in class, for example. However, the participants' different beliefs, meanings, and behaviours may also possibly result from diverse worldviews shaped by their perceptions of religion, their past experiences and family upbringing, even though they come from the same country of origin.

Thirdly, the data in Chapters Four, Five and Six reveal that the participants were aware of their religious perspectives during intercultural interactions. For example, the participants—as independent individuals— were aware of their perceptions of religion when it came to the presence and the consumption of alcohol, the consumption of nonhalal food, and the restrictions on physical

contact such as shaking hands with individuals from the opposite gender. However, this awareness of the religious perspectives was what hindered some participants from experiencing intercultural communication because some of them deliberately avoided situations where alcohol was present. Therefore, although Byram (1997) includes religion in the "ideological perspectives" (p. 64) that individuals use as rational and explicit standpoints for evaluating events, the findings show that the participants will need to go beyond this awareness of religion to actual questioning for these religious perspectives that, in the majority of cases, are based on mere beliefs rather than reasoning, as Grayling (2012) argues.

Finally, the findings, overall, show that, although Byram's (1997) intercultural competence model explains the participants' intercultural communication experiences in the UK, the model may have some limitations when it comes to the notion of identification. Drawing heavily on Tajfel's (1981) social identity theory, the model suggests that individuals form social groups (i.e., in-groups) according to their countries of origin as well as their shared meanings, beliefs, and behaviours. Once this in-group formation has been established, individuals bring these beliefs, meanings, behaviours, and identities to their intercultural interactions with out-group members. The findings have shown that although this may have been the case with some participants, there were many participants whose identifications of themselves, as well as of others, were shifting and inconsistent and could not be explained by shared meanings, beliefs, and behaviours or even by their country of origin.

Therefore, the study's findings support Dervin's (2013) mixed intersubjectivity paradigm in which "interlocutors' 'play' with different voices (their own and others') goes well beyond what appears at the surface level" (p. 18). He further adds:

> Mixed Intersubjectivity relies on identification, or process rather than objects. What this last approach suggests is that it is important to work on several layers of identity at micro-levels to be able to give a more balanced and a more mixed and complex vision of research participants… not in a naïve 'truthful' sense but in a constructivist fashion which reflects the fact that postmodern individuals are torn apart by contradictory discourses about belonging and not belonging. (p. 20)

The quotation explains some participants' inconsistent and simultaneous in-group and out-group formations with other international, Muslim, and Saudi individuals. Nevertheless, Dervin's point here does not explain some participants' 'truthful', and their perhaps consistent, identification of themselves as being strongly identified as Saudi nationals or Muslims, for example. Therefore, the findings from the study take a stance in between both the theories of Byram (1997) and of Dervin (2013) in that some participants showed complex, shifting, and inconsistent identifications, while others proffered more fixed identifications.

8.4 Methodological implications

The first methodological implication from the study relates to the data collected from the female participants. Since some studies described Saudi women as subordinated individuals within Saudi Arabia (El-Fadl, 2001; Doumato, 1992;

2000; 2001; 2003) who may find interactions with men difficult (Alhazmi & Nyland, 2013), I assumed that conducting interviews with Saudi female participants would be difficult. However, when seeking Saudi female participants to take part in the study, I was approached by more female participants than males. While it was not clear why this was the case, it does showthat Saudi women may not fit the stereotype for being introvert or not easily capable of speaking to men because of their subordination in their home country. Further, some female participants had sufficient trust in me to talk about their personal, dating relationships with other men. What seems to have encouraged them to speak freely was the trust that I had initially built with them before conducting the interviews when I invited a group of them to a public place such as a coffee shop. Overall, the majority of the female participants seemed interested in taking part in the study even though I, as the researcher, am a male. Consequently, it should not be assumed that Saudi women find interacting with men difficult, as Alhazmi and Nyland (2013) argue. Rather, while Mirza (2013) argues that Muslim women challenge hegemonic assumptions about them being oppressed and marginalised, this study has shown that Saudi women also challenge the assumptions that they find interacting with men challenging.

The second methodological implication concerns the ethics form that the participants had to sign before the interview was conducted. The idea of signing a consent form seemed to be intimidating for some participants although they were interested in taking part in the study. Some of those who had initially seemed interested in taking part in the later changed their minds and decided to withdraw from the study. Other participants suggested taking part in the study

but without signing any forms. It seemed that the idea of signing a form was worrying for some of them because they may had thought that the stories that they told during the interviews might have consequences for them and that they would be faced with their consent signatures. However, I had to reassure them and explain that the purpose of these forms was aimed primarily at preserving their rights rather than something that carried future ramifications for them. Further, I also reassured them that no one, apart from me as the researcher, had access to the consent form, and therefore, that their identities and anonymity would be protected. It is, therefore, important to explain the purpose of ethics forms to the participants in any study rather than assum that they are things that they will be familiar with or expect.

8.5 Implications for administrators at UK universities

The diverse intercultural communication experiences and the self-identifications of the participants show that Saudi international students should not be stereotyped by simplistic labels such as being Muslims, coming from a collectivistic culture, or finding interaction with individuals from the opposite gender challenging. Rather, they—as well as any other non-Saudi international students—should be viewed as independent individuals who reconstruct their self-identifications independently from one another, rather than viewing them as a homogeneous group.

The findings from Chapter Four have shown that some participants were willing to engage in intercultural communication with all students, whether domestic or international students. However, the administrators at the university

accommodation placed Saudis in halls that consisted only of international students, which implies that both the Saudi and the international students were perceived as a one homogeneous group. As a result, the participants had little opportunity to engage with many home students because they lived in different halls. Therefore, university administrators need to be aware of the heterogeneity of international students and should not assume that accommodating international students in one place is the best choice for them.

Further, universities' faith-based societies— such as the mosque—are meant to provide their followers with any help they may need during their sojourns, such as facilitating meetings with individuals who may share similar beliefs, meanings, and behaviours. However, they also seem to contribute to demotivating their followers from experiencing intercultural communication. The findings from this study have shown that the mosque's ability to createa 'comfort zone' where some participants could meet their Muslim peers, may, inadvertently, have demotivated some of them from experiencing intercultural communication with non-Muslim individuals outside of the mosque.

Although university faith societies are meant to be inclusive, even those who do not follow the same faith, university administrators should start to adopt strategies to encourage faith societies to be more inclusive by, for example, rewarding societies that have a larger number of attendees who come from outside that particular society's faith. Doing so may encourage faith societies at universities to expend extra effort on making sure their events and activities reach a broader audience rather than simply targeting a specific audience.

8.6 Implications for the authorities

The authorities in the UK should take verbal assaults against international students more seriously, even when the offenders are under age. The findings from this study have shown that the participants constructed either positive or negative knowledge about the UK according to their positive or negative experiences. Those who experienced physical or verbal assaults and complained to the police but found their complaints were not taken seriously—because of the age of the offenders—may have concluded that they were not welcomed in the UK, while those who encountered positive experiences formed more positive assumptions.

Saudi and other international students studying abroad are not immune from verbal or physical street assaults. Holmes and O'Neill (2010), for instance, reported in their study that Chinese students in New Zealand were also subject to such assaults. Therefore, as Marginson et al. (2010) argue, the safety of international students should be a high priority for countries such as the UK which is a popular destination for international students.

8.7- Implications for the Saudi Cultural Bureaux abroad

Saudi Cultural Bureaux should encourage Saudi international students to experience intercultural communication as a major objective—alongside gaining their academic qualifications—of studying abroad. Although this objective is mentioned in some Saudi Cultural Bureaux's websites, it is mentioned very briefly as 'cultural exchange' without any further explanation of what that concept means. Therefore, Saudi Cultural Bureaux should elaborate upon on this

objective and encourage Saudi international students to engage in intercultural communication experiences while they are abroad. This goal might be achieved if Saudi Cultural Bureaux encouraged the Saudi Societies, which are present in almost every UK university, to organise more inclusive events and activities for non-Saudi individuals, as suggested in the previous discussion on universities' faith societies.

8.8 Implications for intercultural education and internationalization of the curricula in Saudi Arabia

As indicated in the findings chapters, many participants seemed to use religion as a framework that determined the limits of their intercultural engagement. For example, based on their religious perceptions, some participants refused to consume nonhalal food; others refused to be present in a place where alcohol is served; and others refused to shake hands with individuals from the opposite gender. The intense formal religious education that occupies a significant part in the national curriculum in Saudi Arabia and teaches that the Wahhabi sect is the only "true faith" of Islam (Prokop, 2003, p. 80), while other sects and religions to be less so, may have contributed, in various degrees, to the intensity of the participants' religious beliefs which seemed to have limited their intercultural engagement.

When Saudi Arabia introduced 'Citizenship Education', which is only taught by Saudi teachers, into the national curriculum to instil Saudi national values, that are inclusive for all citizens regardless of their sectarian or regional backgrounds, it focused mainly on equipping school pupils with Saudi national

patriotic values with little focus on intercultural education (Al-Abdulkarim & Al-Nassar, 2006). Therefore, the national curriculum in Saudi Arabia may need to pay more attention to intercultural education (Al-Abdulkarim & Al-Nassar, 2006) as well as the internationalisation which is pivotal (Jones & Killick, 2007) to the curriculum. This goal may be achieved by, for example, employing international teachers (Jones, 2011) rather than employing only Saudi teachers.

8.9 Implications for teachers in the UK and Saudi international students

The findings from this study have shown how some participants found interaction with individuals from the opposite gender difficult in the classroom. However, this does not mean that teachers should assume that Saudi international students are less willing to interact with individuals from the opposite gender because it was evident that some participants willingly engaged in this type of interaction.

Therefore, university teachers should negotiate with Saudi international students to see if they do prefer not being sat next to individuals from the opposite gender in the classroom, rather than working on the assumption that they always do or do not wish to sit in mixed-sex groups. Such negotiation may lead both teachers and students to reach a solution that meets their preferences, as demonstrated in Chapter 5 when Sameer's one-on-one female teacher brought another teacher to the classroom, which seemed to help Sameer to feel less distressed. Therefore, university teachers and Saudi international students

should be encouraged to talk about any issue in the classroom that may impede their learning process.

8.10 Limitations of the study

Despite its contributions and implications this study has a number of limitations. First of all, since it is a qualitative study, the number of the participants is small—15 participants. Therefore, the findings are not generalisable and they cannot be taken to represent all Saudi international students. However, in naturalistic enquiry, the generalisability of the research shifts to transferability (Guba, 1981; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In transferability, the researcher has to provide rich descriptions about the researched area and it is for the reader to decide whether or not the research is transferable to other contexts. Having provided rich descriptions of the lived intercultural experiences of Saudi international students in the UK, future researchers can decide whether the findings are transferrable to other settings.

The second limitation of the study is related to the reliability of the stories that the participants provided. In other words, it is not possible to know whether the participants were telling the truth about their experiences or not (Brewer, 2000). However, my role, as a researcher, did not involve investigating whether the participants were telling 'true stories' or not because attempting to do so may raise ethical issues, since participants may not be willing to share some of their personal stories (Clark & Sharf, 2007).

The third limitation of the study can be linked to qualitative research in general, i.e., the subjectivity of the research (Hammersley, 1998). My interpretations of the data are highly subjective. However, as discussed in Chapter Three, I used 'member checks'. These help the researcher to verify the data (Talburt, 2004) by enabling the participants to react to the findings and the researcher's interpretations (Jones et al., 2006). Further, I asked the participants to preview my interpretations of the data during the actual interviews. Nevertheless, my subjective interpretation as a researcher is likely to be present in interpreting the data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Whealthy, 2006).

The fourth limitation of the study is related to the fact that I am a Saudi international student, as are the participants. Some participants expressed their concernat being judged by other Saudi students if they did not fit a certain image of what it means to be 'Saudi', a concern which is likely to have put pressure on them (Campbell, 2000). However, there was no reason why the participants would have made me an exception to other Saudi individuals and, therefore, they may also have felt pressured around me. As discussed in Chapter Three, building a relationship with them before conducting the interviews may have helped to ease any pressure with the participants (Kvale, 2006).

The final limitation of the study is related to Chapter 6. It focuses on the motivating and demotivating experiences of the participants to experience intercultural communication. The limitation lies in the fact that the majority of the participants did not explicitly state that the experiences that they reported motivated them or demotivated them to engage in intercultural communication,

even though that seemed to be the case. Nevertheless, since I use Byram's (1997) model to analyse the data, these experiences may have fed into the participants' attitudes and knowledge when engaged in intercultural interaction.

8.11 Directions for future research

This study has shown that Saudi international students have different, and often inconsistent, shifting, and ever-changing self-identifications, and different worldviews that are influenced by different experiences. The findings also show that they are not a homogeneous Muslim group that have a collectivistic culture, or a group where women are subordinated. Further research might investigate these identifications, especially eschewing essentialist ideas of Saudi international students –both males and females—and thus focus on each student as an independent individual.

Secondly, future research on including intercultural education and internationalisation in the curriculum in Saudi Arabia is recommended. Although this was one of the objectives in the study of Al-Abdulkarim and Al-Nassar (2006), they emphasise maintaining what they refer to as "Saudi identity" (p. 8). This emphasis may prove problematic since strengthening one's identity may lead to "closing up of the individual" (Dervin, 2012, p. 183). Therefore, any research on the introduction of intercultural education in the Saudi national curriculum should pay attention to the fluidity of Saudi students' identifications.

Thirdly, is conducting research on universities' faith societies is recommended, particularly if plans to make them more inclusive, as discussed in the

implications of this study, have been set in motion. Similar research is also recommended to investigate whether international students, and in particularSaudi international students, would have more opportunities to experience intercultural communication with domestic as well as other international students if they were accommodated in more ethnically diverse halls of residence.

Further, since the UK is a popular destination for international students (Marginson et al., 2010), investigating whether those who experienced physical or verbal assaults would recommend the UK as a study destination to other international students. In addition, it may be important to investigate whether there is a correlation between the safety of the place and the growth of the number of international students on the one hand, and also the insecurity of the place and the decline in international students enrolments.

Finally, Taylor and Albasri (2014) point out that Saudi international students are likely to bring back to Saudi Arabia what they learnt from their intercultural communication experiences thus "expanding the potential for Saudi Arabia to show significant cultural changes in the future" (p. 117). However, this seems to be a mere assumption since there has been no study on this topic. Therefore, it would be interesting for future research to investigate how alumni Saudi international students engage in Saudi Arabia after years of studying abroad, and whether any changes in their worldviews and identifications are sustained or not.

8.12 Conclusion to the study

By providing a detailed description of the intercultural communication experiences of Saudi international students in the UK, this study has contributed to practice and research in a number of ways. First, it has deconstructed the essentialist descriptions of Saudi international students as being Muslimsfrom a collectivistic culture in which women are subordinated. Secondly, the study added some theoretical contribution to Byram's (1997) intercultural communication competence model as well as to Dervin's (2013) mixed intersubjectivity since it takes a middle stance between both theories when it comes to identification. Further, the study brings attention to the roles of university faith societies and whether they work to facilitate communication amongst their attendees, or function as separating mechanisms between the attendees themselves and also those who do not attend. Finally, the study highlights the complexity and fluidity of Saudi individuals' identifications, thus providing grounds for the implementation of intercultural education in the Saudi national curriculum, or any other future research agendas.

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Appendix 1: Ethics form

University of Durham School of Education

Department Code of Practice on Research Ethics

The University of Durham School of Education believes that all educational research should be conducted within an ethic of respect for persons, knowledge, democratic values and quality of educational research.

Code of Conduct: Responsibility to students and participants

1. The securing of participants' voluntary informed consent prior to research is considered the norm for the conduct of research. Rare cases of proposals where the research design does not make informed consent appropriate (e.g. covert research or deception studies) must be fully scrutinised by the full ethics committee.

2. Informants have a right to remain anonymous. Researchers are responsible for taking appropriate precautions to protect the confidentiality of both participants and data. Where data is kept on a computer the researchers will be responsible for ensuring that the requirements of the Data Protection Act are fulfilled.

3. In the case of interviews involving children below school leaving age, permission should be obtained from the school and if they so suggest, the parents.

4. When filming or recording, researchers should make it clear to research participants the purpose of the recording and to whom the recording will be communicated.

5. Researchers should not deceive or coerce their students into serving as research subjects or assistants. They should not represent a student's work as their own.

6. In planning, and in the conduct and reporting of research, researchers should act in ways that ensure that no participant is disadvantaged by their age, class, 'race', gender, sexual orientation, religious or political beliefs or disability.

7. Sexual and racial harassment are recognised as abuses of power. Researchers have a duty to refrain from, and actively oppose such behaviour. Researchers should not use the inequalities of power which characterise the tutor – student, researcher – respondent relationship to obtain personal, sexual, economic or professional advantages.

8. Where a tutor/supervisor enters into an intimate or sexual relationship with their student, the emotional involvement, whether reciprocal or otherwise, is liable to compromise evaluation and assessment. Particular dangers arise in post-graduate supervision where the relationship between student and supervisor is necessarily one-to-one, protracted and supportive. In any such cases it is the tutor/supervisors responsibility to ensure that an alternative tutor/supervisor is found for the student.

Responsibility to the research profession

Educational researchers should;

1. Avoid fabrication, falsification or misrepresentation of evidence, data, findings or conclusions.

2. In case study and evaluative research, actively seek and include data and evidence provided by all relevant stakeholders.

3. Report their findings to all relevant stakeholders and avoid selective communication of findings.

4. Report research conceptions, procedures, results, and analysis accurately and in sufficient detail for other researchers to understand and interpret them.

5. Never *knowingly*, omit reference to any relevant work by others.

Responsibility to research assistants/partners

1. All employees should be properly informed of the terms and conditions of their employment. Care should be taken not to underpay part-time staff or to use them or secretarial staff for duties for which they are not being paid.

2. All those involved in research should be aware of the intellectual property rights with respect to the data collected or to which they have access. The general principle of academic freedom means that freedom to analyse and publish the results of research should only be limited in exceptional circumstances.

3. Researchers should never present other people's work as their own, nor hold up the publication of work by others so that their own gets precedence.

4. Researchers should acknowledge fully all of those who contributed to their research and publications.

5. Attribution and ordering of authorship and acknowledgements should accurately reflect the contributions of all main participants in both research and writing processes, including students.

6. Material quoted verbatim from the writing of others must be clearly identified and referenced to the author.

Relationship with Funding Agencies

The University of Durham School of Education code of practice governs ethical principles and establishes appropriate standards of academic freedom, including the right to disseminate research findings. While this code should be observed

within all research it is particularly important in respect to contract research. The code should be honoured by researchers in the negotiation of contractual arrangements put forward by funding agencies, and in the carrying out of these obligations once they have been agreed.

1. The aims and sponsorship of research should always be made explicit by researchers.

2. Researchers should not agree to conduct research that conflicts with academic freedom, nor any other principles included in these guidelines. They should not agree to any undue or questionable influence by government or other funding agency in the conduct, analysis or reporting of research.

3. Academic staff should not engage in contract research without agreement by the institution and the institution will not compel academic staff to engage in any particular contract research.

EXAMPLE CONSENT FORM

TITLE OF PROJECT:

(The participant should complete the whole of this sheet himself/herself)

	Please cross out as necessary
Have you read the Participant Information Sheet?	YES / NO
Have you had an opportunity to ask questions and to discuss the study?	YES / NO
Have you received satisfactory answers to all of your questions?	YES / NO
Have you received enough information about the study?	YES / NO
Who have you spoken to? Dr/Mr/Mrs/Ms/Prof.	
Do you consent to participate in the study?	YES/NO
Do you understand that you are free to withdraw from the study: * at any time and * without having to give a reason for withdrawing and * without affecting your position in the University?	YES / NO

Signed ..... **Date** .....

(NAME IN BLOCK LETTERS) .....

NOTES:

1) **If you intend to make tape recordings or video recordings of participants, your consent form should also include a section indicating that participants are aware of, and consent to, any use you intend to make of the recordings after the end of the project.**

2) **The information sheet should contain the statement 'Approved by Durham University's Ethics Advisory Committee' when approval has been given.**

Appendix 2: Pilot Study interview protocols

السؤال الأول:
قبل القدوم إلى بريطانيا ماذا كانت مشاعرك وأفكارك عن:
1 الناس في بريطانيا (قيمهم، تقاليدهم، حياتهم العامة...إلخ)
2 الثقافة البريطانية (الدين أو العادات...الخ)
3 النظام التعليمي في بريطانيا (الاختلاط في الفصل، اللغة، التقييم.... إلخ)

هل تغيرت رؤيتك من أن أتيت ولماذا؟

السؤال الثاني:
صف خبرتك الأولى في بريطانيا، أول شعور لك. ذكرى حدثت لك؟

السؤال الثالث: البيئة التعليمية
اذكر لي قصة عن:
1 أول تجربة لك في فصل مختلط
2 محادثة بينك وبين شخص من دين آخر، ثقافة أخرى

السؤال الرابع: الحياة الاجتماعية
1 كيف تمضي وقت فراغك؟
2 صف أصدقائك المقربين منك الذين تمضي معهم معظم وقتك
3 هل لديك أصدقاء بريطانيين أو من جنسيات أخرى؟ أم تفضل أصدقاء من نفس دينك، جنسيتك...إلخ. كيف ولماذا؟
4 هل حدثت لك تجربة أن الناس الآخرين كان لديهم أسلوب أو طريقة تفكير مختلفة عنك وتختلف عن ثقافتك وقيمك؟ كيف وماذا حدث؟ كيف تعاملت مع التجربة وكيف كان شعورك؟ هل حاولت التكيف؟ أم اعتزلتهم؟

السؤال الخامس: صف شعورك وتجربتك وماذا حدث حول التالي:

في الجانب الجيد:
1 سعادة
2 صداقة
3 نجاح
4 أخرى

في الجانب الغير جيد
1 اشتياق للوطن
2 وحدة
3 خوف
4 حيرة
5 أخرى

السؤال السابع: أي شيء تريد إضافته؟

1- Perceptions about being in the UK (before coming)

What perceptions did you have of:

a. People in the UK (e.g. their values, attitudes, social life… etc)
b. UK Culture (e.g. religion, traditions, habits… etc)
c. UK education system (mixed classes, language, assessment… etc)

Have these perceptions changed, challenged or remained the same?

2- Describe your first experience, impression when you arrived to the UK (what is a significant memory or experience for you? Describe it.)

3- Learning environment:

Tell me a story about:

a. Your first experience in a mixed class.
b. A conversation with a classmate from another religion, culture or nationality

4- Social life:

a. Tell me how you spend your spare time.
b. Describe your friends that you socialize with.
c. Do you have friends from the UK or international students? Or you prefer to socialize with people from your group (e.g. Muslims, Saudis…etc)?
d. Have you had any experience in which people had a different way of behavior? Describe what happened and how you felt or did.
e. In your opinion, how do British people communicate with others?

5- Key words

Describe when you have had this feeling. What happened? What did you do?

On the light side:

a. Happiness
b. Friendship
c. Success
d. Other

On the dark side:

a. Homesickness
b. Loneliness
c. Fear
d. Confusion
e. Other

6- Tell me about an awkward/negative/positive experience you have had in the UK?

7- Anything else you would like to tell me about?

Appendix 3: First interviews protocols

السؤال الأول:
قبل القدوم إلى بريطانيا ماذا كانت مشاعرك وأفكارك عن:
1 الناس في بريطانيا (قيمهم، تقاليدهم، حياتهم العامة...إلخ)
2 الثقافة البريطانية (الدين أو العادات...الخ)
3 النظام التعليمي في بريطانيا (الاختلاط في الفصل، اللغة، التقييم.... إلخ)

هل تغيرت رؤيتك من أن أتيت ولماذا؟

السؤال الثاني:
صف خبرتك الأولى في بريطانيا، أول شعور لك. ذكرى حدثت لك؟

السؤال الثالث: البيئة التعليمية
اذكر لي قصة عن:
1 أول تجربة لك في فصل مختلط
2 محادثة بينك وبين شخص من الجنس الآخر، دين آخر، ثقافة أخرى

السؤال الرابع: الحياة الاجتماعية
1 كيف تمضي وقت فراغك؟
2 صف أصدقائك المقربين منك الذين تمضي معهم معظم وقتك
3 هل لديك أصدقاء بريطانيين أو من جنسيات أخرى؟ أم تفضل أصدقاء من نفس جنسك، دينك، جنسيتك...إلخ. كيف ولماذا؟
4 هل حدثت لك تجربة أن الناس الآخرين كان لديهم أسلوب أو طريقة تفكير مختلفة عنك وتختلف عن ثقافتك وقيمك؟ كيف وماذا حدث؟ كيف تعاملت مع التجربة وكيف كان شعورك؟ هل حاولت التكيف؟ أم اعتزلتهم؟

السؤال الخامس: صف شعورك وتجربتك وماذا حدث حول التالي:

في الجانب الجيد:
1 سعادة
2 صداقة
3 نجاح
4 أخرى

في الجانب الغير جيد
1 اشتياق للوطن
2 وحدة
3 خوف
4 حيرة
5 أخرى

السؤال السابع: أي شيء تريد إضافته؟

Interview

1- Perceptions about being in the UK (before coming)

What perceptions did you have of:

d. People in the UK (e.g. their values, attitudes, social life… etc)
e. UK Culture (e.g. religion, traditions, habits… etc)
f. UK education system (mixed classes, language, assessment… etc)

Have these perceptions changed, challenged or remained the same?

2- Describe your first experience, impression when you arrived to the UK (what is a significant memory or experience for you? Describe it.)

3- Learning environment:

Tell me a story about:

c. Your first experience in a mixed class.
d. A conversation with a classmate from the other gender/another religion, culture or nationality

4- Social life:

f. Tell me how you spend your spare time.
g. Describe your friends that you socialize with.
h. Do you have friends from the UK or international students? Or you prefer to socialize with people from your group (e.g. Muslims, Saudis, males/females)?
i. Have you had any experience in which people had a different way of behavior? Describe what happened and how you felt or did.
j. In your opinion, how do British people communicate with others?

5- Key words

Describe when you have had this feeling. What happened? What did you do?

On the light side:

e. Happiness
f. Friendship
g. Success
h. Other

On the dark side:

f. Homesickness
g. Loneliness
h. Fear
i. Confusion
j. Other

6- Tell me about an awkward/negative/positive experience you have had in the UK?

7- Anything else you would like to tell me about?

Appendix 4: Second interviews protocols

السؤال الأول:
هل يوجد أي شيء تريد زن تخبرني به، أو تسأل عنه؟ هل يوجد أي شيء تريد الحديث عنه؟ أي شيء يقلقك أو تخشى الحديث عنه؟

السؤال الثاني:
كيف تشعر الآن عن نفسك؟

السؤال الثالث:
هل تشعر أنك تغيرت أو أشياء اختلفت فيك منذ آخر مقابلة؟

السؤال الرابع:
ماذا تعلمت من الطريقة التي يتعامل بها الطلاب البريطانيين أو الانترناشنال؟

السؤال الخامس:
هل غيرت أية ممارسات تقوم بها لأجل أن تتكيف في بعض الحالات مع الآخرين؟ مثلا تغيير في عادات الطعام، طريقة الحديث، تغيير في لبس الحجاب مثلا؟

السؤال السادس:
خل حدثت لك تجربة في التالي وماذا حدث؟
1 حرية (سواء حرية التعبير، حرية الديانات، حرية الممارسات...إلخ)
2 حقوق الإنسان
3 عزلة ووحدة
4 أخرى

السؤال السابع:
من خلال تجربتك في بريطانيا، هل لاحظت على نفسك تطور أو ربما صعوبات في مقدرتك للتواصل والحوار مع الطلاب البريطانيين أو الإنترناشنال سواء داخل الفصل أو خارج الفصل؟

السؤال الثامن:
هل عملت صداقات جديدة سواء مع بريطانيين أو انترناشنال منذ آخر مرة تقابلنا؟

السؤال التاسع:
في قسمك أو كليتك، هل تشعر أنك انتميت إليهم كفرد من مجموعة أو تشعر بأنك دخيل أو معزول عنهم؟

السؤال العاشر:
بما أنك أمضيت كل هذه الفترة في بريطانيا، ماهو رأيك في الثقافة البريطانية وبريطانيا بشكل عام مقارنة بأول قدوم لك؟ هل تغيرت أفكارك؟ كيف؟

السؤال الحادي عشر:
هل هناك أية عادات دينية أو قيم اجتماعية وثقافية تخليت عنها من خلال تواجدك في بريطانيا؟ وأي منها لازلت محافظ عليها؟ ما الذي يجعلك تحافظ على بعضها وتتخلى عن الآخر؟

السؤال الثاني عشر:
لو بإمكانك أن تشرح لنفسك أول ما وصلت عن هذه التغييرات، فما الذي ستقوله؟

السؤال الثالث عشر:
كيف تشعر عائلتك وأصدقائك والمقربون منك في السعودية حول هذه التغييرات؟ إيجابية أم سلبية؟ هل تذكر أي شيء من هذا القبيل؟

السؤال الرابع عشر:
ماهي الأشياء التي تقدرها وتحبها في بريطانيا وأشياء لم تحبها من خلال تجربتك هنا؟ كيف تعاملت مع هذه الأشياء؟

أي شيء تريد إضافته؟

1- Is there anything you would like to ask or tell me about? Is there anything you find confusing or worrying and afraid to talk to anyone about?

2- How are you feeling now about yourself?

3- Are you feeling any different from the last time we met? Could you explain please?

4- What have you learned from the way UK or international students behave?

5- Have you changed any of your way of behavior in order to cope with the others? (e.g. the way of speaking, eating, compromising the headscarf… etc)

6- Have you had any experiences of the following words? Describe what exactly happened?

- Freedom (e.g. freedom of speech, freedom from social or religious restrictions… etc)
- Human rights
- Isolation

7- Have you noticed any changes, whether improvement or more difficulties, in your ability to communicate with British or international students whether outside or inside the classroom?

8- Have you made any new friends whether British or international students since our last interview?

9- In your school, department or college, do you feel you belong to them as a community? Or you feel something else? Explain.

10- Having spent sometime in the UK, what do you think now of the UK culture comparing to when you first arrived? Have your ideas changed about it? In what way? Could you describe in details please.

11- What are the cultural (including religious) values that you have given up since you arrived here and what are the values that you still have maintained? Why have you maintained some and given up others?

12- Imagine you had to give an explanation to yourself when you first arrive from your perspective now, what would you say? What would you tell yourself about the changes?

13- What do you family think about these changes? Positive or negative? Do you remember any experiences happened? Explain please.

14- What things do you values here in the UK? What things do you values less as a result of your experience? How did you deal with these values? (e.g. have you gain any)

Anything you'd like to add?

Appendix 5: Initial analysis codes

First interview initial codes:

Zahir

Data extract	Coded for
I had this impression about British people that they are not as friendly as American or Canadian people and they are too proud of their history and culture.	1. A prejudice he had made about British people before he came to the UK.
When I came here, I found people just as friendly as Americans or Canadians, not different at all especially in smaller cities like Durham.	1. Changed his mind about it when he experienced it.
I never had any issues about mixed classes although I studied in segregated classes in SA	1. No issues with mixed classes in the UK
Learning in the UK is very autonomous unlike SA where 90% of what we study in the class will come in the exam. I like it here even though I find it difficult to adapt to this new system but I like it especially I want to do a PhD and therefore I need to get used to it.	1. A struggle in the beginning about the education system in the UK then starting to adapt to it.
Most of my friends are Saudis or Arabs because I'm doing an MA in translation and few friends from China who I met during the Presessional Course in the summer. I do not have any British friends as I find it difficult to make a friendship with them because they tend to spend time with each other and do not seem to be interested in making friends with other people. Even in the college accommodation, all my corridor mates are Chinese, which stops me from getting to know any British.	1. A willingness to get to know British people and experience their daily life but there is a frustration from the participant's side that he could not do so because of the nature of his course that consists of SA students or Arabs as well as his accommodation that consists of 13 Chinese students.
I knew before I came to the UK that there will be a lot of differences between our cultures such as drinking and having girlfriends which is not the case in SA. However, I did want to see	1. The participant is aware of the differences between his Saudi culture and the UK culture but he is willing to see these differences as supportive for communication rather than barriers.

these differences and I don't want them to change their life styles for me; I would like making friends with them despite any differences. I don't mind making friends with people with tattoos and piercings. I don't want them to change; I want them to be as they are.	
When British people meet each other or meet other people, they tend to keep their greetings very brief unlike in SA when people ask about each other's families and health with a lot of 'passion'. I think the British have failed in maintaining good social relationships with each other unlike us in SA. I cannot live isolated from people without 'passionate' relationship and regular visits to our relatives. I want to have people who I love and they love me and I care about them and they care about me. But as I mentioned earlier, it is not the case here. Here people only care about materials, so if there is a benefit from being nice to me or even to their relatives they surely will be nice. They only care about themselves.	The participants does not approve how British people, according to his observation, way of social relationships with their families and friends and genuinely believe that the way it works in SA is 'better'.
It was difficult for me to spend the Eid in the UK away from my family. I missed my relatives and friends back in SA. Although the Eid here in Durham was nice and met different people but it is still not as nice as you have your family and friends around you.	Repeating the notion of 'family and relatives' in his speech.
Speaking about homesickness, what makes me feel better about is meeting other SA students or anybody who shares similar backgrounds to yours because they can understand you and have more empathy more than any other people.	The participant makes a distinction between having British or international friends, who can help him to explore more about other cultures, and friends who come from the same background who can help him to overcome any problems he may encounter.
Thanks God I have only met nice and honest people even who are not Muslims. In fact, I feel like they have Islamic morals and values even though they are not.	The Islamic identity appears clearly in his sentence as a model of good values such as honesty.
I'm disappointed that 90% of the	The willingness to get to know and

people I have met are Chinese. Don't get me wrong, they are lovely people but what I meant is that I want to see other people from different backgrounds. I want to see British, German, Chinese, and Japanese… etc. I wouldn't be happy either if the majority of the people I have met were British or German or even Saudis! I want to explore more bout other people.	discover other cultures.
I have been here in the UK and I feel there are a number of things have changed in my character. For instance, in the UK, you see British people working as cleaners or waiters/waitresses, which is considered to be very low jobs in SA, I'm afraid and cannot see it happening in the near future. But if you think about it, without cleaners, who is going to clean? Nonetheless, these jobs in the UK are still respected and fine which has made me respect British people even more.	There is some renegotiating going on in which the participant started to rethink again about the social status of such jobs comparing to SA.
I don't think I have changed a lot in my acceptance to the "others" because most of my friends were from India, Pakistan, Morocco or Tunisia. I feel that I have always been like that. However, I don't think I would've been the same if I hadn't had such friends because I think when individuals are exposed to "the other" they will develop such sensitivity toward accepting them. Otherwise, it wouldn't be difficult because these individuals are only used to what certain habits that they cannot think to change. Besides, I think my short stay in Canada has helped me as well.	The participant emphasizes the importance of being exposed to the other in order to develop the sense of accepting the others.

Raneem

the first when I came was in 1997 I was	The participant tells her experience

9 to 10 years old I lived in London for 5 years... hmmm... I was living in Riyadh at that point and before that I came from Greece.. so I'm saying that because it relates to how I was living in the west and came back to Saudi then moved back. so during Saudi there was kind of cultural problem...hmmm faced a little bit of problem.. but I was very young that I didn't notice many things.. but you I know I just wanted to go back to the west..	living in the west and how SA was a difficult place to live in when she went back.
I always loved British people... I love the British accent... hmmm.. I .... I..... I thought that the whole drinking thing that would be a problem for me, I didn't think that I'd be socialising with them cos I don't drink and they do.. hmmmm... I always was afraid of facing racism... especially now cos after what's happening in the world... hmmm... a bit of close mindness... some people don't even know where Saudi Arabia is in the map.	The participants shows her interests to get to know the British culture and to make British friends but she was concerned not to be in situations in which she has to drink or to encounter racism.
yes them also not being friendly... I thought were not... they always say the British are not like machines and they don't care about other people... they will not help you in the street and so on... but this is not true..	The participant had a prejudice about the unfriendliness of British people.
we have family.. people here are not really connected to their families a lot... you hear people haven't seen their mums 5 years and they live just an hour... like if go back to Saudi...I have to see... I just can't go to one of my uncles' houses.. I have to to all of them.. including my antis... and have a meal here.. but here they don't have this pressure in a way... it makes me sad that people lack this... they are the support system that I need... no matter what your independent your work you have your money... for me I always need to go back to them...not necessarily telling me what to do but guiding me... I can choose to listen and not to... but always happy to just hear them supporting me...	She doesn't seem to approve the lack of family relationships, according to her, in the UK. On the other hand, she seems to approve the notion and the role of the family in her life.

I didn't face a problem for me it was very natural... but I know other people... they find difficult to some extent... like some cousins who moved to the US... she didn't know how to like be friends with guys.... she find it a bit awkward position in a way... she wasn't sure how to take it... and I have met some people in my university... she wouldn't sit next to a male student... she actually got up of her seat and sat somewhere else.. and I think that..... I think it's really rude and disrespectful... to the class and to the person... I don't like that... I think it's very disrespectful... yeah	She hasn't faced any issues with mixed classes because of her life in the west. But she talks about other people, especially SA females, who have issues with that and she doesn't approve it.
I still don't have a lot of British people as friends... I have Europeans... the.... hmmm... they don't really mixing with us a lot... we see them in the department or in my classes and we talk in class... but they just leave straight away.. and I feel that they don't wanna mix in with foreigners a lot... I mean... I know they are friendly don't get me wrong... but they don't come to the events... they have their own lives..	She doesn't have British friends and socializes with Europeans instead.
I have this friend who I feel very judgmental.. she doesn't have the ability to understand that people have different cultures, opinons, points and beliefs... but they I end up with this friend who keeps calling me hypocrite cos I don't wear the Hijab..	She struggles with the concept of headscarf even by non Muslims.
but you know... you don't..... you don't attack people for their beliefs.. it's important to respect... if you think it's ridiculous like... if Hindus don't eat cows... or.... they all have their own opinions and beliefs.. you don't attack them... and for me it was actually very surprising that she comes from the west and she doesn't have that idea... they just respect and that's it.. and she keeps attacking me as an individual and as a Muslim... so... I don't know...	She doesn't approve being criticized or (not respected) because of her not wearing the headscarf. At the same time, she emphasizes the importance of respecting other different beliefs and cultures.
she thinks Islam oppresses women and wearing the headscarf is wrong cos it's not fair... men don't wear it and women	The Islamic identity is present in her sentences even though she doesn't understand much about it.

wear it... but she likes the understanding... and I do... I mean... something we don't understand about Islam and.... I mean.... if you have the faith you accept it...	
she wants to push me to drinking and so on and I think that's very disrespectful... and she calls me a hypocrite cos I refer to myself as a Muslim and as a believer... but she's like you don't wear the headscarf... you hang out with guys or... you dance or whatever... but I'm like... I don't know how to explain it to her… I'm also a human and I wanna do things cos of my needs... or yeah... what I wanna do... I try to balance it... and we all try to be good people... and for me.... Islam is just a way of life... and I try to mix it together with my life... you know... I.... I.... I.... I don't know... I sometimes refer to myself as a conservative... but conservative compared to whom? that's the question... yeah.. so I feel like I'm just in between.. trying to balance things out...hahaha... you know...	Struggling with the her Islamic identity and her life in the west.
yes most of them Europeans actually... Germans... Italians… I don't really hang out with people who come from the same backgrounds like Arabs.... it's not that I have a problem with them or I'm racist or whatever.. it's just... me growing up in the west I face a lot of problems being not accepted and judged and I don't like to be ... obviously none wants to be judged but people judge how I look or how I act with people because they grew up in SA and... for them it's not ok... like for example having guy friends or hanging out in the bar.. they are like "what are you doing in the bar" they assume that I drink or whatever and... it's not about the drinking thing... I don't care... but for them it's a big deal... and I don't wear the headscarf.... I don't know... I just don't wanna keep trying to be someone I'm not... and with them I feel like I have to control what I say and	She avoids making friendships with people who come from the same background because of they judgmental, according to the participant.

how I act... it's... it's too exhausting... too exhausting...	
I think people in Saudi… they grew up with what they have to and what not to do... there's nothing in between... I feel like they don't think in their own... but they think their opinions are... just.... imposed by others... they don't find their opinions... they don't criticise it... they don't look at things critically... they are just yes or no... nothing in the middle... and I think they judge me cos... I might be different... and... they would... for us in Saudi of course you shouldn't be drinking... you shouldn't be going out with guys.. you shouldn't be going to clubs..	She continues talking about SA people and why she avoids them.
I'm very confused about my identity... I have a Saudi passport... I've never lived really.. I mean really in Saudi.. I did mention I lived there when I was 5 and I was there last year... and... but when I was there last year I didn't know who I was... I felt so lost... I don't know... my identity... it's exhausting when I tell people where I lived... I don't know what I am... I am international.	She talks about her identity struggle.
it actually makes me sad that I don't know it (Arabic Language) as well as I should be... and it's something that I do wanna work on later... I do wanna read more books and I wanna know more about our literature cos I think it's amazing and it's stupid that I don't know enough... and.... I did mention that I read one Arabic book.. I was proud of my self hahaha.. but it's something I wanna work on better... cos I don't.... it's like a British person who doesn't speak English...	She continues to speak about her identity but from a different angle (Arabic Identity this time)
When somebody meets me I always say I'm saudi and obviously it means Muslim no doubt and I have no problem with that cos I am Muslim and I am Saudi... but it's not the only two things about me... and I also hang out more with guys hahahaha....	The struggle comes back again in which she sometimes feels she's Saudi.
It's gonna come off as if I have a problem with drinking.... I don't.... like	The religion is present again about drinking.

all my friends do... it's just a personal thing that I don't... and obviously in our religion it's forbidden and... yes I do it cos of religion but... I also like to control what I do... I don't wanna... I always have... it's not I'm so tight... but I also wanna know what I'm doing.. and I don't wanna please myself in situations and hate myself next day.	
I will not compromise... I will not start drinking just to make friends cos they will be changing me... and I shouldn't be changing myself to make friends... they either like me as I am or not... hmmm... I don't think they have a problem with me not drinking… but sometimes I see it as a barrier... but it's just how it is... and like I said I'm not changing myself for anyone... it's not fair to me or them... I don't know.... it's.... for them... for them it's just to loosen up and take the stress away... but for me I can do it through other ways... just chilling..	The participant is making her way and shaping her argument about drinking between religion and her personal choice.
it's not that I don't socialise with British people but because you live in the UK and they have their own things.. they are home in a way even if it was 2 hours away or whatever... but when you have Europeans they are away from and I'm away from home so we find each other and we relate to each other in a way..	Comparing her European and British friends.
I like to meet people from everywhere cos I like understanding about their culture and what they think about things and... I mean... you see different opinions in class and I love that... I guess I'm joined more to Europeans and.... and more to people.... different... I mean who are "cultured"... and cultured in a way that they are not practising their own cultures or whatever but they have the understanding of other people and they respect... and the whole respect is the very important... it's really important... people don't get it cos.... I don't know... you respect yourself and	She goes back to the idea of 'respect' and how she approves people who respect other peoples' cultures.

you respect others.	
(I am) really angry... it's like I'm not good enough or not a headworker so I deserve it or whatever... and I don't think they should... hmmm... well first I think it's very degrading and I feel like women are not trusted or they can't live alone when I know a lot of guys take seven or eight years to do a bachelor and they are only there so they can live in the west rather than actually having... you know... the passion about what they are doing.	She talks about the rules in SA that prevents her from being sponsored because she doesn't have a male guard.
Where my family lives... where my parents are... I don't know... where I sleep comfortably... this is home... because yeah so I've been moving around a lot and I don't consider Saudi as my home... no... I don't feel comfortable... I feel even... we have a house there but it's like a hotel to me.. I don't have my stuff there.. it's my bedroom when I was very little.. we haven't changed anything.	As the struggle of identity, she is struggling about the concept of 'home'.
(I miss) Anywhere but Saudi… I miss the trees, I miss the green, I miss the clear sky... I miss... you don't see this in Saudi.. all the houses are constructed in a weird way... people... not as friendly... yes I come from Jeddah and I think people are friendlier there than Riyadh.... I don't feel it's me I told you I kinda lose my identity when I'm in Saudi... I think I link it to the Abayah and everything but also when I'm walking in the street or... people are just different... really.... I don't know	She talks about her 'different' tyoe of sickness.
Identity! I know I talk about a lot being myself and everything but also... coming from two two completely different cultures and... I'm confused when I go back home and I'm confused when I come here and I'm confused with limitations...as in like you can't do that cos you're that... and sometimes I'm like NO... but then I go back to what I said... and... this is confusing and... I don't know.. in school and...	She goes back again to the notion of 'identity'
obviously it's influenced by my culture	She struggles again about balancing

and so on and I try to balance things out but sometimes it gets confusing like I wanna do something and I shouldn't be doing something... I don't know... it's difficult I wanna put it in words... but... I'm confused I guess... I guess I'm worse when I'm confused... hmmm.... I don't know...	her cultural values and her life in the UK.
I think I would have been very very different if I had grown up in Saudi...I think I would've been close-minded... I would've been satisfied... and I don't think... satisfied.... satisfied as in having a lot of things only... not wanting to learn more... or no more appreciate things and respected... and I think that's sad... you always... we don't know enough... and I think we always have to continue.... not only studying but searching and reading and talking to people and discussing and understanding people's views and opinions and... people just don't look at these things... they just wanna shop and go to the mall and have coffee and not talk about important things... I don't have real discussions and I miss that and that's sad...	She argues that she would've been different if she had grown up in Saudi.

Haleemah

Most of my perceptions about the UK are taken from the media such as films. Besides, some of my family members live in the UK and Canada and therefore I've got some knowledge about life here.	She tells how she has got her knowledge about the UK.
Most of the films I have watched were produced in the USA so I assumed that the UK and the USA or any European country are exactly the same.	She used to mix up between British and American cultures assuming that they are all the same. In other words, "the west is the same".
There are so many churches in the UK so I assumed people here are more religious than people in the USA. But when I came here it was the opposite. I've been here in the UK for about 5 to 6 years and never seen a nun.	She assumed British people are more religious than Americans.

I was so cared about the idea of being taught by a male teacher. As you know in Saudi Arabia when the lecturer is a male, we are taught using TV and thus the experience in the beginning here in the UK was really scary and stressful in the beginning. However, the teachers realized that so they were treating me in a friendly way and knowing their 'boundaries' which made me feel more comfortable with time.	She is expressing her experience in a mixed class and being taught by a male teacher.
The same thing and fears I had with my male classmates. For instance, I couldn't accept the idea of some of them sitting next to me, but when someone comes late and sits next to me, I can't tell them to leave.	The same fears and experience with the male classmates.
But because it happens daily, I started to accept the idea especially I had the impression that it is an educational environment and therefore no worries… I started to observe how the male classmates behave with other girls and I noticed that they were behaving with all girls in the same way whether those girls were wearing the headscarf or not, it did not matter as it was the same. Hence, I thought that I shouldn't be keeping myself in a bubble otherwise I will lose a lot. Therefore, I gradually started to adopt with it bearing in mind that I don't cross the limits and the same thing with the males they don't cross the limits either. I am the first person who should be watching herself.	She tells how she adopted with the situation in a mixed class and expressing that there are 'boundaries' and limits that none must cross.
When I first arrived, I was in Stockton and I was the only one wearing the headscarf in the class. I felt discriminated… even from the staff itself… the teacher was ignoring my questions or comments…	She's talking about the racism she experienced in Stockton.
The male staff or the students had the idea that I'm a Muslim woman and therefore they shouldn't be talking to be so they were trying to avoid me in order not to cross their limits as they weren't sure how to deal with a Muslim woman.	She carries on her story about racism.

I tried to communicate with everyone especially my male colleagues in order to show them that I have no issues to speak to a male at all and that being Muslim doesn't mean I'm not going to. It was difficult in the beginning I must say, but later on it worked well and they started to feel more comfortable about me.	She explains how she dealt with the issue of being ignored by her male counterparts.
I struggled in the first term then in the second term things started to be easier and I got used to my classmates and they got used to me, but as I said within the 'boundaries' as I will never cross them.	She focuses on the boundaries again and talking about the period of time she spent in order to adjust in the new environment.
It was difficult in the beginning to make new friends… I didn't take the initiative I must say… perhaps I was scared of rejection but I had to be ready for the worse…	Explaining why she didn't take the initiative to make new friends…
Other students from China and Pakistan, for instance faced the same problem. Home students prefer to spend their time with each other rather than with international students… it feels like I'm the outsider so I've got to take the initiative to communicate with them..	Describing her British classmates
If I had lived in a college, I think things would've been very different… I would've developed a very good relationship with home students and would've made new friends…	She assumes that living out stopped her from making students with home students…
I faced a lot of difficulties as a Muslim woman especially when other students ask me about the headscarf and why I don't shake hands with men… it is so difficult to explain to them… this is how I am and how I was brought up to believe… I can't explain to them why we do it but they keep asking me all the time…	Difficulties of being a Muslim female and difficult in answering other people's questions.
I tried to explain to them many times, but when they start being sarcastic about my religion I get very offended then I stop talking to them. They apologized later on and they did tell me that they did not know that it is a sensitive topic for her…	Primary socialization when it comes to religion.

One of my classmates felt very angry at me because I told her that I was going for few minutes to say my prayers… I don't know why she got angry although this has nothing to do with her…	Difficulties for prayers and Islamic practices
I spend a lot of my time now in a sport centre only for women. I also go shopping sometimes but I have changed a lot from when I was in Saudi i.e. I don't spend too much time in shopping. I just buy what I need then I leave.	Changes in some habits from when she was in Saudi Arabia.
I've got at least two or three female friends from Saudi Arabia that I meet them almost everyday… I also have got three female British friends and one male.	Describing her friends
This British male friend respects me a lot and respects my religion because he's a mature student unlike those who are in beginning 20s… they are very difficult to engage with them…	She distinguishes between younger and mature students.
I like making new friends and making contacts with other people from different backgrounds… I'm very curious to find out more about other cultures and different backgrounds… we can't isolate ourselves from other people as this gives them the wrong impression about us… we need to show them that we are not aliens… we are just like them…	Showing interests to build relationships with other people.
What makes me accepting other people and curious to know them is my background. My mother is Syrian and when we go to visit my relatives from my mother's side, our neighbors come to visit us and we get mixed together males and females.	Telling why she feels this way
I like going out with Saudi girls because we have the same background which makes it much easier to communicate with each other… for instance I don't shake hands with other males but my Saudi friends understand this thing unlike other friends even who are Muslims.	Telling why she likes Saudi friends.
Sometimes I feel like I've got to shake hands with other males, depending on	Trying to adapt and negotiate to fit into the context.

the situation… when I go out with my non Muslim friends, they usually drink alcohol with the food but for me I don't but I also don't mind them as long as I'm not having it…	
I know male colleagues but I prefer not to call them friends… it doesn't matter whether they are Saudis or not Saudis… I can't go out with them just like I do with my female friends… it's difficult…	Assuring that gender is important for friendship.
i call my family in a daily basis unlike people here who see their families only in Christmas time… they find it very strange that I'm married and still having a good relationship with my family…	Comparing families between Saudi Arabia and the UK
I think in Saudi Arabia we've got some sense of racism against foreigners. Even if they were Egyptians or Syrians they still foreigners as long as they are not Saudis. But since I've been in the UK, I've changed my mind about it… when people ignored me in the beginning because I was different from them; this is exactly how we do it SA to other people…	Reflecting her experience in the UK on what she used to do in SA
I faced a lot of troubles in Stockton mainly by teenagers and one day I would've been beaten if I hadn't had help from a male pedastrian…	Talking again about her experience with racism.

Zainah

Before I came to the UK I had this impression about English people that they are too cold and don't provide help to others… but then I came here I found the opposite… everybody wants to help me especially when I'm with my child… unlike in Saudi Arabia where nobody helps anybody… here you find Islam without Muslims…	She changed her impression about people in the UK Associating Islam is the centre for good behaviour such as helping others…
I went to Durham Cathedral and the people there welcomed me and were very kind to me… in Mecca on the other hand, someone hit me because I was	Comparing her experience in religious places in Saudi Arabia and the UK

wearing white and he thought I was Iranian… people here accept you as you are and no matter how different you may look…	
I was surprised to hear about the 'hate crime' in the UK as this doesn't happen in SA… I think the reason is because here you've got written laws but in SA there's nothing like that…	Another comparison
I didn't have any problem with mixed classes because I worked in a company with other males… the problem is that many people look at women as 'sexual tools'… in my class, you find men in one side and women on the other, this is because most of the class are Saudis…	Her experience about mixed classes
My non Saudis classmates think I'm different from any other Saudis because I go to the library with my male colleagues and I sit on the floor when we do work and I have no problem with that… but I don't do it with the Saudi males…	Accommodating herself in the new environment by sitting on the floor and going out to the library with males…
Saudi males have a negative idea about open-minded girls and that's why I don't do such things with them… I don't think it has anything to do with religion though, I think it's a very cultural idea…	She tries to distinguish between religion and such behaviors
Before I came here, I used to think we are the best people and the most helpful and generous as Islam supports helping others… but when I came here and compared people including other Arabs from non Saudis, there were more helpful to me than Saudis…	Changing her view about Saudis and non Saudis…
Although my neighbors in SA are Siah , they still don't provide much help to me…	Linking her Shia identity as one group that has to help each other
I don't think there's anything to do with me as a woman, because even Saudi girls don't provide any help to anyone… I think it's just something about Saudis…	A bit cynical about Saudi students
Because I was born in Qatar, then worked in a mixed company, this has helped me to accept different people including the other gender.	Her multicultural background affecting how she behaves

Besides, in our history as Shia, we have been communicating with other people including other enemies… Sayedah Zainab for instance went to her enemy and gave her famous speech…	Her Shia identity affecting her communication
This has affected us as Shia so our women go and talk to men as Sayedah Zainab did… she's our example… besides, our women don't have to cover their faces like Sunni women whi I think are oppressed and that's why they struggle when they come here…	Shia history and its impact on women communication Comparing Shia women to Sunnis
Although Shia in Qatif for instance are more capable of communicating with different people, they still would find it difficult if they hadn't had any contacts with anyone or if they had stayed in their place forever…	Multicultural background and its influence on accepting the other…
In the classroom, I sit with a male students from Palestine, Sudan, a girl from Taiwan and Tunisia but not with Saudi males or females…. I feel like we have formed an international group that I belong to….	Very interesting! She feels international when she couldn't fit in the Saudi male or female groups.
Sometimes I feel I'm a bad person because Saudis don't talk to me but also sometimes I feel it's a normal thing to talk to other males…	Struggling and negotiating her feelings
I find it difficult with the Saudi female students more than the male ones… don't know why maybe because I'm shia or maybe as a woman they've got expectations on me…	Explaining why this is the case with her
When I first arrived to Durham I was put with a female student from Israel… I didn't feel comfortable because we were taught that all Israelis are bad people and murderers… now I've changed my mind about it her and whenever I see her I greet her… she's a nice girl…	Renegotiating her position about Israeli people
I still find it difficult to accept people from Israel… I'm 29 years old and I can't change it in such a short time… but certainly it's not as bad as before…	She still struggles in accepting Israelis but has improved than before
At school, we were taught that Shias are infidels and not real Muslims… this made me upset as Shia…	
I have been to the Cathedral many	She assumes that British or Christian

times but not to the mosque… I assume nobody will accept me in the mosque because I'm shia…	people will accept her but not Muslims because she's a shia.
I actually think we (as shia) have something in common with Christians… we believe in shrines of good people who died… I felt a lot of spiritual feelings in the cathedral…	It seems that she goes to the cathedral because of the similarities in spiritual practices between both Christians and Shias…
I'd like to make British friends but I'm afraid I didn't have the chance because of the nature of my course…. Most of them are Arabs apart from the Taiwanese girl…	She likes to meet British people but no chance
I have no problem in making new friends from any different background… it doesn't matter at all… but to be honest not with Jewish people because we were taught that all Jewish are Israelis and murderers…	She states that she doesn't mind any friend apart from Jewish (Israeli) people
When I went to SA, I changed few things in my behavious such as opening the door for the next person…	Some of her behavior changed bcause of her staying in the UK
Unlike in Saudi Arabia, people here smile all the time, which makes me feel comfortable and happy…	The impact of smile from her view point
When I went to the cathedral, a man shook hands with my sister and me… I felt guilty… I couldn't sleep at night… sometimes I felt like I shouldn't have don't it…	Struggling with the concept of shaking hands and how she felt she had to but not liking it at the same time.
I never shake hands with Saudis though, because they know it's not acceptable. But non-Saudis don't know so they've got a good intention.	She makes a distinction between Saudis and non-Saudis in this regard.
I miss my husband but not Saudi Arabia as such… it's not my home… my home is Qatif only… Jeddah, Riyadh or any other places are not my home just because they are in the Saudi territories	Her national identity doesn't belong to SA but to her hometown
Here we have freedom of speech unlike in SA that you might get arrested for that	Feeling more comfortable in the UK
I never experienced any racism although I'm wearing a headscarf	Racism
I liked the life here… the nursery where I take my daughter to is brilliant… they care about children unlike SA… I didn't know the UK or	Her experience in the UK

never met British people before coming here so I didn't know much bout them, but now since I know them I liked life here a lot…	

Khadijah

Before I came to the UK, I had this idea that English people are not friendly and they have snobbish attitude unlike American people.	Her impression about British people before she came to the UK
I thought they weren't friendly and wouldn't accept Arabs… they wouldn't accept Muslims…	Mixing both identities; Arabs and Muslims
My view has changed 70% since I came here last September… there are many friendly people and just like we've got friendly and unfriendly people in our countries, here the same… we shouldn't over generalise…	Changed her view when she came here and avoided stereotypes
I changed my view once I arrived here as the teachers and the whole people gave me a good impression about them… I like it here in Durham everyone is friendly including the staff and students… maybe they are used to people from different backgrounds unlike in Newcastle…	This contrasts with Haleemah's experience
Unlike SA, people here don't get involved in your business… everybody is in their own… in SA people keep an eye on whatever you are doing…	Comparing people in SA and the UK
I never thought of mixed classes as a problem for me because I worked in mixed places in SA… if I were a teacher working in a girls school then surely it would've been an issue… I don't cover my face in SA so I never experienced any issues here in this regard, especially my husband is open-minded and doesn't mind it…	No issues with mixed classes because of her previous work and her life in SA
I never had any issues with international students, but in fact I had issues with a SA female who comes from the same country… we come from different backgrounds in which she covers her face… she keeps telling me that I shouldn't wear too much perfume and she gets nosy in my	She struggles with people from her background more than different people

business…	
People's backgrounds don't matter to me as long as they are nice to me… I had an Italian friend of mine who were Christian and drinks and has a boyfriend but this didn't stop me from being friends… we had a party at the end of the term and I brought some food but the other Saudi girl didn't because she thought they don't deserve it… and when her Ukrainian friend said she's going to bring wine, she yelled "shut up"	A struggle with her Saudi counterpart more than different backgrounds
The Ukrainian girl brought the wine and the Saudi girl was upset about it… for me it doesn't matter... people's own private behaviour is up to them… it's non of my business as long as they are nice to me…	She focuses on the importance of people being nice to her regardless their background
I don't have issues with making male friends, but I know my boundaries… whether Saudi or non Saudi it doesn't really matter as long as they are nice to me…	Again, the importance of people being nice to her… she says that there's no problem but the word 'boundaries' suggests there is a difference
I never had the chance to meet British people because of my class which only consists of international students	No chance to meet British people
I never experienced any racism; maybe because I don't wear the headscarf… people don't expect me to be from SA…	Headscarf could be a reason for racism
When I meet people I try not to tell them I'm from SA, I just don't want to go into discussions about it as they might have a stereotypical ideas that I don't fit in and then it'll be a long discussion…	Negotiating her choice of telling she's SA or not…
I can't adopt to certain situations such as people getting drunk… I don't to be in a situation when my friends are drunk and don't understand what I'm saying…	She finds it difficult when it comes to drinking
I miss SA, but the people not the place… I miss my friends and everyone rather than the place SA as such	She prefers the UK to SA

Aminah

I thought about British people as not very friendly like Americans and they are very serious people…	An assumption about British people before coming to the UK
As for mixed classes, I was ready for that… I'm here for a purpose then I'll leave back home…	Readiness for mixed classes
I've changed my mind when I came here… I think it depends where you are in the UK… in the north people re very friendly and helpful… I have been in difficult situations before perhaps because I wear 'niqab'! I experienced forms of racism in the street, but nothing at the university itself…	Racism, headscarf
I ignored these problems…. They are teenagers…. You know… I shouldn't make a big deal out of it…	Ignoring the problem to avoid it
The immigration officer in the airport was very rude to me and my husband and this left a lot of bad impact on me for the next 2 weeks…	First experience in the UK
Whenever I go the class, I try to sit with female students but even if I'm sat with a male, they (the males) leave a distance between us… they respect me…	Males and females in the class
We work as a team as long as we respect each other… we sit in a circle and when it comes to work, nothing should affect that…	Respect seems to be boundaries
I treat people in the best way I can, doesn't matter Muslim or non Muslim… but when we go out I tell everyone as a joke that we are not going to have any alcoholic drinks…	Trying to negotiate her choices when she goes out
I go out with females only… I don't go out with males… doesn't matter what they believe in…	Gender issue
I prefer socializing with non Saudis so I practice English and also I'd like to find out about other cultures… I mean females not males…	gender
When they brought wine to the party I sat far in the corner… as a religious person, my religion doesn't allow me to sit in a place where there's alcohol in	Negotiating her choices

it… I id my best that they don't bring it but it was out of my hand	
I respect what they do as they have to respect what I do…	
There is somebody in the town who tried to shake hands with me but I declined in a nice way… the same with our old neighbour who wanted to shake hands with me but I rejected…	Shaking hands
I will never compromise anything I believe it's wrong…	Adaptation
One day an old man over 80s came and sat next to me on the bus but I had to leave a distance between me and him… I had no options but to stay…	adaptation
I don't like it here… I feel very depressed…. Sometimes I feel like going back to SA…	Struggle in the UK
I feel homesick… my children and I miss home a lot and when we see any green colour we feel very homesick…	Homesickness
I feel very lonely here and when I felt sick last week nobody looked after my children… I felt very lonely…	Loneliness
A girl told my daughter that her colour looks like an orange pen and that she hates black colour…	Racism at school

Hannah

I had the impression about people in the UK that they are friendly but very strict about time and queues… honestly I wasn't interested to find out about them and their culture…	Impression about people in the UK
Our British neighbour is a nice guy, we visit each other and we send him chocolate sometimes… he's very friendly…	Relationship with neighbors
I don't like the teenagers here, they scream in my face and cause me troubles, but not to the extent to be an extreme struggle as many Saudis say, it's fine…	Experience with teenagers
I think British people are more understanding to Muslims than	Comparison between UK and USA

Americans… maybe elder generations are not but younger ones are…	
Sometimes when I'm on the bus, people avoid sitting next to me… I don't know why, perhaps they see me wearing headscarf and they think I don't want anybody to sit next to me…	headscarf
Mixed classes haven't been an issue for me… since we were children, we have been travelling a lot which made us open-minded… also not having brothers gave us a lot of responsibilities which made any experience less fearful…	No issues with mixed classes
There are a number of Saudi students in my class and for some reason they avoid talking to me just because I'm Saudi… I don't know why… they talk to any girl from any country but not Saudi girls… it makes me feel that I don't want to talk to them either because if I did they may think I'm flirting with them….	A tension between both male and female Saudi students in the class
When I came here I had brought a lot of stuff with me even pots and Arabian coffee and so many things… I had read in websites that we have to bring these things… I think that's stupid… I think the reason is ignorance… people have no idea what is here so they still write in websites what to bring… my husband had to carry a lot of stuff in the airport… it was really tiring…	Explaining what she went through before she came and why
People who do that are those who have come to the UK but don't integrate… they don't go out and shop or see what is out there… their husbands shop for everything so they've got a lot of spare time so they go and write in websites… some even bring pillows like the ones in Saudi…	Some Saudis lock themselves up and don't integrate especially females…
A lot of Saudis come here and want to live the same life in Saudi… I think it's a new experience here so why not trying new things rather than the same thing…	Integration and not willing to know try new things
Some Saudi women are afraid of going out or even studying… some are afraid of mixed classes and ask if there are	Saudi women lock themselves up because their husbands are in charge of everything…

any female teachers to come and teach them at home… I think this is because of their husbands…	
In SA, these women are used to cook and look after the children and that's all… when she comes here they don't want to change…	Life in SA and UK
When these women meet other Saudi women who are studying, they feel they want to study too but a number of barriers stopping them…	Husbands could be stopping their wives from integrating…
We don't talk about religion a lot in the class although I get asked many times by different students about Islam and especially the headscarf and the relationships between men and women… I think they focus on tiny things and leave more important ones…	Discussions about religion in the class
I don't like 'gender equality' here as I feel women are exploited at work, but I also don't like in SA of course… I respect how people live here but necessarily I like it…	She respects but necessarily accept the lifestyle in the UK
I don't have any friends I'm afraid… maybe I'm too busy… The Chinese students speak in their language whenever we go out… I don't feel I fit anywhere… maybe I'm a friend with my husband, we talk about what happens in the daily life… sometimes I skype my mother and sisters for a chat…	No friendship, but family instead
I'd love to meet new people, but impossible…. How can I find British students… they are not in my class… also I can't fit with international students as I feel that they have misconceptions about Saudi students especially I wear the headscarf…	Struggle to make friends with both with both British and international students
I don't mind making friends with different people but of course not male friends… because of religion as first place and also because I don't believe men and women can be friends… I just don't feel it's right to have a male friend… with females I feel more myself…	Friends with anybody but not males
When I first arrived, I refused shaking	Refusing to shake hands in the

hands with our neighbor, but I felt bad later… I asked my sister who said it's fine he's an old man so shake hands it's ok… so I started shaking hands with him now…	beginning and now renegotiated
My classmates and the teacher went to the pub one day but I refused going with them… I wouldn't look nice to go to the pub wearing a headscarf…	
When I first arrived I was too scared of everything… I never used public transport but now I do everything alone it's fine…	She adopted to the new lifestyle
I've changed since I first arrived here… in the past I used to be very critical person about everybody and everything and now I leave people alone… this is something I like about British people they don't intervene in other people's business…	Some changes in her character since she came here
I started to be worried about my 4 years old daughter who started to believe in Father Christmas and that he's going to bring her a present… I don't mind my daughter to acquire new cultural things but this one is about religion…	The importance of religion in her life
I don't want my daughter to study about sex education or in a mixed class in a young age because I have seen what boys do to girls at classes, it wasn't nice at all…	Worries about her daughter
I miss home sometimes especially when things go complicated with my studies and house work… I feel like I want to vanish and appear in my parents' house… it's way more comfortable and less stressful…	Homesickness when there are difficult situations
I feel sorry for single students as they feel very lonely unlike me who have got a husband so I feel a company…	She compares herself to her single friends

Lubna, Norah and Hadeel

Lubna: when I first arrived to the UK I	Perceptions about the UK before

thought they weren't friendly at all and very strict people especially when it comes to time… I didn't know much about Durham and thought not many Arabs around… I was scared…	coming
Hedaya: I chose to come to the UK because of the history of the country and when I came to Durham and saw the old buildings I loved it… this is what I was after…	
Norah: they are very proud of their history and nation…	
Hadeel: I think if I had gone to the USA instead I would've made more friends… people here are very conservative…	Friends in the UK and how changed her mind when she came here
Lubna: most of our friends are international students not local…	
Norah: last year I spent my time with international students because it was a foundation course, but even now I've got the chance to meet British students, I still spend most of my time with international students….	
Lubna: when I first arrived, I met some local students but for a short time, but I felt we didn't get along very well… don't know why… maybe the reason is that we as international students share the same experience of being here and have homesickness unlike local students…	Reasons why international students but not home students
Lubna: international students arrive a week before home students. Therefore, by the time home students arrive, international students had already made friends with each other and home students start to get to know each other as new arrivals which makes it difficult for both to meet with one another…	
Hedaya: I think the international students that we got to know have similar way of thinking to ours… even in the class there are home students but they don't mix with us [international students] and when we go out they sit with each other on a different table unless we call them and	

ask them to join us…	
Norah: it all depends on the background of the student… someone who comes from London is used to multiculturalism unlike somebody from the north or from a small town who hasn't been exposed to any different backgrounds before…	The multicultural background and its role in integration but from the side of home students this time
Lubna: I prefer getting to know an Arabic speaking person to a different one… perhaps because of the language… hmmm… not only the language but I also think Arabs are more understanding for my cultural values and habits…	Preferring someone from the same background
Norah: although British people are punctual, I refuse to accept that we are not… it depends on the individual themselves…	Refusing being stereotyped as unpunctual person
Lubna: when I first arrived I was a little bit scared of mixed classes… perhaps because of the segregation in SA. But last year I had make teachers teaching me which made it less problematic for me and prepared me to come here… also it depends on the family background… if they are openminded or not… do they allow their daughters to work in voluntary work or not…	Mixed classes and mixed gender places and families backgrounds
Norah: mixed classes haven't been an issue for me	
Hedaya: I like meeting new people but it depends on how they look, so if somebody with a tattoo for instance, I don't want to know them…	The appearance
Hedaya: I always would like to meet new people but I'm scared of rejection… I used to think it's about the gender, it's easier to get to know females more than males but it turned out it's the same...	No gender differences
Others: … if I liked somebody then I'd like to get to know them and doesn't matter what their gender is…	No gender problem
Hedaya: I don't think so; I think it'd be more difficult with males… perhaps because I'm not used to talk to males…	Gender problems
Lubna: I don't mind speaking to male students, but it is difficult to go to a	Gender issue

male and say hi I'd like to know you without a good reason… but with girls it's fine…	
Norah: I don't mind knowing anybody, but the most important thing for me is that they have 'good morals'…	Morals equals respect equals boundaries
Lubna: because we three live in Shepherd wing, we get to know girls more than boys… it feels more comfortable to move in the accommodation without being anxious about being seen by a male student…	Shepherd wing
Hedaya: I lived in Stockton for sometime in a mixed accommodation and never had any issue with my flat mates although I heard that my corridor was quiet comparing to others…	
Lubna: when I was at school in SA, I had friends from different countries such as Egypt and Palestine. So when I came here, I got used to it very quickly and as for male students, in my family I can see my male relatives and cousins and it's fine…	Her family background, especially her Lebanese mother as well as her international friends at school played an important role
Hedaya: when I came here, I didn't have an issue with knowing male students either because of my mixed gender work last year in Saudi ARAMCO …	Her experience in a mixed place at work prepared her to fit into the new environment
Hedaya: in SA men do everything starting from paying money to the cashier. But my work at ARAMCO taught me to take responsibilities and to depend on myself…	
Lubna: I don't mind knowing anybody as long as they respect me…	Respect equals boundaries equals morals
Lubna: when we go out in the weekends we just go out with girls… sometimes we go out with guys to other places… it depends… we've got more than one group of friends…	
Hedaya: if I went back to SA now without knowing other home students, I'd be disappointed because I'd love to have British friends but perhaps we are still in the first year so we need sometime…	Wanting to know home students
Lubna: of course people from the same	Knowing British students as a matter

background, whether females or Arabs, are easier to make friends with but this doesn't mean I don't want to know British students… so if I needed something from anybody I'd go to the same people from my background…	of curiosity but not going back to them if they need something
Hedaya: a Greek girl was asking about things in Islam such as headscarf and Lubna didn't like it and decided not to talk to her again if she brings it up… but for me I think it's a good chance to talk about it, we are here to exchange ideas…	Perhaps Hedaya's Shia background is helping her… Lubna is being more defensive
Lubna: if somebody doesn't want to know me because of my headscarf or doesn't want me as I am then I don't want to know them either…	Protective about her Islamic identity
Hedaya: I think the headscarf sometimes is a barrier because most people haven't met women wearing headscarf so they think we don't want to know them…	Headscarf as a barrier
Hedaya: meeting British postgraduates is easier than undergraduates because they are mature, unlike the undergraduates…	
Lubna: I wouldn't cross the boundaries whenever I know anybody… the boundaries that my parents brought me to believe in and that God and religion has set up for me…	Boundaries and limits

Abdulaziz

Before I came to the UK, I thought people would be unfriendly and racists against anybody coming to their country… I got this impression from some British people in Jeddah…	Before coming to the UK
When I go back home, the last thing I'd like to hear is that I've changed… I don't mind me changing positively like being punctual, but certainly not changing in religion or changing my values and morals…	Resistance to change
This is similar to what is happening here during Christmas time… you find Christmas trees everywhere, so people keep their traditions and they don't	Justifying resistance to change to traditions in the UK

want to change because it's part of their identity… the same thing with going out on Fridays, though people drink heavily, it's still their traditions… I respect it although it's against what I believe in…	
I didn't have any issue with mixed classes because in my family we mix together with my cousins and everyone… we obviously don't party together, but we visit each other and it's fine with us… unlike my Saudis friends who never been in mixed situations and they find it difficult when they come in mixed classes…	No issues with mixed classes
My family is religious, but we are not too fussed about the mixed gender situations…	It looks like it is a Saudi thing when it comes to mixed gender places, because he's from Pakistan and comes from a religious family but still not too concerned about it…
People here are very polite and helpful… when I go to the bank for instance, everybody is welcoming no matter where I come from… I had a different idea before that they'd be racists….	Changed his mind about british people
In the UK people have got their rights... nobody can harm anybody and get away with it… this is not the case in SA I'm afraid… I see racism in SA… young teenagers could harm foreign labours and they get away with it… in the UK some teenagers called me "Bin Ladin" then they apologized because they knew they shouldn't have said so…	Comparing UK to SA in term of human rights
But I still feel there's some racism going on… when I landed in the airport, I was stopped for personal checking… but that was with everybody came from SA or looked middle eastern… I think that was racist…	Racism in the airport
As I said I have no problems in communicating with girls, but I must say my Saudi friends do have an issue… they claim that the Saudi girls don't communicate with them and both sides (the boys and girls from SA) ignore each other…	This works well with what Zainah and Hannah was saying
I didn't have a problem to make friends	This is what Zainah said as well about

with anybody from any religion or background either, but I have to say it was a problem with Shias… a lot of them make barriers and don't want to talk to me… so it feels like the barriers between Shias and Sunnis is bigger than anybody else…	Sunnis… looks like the mistrust between both sides is very much like the mistrust between SA males and females
I think we should accept each other despite our differences… Shias and Sunnis should accept each other as long as mutual respect is maintained between the two... accepting other different people started in SA because I belong to Abu Hanifah school, unlike the majority of Saudi people… this makes me different from them and make them different from me, but I had to understand these differences…	His background helped him to understand the different
Accepting other people doesn't mean I agree or deviate from what I believe in or from our values that I was brought up to believe in… I have to be careful from anybody calling me to his or her religion… I have to maintain a good relationship but be conscious not to be affected by what they say…	He may compromise but not completely accepts the differences
I have a Jewish tutor and he's a nice guy but I have to be careful from his way of thinking as you know Jewish people are good at deceiving people…	Prejudice about Jewish people like Zainah
I don't mind making friends with anyone from any background as long as they are nice people… I prefer though my Arab friends because I feel they understand me more and I feel more comfortable with them… we understand each other but with my non Arab friends, I might feel a bit conscious not to say something that could offend them…	No problem with meeting new people and making friends with them but Arabs are preferred for pragmatic reasons
I don't have any British friends mainly because of the course I'm doing mostly Arabs… I have some international friends I met at the college but still not British because they stick to each other and make friends with each other not international students…	Mostly arab friends because of the course or international because of the college, but no British
It happened before when we went out with some international friends, they	Reacting to unacceptable behaviour

had some behaviour that goes against my religion such as swearing and drinking but I tried to ignore it… but honestly I didn't go out with them anymore…	
They are nice people but I don't want to be a close friend to them so they don't affect my behaviour…	Resisting any changes
When similar behaviours happen I try not to make it awkward and be rigid about so I try to change the setting rather than changing these people or myself because I know it's impossible to change them but also I don't want to change myself… so when they start talking about girls I try to change the topic to academic things instead…	Resistance to change
One of my Saudi female colleagues is very feminist… we always argue because I think women in SA are treated very nicely compared to women in the UK…	Restricting women in SA in the name of protecting them
I enjoyed studying here in the UK… I studied Research Method module and it was one of my favourite modules… I didn't like it in SA at all…	Academic adjustment
Whenever I felt homesick in the beginning, I used to go to the mosque where I met very nice people who helped me a lot in my homesickness…	People from the same background help when it comes to homesickness

Ahmed

Before I came to the UK, I thought they are very punctual people and respect time… I also thought they were religious people…	Assumptions about british people
But now I've realized that religion is not a big issue for British people… they barely talk about it… unlike in SA where religion is very present in our culture… Saudi people are more religious than any other Islamic communities…	Changed his view about British people and assuring that Saudis are more religious than anybody else
Because SA is the starting point of Islam, and because of Mecca and Madinah, the whole world looks at SA as the most religious Islamic place… this has influenced our identity and thus affected our engagement in the UK	Explaining the effect of religion on daily life and as a result affecting the intercultural engagement

because there are many practices here that we don't approve in our religion…	
When I came here I didn't have any issues with mixed classes because personally speaking I don't think it contradicts with Islamic teachings… so I studied with my wife at the same class and it was fine…	No issues with mixed classes
Most people who refuse mixed settings such as mixed classes do so because of their cultural, educational backgrounds… but in order to force these ideas, they link them to religion because religion has a stronger effect which gives them more legitimacy to argue against mixed classes…	Explaining why SA people have issues with mixed classes
I don't think my ideas have changed a lot in the UK, but I'm more daring now to express my ideas than ever before…	The ideas were there before but now expressing them
I never experienced any racism and the same with my wife who wears headscarf, this never happened in official establishments like airports or in the street…	No racism
Studying in a multicultural place like in the UK, broadens someone's mind about different habits and practices whether related to the other gender i.e. women or other people from different religions… this is very helpful and healthy rather than spending time with the same people like in SA…	Assuring the benefit of being in a multicultural place and its effect on somebody's thinking
Sometimes I avoided telling people I was from SA because they would assume I'm a rich person and uneducated or narrow-minded… but they felt impressed when they saw me engaging with them in different discussions as that goes against their stereotype about SA people…	Other people having assumptions about SA people
I think we as SA people have the responsibility to engage with other people… it is sad to see a number of Saudis come to the UK and finish their studies without building any communications with British people… must admit we increased the level of the stereotypes about us… a number of SA only interact with each other and	SA not engaging which created a lot of prejudice about them… Similar to what Wafa was saying

don't go beyond that to discover new things…	
Engaging with people from different regions or backgrounds need a lot of open-mindedness and that's why many SA students prefer to keep their engagements within their groups… especially PhD students and then Master students… but undergrads are more willing to engage… I think it is something to do with the age and the marital status as well…	Some factors why SA students and especially postgrads don't engage
Accepting different people needs practice… before coming to the UK I had the idea but not the practice and any idea needs to be practiced… because of my work in the Islamic University in Madina, I worked with people from different Islamic schools, so it is not a new thing to me… but if we judge anybody different from the beginning then we are actually going against the Islamic teachings that encourage us to communicate with people…	Islamic identity coming up again and accepting different people as an Islamic value
I met a number of Saudis who even have Saudi TV channels, they don't want to change or practice anything new… their friends are Saudis and everything is Saudi… they go back to SA with the degree only but without any different experiences….	SA not engaging similar to what Wafa said
A number of SA students are against any changes in their lives… they think any change is negative but I disagree because a lot of changes could be positive… also having their families with them like children and wives stop them from engaging more… so they live in their bubble and don't want to explore anything…	Speaking about SA not engaging again
I'm afraid I don't have British friends, most my friends are Arabs or Muslims because of the Islamic society not because I don't want to…. I would love to have British friends, it's very important… but you know… I have a family here which makes it difficult for me, I don't have time…	Reasons why not having British friends

When it comes to friends from the other gender, I think it is a difficult issue… I don't think there is a friendship between a male and a female, but of course they can be colleagues or whatever… personally I have some 'sisters' and we meet and it's fine but not a friend as such…. But when it comes to people from different backgrounds then certainly we could be friends why not…	He can make friends with anybody but not women
I think British people respect different other cultures and anybody as long as it's not linked to religion because religion is not an important thing here… if I tell them that I don't shake hands because of religion, they would think I'm extremist, but if I tell them it's my culture they would understand it… so we should present ourselves as we are but without linking it to religion…	British people accept the other if not linked to religion
As the Islamic society president, I always emphasize that the society doesn't represent a specific Islamic school such as Sunnis, shias or Sufis or any other thoughts… people couldn't believe I was from SA because they assumed that Saudis are close minded and therefore I will be presenting a specific Islamic school and wouldn't accept any other differences… I'm afraid I noticed that Saudis don't accept any differences and therefore they have left this impression about them…	Saudis don't accept different others
In the past happiness for me was in Islam and 'belief' and pleasing God because we were living in an Islamic society and we couldn't see any differences, but now this concept has changed… happiness for me here is when someone behaves the way they want rather than pressure from the family, tribe or society… so in SA people are double standard, we behave in certain way although we may not be convinced about it… but here the British society is very clear and not hypocrite, you behave as you like…	FREEDOM and how it shapes people's mentality in the UK, he has freedom in the UK which made him feeling happy

here is freedom… freedom shows what you believe in, whether what you do is a result of pressure or you want to do it…	
I believe that when I make new friends, we shouldn't stick to our groups… I don't want to be your friends just because you are Saudi or Muslim… the more we make friends with different people the more we broaden our knowledge… the more we talk to other different people from us the more we understand… however, I have to say that no friendships I mean real friendship between a male and a female…	He believes in the necessity of having new friends outside one's group but not from the other gender
Homesickness hasn't been a huge issue to me like many other Saudis… yeah I miss my family and my mother, but not really the country… I mean I miss my family and it's nice to go back to them…	He misses the family rather than the actual country

Sameer

I think the society in the UK is very conservative when dealing with other people and also people are very materialistic…	Opinion about the UK
I haven't experienced any mistreatment because of my colour or background…	No racism
In the UK, you have written laws, but nothing like that in SA and that is why I haven't seen much racism here but I have seen a lot of it in SA…	Racism in SA
European societies don't have strong relationships with each other, including their families… unlike Arabian societies we care a lot about each other…	assumptions about European as if they are all the same with their families
I wouldn't prefer to be in a mixed class, though this has nothing to do with religion… this is of course in the beginning but in postgraduate level, I think we are mature enough now…	Mixed classes
When I first arrived, I was taught by a young female teacher, I didn't feel	Mixed classes

comfortable at all… she understood that so she started calling a friend of her to join us in the class to make feel more comfortable…	
I was the only male in another class but my relationships with the other female students was very normal, perhaps they understood that I had a problem with it so they didn't talk a lot to me…	
It's strange thing that I could deal with Chinese female students more than Saudi female students… I don't know why…	Relationship to Saudi females
I don't have any problem to deal with them as long as under the religion boundaries	Religion boundaries again
I even had to ask my British female colleague to ask the Saudi girls few things related to the Islamic society as I couldn't talk to them	Difficulties in dealing with Saudi females
Tell you the truth, I haven't tried it's just an assumption that they will not feel comfortable to talk to me… I blame it on our society how we were brought up…	Assumption + blame it on the society
I love making friends from different backgrounds… I made friends with British people using the language tandom programme…	Strategies to make friends with British people
I didn't like when they drink, so I had some difficulties as I come from a different culture	Difficulties with British people
I also have many international friends especially from the Islamic society…	
But I have to point out that although in the beginning my aim is to get to know people from different backgrounds, we still need to know people similar to us who can understand me… they are closer to me… I mean Muslims or Arabs… they understand my culture shock and any issues I go through…	Preferring people from the same background
I don't have many Saudi friends… mainly because we'd talk about SA and someone needs to broaden their minds more… I don't want to stick to my group all the time…	No SA friends
When I'm in a situation I have to shake hands with a lady, if she's elder lady	Struggle with shaking hands

then I don't mind but if she's a young lady then I put my hand on my chest rather than shaking hands… it's a problem as they might think I'm being racist or patronizing women	
I remember working in the mosque for my essays for three days so there was this man who brought his books with him to work with me and he explained that he didn't want me to feel lonely so he was giving me some company…	The role of the mosque
There was this female classmate who was against all religions, so I just decided to ignore getting into any conversation with her… but I still treat in the best way I could of course…	Strategy

Abdul, Mohammed and Yunos

Abdul: Before I arrived to the UK, I was worried about racism against Muslims especially my name is Abdul which could be a problem…	Worries about racism
But when I came to the school I hadn't seen any of that and I also thought I had to go and make friends with them, but in fact they were interested to get to know me…	Willingness from the side of established British students to get to know him…
Mohammed: I was ready for the differences between our culture in SA and the culture here… I had prepared myself for the positive things such as being punctual and to be very organized in my work, but at the same had prepared myself not to change to any of any habits that contradicts with my religion and values…	Adapting and resisting
Yunos: I used to come to the UK, especially in London when I was child and I think we noticed some 'arrogance' from some people… but not in the north hear as I think in London people are very stressed out and busy…	The same conception about british people to be arrogant
Mohammed: I don't think they are arrogant it's just this is their culture, they don't talk to people they don't know unlike us who welcome people and guests even if we don't know them,	Assuring that it's just different culture

it's just different	
Abdul: I had an experience in which I went kissing guys on the cheeks as we do in SA but they thought I was gay but when I explained to them they understood it and two of them started greeting me the same way, but another didn't like it…	Interesting how body greetings work differently and how both parts understand it and take it
Mohammed: although our religion is different, our culture is different generally anyway… we may not accept some habits here and they may not accept our habits… but I have to mention that I felt here's a freedom of religion, when I first arrived to the airport I found a prayer room and this made feel really comfortable… also my wife had a female officer to check her passport as they were understanding that she wants her face to remain covered…	Unlike Aminah's experience, he felt good from the first of arrival in the airport
Abdul: I got asked at school by some students, does your mother wear the headscarf? When I said yes, they said it's against her freedom… but I explained to them that as long as she wants to keep it then it's her freedom but when you say she has to remove it then this is against the real freedom, and they were understanding	He negotiated his argument with them and they were understanding
Yunos: I was shocked to see there is a mosque built by the university itself, I'm impressed by the freedom of religion in the UK	Freedom of religion and British understanding others
Yunos: I think we isolated ourselves from communicating with other people, especially when it comes to religious ideas such as "ALWALA AND ALBARA'A"	Very interesting, how education in SA shaped the concept of isolating people from others
Mohammed: also it's difficult to meet people because of the time and also where to meet them… I will never go to the pub for example because my Islamic culture doesn't permit me to do so or even sitting on a table that has alcoholic drink on it…	Reasons for not going out with different people, and "Islamic culture" is a reason for that
Abdul: when I first arrived to my mixed class I was happy as I was intrigued to study with girls and see how they think	Mixed classes, Asking questions as a strategy to speak to the girl

but I was very shy to talk to the girl next to me then eventually I got used to it after asking her few questions…	
Abdul: when I got to know my female friends we started playing during lunch time but I was trying not have any physical touches with them as it's against religion… you know…	No physical touches with his female friends
Yunos: we are not used to mixed classes back in SA so I didn't want to sit next to female students especially I'm married… but my wife accepted the idea and it's fine…	Mixed classes
Mohammed: it was difficult for me too to be a in a mixed class, so I tend not to start a conversation with any girl, of course I speak to them politely but not to give them the chance to talk to me…	Mixed classes
Mohammed: the reason is that we are human beings and we might fall for somebody from a conversation, this is why I don't talk to them even though I'm married as this will affect both my family and academic life	Mixed classes and fears of affection to girls
Yunos: I try to be in a group of male students, but if I am put in a group of girls then I try to answer any question they ask briefly just not to give them the chance to talk to me and hoping they will understand that I don't feel comfortable then they stop it…	Strategy in mixed classes
Abdul: there was a girl who sent me a message with her friend asking me to be her boyfriend, so I didn't know what to say and told my mother… eventually I told her that I had a girl friend, though I didn't, just not to hurt her feelings…	Strategy to get a way with the situation
Mohammed: I don't have many friends because of my studies but my first friend is my wife…	friends
Yunos: my wife is my first friend of course but I also have male friends and doesn't matter Muslims or non Muslims as long as there are no females with us…	friends
Abdul: I have three male English friends… and we are still in touch although I'm in Liverpool now…	friends

Yunos: I think being a friend with people from different backgrounds is a great chance to show them who and how we are and give them the real impression about us… but as I said not females even Muslim females…	Friends with different people
Abdul: as I said I like my three English friends and it doesn't matter to me who the person is… as for having a female friend hmmm maybe I prefer males, you know it's forbidden in Islam to have a female friend…	friendship
Abdul: in a birthday party of one of my friends, his mother brought some beer, so because I don't drink, I asked her for apple juice instead, and shook it to have some fizzy shape, so I engaged with my friends and looked like if it was beer just not create any barriers… in fact my friend understands that I don't drink but I was concerned about other people were present and I never met before…	Strategy to engage with friends
Abdul: one day I had a sleep over in my friend's house and in the morning his mother had prepared some ham… I didn't want to have it and I didn't want to be rude and reject it so I pretended to eat it but I spat it out in the bin and they didn't notice…	Strategy to engage
Abdul: I liked at school we were taught 'facts' and 'opinions' I think this made me open minded to understand other people…	Facts and opinions at school
Yunos: when I compare here to SA, I feel here everybody cares about their job unlike in SA when there is a lot of connection…	Comparing to SA
Mohammed: I don't like how relationship between people here… I mean you don't know your neighbor even if you have been living for a while unlike in SA…	Comparing to SA
Abdul: I think we are the future of SA, we should take the good things from here and leave the bad things…	Comparing to SA

Second interview initial codes

Zainah

I expressed my opinion about the protests in Bahrain, and condemned the way protestors were treated, so I was worried that the Saudi students heard me and had reported about me, so I'll go to prison once I go back to SA	Fears of being prosecuted in SA because of her opinion
I'm really scared, I don't want to go back to SA… I haven't been eating or sleeping well because of the thought about it.. I might go to prison.. I've got a baby I have to look after	She doesn't want to go back because of her fears
I don't want to go back because I feel free here.. although my husband doesn't control my movements but I still have more freedom in the UK.. I can use public transport, I don't need a male guardian to go out with me, I can go to the cinema or go out whenever I like unlike in SA	Another reason for not going back to SA
I used to feel lonely but not anymore especially after the arrival of my husband..	Not lonely anymore
in the first interview, I wanted to go back to SA as soon as possible, but not anymore… I want to stay (why?) because of my opinion in Bahrain	Her opinion is scaring her
I only talked to Shia friend (about this topic) who reassured me that nothing is going to happen	Her Shia friend being somebody she can trust
I used to be neutral about Chinese students, but now I don't like them… they're just like Indians (laughing)	Racist remarks
It has nothing to do with their ideas, but it is the way they behave…	Justifying her racist remarks
I have an American friend living with her boyfriend and I have no problem with her unlike other Muslims who may not like the idea… her beliefs don't concern me… she's a nice person and she's very curious to get to know other	She thinks she's interculturally competent by being a friend with this American friend

people…	
I stopped talking about so many things since I arrived here because of my fears of getting in a trouble in SA especially I'm Shia… this only happens with Arabs and Muslims not others…	She changed how much she speaks and expresses her opinion
A number of incidents happened when I declined shaking hands with other men… one of them wanted to shake hands with me but I told him I'm Muslim so he understood and stopped it…	Shaking hands
I don't see any hatred from British people towards Muslims, but I see the opposite how Muslims hate each other… for example, my Palestinian classmate hates Shias more than anything else…	Hating Shia
Having spent this period of time in the UK, I feel that I prefer socializing with non Arabs instead… because I'm very open minded and I don't mind sitting with other males and I don't believe it's wrong… but other Arabs think so… there is a gender division in the classroom…	Being judged by other Arabs
My American friend invited me one day and made sure to keep pork away from me… they respect us unlike many Muslims who only pray without actually tolerance…	Tolerance with non Muslims
One day I was lost with my sister in a rural area and there was an old man who said I'll give you a lift in my car…	
One day my American's friend's friend invited me for her daughter's birthday but I didn't want to have any cake because she wasn't from the family of the book, but I had to eat with them otherwise it would've been rude…	Trying to adapt although it's against what she believes in…
I don't feel like if I belong to the department… this is because most of them are Saudis who are selfish and care about themselves…	Not liking Saudis
I have been impressed by British people and how much they like helping people… this has been my opinion about them from the beginning	Liking British people
I started believing in God more than	Believing in God more than before

before… whenever I needed anything I just pray and God does it for me… I can see his miracles…	
I've learnt from British and international students how to be accepting to different views.. in the past if somebody had said to me they don't believe in God I would've argued about it to prove that he exists…	Being relative about reality (Kim intercultural identity)
How about	
My family don't know about these changes in the way I look t things… my mother only asks me about my studies but nothing else…	Hiding the changes from her family
What I don't like here is not hearing the call for prayers… I'm sure if I go to the mosque they won't accept me because I'm shia…	The call for prayer is a sign of her religious identity She thinks nobody would accept her in the mosque…
I don't feel I'm Saudi anymore… I'm Qatifi…	Ethnocentric view to her identity

Raneem

I told my friend that I wanna do some volunteering somewhere. but I'm not sure how my parents will see that.. because I found a volunteer position in Kenya and my dad doesn't want me to go there because he wants to me to be at home and have a job.. I don't know I think it'll be a good experience... but also it could be a reason not to go back to Saudi Arabia... I'm nervous about my future...	Not wanting to go to SA and worried about her future
I've been living alone here and I feel I'm alone and I do what I want... so in Saudi a lot of restrictions.. but here I can leave whenever I want... I don't need a driver here.. so it's more difficult...	Reasons for not wanting to go to SA
i wanna do something in human rights.. especially current slavery in Saudi Arabia and how we treat them that they don't have rights and how they're not seen as humans... I wanna work in this field.. but obviously in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf region we say about Islam while we don't treat them equally and we have slavery... it makes	Reflecting on SA… but also implying that Islam has human rights

me so angry.. so it's something i wanna do but I also don't wanna go to Saudi... so I'm torn about what I'm doing..	
yeah I feel different, I'm more confident now.	Confident just like Zainah… she has lerarnt from her stay in the UK
well when you see different students from different parts of the world, and when we talk about the WEST as Europe and the USA but you still see so many differences between them… there's something don't understand about us, i feel Europeans know more about us, but they don't understand my culture.. but Americans don't.. though they all are so different... for example, I asked my dad for a new phone so he got it for me, it's not about being spoiled but it's my dad's job to do it for me, but then my friends thought i was spoiled and they asked why don't you get it for yourself.. but the thing this is how i grow up in my culture i get what i ask my dad.. so they were lost, how can you get something for free!! but i told them it's not for free... but he got it for me.. but i found it interesting that how they reacted to it.. but obviously i want to be independent..	She is negotiating her identity of getting what she wants from her father as it is his job but also wanting to be independent… she is trying to find somewhere in between
i mean in many cases they don't understand what i come from.. they can't get it.. i don't know why.. i think i understand them more, maybe because i lived in different places, but i don't understand why they approach it with close mindedness.. so it's ok to live with my parents or getting me a new phone, so they think i have to move out.. so we're family oriented, we're not individualistic so we think collectively..	She is comparing herself to her European peers
i don't think so (not being influenced or have to change) , i've been in Europe most of my life.. I've been getting along well with Europeans.. and i also learnt not to be influenced by anybody.. i've been picked up on as the odd person cos i was different.. so i don't know.. hmmm when i talk about drinking it was about with a Saudi friend rather	She doesn't want to change to cope, and drinking was by a Saudi friend

than influenced by western friends... of course i'm not justifying myself but it's a Saudi friend of mine..	
it's (drinking) also a bad thing cos it's forbidden in religion and you put up weights.. but i don't know maybe cos i've been drilled not to try it.. and to be honest i can see why it's forbidden but we're not perfect, and i can't imagine my parents being happy about it.. gosh.. of course they know how i am but it's not something to be proud of.. i mean nothing wrong about it here but it's not there.. so yeah since then i've been drinking hahaha	Worries about the family knowing about her drinking Justifying drinking that we're not perfect
i drink with friends only.. when we go out.. and i enjoy the effect as bad as it is though.. one day i had too much i have to say and they had to carry me back home.. so yeah mostly with my friends.. sometimes we go to the bar just for some drinks with my European friends	She says the opposite, drinking is not a result of her friends' influence but it seems so
i felt bad about it.. but i'm just thinking like we should have fun and enjoy and we live once and we should do something challenging at least once, so what's the point of living.. i know it's stupid to say this but, i don't know.. i have an uncle who drinks so it annoys me when they act in a conservative way but they drink in front of me…	Wanting to try new things including drinking
they were so excited hahaha although they always said i never needed alcohol because im a happy person, but they were excited anyway.. i don't really think it's a big deal for me..	Her friends' reaction about drinking
i have what i want but there are restrictions by my family.. so i can't go to kenya as i want.. so in my daily life here i do whatever i like.. but in saudi as a girl i get told off about it.. so socially it's not accepted.. i have social freedom here but not there in saudi.. so i have male friends here but i'd be nervous meeting them over there when i go to saudi although my sisters have met them and went for dinner but i think it's still less extreme in jeddah more than riyadh.. so social freedom	Speaking about freedom Her family are in charge

here is more..	
in Saudi we don't have a big political society so people don't really care and the most oppression is from politics and religion.. so they are the same obviously.. in Saudi i can go out and do whatever but there are other things we can't do.. and can you imagine that we can't leave the country without a guardian.. i mean.. now i'm defining myself as Hijazi rather than Saudi cos i don't belong to that family, although i really don't like it because i don't like making barriers with other people as Najdi and Hijazi, but i still can see it because in my culture we're so friendly..	Like Zainah, she's Hijazi rather than Saudi Having an intercultural identity (Kim) but still acknowledges her culture as 'friendly' and 'they' are not
and when i think about Shias, my parents never had a problem with me being friends with them but we never recognised them as Muslims.. in fact why should i care.. people have the rights to believe in whatever they want rather than opressing them... the government is so centralised, so they want to oppress them and we shouldn't fear them.. especially when they're linked to Iran and so on.. but if they were respected and not oppressed then they won't fight against you but this is what the government wants to do...	She has sympathy and empathy for shias because they seem to be in the same position
I don't know any Saudis except you.. most of my friends are Europeans and International students... but few British friends.. you're Muneer the only Saudi student.. so my relationship with other friends are getting closer and we are leaving each other soon so we are feeling all sad but i have the opposite problem..	Similar to Zainah, not wanting to meet Saudis…
I lived here few years ago and now I'm used to it.. so I don't pick on things that much.. so in the UK I noticed Geordies have a different culture and they're different.. so my friends keep complaining about it such as how women dress and how much and early they get drunk... my friends pick on it	Coping with the environment

but for me it never bothered me.. so you either get used to it or you isolate yourself.. i don't know..	
the only thing is drinking i would say, also fasting but it's because i'm studying and i can't do it so i felt i was falling behind.. so i still pray and doing the same thing i've been doing... maybe as i said to my friends i'm holding to prayers because it's the only thing can make up for my drinking hahaha... but im still believing in God and believe in religion although i hate how religions are becoming political... so i've made my own mind in my way... it's between me and God.. i have so many atheist friends and they respect that and i like to believe in God, so in case hahaha.. for me praying is being grateful to God.. so when i pray it's not because i'm asking for forgiveness but it's appreciating what God has given me.. it's just appreciation.. so i think i need guidness from God.. because im trying to be good..	She's talking about her Islamic identity and what she gave up It is very different from what she said in London as she stopped praying and doubting God
want also to add that that although i've been travelling around and sometimes people think oh im western or whatever but i sometimes i say wait i have also my culture and values.. if you think i've rejected everything then you're wrong.. im still in both sides.. so i don't get biased to either to my culture or other cultures.. you know i don't wanna be categorised or stereotyped as Saudi or western.. nothing wrong with either it's just i want to be myself.. especially people who grew up somewhere else like me it's difficult.. i think although my parents are Saudis, i still feel i'm sometimes western so i don't know.. me and my sisters grew up in the same place in the west but we are different.. so it depends on our personalities and depeding on who we are..	She is trying to find a place for her identity and not to be stereotyped
I'm not seen as ... my dad thinks i'm wild hahaha but when i'm with Saudi people they look at me as western	She is nonetheless still stereotyped by both Saudis and non Saudis… she is also trying to get out of her box of

though they think of west is evil or whatever.. but when i talk to western people they look at me as eastern.. so because i'm different person with different people.. so in a negative way they always see me as somebody different.. hmmm my dad wants me to calm down so he wants me to get married and have kids and that's it.. although i don't want it.. positively sometimes they think i'm good as a strong woman and educated..	being just a woman… she is fighting the stereotyped of a woman who gets kids
i want to have kids of course and get married but it's the restrictions on me.. so i reached 24 and they think it's time to get married now.. and all my cousines in my age are already engaged and so on.. i mean i haven't done what i want to do yet.. i haven't prepared myself yet.. so that's why i'm not ready yet.. i don't want a man to stop me from doing what i want.. i don't care if i don't get married at the age of 30 but in Saudi it's too old..	Trying to fight the Saudi female norm again
also i don't know many people there so it's not gonna be easy.. and it's also i don't wanna be in arranged marriages because i don't want to... it's something i have to consider..	Marriages… being different from other females
well i think one of the problems here is exccessive drinking.. they get drunk at 7 and that's not good.. but also people here are very organised and friendly.. so they have queues and things.. so i like that sometimes although it's tiring sometimes.. so they have go by rules here.. but in Saudi you'll need a lot of connections to have things done for you..	Reflecting on SA
my identity is fluid i wanna create my own idintity rather than restricted to a certain group or the colour of my passport.. i wanna have the freedom in being who i want.. i understand the political reasons but we can't generalise or steretype or whatever..	Identity fluidity
my religious identity they ask me oh you'r eMuslim how come you don't wear the headscarf... like this chinese	Speaking about her identity and its fluidity

guy who embarrassed me on the bus he was asksing me how come i'm not wearing the headsarf how come i asmoke., and he asked how come you have curly hair.. so he had some fixed ideas and he wanted to prove it hahaha... so i don't wanna belong to one identity i can't do that.. because i grew up everywhere and studied in american schools so it's so exhausting.. i can't put my finger on it.. i don't think i want to identitfy myself with one thing.. i think everybody should be a part of this world and especially globalisation brought everybody together..	

Zahir

I feel that my level of tolerance has increased since I've been here in the UK… I always was tolerant when I was in SA but now it's even more… doesn't matter what religion or background the other person comes from… I don't like holding any stereotypes about anybody	Changes happened in him during the UK
I'm fine in dealing with the opposite gender as long as they accept me too…	No problem with knowing females
I'm very excited to go back to SA because I've almost my degree now and this is a big achievement… especially we have very strong family connections with each other…	Unlike Raneem and Zainah.. he wants to go back to SA
I used to be picky about Halal food but not anymore… this is because there have been some religious scholars who said it's fine (mainly because it is sacrificed by the people of the book)	Having non halal because of religion permits it rather than questioning it
One day we protested in London for Syrian people… it is beautiful to see the freedom of speech… we'd like to have similar rights in SA but the problem is with people themselves… they're not used to protest peacefully because it is a new culture in SA… we need some time to achieve it and it is progressing anyway…	Talking about freedom of speech compared to SA

In SA you need to have connections in order to have things done for you… but in the UK you don't need all of that… everybody is doing their job…	Connections in SA
I'm leaving the UK soon but I don't have many British friends because they are difficult to deal with… my course is full of Arabs and the accommodation is full of Chinese… so most of my friends are Saudis…	friends
There is a clear gender division in the classroom; males and females (Saudis)… we speak only within the classroom but not outside… if I see any of them in the street we don't say hello to each other… especially they wear the headscarf and their husbands are in the Saudi society	Relationship to Saudi males/females (similar to Zainah)
Many of them (Saudi female students) have just arrived from SA and not expecting to be comfortable speaking to males…	
we saw each other a number of times in the street but they avoided me so I started avoiding them too…	Relationship between Saudi males and females, just like what Wafa'a said
There were only two Saudi girls who were comfortable in speaking with me… the others were not… the reason is because depending on her background… those who come from a tribal background are more reserved than somebody from Mecca or Jeddah…	Stereotyping tribes and the effect of backgrounds
A British friend of mine has invited me several times for dinner… he's a nice guy though he speaks a lot about the Bible… perhaps he wants to serve his religion…	Religion conversion
Our friendship with other Saudi guys have developed a lot… they're mainly males because Saudi females are very difficult to speak to…	Male friends
I'm disappointed in the education system in the UK… also disappointed in the way the daily life functions here…	This may have let him not to negotiate anything compared to Zainah and Raneem
I stopped coming to the mosque because it's far from my home… and sometimes I'm too busy to go to the mosque, unlike when I was in SA going	He stopped the behaviour but the motivation is still religious

to the mosque for every prayer… an Islamic scholar stated that it is fine to pray at home if I'm travelling which is my case today…	
My religious decisions have to be based on statements by scholars… I take religion seriously so I don't make my own mind about it…	Religion
(asking him about going to the mosque) I don't feel I've changed a lot because I feel like I'm living in SA… I go out with my SA friends and also visit the Saudi society quite often…	Not leaving his comfort zone
The only thing has changed in my personality is liking to speak about politics… I think it's because of freedom here…	Freedom and liking politics/ similar to what Raneem said about freedom and politics
I'm more confident now compared to when I first arrived…	Changed in confidence
I feel I'm more Saudi than before… I appreciate SA and our culture when I compare it to the UK… especially when it comes to generosity; we are very generous, friendly and we love everybody in SA… I know many Saudis who don't have any sense of Saudi identity anymore unlike me…	Stronger Saudi ID

Abdul, Mohammed and Yunos

Yunos: I feel that I've changed in term of punctuality… when I have an appointment with somebody I have to arrive on time… in the past I used to be late few minutes but now I arrive before time sometimes… I think it is because of the culture here as they care about punctuality… though it is something in our religion and Islam requires people to be punctual but it is us who do not stick to it…	Changing in term of punctuality and acknowledging that it is something based in Islam, so blaming people for it but not the religion
Mohammed: the environment here where you live helps you to be punctual and follow the rules… I had these values when I was in SA but now I can practise it in my daily life…	The effect of the place
Abdul: the thing has changed in me is making friends with girls… because I've been socialising with Saudi	Not being a friend with females because of the effect of his Saudi friends

married guys, they have told me that when I get married in the future, my wife has to be the only woman who I can socialise with, so I'm preparing myself from now…	
This doesn't include elder women because I look at them as mothers or teachers, and nothing else will develop with them…	Fears of intimacy with females
Yunos: unlike Mohammed, I didn't have such values but I developed them here in the UK… now I get annoyed when my friends in SA arrive late… I'd love to change it in them…	Punctuality and the willing to change
Mohammed: one of the important things I learnt is treating everybody equally… doesn't matter what background they come from… sadly in SA we have racism against labours [from Asia or Africa] but now because we are in a similar situation, we have the empathy and we know how they feel…	Empathy and reflecting on SA about labour
Yunos: I agree	
Abdul: one of my female friends was upset with me when she saw me changing my place whenever she came next to me and she asked me that I have changed so I explained to her that it is a part of my religion to do so… a Muslim girl helped me to explain to them but this girl in particular wasn't happy about it as she insisted that there should be no differences between people…	Justifying his changes by religion.
Yunos: as Mohammed said you may find some forms of racist acts in the UK but I have to say it's not as much as in SA… so this has made me to reflect on myself and learn from it…	Reflection on SA
Abdul: one of the changes also I started being more friendly with my Saudi friends… this is because my British friends are very friendly…	Influenced by friends
Mohammed: I'm the opposite, in the beginning I was very friendly with everybody but now I started being less because I don't want people to take advantage of my friendliness… this is	Being less friendly/ like Zahir he argues that British people are less friendly

because in the UK people aren't as friendly as in SA…	
Mohammed: when I speak about freedom, it has to be within Islamic values… I don't appreciate the freedom here because it could go too far… being restricted by Islam makes me feel free… we shouldn't go beyond this "box" [religion]…	Freedom within religion
Abdul: I like freedom here as I can do whatever I want and I can express my opinion… of course as long as they're within Islam… so I wouldn't go out with girls or start drinking otherwise I'll be lost…	Freedom within religion
Yunos: I don't like the kind of freedom when women don't dress properly or people start drinking… this is not freedom… our freedom should be within religion… but I like the freedom of speech and access of information unlike SA…	Freedom within religion
Yunos: Here is law in the UK that protects peoples' rights… there was a waiter someday who gave me a bad attitude, so I had to write to the manager who apologised…	Appreciating law in the UK
Mohammed: everybody in the UK is equal behind the law, but there are some racist acts unofficially like the Muslim who was killed outside a mosque…	Appreciating the law in the UK
Yunos: but this is not official… here is freedom of religion and you find prayer rooms for all religions…	Freedom of religion
Yunos: because I've got my wife with me I don't feel lonely…	Loneliness
Abdul: I feel lonely when I leave from my family going to Liverpool…	
Mohammed: it happened in the beginning when I felt lonely but now it's fine with me…	
Yunos: because I met people from around the world, I'm more opened now to speak to anybody no matter what their background is… but of course this doesn't include female students…	Opened to anybody but not females
Mohammed: I felt happy when people	Being acknowledged and happy

congratulated me for Eid… it means that they know about my culture… it means that they know about Islam…	
Abdul: me too… it means they acknowledge me and my culture…	
Yunos: I say the same thing to them about Christmas… when they say to me Happy Eid, I just answer thank you, not happy Eid to you too… it is our Eid not theirs… I just congratulate them as they do with me… I want to treat people the way they treat me…	Us and them
Abdul: I agree	
Abdul: I've made more Saudi friends now… when I was in SA I had international friends and I was the only Saudi one… when I met my Saudi friends here it appeared that I didn't know much about Saudi culture… I want to know more now… it never crossed my mind when I was in SA but when I met them here I felt I'd like to meet them more regularly…	Stronger relationship with Saudi students FRIENDS
Mohammed: I have fewer friends now because of I have my family here so it's difficult…	friends
Yunos: I think the English are arrogant sometimes but North East is much better than London or other places… I have been to the USA and people were friendlier…	Stereotyping British people
Abdul: I'm the opposite… I like British people I think they're very friendly…	Opposite stereotype
Yunos: I don't mind non Halal food because it is from the family of the book so we can have it… but there are of course limits which is religion, so if a woman shook my hand, I may let it go but surely not kissing on the cheeks or hugs… so from the beginning I sat my limits which is religion not to go beyond that and I don't think I've done anything wrong so far…	Religion restricting his cultural engagement… even non halal food is justified by the food of the people of the book
Mohammed: there are two types: one; something you choose and control to do and the second sometimes you can't control it like if a girl was sat next to you in the class… one day I was invited to dinner and there was wine on the	Struggling to integrate and adapt

table and that was very awkward but I had to let it go… I couldn't do anything about it… it's forbidden to sit on a table has wine on it…	
Abdul: I agree… one day we had a party and then my teacher opened a bottle of champagne and I didn't want to have any although she told me it was non alcoholic… I hesitated a lot then I had it at the end as long as it's not alcoholic…	His hesitation is purely psychological because it has no alcohol…
Abdul: there are certain things I can't negotiate such as prayers… it is something I've been doing since I was a child so I cannot not do it…	Primary socialisation
Another girl asked me to be her boyfriend and my heart started beating because I can't do it… you know because of my religion…	girlfriend

Lubna and Hadeel

Hadeel: I've been living a love story with a Saudi guy… He studies here in the UK and I see him from time to time…	Love with Saudis
Lubna: I'm in love too… obviously we love Arabs only…	Loving Arabs
Hadeel: yes I love Arab guys more than any other guys…	
Lubna: I always believed in love even before coming here…	Hasn't changed about love
Hadeel: I feel I'm a bit more confident person now compared to when I first arrived… now I help new students to cope with life here…	More confident
Lubna: I'm the opposite I feel I'm stronger in SA… I don't know why… I cry a lot here…	Vulnerable
Hadeel: I've become more friendly now with people… when I went back to SA I started opening doors for people like here which made them feel happy…	Changes in SA
Lubna: I still feel that socialising with international students is easier than home students… well unless if you do them a favour like helping them with homework then they become friends…	International vs. home
Hadeel: I wore abaya one day and nobody gave me any looks… I felt	Happy for not being given looks

happy that nobody felt I was weird or different…	
Lubna: I changed the way I wear the headscarf because my Saudi female friends told me to try the new style… in fact I feel it's easier to deal with people now… I also heard people saying I look beautiful…	Changing the headscarf to look more beautiful and also to be easier in dealing with people…
Hadeel: I like freedom here as you can love as you like and I can meet my boyfriend whenever I like without feeling worried like in SA…	Freedom of love
Hadeel: I get worried to be seen by other Saudis because I don't want them to start talking about me… it'd be like living in SA…	Fears of similar groups
Lubna: it's easier for guys of course… the guys said they wanna try go clubbing and nothing wrong with it but if we as girls went clubbing it'd be a big deal and a scandal… I have to say though that even I have freedom here there's always something stopping me from doing anything wrong… it's all about how my family brought me up to be…	Family/primary socialisation
Lubna: whenever I feel lonely or going through difficult times I usually call my Muslim friend to speak to her… I feel Muslims understand each other more… my Greek friend wouldn't have the same empathy because she doesn't' know what I'm going through…	Muslim friends
Lubna: We've got more British students now in the course but still difficult to communicate with them… we've got to spend the effort to do it…	British students
Hadeel: If we were in SA and saw non Saudi students, I'd be more than happy to speak to them… but British students for some reason don't…	British students
Hadeel: I feel I belong to my department more than the college because I'm living alone now…	College life
Lubna: I sometimes feel that I should've gone to the USA instead because it's maybe easier than here…	USA
Lubna: I feel I don't pray as before… I have missed a number of prayers… but	Fewer prayers/ religion

of course I feel guilty because religion is the most important thing in somebody's life…	
Hadeel: the same thing with the headscarf… in the beginning I used to wear it long but now shorter…	Headscarf
Lubna: I got used to speak to guys now unlike before when it was very difficult…	Speaking to the opposite gender
Lubna: I tell my mother about most of what is happening here… we're honest with each other…	Intracultural communication
Hadeel: the same here I tell my mother what I can't tell to my father…	
Hadeel: I feel that I'm more accepting to people criticising my religion unlike before… I think we have to listen to other people and what they think…	Accepting differences and less defensive
Lubna: I know I should be wearing the headscarf in a proper way but I have to say this way now has helped me to get to know people more… it's made my life easier… but for the prayers, it's something between God and me… my mother keeps reminding me of the prayers…	Headscarf is an identity sign unlike prayers which are en things
Hadeel: my family in SA don't like the way I dress up when I send them my photos…	Family control
Lubna: I sometimes don't know who I am… I learn from my mistakes but I always remember that I am Muslim and carrying my country and family's name… my parents trust me so I shouldn't betray their trust in me…	Identity issue?

Haleemah

Some Saudis believe that someone should travel abroad to get the only 'knowledge' they intend to study but not to change anything else…	Sounds like internal vs. external changes
I'm more interested to pursue my postgraduates now… in the beginning I just wanted to finish my studies then go back to SA but now I want to stay and study more… in the beginning I had a lot of pressure even from people around me, mainly because my appearance wearing the headscarf…	Changed the attitude toward studies

but now since I'm capable of doing it surely I can continue…	
In the last year, I felt that most of my classmates, both males and females, who were avoiding me started to love me and we became really good friends…	Better friendship now
Other Saudi female friends who cover their faces are still incapable of making friends… it's very difficult to communicate with somebody covering their face… I know that these women don't want to cover their faces but it's all because of their husbands or anybody in charge of being with them… I think they [the women] should explain to their husbands that it is very difficult to wear it… I also have to say that the British students tried to communicate with them but it's still difficult…	Headscarf and niqab So British now spending effort to communicate with them
In my third year I knew more understanding people who don't mind me praying anytime if I tell them…	Different from the other girl in the beginning who was angry
In the past I found it difficult to communicate with both British and international students, so I stopped socialising with them… but in my last year I decided to spend more effort to communicate with them and that did help me to have better relationships with them…	Spending effort to communicate rather than avoiding them
Most of my new friends now are Arabs because of the nature of the course… but I still have my British friends from my undergraduate course… we have met several times for a coffee… the same thing with the British male friend he's still in touch with me…	Friendship
I think that the UK is one of the best countries in term of freedom and freedom of religion… nobody has the rights to impose their opinion on you…	Positive attitude about the UK
We shouldn't ignore [the differences] between one another… we should acknowledge them and accept each other no matter… we should learn to live alongside each other…	Brining up differences rather than ignoring them
If I don't find halal meat then I just	Not changing

have vegetarian food… I haven't changed anything in my values or culture… especially everybody represents their religion, culture and family… in fact, when people see you preserving your culture and religion they respect you more…	
The university asked us for interviews to be filmed about the students life… my family found it interesting to see me on YouTube talking about my experience but my Saudi female friends found it inappropriate and said that I should've asked my husband's permission first to be interviewed… they said that I had rebelled against my culture and values… they didn't like my independence in making my own decision…	Women's freedom is restricted and linked to males
If it were my husband to be interviewed and filmed it wouldn't have been a problem… but for me as a woman then it's a big deal…	Men vs. women
I like the absolute freedom in the UK… it allows people to use it wisely…	freedom
I learnt in the UK how to like all people no matter what their backgrounds are… in SA everybody who is non Saudi is considered to be a foreigner no matter whether they're Arabs or non Arabs… we have a 'foreigner complex'… we have to remember that we have to deal with all people as human beings no matter where they come from, rather than believing that we are 'the chosen people of God'…	Against Saudi ethnocentrism
If you go to the Saudi society, you'll see how Saudis put themselves into groups… they are ethnocentric against each other depending which tribal background you come from…	Tribal ethnocentric
When I first arrived to the UK I thought everybody was going to hell apart from us… now I feel I'm a part of all human beings… we are all humans… no matter what beliefs or nationalities we hold…	More human international identity

Sameer

A couple of incidents happened in the	Looks like external outcome but

Islamic society; first, we invited non-Muslims to the mosque and had a meal together… many people turned up and a big number of them were Christians and Jews, so it was good to have a discussion together… the second incident was about an even when all faith societies were distributing leaflets to people in the street so we had a good opportunity to speak to each other…	nothing internal
We gave them books about Islam and they gave us books about Christianity… their president was very keen to keep in touch with our society…	A lot of communication but still looks external
There are many differences between us and them… eventually they are Christians and we are Muslims… but my religion requires me to deal with people in a good way…	Recognising differences and treating the different nicely is a motivation by religion… so religion come here again
We're eventually all humans but we're still different if not in religion, in nationalities… nationalities could create more stereotypes in some cases than religions…	Being all humans then different again
I don't have any British friend… I think they're so reserved and don't want to be your friend unless there is a shared benefit… this doesn't include British Muslims as we share religious brotherhood with each other…	No British friend unless there is something (this is what Lubna said) But with British Muslims is different
I had read some books stereotyping British people of being reserved and I tried to challenge this stereotype but I couldn't… all what the book had said was true…	Seeking information and stereotype from other sources
We tend to categorise people to make sense out of things around us… even within Muslims themselves you find such categories…	Justifying categories and stereotypes
I believe in freedom, as it is a part of religion… religion gives you the freedom to choose your belief…	His understanding of freedom comes from religion too, similar to Mohammed and Yunos though they had a different understanding of religion and freedom
We can't speak about multiculturalism in SA because many people are in need of jobs and more important things… so it's too early to speak about it before	Multiculturalism in SA

satisfying more important needs…	
The brotherhood with other Muslims in the Islamic Society has led me to stick to them and not willing to make new friends such as British friends as I was willing in the beginning… I think I failed in making new British friends but I have enough friends I think…	Religious societies stopping people from getting to know others
We don't have much to do with the Saudi society because I want to get out of the Saudi zone and get to know other people… also an incident happened in the Saudi society when some of them had some ethnocentric views about other Saudis because of their tribal background…	Similar to what Haleemahh said, racism within Saudis
I don't think religious societies have made differences between people… this [Islam] is the right religion… and my duty is to tell people about its message and it is their decision to take it or leave it… of course we treat people nicely no matter how different they are…	External behaviour is to be nice but internally they're not right… Converting people?
Of course my relationship with other Muslims is stronger than non Muslims because we meet in the mosque quite often and we have more common things…	Religion comes first as the source of identity
I used to have non halal food because of some religious statements that permitted that… but the fact is that not everybody here is from the people of the book, so I stopped it…	Opposite of Zahir
Religion is the 'red line' that I will never cross… I might change in some of my daily habits such as I started cooking but surely nothing to change in religion…	Stick to religion but not minding changing anything not related to religion
I'm sure many people in SA wouldn't be happy to know that I cook… but I have a goal of changing such ways of thinking…	Changing SA mentalities
The prophet used to work in his own house and help his wife in cleaning and sewing his clothes… so there is nothing wrong with that…	His daily changes are still linked to religion then and motivated by religion
Identities exist today and we can't ignore them… religion made black and	Identities debate

white people similar… Arabs and non Arabs similar… but we can't neglect the differences related to nationalities… why are we upset about religions for making differences between people and happy about nationalities although they do the same thing?	
Religion should be the source how we establish our categories… if Islam tells us to make a distinction between men and women and that women have to wear headscarf, for instance, then we have to do it… surely there is a reason behind it…	Religion categorising people

Appendix 6: Coding the themes

First interview

Assumptions before coming to the UK:

There are so many churches in the UK so I assumed people here are more religious than people in the USA. But when I came here it was the opposite. I've been here in the UK for about 5 to 6 years and never seen a nun.

Before I came to the UK I had this impression about English people that they are too cold and don't provide help to others… but then I came here I found the opposite… everybody wants to help me especially when I'm with my child… unlike in Saudi Arabia where nobody helps anybody… here you find Islam without Muslims…

Before I came to the UK, I had this idea that English people are not friendly and they have snobbish attitude unlike American people.

I thought they weren't friendly and wouldn't accept Arabs… they wouldn't accept Muslims…

I thought about British people as not very friendly like Americans and they are very serious people…

I had the impression about people in the UK that they are friendly but very strict about time and queues… honestly I wasn't interested to find out about them and their culture…

I think British people are more understanding to Muslims than Americans… maybe elder generations are not but younger ones are…

Lubna: when I first arrived to the UK I thought they weren't friendly at all and very strict people especially when it comes to time… I didn't know much about Durham and thought not many Arabs around… I was scared…

Hadeel: I chose to come to the UK because of the history of the country and when I came to Durham and saw the old buildings I loved it… this is what I was after…

Norah: they are very proud of their history and nation…

Before I came to the UK, I thought people would be unfriendly and racists against anybody coming to their country… I got this impression from some British people in Jeddah…

Before I came to the UK, I thought they are very punctual people and respect time… I also thought they were religious people…

I think the society in the UK is very conservative when dealing with other people and also people are very materialistic…

Abdul: Before I arrived to the UK, I was worried about racism against Muslims especially my name is Abdul which could be a problem…

Yunos: I used to come to the UK, especially in London when I was child and I think we noticed some 'arrogance' from some people… but not in the north hear as I think in London people are very stressed out and busy…

Assumptions after coming to the UK:

My view has changed 70% since I came here last September… there are many friendly people and just like we've got friendly and unfriendly people in our countries, here the same… we shouldn't over generalise…

People here are very polite and helpful… when I go to the bank for instance, everybody is welcoming no matter where I come from… I had a different idea before that they'd be racists….

I think British people respect different other cultures and anybody as long as it's not linked to religion because religion is not an important thing here… if I tell them that I don't shake hands because of religion, they would think I'm extremist, but if I tell them it's my culture they would understand it… so we should present ourselves as we are but without linking it to religion…

But when I came to the school I hadn't seen any of that and I also thought I had to go and make friends with them, but in fact they were interested to get to know me…

Mohammed: I don't think they are arrogant it's just this is their culture, they don't talk to people they don't know unlike us who welcome people and guests even if we don't know them, it's just different
Abdul: I had an experience in which I went kissing guys on the cheeks as we do in SA but they thought I was gay but when I explained to them they understood it and two of them started greeting me the same way, but another didn't like it…

Mohammed: although our religion is different, our culture is different generally anyway… we may not accept some habits here and they may not accept our habits… but I have to mention that I felt here's a freedom of religion, when I first arrived to the airport I found a prayer room and this made feel really comfortable… also my wife had a female officer to check her passport as they were understanding that she wants her face to remain covered…

Abdul: I got asked at school by some students, does your mother wear the headscarf? When I said yes, they said it's against her freedom… but I explained to them that as long as she wants to keep it then it's her freedom but when you say she has to remove it then this is against the real freedom, and they were understanding

Yunos: I was shocked to see there is a mosque built by the university itself, I'm impressed by the freedom of religion in the UK

The experience with the opposite gender

a. in the classroom

I was so cared about the idea of being taught by a male teacher. As you know in Saudi Arabia when the lecturer is a male, we are taught using TV and thus the experience in the beginning here in the UK was really scary and stressful in the beginning. However, the teachers realized that so they were treating me in a friendly way and knowing their 'boundaries' which made me feel more comfortable with time.

The same thing and fears I had with my male classmates. For instance, I couldn't accept the idea of some of them sitting next to me, but when someone comes late and sits next to me, I can't tell them to leave.

I struggled in the first term then in the second term things started to be easier and I got used to my classmates and they got used to me, but as I said within the 'boundaries' as I will never cross them.

➔ adaptation:
But because it happens daily, I started to accept the idea especially I had the impression that it is an educational environment and therefore no worries… I started to observe how the male classmates behave with other girls and I noticed that they were behaving with all girls in the same way whether those girls were wearing the headscarf or not, it did not matter as it was the same. Hence, I thought that I shouldn't be keeping myself in a bubble otherwise I will lose a lot. Therefore, I gradually started to adopt with it bearing in mind that I don't cross the limits and the same thing with the males they don't cross the limits either. I am the first person who should be watching herself.

In the classroom, I sit with a male students from Palestine, Sudan, a girl from Taiwan and Tunisia but not with Saudi males or females…. I feel like we have formed an international group that I belong to….

I didn't have any problem with mixed classes because I worked in a company with other males… the problem is that many people look at women as 'sexual tools'… in my class, you find men in one side and women on the other, this is because most of the class are Saudis…

My non Saudis classmates think I'm different from any other Saudis because I go to the library with my male colleagues and I sit on the floor when we do work and I have no problem with that… but I don't do it with the Saudi males…

Saudi males have a negative idea about open-minded girls and that's why I don't do such things with them… I don't think it has anything to do with religion though, I think it's a very cultural idea…

I never thought of mixed classes as a problem for me because I worked in mixed places in SA… if I were a teacher working in a girls school then surely it would've been an issue… I don't cover my face in SA so I never experienced any issues here in this regard, especially my husband is open-minded and doesn't mind it…

As for mixed classes, I was ready for that… I'm here for a purpose then I'll leave back home…
Whenever I go the class, I try to sit with female students but even if I'm sat with a male, they (the males) leave a distance between us… they respect me…

We work as a team as long as we respect each other… we sit in a circle and when it comes to work, nothing should affect that…

Mixed classes haven't been an issue for me… since we were children, we have been travelling a lot which made us open-minded… also not having brothers gave us a lot of responsibilities which made any experience less fearful…

There are a number of Saudi students in my class and for some reason they avoid talking to me just because I'm Saudi… I don't know why… they talk to any girl from any country but not Saudi girls… it makes me feel that I don't want to talk to them either because if I did they may think I'm flirting with them….

Lubna: when I first arrived I was a little bit scared of mixed classes… perhaps because of the segregation in SA. But last year I had make teachers teaching me which made it less problematic for me and prepared me to come here… also it depends on the family background… if they are openminded or not… do they allow their daughters to work in voluntary work or not…

Norah: mixed classes haven't been an issue for me

I didn't have any issue with mixed classes because in my family we mix together with my cousins and everyone… we obviously don't party together, but we visit each other and it's fine with us… unlike my Saudis friends who never been in mixed situations and they find it difficult when they come in mixed classes…

As I said I have no problems in communicating with girls, but I must say my Saudi friends do have an issue… they claim that the Saudi girls don't communicate with them and both sides (the boys and girls from SA) ignore each other…

When I came here I didn't have any issues with mixed classes because personally speaking I don't think it contradicts with Islamic teachings… so I studied with my wife at the same class and it was fine…

Studying in a multicultural place like in the UK, broadens someone's mind about different habits and practices whether related to the other gender i.e. women or other people from different religions… this is very helpful and healthy rather than spending time with the same people like in SA…

I wouldn't prefer to be in a mixed class, though this has nothing to do with religion… this is of course in the beginning but in postgraduate level, I think we are mature enough now…

In order to sort it ➔ When I first arrived, I was taught by a young female teacher, I didn't feel comfortable at all… she understood that so she started calling a friend of her to join us in the class to make feel more comfortable…

I was the only male in another class but my relationships with the other female students was very normal, perhaps they understood that I had a problem with it so they didn't talk a lot to me…

Abdul: when I first arrived to my mixed class I was happy as I was intrigued to study with girls and see how they think but I was very shy to talk to the girl next to me then eventually I got used to it after asking her few questions…

Abdul: when I got to know my female friends we started playing during lunch time but I was trying not have any physical touches with them as it's against religion… you know…

Yunos: we are not used to mixed classes back in SA so I didn't want to sit next to female students especially I'm married… but my wife accepted the idea and it's fine…

Mohammed: it was difficult for me too to be a in a mixed class, so I tend not to start a conversation with any girl, of course I speak to them politely but not to give them the chance to talk to me…

Mohammed: the reason is that we are human beings and we might fall for somebody from a conversation, this is why I don't talk to them even though I'm married as this will affect both my family and academic life

Yunos: I try to be in a group of male students, but if I am put in a group of girls then I try to answer any question they ask briefly just not to give them the chance to talk to me and hoping they will understand that I don't feel comfortable then they stop it…

b. outside the classroom:

Sometimes I feel like I've got to shake hands with other males, depending on the situation… when I go out with my non Muslim friends, they usually drink alcohol with the food but for me I don't but I also don't mind them as long as I'm not having it…

There is somebody in the town who tried to shake hands with me but I declined in a nice way… the same with our old neighbour who wanted to shake hands with me but I rejected…

I will never compromise anything I believe it's wrong…

One day an old man over 80s came and sat next to me on the bus but I had to leave a distance between me and him… I had no options but to stay…

Our British neighbour is a nice guy, we visit each other and we send him chocolate sometimes… he's very friendly…

Sometimes when I'm on the bus, people avoid sitting next to me… I don't know why, perhaps they see me wearing headscarf and they think I don't want anybody to sit next to me…

When I first arrived, I refused shaking hands with our neighbor, but I felt bad later… I asked my sister who said it's fine he's an old man so shake hands it's ok… so I started shaking hands with him now…

When I'm in a situation I have to shake hands with a lady, if she's elder lady then I don't mind but if she's a young lady then I put my hand on my chest rather than shaking hands… it's a problem as they might think I'm being racist or patronizing women

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Abdul: there was a girl who sent me a message with her friend asking me to be her boyfriend, so I didn't know what to say and told my mother… eventually I told her that I had a girl friend, though I didn't, just not to hurt her feelings…

Struggle with being Muslim:

I faced a lot of difficulties as a Muslim woman especially when other students ask me about the headscarf and why I don't shake hands with men… it is so difficult to explain to them… this is how I am and how I was brought up to believe… I can't explain to them why we do it but they keep asking me all the time…

I tried to explain to them many times, but when they start being sarcastic about my religion I get very offended then I stop talking to them. They apologized later on and they did tell me that they did not know that it is a sensitive topic for her…

One of my classmates felt very angry at me because I told her that I was going for few minutes to say my prayers… I don't know why she got angry although this has nothing to do with her…

Sometimes I feel I'm a bad person because Saudis don't talk to me but also sometimes I feel it's a normal thing to talk to other males…

At school, we were taught that Shias are infidels and not real Muslims… this made me upset as Shia…
When I went to the cathedral, a man shook hands with my sister and me… I felt guilty… I couldn't sleep at night… sometimes I felt like I shouldn't have don't it…

I never shake hands with Saudis though, because they know it's not acceptable. But non-Saudis don't know so they've got a good intention.

I can't adopt to certain situations such as people getting drunk… I don't to be in a situation when my friends are drunk and don't understand what I'm saying…

When these women meet other Saudi women who are studying, they feel they want to study too but a number of barriers stopping them…

We don't talk about religion a lot in the class although I get asked many times by different students about Islam and especially the headscarf and the relationships between men and women… I think they focus on tiny things and leave more important ones…

When I first arrived I was too scared of everything… I never used public transport but now I do everything alone it's fine…

Hadeel: a Greek girl was asking about things in Islam such as headscarf and Lubna didn't like it and decided not to talk to her again if she brings it up… but for me I think it's a good chance to talk about it, we are here to exchange ideas…

Lubna: if somebody doesn't want to know me because of my headscarf or doesn't want me as I am then I don't want to know them either…

Hadeel: I think the headscarf sometimes is a barrier because most people haven't met women wearing headscarf so they think we don't want to know them…

Lubna: I wouldn't cross the boundaries whenever I know anybody… the boundaries that my parents brought me to believe in and that God and religion has set up for me…

There was this female classmate who was against all religions, so I just decided to ignore getting into any conversation with her… but I still treat in the best way I could of course…

Racism:

When I first arrived, I was in Stockton and I was the only one wearing the headscarf in the class. I felt discriminated… even from the staff itself… the teacher was ignoring my questions or comments…

The male staff or the students had the idea that I'm a Muslim woman and therefore they shouldn't be talking to be so they were trying to avoid me in order not to cross their limits as they weren't sure how to deal with a Muslim woman.

➔ to sort it out:
I tried to communicate with everyone especially my male colleagues in order to show them that I have no issues to speak to a male at all and that being Muslim doesn't mean I'm not going to. It was difficult in the beginning I must say, but later on it worked well and they started to feel more comfortable about me.

I faced a lot of troubles in Stockton mainly by teenagers and one day I would've been beaten if I hadn't had help from a male pedestrian…

I think in Saudi Arabia we've got some sense of racism against foreigners. Even if they were Egyptians or Syrians they still foreigners as long as they are not Saudis. But since I've been in the UK, I've changed my mind about it… when people ignored me in the beginning because I was different from them; this is exactly how we do it SA to other people…

I went to Durham Cathedral and the people there welcomed me and were very kind to me… in Mecca on the other hand, someone hit me because I was wearing white and he thought I was Iranian… people here accept you as you are and no matter how different you may look…

I was surprised to hear about the 'hate crime' in the UK as this doesn't happen in SA… I think the reason is because here you've got written laws but in SA there's nothing like that…

I never experienced any racism although I'm wearing a headscarf

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I never experienced any racism; maybe because I don't wear the headscarf… people don't expect me to be from SA…

I've changed my mind when I came here… I think it depends where you are in the UK… in the north people re very friendly and helpful… I have been in difficult situations before perhaps because I wear 'niqab'! I experienced forms of racism in the street, but nothing at the university itself…

➔ to sort it out:
I ignored these problems…. They are teenagers…. You know… I shouldn't make a big deal out of it…

The immigration officer in the airport was very rude to me and my husband and this left a lot of bad impact on me for the next 2 weeks…

A girl told my daughter that her colour looks like an orange pen and that she hates black colour…

I don't like the teenagers here, they scream in my face and cause me troubles, but not to the extent to be an extreme struggle as many Saudis say, it's fine…

But I still feel there's some racism going on… when I landed in the airport, I was stopped for personal checking… but that was with everybody came from SA or looked middle eastern… I think that was racist…

I never experienced any racism and the same with my wife who wears headscarf, this never happened in official establishments like airports or in the street…

I haven't experienced any mistreatment because of my colour or background…

Friends:

I've got at least two or three female friends from Saudi Arabia that I meet them almost everyday… I also have got three female British friends and one male.

This British male friend respects me a lot and respects my religion because he's a mature student unlike those who are in beginning 20s… they are very difficult to engage with them…

I like making new friends and making contacts with other people from different backgrounds… I'm very curious to find out more about other cultures and different backgrounds… we can't isolate ourselves from other people as this gives them the wrong impression about us… we need to show them that we are not aliens… we are just like them…
I like going out with Saudi girls because we have the same background which makes it much easier to communicate with each other… for instance I don't shake hands with other males but my Saudi friends understand this thing unlike other friends even who are Muslims.

It was difficult in the beginning to make new friends… I didn't take the initiative I must say… perhaps I was scared of rejection but I had to be ready for the worse…

Other students from China and Pakistan, for instance faced the same problem. Home students prefer to spend their time with each other rather than with international students… it feels like I'm the outsider so I've got to take the initiative to communicate with them..

If I had lived in a college, I think things would've been very different… I would've developed a very good relationship with home students and would've made new friends…

I find it difficult with the Saudi female students more than the male ones… don't know why maybe because I'm shia or maybe as a woman they've got expectations on me…

I'd like to make British friends but I'm afraid I didn't have the chance because of the nature of my course…. Most of them are Arabs apart from the Taiwanese girl…

I have no problem in making new friends from any different background… it doesn't matter at all… but to be honest not with Jewish people because we were taught that all Jewish are Israelis and murderers…

I never had any issues with international students, but in fact I had issues with a SA female who comes from the same country… we come from different backgrounds in which she covers her face… she keeps telling me that I shouldn't wear too much perfume and she gets nosy in my business…

People's backgrounds don't matter to me as long as they are nice to me… I had an Italian friend of mine who were Christian and drinks and has a boyfriend but this didn't stop me from being friends… we had a party at the end of the term and I brought some food but the other Saudi girl didn't because she thought they don't

deserve it… and when her Ukrainian friend said she's going to bring wine, she yelled "shut up"

I don't have issues with making male friends, but I know my boundaries… whether Saudi or non Saudi it doesn't really matter as long as they are nice to me…

I never had the chance to meet British people because of my class which only consists of international students
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I treat people in the best way I can, doesn't matter Muslim or non Muslim… but when we go out I tell everyone as a joke that we are not going to have any alcoholic drinks…

I go out with females only… I don't go out with males… doesn't matter what they believe in…

I prefer socializing with non Saudis so I practice English and also I'd like to find out about other cultures… I mean females not males…

When they brought wine to the party I sat far in the corner… as a religious person, my religion doesn't allow me to sit in a place where there's alcohol in it… I id my best that they don't bring it but it was out of my hand..

I respect what they do as they have to respect what I do…

I don't have any friends I'm afraid… maybe I'm too busy… The Chinese students speak in their language whenever we go out… I don't feel I fit anywhere… maybe I'm a friend with my husband, we talk about what happens in the daily life… sometimes I skype my mother and sisters for a chat…

I'd love to meet new people, but impossible…. How can I find British students… they are not in my class… also I can't fit with international students as I feel that they have misconceptions about Saudi students especially I wear the headscarf…

I don't mind making friends with different people but of course not male friends… because of religion as first place and also because I don't believe men and women can be friends… I just don't feel it's right to have a male friend… with females I feel more myself…

My classmates and the teacher went to the pub one day but I refused going with them… I wouldn't look nice to go to the pub wearing a headscarf…

Hadeel: I think if I had gone to the USA instead I would've made more friends… people here are very conservative…

Lubna: most of our friends are international students not local…

Norah: last year I spent my time with international students because it was a foundation course, but even now I've got the chance to meet British students, I still spend most of my time with international students….

Lubna: when I first arrived, I met some local students but for a short time, but I felt we didn't get along very well… don't know why… maybe the reason is that we as international students share the same experience of being here and have homesickness unlike local students…

Lubna: international students arrive a week before home students. Therefore, by the time home students arrive, international students had already made friends with each other and home students start to get to know each other as new arrivals which makes it difficult for both to meet with one another…

Hadeel: I think the international students that we got to know have similar way of thinking to ours… even in the class there are home students but they don't mix with us [international students] and when we go out they sit with each other on a different table unless we call them and ask them to join us…

Nora: it all depends on the background of the student… someone who comes from London is used to multiculturalism unlike somebody from the north or from a small town who hasn't been exposed to any different backgrounds before…

Lubna: I prefer getting to know an Arabic speaking person to a different one… perhaps because of the language… hmmm… not only the language but I also think Arabs are more understanding for my cultural values and habits…

Hadeel: I like meeting new people but it depends on how they look, so if somebody with a tattoo for instance, I don't want to know them…

Hadeel: I always would like to meet new people but I'm scared of rejection… I used to think it's about the gender, it's easier to get to know females more than males but it turned out it's the same...

Hadeel: I don't think so; I think it'd be more difficult with males… perhaps because I'm not used to talk to males…

Lubna: I don't mind speaking to male students, but it is difficult to go to a male and say hi I'd like to know you without a good reason… but with girls it's fine…

Nora: I don't mind knowing anybody, but the most important thing for me is that they have 'good morals'…

Lubna: because we three live in Shepherd wing, we get to know girls more than boys… it feels more comfortable to move in the accommodation without being anxious about being seen by a male student…

Hedaya: I lived in Stockton for sometime in a mixed accommodation and never had any issue with my flat mates although I heard that my corridor was quiet comparing to others…

Lubna: I don't mind knowing anybody as long as they respect me…

Lubna: when we go out in the weekends we just go out with girls… sometimes we go out with guys to other places… it depends… we've got more than one group of friends…

Hedaya: if I went back to SA now without knowing other home students, I'd be disappointed because I'd love to have British friends but perhaps we are still in the first year so we need sometime…

Lubna: of course people from the same background, whether females or Arabs, are easier to make friends with but this doesn't mean I don't want to know British students… so if I needed something from anybody I'd go to the same people from my background…

Hedaya: meeting British postgraduates is easier than undergraduates because they are mature, unlike the undergraduates…

I didn't have a problem to make friends with anybody from any religion or background either, but I have to say it was a problem with Shias… a lot of them make barriers and don't want to talk to me… so it feels like the barriers between Shias and Sunnis is bigger than anybody else…

I don't mind making friends with anyone from any background as long as they are nice people… I prefer though my Arab friends because I feel they understand me more and I feel more comfortable with them… we understand each other but with my non Arab friends, I might feel a bit conscious not to say something that could offend them…

I don't have any British friends mainly because of the course I'm doing mostly Arabs… I have some international friends I met at the college but still not British because they stick to each other and make friends with each other not international students…

It happened before when we went out with some international friends, they had some behaviour that goes against my religion such as swearing and drinking but I tried to ignore it… but honestly I didn't go out with them anymore…

They are nice people but I don't want to be a close friend to them so they don't affect my behaviour…

One of my Saudi female colleagues is very feminist… we always argue because I think women in SA are treated very nicely compared to women in the UK…

I think we as SA people have the responsibility to engage with other people… it is sad to see a number of Saudis come to the UK and finish their studies without building any communications with British people… must admit we increased the level of the stereotypes about us… a number of SA only interact with each other and don't go beyond that to discover new things…

Engaging with people from different regions or backgrounds need a lot of open-mindedness and that's why many SA students prefer to keep their engagements within their groups… especially PhD students and then Master students… but undergrads are more willing to engage… I think it is something to do with the age and the marital status as well…

I'm afraid I don't have British friends, most my friends are Arabs or Muslims because of the Islamic society not because I don't want to…. I would love to have British friends, it's very important… but you know… I have a family here which makes it difficult for me, I don't have time…

When it comes to friends from the other gender, I think it is a difficult issue… I don't think there is a friendship between a male and a female, but of course they can be colleagues or whatever… personally I have some 'sisters' and we meet and it's fine but not a friend as such…. But when it comes to people from different backgrounds then certainly we could be friends why not…

I believe that when I make new friends, we shouldn't stick to our groups… I don't want to be your friends just because you are Saudi or Muslim… the more we make friends with different people the more we broaden our knowledge… the more we talk to other different people from us the more we understand… however, I have to say that no friendships I mean real friendship between a male and a female…

It's strange thing that I could deal with Chinese female students more than Saudi female students… I don't know why…

I don't have any problem to deal with them as long as under the religion boundaries

I even had to ask my British female colleague to ask the Saudi girls few things related to the Islamic society as I couldn't talk to them

Tell you the truth, I haven't tried it's just an assumption that they will not feel comfortable to talk to me… I blame it on our society how we were brought up…

I love making friends from different backgrounds… I made friends with British people using the language tandom programme…

I didn't like when they drink, so I had some difficulties as I come from a different culture

I also have many international friends especially from the Islamic society…

But I have to point out that although in the beginning my aim is to get to know people from different backgrounds, we still need to know people similar to us who can understand me… they are closer to me… I mean Muslims or Arabs… they understand my culture shock and any issues I go through…

I don't have many Saudi friends… mainly because we'd talk about SA and someone needs to broaden their minds more… I don't want to stick to my group all the time…

Mohammed: also it's difficult to meet people because of the time and also where to meet them… I will never go to the pub for example because my Islamic culture doesn't permit me to do so or even sitting on a table that has alcoholic drink on it…

Mohammed: I don't have many friends because of my studies but my first friend is my wife…

Yunos: my wife is my first friend of course but I also have male friends and doesn't matter Muslims or non Muslims as long as there are no females with us…

Abdul: I have three male English friends… and we are still in touch although I'm in Liverpool now…

Yunos: I think being a friend with people from different backgrounds is a great chance to show them who and how we are and give them the real impression about us… but as I said not females even Muslim females…

Abdul: as I said I like my three English friends and it doesn't matter to me who the person is… as for having a female friend hmmm maybe I prefer males, you know it's forbidden in Islam to have a female friend…

Abdul: in a birthday party of one of my friends, his mother brought some beer, so because I don't drink, I asked her for apple juice instead, and shook it to have some fizzy shape, so I engaged with my friends and looked like if it was beer just

not create any barriers… in fact my friend understands that I don't drink but I was concerned about other people were present and I never met before…

Abdul: one day I had a sleep over in my friend's house and in the morning his mother had prepared some ham… I didn't want to have it and I didn't want to be rude and reject it so I pretended to eat it but I spat it out in the bin and they didn't notice…

What makes them open-minded or not:

What makes me accepting other people and curious to know them is my background. My mother is Syrian and when we go to visit my relatives from my mother's side, our neighbors come to visit us and we get mixed together males and females.

I know male colleagues but I prefer not to call them friends… it doesn't matter whether they are Saudis or not Saudis… I can't go out with them just like I do with my female friends… it's difficult…

Because I was born in Qatar, then worked in a mixed company, this has helped me to accept different people including the other gender.

Besides, in our history as Shia, we have been communicating with other people including other enemies… Sayedah Zainab for instance went to her enemy and gave her famous speech…

This has affected us as Shia so our women go and talk to men as Sayedah Zainab did… she's our example… besides, our women don't have to cover their faces like Sunni women whi I think are oppressed and that's why they struggle when they come here…

Although Shia in Qatif for instance are more capable of communicating with different people, they still would find it difficult if they hadn't had any contacts with anyone or if they had stayed in their place forever…
Family:

Mixed classes haven't been an issue for me… since we were children, we have been travelling a lot which made us open-minded… also not having brothers gave us a lot of responsibilities which made any experience less fearful…

Hedaya: when I came here, I didn't have an issue with knowing male students either because of my mixed gender work last year in Saudi ARAMCO …

Hedaya: in SA men do everything starting from paying money to the cashier. But my work at ARAMCO taught me to take responsibilities and to depend on myself…

I didn't have any issue with mixed classes because in my family we mix together with my cousins and everyone… we obviously don't party together, but we visit each other and it's fine with us… unlike my Saudis friends who never been in mixed situations and they find it difficult when they come in mixed classes…

I think we should accept each other despite our differences… Shias and Sunnis should accept each other as long as mutual respect is maintained between the two... accepting other different people started in SA because I belong to Abu Hanifah school, unlike the majority of Saudi people… this makes me different from them and make them different from me, but I had to understand these differences…

Accepting different people needs practice… before coming to the UK I had the idea but not the practice and any idea needs to be practiced… because of my work in the Islamic University in Madina, I worked with people from different Islamic schools, so it is not a new thing to me… but if we judge anybody different from the beginning then we are actually going against the Islamic teachings that encourage us to communicate with people…

Abdul: I liked at school we were taught 'facts' and 'opinions' I think this made me open minded to understand other people…

Relationship to Saudi and changes to the participants:

Before I came here, I used to think we are the best people and the most helpful and generous as Islam supports helping others… but when I came here and compared people including other Arabs from non Saudis, there were more helpful to me than Saudis…

I don't think there's anything to do with me as a woman, because even Saudi girls don't provide any help to anyone… I think it's just something about Saudis…

When I went to SA, I changed few things in my behavious such as opening the door for the next person…

Unlike in Saudi Arabia, people here smile all the time, which makes me feel comfortable and happy…

I miss my husband but not Saudi Arabia as such… it's not my home… my home is Qatif only… Jeddah, Riyadh or any other places are not my home just because they are in the Saudi territories

Here we have freedom of speech unlike in SA that you might get arrested for that..

I liked the life here… the nursery where I take my daughter to is brilliant… they care about children unlike SA… I didn't know the UK or never met British people before coming here so I didn't know much bout them, but now since I know them I liked life here a lot…

Unlike SA, people here don't get involved in your business… everybody is in their own… in SA people keep an eye on whatever you are doing…

When I meet people I try not to tell them I'm from SA, I just don't want to go into discussions about it as they might have a stereotypical ideas that I don't fit in and then it'll be a long discussion…

I miss SA, but the people not the place… I miss my friends and everyone rather than the place SA as such

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I don't like it here… I feel very depressed…. Sometimes I feel like going back to SA…

I feel homesick… my children and I miss home a lot and when we see any green colour we feel very homesick…

I don't like 'gender equality' here as I feel women are exploited at work, but I also don't like in SA of course… I respect how people live here but necessarily I like it…

I've changed since I first arrived here… in the past I used to be very critical person about everybody and everything and now I leave people alone… this is something I like about British people they don't intervene in other people's business…

I miss home sometimes especially when things go complicated with my studies and house work… I feel like I want to vanish and appear in my parents' house… it's way more comfortable and less stressful…

Norah: although British people are punctual, I refuse to accept that we are not… it depends on the individual themselves…

In the UK people have got their rights... nobody can harm anybody and get away with it… this is not the case in SA I'm afraid… I see racism in SA… young teenagers could harm foreign labours and they get away with it… in the UK some teenagers called me "Bin Ladin" then they apologized because they knew they shouldn't have said so…

But now I've realized that religion is not a big issue for British people… they barely talk about it… unlike in SA where religion is very present in our culture… Saudi people are more religious than any other Islamic communities…

Because SA is the starting point of Islam, and because of Mecca and Madinah, the whole world looks at SA as the most religious Islamic place… this has influenced our identity and thus affected our engagement in the UK because there are many practices here that we don't approve in our religion…

I don't think my ideas have changed a lot in the UK, but I'm more daring now to express my ideas than ever before…

Sometimes I avoided telling people I was from SA because they would assume I'm a rich person and uneducated or narrow-minded… but they felt impressed when they saw me engaging with them in different discussions as that goes against their stereotype about SA people…

As the Islamic society president, I always emphasize that the society doesn't represent a specific Islamic school such as Sunnis, shias or Sufis or any other thoughts… people couldn't believe I was from SA because they assumed that Saudis are close minded and therefore I will be presenting a specific Islamic school and wouldn't accept any other differences… I'm afraid I noticed that Saudis don't accept any differences and therefore they have left this impression about them…

In the past happiness for me was in Islam and 'belief' and pleasing God because we were living in an Islamic society and we couldn't see any differences, but now this concept has changed… happiness for me here is when someone behaves the way they want rather than pressure from the family, tribe or society… so in SA

people are double standard, we behave in certain way although we may not be convinced about it… but here the British society is very clear and not hypocrite, you behave as you like… here is freedom… freedom shows what you believe in, whether what you do is a result of pressure or you want to do it…

In the UK, you have written laws, but nothing like that in SA and that is why I haven't seen much racism here but I have seen a lot of it in SA…

Yunos: when I compare here to SA, I feel here everybody cares about their job unlike in SA when there is a lot of connection…

Mohammed: I don't like how relationship between people here… I mean you don't know your neighbor even if you have been living for a while unlike in SA…

Abdul: I think we are the future of SA, we should take the good things from here and leave the bad things…

Family:

i call my family in a daily basis unlike people here who see their families only in Christmas time… they find it very strange that I'm married and still having a good relationship with my family…

European societies don't have strong relationships with each other, including their families… unlike Arabian societies we care a lot about each other…

Resistance to changes:

I started to be worried about my 4 years old daughter who started to believe in Father Christmas and that he's going to bring her a present… I don't mind my daughter to acquire new cultural things but this one is about religion…

I don't want my daughter to study about sex education or in a mixed class in a young age because I have seen what boys do to girls at classes, it wasn't nice at all…

People who do that are those who have come to the UK but don't integrate… they don't go out and shop or see what is out there… their husbands shop for everything so they've got a lot of spare time so they go and write in websites… some even bring pillows like the ones in Saudi…

A lot of Saudis come here and want to live the same life in Saudi… I think it's a new experience here so why not trying new things rather than the same thing…

Some Saudi women are afraid of going out or even studying… some are afraid of mixed classes and ask if there are any female teachers to come and teach them at home… I think this is because of their husbands…

In SA, these women are used to cook and look after the children and that's all… when she comes here they don't want to change…

When I go back home, the last thing I'd like to hear is that I've changed… I don't mind me changing positively like being punctual, but certainly not changing in religion or changing my values and morals…

This is similar to what is happening here during Christmas time… you find Christmas trees everywhere, so people keep their traditions and they don't want to change because it's part of their identity… the same thing with going out on Fridays, though people drink heavily, it's still their traditions… I respect it although it's against what I believe in…

Accepting other people doesn't mean I agree or deviate from what I believe in or from our values that I was brought up to believe in… I have to be careful from anybody calling me to his or her religion… I have to maintain a good relationship but be conscious not to be affected by what they say…

Most people who refuse mixed settings such as mixed classes do so because of their cultural, educational backgrounds… but in order to force these ideas, they link them to religion because religion has a stronger effect which gives them more legitimacy to argue against mixed classes…

I met a number of Saudis who even have Saudi TV channels, they don't want to change or practice anything new… their friends are Saudis and everything is Saudi… they go back to SA with the degree only but without any different experiences….

A number of SA students are against any changes in their lives… they think any change is negative but I disagree because a lot of changes could be positive… also having their families with them like children and wives stop them from engaging more… so they live in their bubble and don't want to explore anything…

Mosque and homesickness:

Whenever I felt homesick in the beginning, I used to go to the mosque where I met very nice people who helped me a lot in my homesickness…

Homesickness hasn't been a huge issue to me like many other Saudis… yeah I miss my family and my mother, but not really the country… I mean I miss my family and it's nice to go back to them…

I remember working in the mosque for my essays for three days so there was this man who brought his books with him to work with me and he explained that he didn't want me to feel lonely so he was giving me some company…

Second interview

Feelings about going back to SA:

Zainab:

I expressed my opinion about the protests in Bahrain, and condemned the way protestors were treated, so I was worried that the Saudi students heard me and had reported about me, so I'll go to prison once I go back to SA

I'm really scared, I don't want to go back to SA... I haven't been eating or sleeping well because of the thought about it.. I might go to prison.. I've got a baby I have to look after

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Raneem:
I told my friend that I wanna do some volunteering somewhere. but I'm not sure how my parents will see that.. because I found a volunteer position in Kenya and my dad doesn't want me to go there because he wants to me to be at home and have a job.. I don't know I think it'll be a good experience... but also it could be a reason not to go back to Saudi Arabia... I'm nervous about my future...

Zahir:
I'm very excited to go back to SA because I've almost my degree now and this is a big achievement… especially we have very strong family connections with each other…

Freedom in the UK

I don't want to go back because I feel free here.. although my husband doesn't control my movements but I still have more freedom in the UK.. I can use public transport, I don't need a male guardian to go out with me, I can go to the cinema or go out whenever I like unlike in SA

Raneem:
I've been living alone here and I feel I'm alone and I do what I want... so in Saudi a lot of restrictions.. but here I can leave whenever I want... I don't need a driver here.. so it's more difficult...

Zahir:
One day we protested in London for Syrian people… it is beautiful to see the freedom of speech… we'd like to have similar rights in SA but the problem is with people themselves… they're not used to protest peacefully because it is a new culture in SA… we need some time to achieve it and it is progressing anyway…

The only thing has changed in my personality is liking to speak about politics… I think it's because of freedom here…

Mohammed: when I speak about freedom, it has to be within Islamic values… I don't appreciate the freedom here because it could go too far… being restricted by Islam makes me feel free… we shouldn't go beyond this "box" [religion]…

Abdul: I like freedom here as I can do whatever I want and I can express my opinion… of course as long as they're within Islam… so I wouldn't go out with girls or start drinking otherwise I'll be lost…

Yunos: I don't like the kind of freedom when women don't dress properly or people start drinking… this is not freedom… our freedom should be within religion… but I like the freedom of speech and access of information unlike SA…

Hadeel: I like freedom here as you can love as you like and I can meet my boyfriend whenever I like without feeling worried like in SA…

Haleemah:
I think that the UK is one of the best countries in term of freedom and freedom of religion… nobody has the rights to impose their opinion on you…

I like the absolute freedom in the UK… it allows people to use it wisely…

Sameer:
I believe in freedom, as it is a part of religion… religion gives you the freedom to choose your belief…

Coping with issues such as loneliness:

I used to feel lonely but not anymore especially after the arrival of my husband..

Yunos: because I've got my wife with me I don't feel lonely…

Abdul: I feel lonely when I leave from my family going to Liverpool…

Mohammed: it happened in the beginning when I felt lonely but now it's fine with me…

People to be trusted and can't be trusted:
I only talked to Shia friend (about this topic) who reassured me that nothing is going to happen…

I stopped talking about so many things since I arrived here because of my fears of getting in a trouble in SA especially I'm Shia… this only happens with Arabs and Muslims not others…

Lubna: whenever I feel lonely or going through difficult times I usually call my Muslim friend to speak to her… I feel Muslims understand each other more… my Greek friend wouldn't have the same empathy because she doesn't' know what I'm going through…

Lubna: I tell my mother about most of what is happening here… we're honest with each other…

Racist remarks towards others:

I used to be neutral about Chinese students, but now I don't like them... they're just like Indians (laughing)... It has nothing to do with their ideas, but it is the way they behave...

Haleemah: If you go to the Saudi society, you'll see how Saudis put themselves into groups… they are ethnocentric against each other depending which tribal background you come from…

Sameer:
We don't have much to do with the Saudi society because I want to get out of the Saudi zone and get to know other people… also an incident happened in the Saudi society when some of them had some ethnocentric views about other Saudis because of their tribal background…

Things have and haven't changed and how they feel and why:
A number of incidents happened when I declined shaking hands with other men... one of them wanted to shake hands with me but I told him I'm Muslim so he understood and stopped it...

Raneem:
i don't think so (not being influenced or have to change) , i've been in Europe most of my life.. I've been getting along well with Europeans.. and i also learnt not to be influenced by anybody.. i've been picked up on as the odd person cos i was different.. so i don't know.. hmmm when i talk about drinking it was about with a Saudi friend rather than influenced by western friends... of course i'm not justifying myself but it's a Saudi friend of mine..

it's (drinking) also a bad thing cos it's forbidden in religion and you put up weights.. but i don't know maybe cos i've been drilled not to try it.. and to be honest i can see why it's forbidden but we're not perfect, and i can't imagine my parents being happy about it.. gosh.. of course they know how i am but it's not something to be proud of.. i mean nothing wrong about it here but it's not there.. so yeah since then i've been drinking hahaha

i felt bad about it.. but i'm just thinking like we should have fun and enjoy and we live once and we should do something challenging at least once, so what's the point of living.. i know it's stupid to say this but, i don't know.. i have an uncle who drinks so it annoys me when they act in a conservative way but they drink in front of me…

the only thing is drinking i would say, also fasting but it's because i'm studying and i can't do it so i felt i was falling behind.. so i still pray and doing the same thing i've been doing... maybe as i said to my friends i'm holding to prayers because it's the only thing can make up for my drinking hahaha... but im still believing in God and believe in religion although i hate how religions are becoming political... so i've made my own mind in my way... it's between me and God.. i have so many atheist friends and they respect that and i like to believe in God, so in case hahaha.. for me praying is being grateful to God.. so when i pray it's not because i'm asking for forgiveness but it's appreciating what God has given me.. it's just appreciation.. so i think i need guidness from God.. because im trying to be good..

I used to be picky about Halal food but not anymore… this is because there have been some religious scholars who said it's fine (mainly because it is sacrificed by the people of the book)

I stopped coming to the mosque because it's far from my home… and sometimes I'm too busy to go to the mosque, unlike when I was in SA going to the mosque for every prayer… an Islamic scholar stated that it is fine to pray at home if I'm travelling which is my case today…

I don't feel I've changed a lot because I feel like I'm living in SA… I go out with my SA friends and also visit the Saudi society quite often…

Yunos: I feel that I've changed in term of punctuality… when I have an appointment with somebody I have to arrive on time… in the past I used to be late few minutes but now I arrive before time sometimes… I think it is because of the culture here as they care about punctuality… though it is something in our religion and Islam requires people to be punctual but it is us who do not stick to it…

Mohammed: the environment here where you live helps you to be punctual and follow the rules… I had these values when I was in SA but now I can practise it in my daily life…

Abdul: the thing has changed in me is making friends with girls… because I've been socialising with Saudi married guys, they have told me that when I get married in the future, my wife has to be the only woman who I can socialise with, so I'm preparing myself from now… This doesn't include elder women because I look at them as mothers or teachers, and nothing else will develop with them…

Mohammed: I'm the opposite, in the beginning I was very friendly with everybody but now I started being less because I don't want people to take advantage of my friendliness… this is because in the UK people aren't as friendly as in SA…

Yunos: I don't mind non Halal food because it is from the family of the book so we can have it… but there are of course limits which is religion, so if a woman shook my hand, I may let it go but surely not kissing on the cheeks or hugs… so from the beginning I sat my limits which is religion not to go beyond that and I don't think I've done anything wrong so far…

Hadeel: I've been living a love story with a Saudi guy… He studies here in the UK and I see him from time to time…

Lubna: I'm in love too… obviously we love Arabs only…

Hadeel: yes I love Arab guys more than any other guys…

Lubna: I always believed in love even before coming here…

Lubna: I changed the way I wear the headscarf because my Saudi female friends told me to try the new style… in fact I feel it's easier to deal with people now… I also heard people saying I look beautiful…

Lubna: I feel I don't pray as before… I have missed a number of prayers… but of course I feel guilty because religion is the most important thing in somebody's life…

Lubna: I got used to speak to guys now unlike before when it was very difficult…

Haleemah:

I'm more interested to pursue my postgraduates now… in the beginning I just wanted to finish my studies then go back to SA but now I want to stay and study more… in the beginning I had a lot of pressure even from people around me, mainly because my appearance wearing the headscarf… but now since I'm capable of doing it surely I can continue…

In the last year, I felt that most of my classmates, both males and females, who were avoiding me started to love me and we became really good friends…

In the past I found it difficult to communicate with both British and international students, so I stopped socialising with them… but in my last year I decided to spend more effort to communicate with them and that did help me to have better relationships with them…

Sameer:
I used to have non halal food because of some religious statements that permitted that… but the fact is that not everybody here is from the people of the book, so I stopped it…

Religion is the 'red line' that I will never cross… I might change in some of my daily habits such as I started cooking but surely nothing to change in religion…

What participants think about their interculturality:

I have an American friend living with her boyfriend and I have no problem with her unlike other Muslims who may not like the idea… her beliefs don't concern me… she's a nice person and she's very curious to get to know other people…

My American friend invited me one day and made sure to keep pork away from me… they respect us unlike many Muslims who only pray without actually tolerance…

I've learnt from British and international students how to be accepting to different views.. in the past if somebody had said to me they don't believe in God I would've argued about it to prove that he exists…

Zahir:
I feel that my level of tolerance has increased since I've been here in the UK… I always was tolerant when I was in SA but now it's even more… doesn't matter what religion or background the other person comes from… I don't like holding any stereotypes about anybody

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Yunos: because I met people from around the world, I'm more opened now to speak to anybody no matter what their background is… but of course this doesn't include female students…

Mohammed: I felt happy when people congratulated me for Eid… it means that they know about my culture… it means that they know about Islam…

Abdul: me too… it means they acknowledge me and my culture…

Yunos: I say the same thing to them about Christmas… when they say to me Happy Eid, I just answer thank you, not happy Eid to you too… it is our Eid not theirs… I just congratulate them as they do with me… I want to treat people the way they treat me…

Hadeel: I wore abaya one day and nobody gave me any looks… I felt happy that nobody felt I was weird or different…

Hadeel: I feel that I'm more accepting to people criticising my religion unlike before… I think we have to listen to other people and what they think…

Haleemah:
In my third year I knew more understanding people who don't mind me praying anytime if I tell them…

We shouldn't ignore [the differences] between one another… we should acknowledge them and accept each other no matter… we should learn to live alongside each other…

Sameer:
A couple of incidents happened in the Islamic society; first, we invited non-Muslims to the mosque and had a meal together… many people turned up and a big number of them were Christians and Jews, so it was good to have a discussion together… the second incident was about an even when all faith societies were distributing leaflets to people in the street so we had a good opportunity to speak to each other…

We gave them books about Islam and they gave us books about Christianity… their president was very keen to keep in touch with our society…

There are many differences between us and them… eventually they are Christians and we are Muslims… but my religion requires me to deal with people in a good way…

I don't think religious societies have made differences between people… this [Islam] is the right religion… and my duty is to tell people about its message and it is their decision to take it or leave it… of course we treat people nicely no matter how different they are…

Of course my relationship with other Muslims is stronger than non Muslims because we meet in the mosque quite often and we have more common things…

Gender issues:
Having spent this period of time in the UK, I feel that I prefer socializing with non Arabs instead... because I'm very open minded and I don't mind sitting with other males and I don't believe it's wrong... but other Arabs think so... there is a gender division in the classroom...

Raneem:
i have what i want but there are restrictions by my family.. so i can't go to kenya as i want.. so in my daily life here i do whatever i like.. but in saudi as a girl i get told off about it.. so socially it's not accepted.. i have social freedom here but not there in saudi.. so i have male friends here but i'd be nervous meeting them over there when i go to saudi although my sisters have met them and went for dinner but i think it's still less extreme in jeddah more than riyadh.. so social freedom here is more..

I don't know any Saudis except you.. most of my friends are Europeans and International students... but few British friends.. you're Muneer the only Saudi student.. so my relationship with other friends are getting closer and we are leaving each other soon so we are feeling all sad but i have the opposite problem..

I'm not seen as ... my dad thinks i'm wild hahaha but when i'm with Saudi people they look at me as western though they think of west is evil or whatever.. but when i talk to western people they look at me as eastern.. so because i'm different person with different people.. so in a negative way they always see me as somebody different.. hmmm my dad wants me to calm down so he wants me to get married and have kids and that's it.. although i don't want it.. positively sometimes they think i'm good as a strong woman and educated..

i want to have kids of course and get married but it's the restrictions on me.. so i reached 24 and they think it's time to get married now.. and all my cousines in my age are already engaged and so on.. i mean i haven't done what i want to do yet.. i haven't prepared myself yet.. so that's why i'm not ready yet.. i don't want a man to stop me from doing what i want.. i don't care if i don't get married at the age of 30 but in Saudi it's too old..

Zahir:
I'm fine in dealing with the opposite gender as long as they accept me too…

There is a clear gender division in the classroom; males and females (Saudis)… we speak only within the classroom but not outside… if I see any of them in the street we don't say hello to each other… especially they wear the headscarf and their husbands are in the Saudi society

Many of them (Saudi female students) have just arrived from SA and not expecting to be comfortable speaking to males…

There were only two Saudi girls who were comfortable in speaking with me… the others were not… the reason is because depending on her background… those who come from a tribal background are more reserved than somebody from Mecca or Jeddah…

Our friendship with other Saudi guys have developed a lot… they're mainly males because Saudi females are very difficult to speak to…

Abdul: one of my female friends was upset with me when she saw me changing my place whenever she came next to me and she asked me that I have changed so I explained to her that it is a part of my religion to do so… a Muslim girl helped me to explain to them but this girl in particular wasn't happy about it as she insisted that there should be no differences between people…

Hadeel: I get worried to be seen by other Saudis because I don't want them to start talking about me… it'd be like living in SA…

Lubna: it's easier for guys of course… the guys said they wanna try go clubbing and nothing wrong with it but if we as girls went clubbing it'd be a big deal and a scandal… I have to say though that even I have freedom here there's always

something stopping me from doing anything wrong… it's all about how my family brought me up to be…

Haleemah:
Other Saudi female friends who cover their faces are still incapable of making friends… it's very difficult to communicate with somebody covering their face… I know that these women don't want to cover their faces but it's all because of their husbands or anybody in charge of being with them… I think they [the women] should explain to their husbands that it is very difficult to wear it…

If it were my husband to be interviewed and filmed it wouldn't have been a problem… but for me as a woman then it's a big deal…

Adaptation:

One day my American's friend's friend invited me for her daughter's birthday but I didn't want to have any cake because she wasn't from the family of the book, but I had to eat with them otherwise it would've been rude...

Raneem:

i drink with friends only.. when we go out.. and i enjoy the effect as bad as it is though.. one day i had too much i have to say and they had to carry me back home.. so yeah mostly with my friends.. sometimes we go to the bar just for some drinks with my European friends

I lived here few years ago and now I'm used to it.. so I don't pick on things that much.. so in the UK I noticed Geordies have a different culture and they're different.. so my friends keep complaining about it such as how women dress and how much and early they get drunk... my friends pick on it but for me it never bothered me.. so you either get used to it or you isolate yourself.. i don't know..

Mohammed: there are two types: one; something you choose and control to do and the second sometimes you can't control it like if a girl was sat next to you in the class… one day I was invited to dinner and there was wine on the table and that was very awkward but I had to let it go… I couldn't do anything about it… it's forbidden to sit on a table has wine on it…

Abdul: I agree… one day we had a party and then my teacher opened a bottle of champagne and I didn't want to have any although she told me it was non alcoholic… I hesitated a lot then I had it at the end as long as it's not alcoholic…

Lubna: I know I should be wearing the headscarf in a proper way but I have to say this way now has helped me to get to know people more… it's made my life easier… but for the prayers, it's something between God and me… my mother keeps reminding me of the prayers…

What they think of the UK today:

I have been impressed by British people and how much they like helping people… this has been my opinion about them from the beginning

Zahir:
I'm leaving the UK soon but I don't have many British friends because they are difficult to deal with… my course is full of Arabs and the accommodation is full of Chinese… so most of my friends are Saudis…

A British friend of mine has invited me several times for dinner… he's a nice guy though he speaks a lot about the Bible… perhaps he wants to serve his religion…

I'm disappointed in the education system in the UK… also disappointed in the way the daily life functions here…

Yunos: Here is law in the UK that protects peoples' rights… there was a waiter someday who gave me a bad attitude, so I had to write to the manager who apologised…

Mohammed: everybody in the UK is equal behind the law, but there are some racist acts unofficially like the Muslim who was killed outside a mosque…

Yunos: I think the English are arrogant sometimes but North East is much better than London or other places… I have been to the USA and people were friendlier…

Abdul: I'm the opposite… I like British people I think they're very friendly…

Lubna: I still feel that socialising with international students is easier than home students… well unless if you do them a favour like helping them with homework then they become friends…

Lubna: We've got more British students now in the course but still difficult to communicate with them… we've got to spend the effort to do it…

Hadeel: If we were in SA and saw non Saudi students, I'd be more than happy to speak to them… but British students for some reason don't…

Haleemah:
Most of my new friends now are Arabs because of the nature of the course… but I still have my British friends from my undergraduate course… we have met several times for a coffee… the same thing with the British male friend he's still in touch with me…

Sameer:
I don't have any British friend… I think they're so reserved and don't want to be your friend unless there is a shared benefit… this doesn't include British Muslims as we share religious brotherhood with each other…

I had read some books stereotyping British people of being reserved and I tried to challenge this stereotype but I couldn't… all what the book had said was true…

Reflections on the participants:
I started believing in God more than before... whenever I needed anything I just pray and God does it for me... I can see his miracles...

Raneem:
i wanna do something in human rights.. especially current slavery in Saudi Arabia and how we treat them that they don't have rights and how they're not seen as humans... I wanna work in this field.. but obviously in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf region we say about Islam while we don't treat them equally and we have slavery... it makes me so angry.. so it's something i wanna do but I also don't wanna go to Saudi... so I'm torn about what I'm doing..

yeah I feel different, I'm more confident now.

and when i think about Shias, my parents never had a problem with me being friends with them but we never recognised them as Muslims.. in fact why should i care.. people have the rights to believe in whatever they want rather than opressing them... the government is so centralised, so they want to oppress them and we shouldn't fear them.. especially when they're linked to Iran and so on.. but if they were respected and not oppressed then they won't fight against you but this is what the government wants to do...

well i think one of the problems here is exccessive drinking.. they get drunk at 7 and that's not good.. but also people here are very organised and friendly.. so they have queues and things.. so i like that sometimes although it's tiring sometimes.. so they have go by rules here.. but in Saudi you'll need a lot of connections to have things done for you..

Zahir:
In SA you need to have connections in order to have things done for you… but in the UK you don't need all of that… everybody is doing their job…

I'm more confident now compared to when I first arrived…

Yunos: unlike Mohammed, I didn't have such values but I developed them here in the UK… now I get annoyed when my friends in SA arrive late… I'd love to change it in them…

Mohammed: one of the important things I learnt is treating everybody equally… doesn't matter what background they come from… sadly in SA we have racism against labours [from Asia or Africa] but now because we are in a similar situation, we have the empathy and we know how they feel…

Yunos: as Mohammed said you may find some forms of racist acts in the UK but I have to say it's not as much as in SA… so this has made me to reflect on myself and learn from it…

Abdul: I've made more Saudi friends now… when I was in SA I had international friends and I was the only Saudi one… when I met my Saudi friends here it appeared that I didn't know much about Saudi culture… I want to know more now… it never crossed my mind when I was in SA but when I met them here I felt I'd like to meet them more regularly…

Hadeel: I feel I'm a bit more confident person now compared to when I first arrived… now I help new students to cope with life here…

Lubna: I'm the opposite I feel I'm stronger in SA… I don't know why… I cry a lot here…

Haleemah: Some Saudis believe that someone should travel abroad to get the only 'knowledge' they intend to study but not to change anything else…

I learnt in the UK how to like all people no matter what their backgrounds are… in SA everybody who is non Saudi is considered to be a foreigner no matter whether they're Arabs or non Arabs… we have a 'foreigner complex'… we have to remember that we have to deal with all people as human beings no matter where they come from, rather than believing that we are 'the chosen people of God'…

Sameer:
We can't speak about multiculturalism in SA because many people are in need of jobs and more important things… so it's too early to speak about it before satisfying more important needs…

I'm sure many people in SA wouldn't be happy to know that I cook… but I have a goal of changing such ways of thinking…

The prophet used to work in his own house and help his wife in cleaning and sewing his clothes… so there is nothing wrong with that…

What their families think:

My family don't know about these changes in the way I look t things… my mother only asks me about my studies but nothing else…

Hadeel: my family in SA don't like the way I dress up when I send them my photos…

Haleemah:
The university asked us for interviews to be filmed about the students life… my family found it interesting to see me on YouTube talking about my experience but my Saudi female friends found it inappropriate and said that I should've asked my

husband's permission first to be interviewed… they said that I had rebelled against my culture and values… they didn't like my independence in making my own decision…

Identity:

What I don't like here is not hearing the call for prayers... I'm sure if I go to the mosque they won't accept me because I'm shia...

I don't feel I'm Saudi anymore... I'm Qatifi...

Raneem:
well when you see different students from different parts of the world, and when we talk about the WEST as Europe and the USA but you still see so many differences between them… there's something don't understand about us, i feel Europeans know more about us, but they don't understand my culture.. but Americans don't.. though they all are so different... for example, I asked my dad for a new phone so he got it for me, it's not about being spoiled but it's my dad's job to do it for me, but then my friends thought i was spoiled and they asked why don't you get it for yourself.. but the thing this is how i grow up in my culture i get what i ask my dad.. so they were lost, how can you get something for free!! but i told them it's not for free... but he got it for me.. but i found it interesting that how they reacted to it.. but obviously i want to be independent..

in Saudi we don't have a big political society so people don't really care and the most oppression is from politics and religion.. so they are the same obviously.. in Saudi i can go out and do whatever but there are other things we can't do.. and can you imagine that we can't leave the country without a guardian.. i mean.. now i'm defining myself as Hijazi rather than Saudi cos i don't belong to that family, although i really don't like it because i don't like making barriers with other people as Najdi and Hijazi, but i still can see it because in my culture we're so friendly..

want also to add that that although i've been travelling around and sometimes people think oh im western or whatever but i sometimes i say wait i have also my culture and values.. if you think i've rejected everything then you're wrong.. im still in both sides.. so i don't get biased to either to my culture or other cultures.. you know i don't wanna be categorised or stereotyped as Saudi or western.. nothing wrong with either it's just i want to be myself.. especially people who grew up somewhere else like me it's difficult.. i think although my parents are Saudis, i still feel i'm sometimes western so i don't know.. me and my sisters grew up in the same place in the west but we are different.. so it depends on our personalities and depeding on who we are..

my identity is fluid i wanna create my own idintity rather than restricted to a certain group or the colour of my passport.. i wanna have the freedom in being who i want.. i understand the political reasons but we can't generalise or steretype or whatever..

my religious identity they ask me oh you'r eMuslim how come you don't wear the headscarf... like this chinese guy who embarrassed me on the bus he was asksing me how come i'm not wearing the headsarf how come i asmoke., and he asked how come you have curly hair.. so he had some fixed ideas and he wanted to prove it hahaha... so i don't wanna belong to one identity i can't do that.. because i grew up everywhere and studied in american schools so it's so exhausting.. i can't put my finger on it.. i don't think i want to identitfy myself with one thing.. i think everybody should be a part of this world and especially globalisation brought everybody together..

Zahir:
My religious decisions have to be based on statements by scholars… I take religion seriously so I don't make my own mind about it…

I feel I'm more Saudi than before… I appreciate SA and our culture when I compare it to the UK… especially when it comes to generosity; we are very generous, friendly and we love everybody in SA… I know many Saudis who don't have any sense of Saudi identity anymore unlike me…

Abdul: there are certain things I can't negotiate such as prayers… it is something I've been doing since I was a child so I cannot not do it…

Another girl asked me to be her boyfriend and my heart started beating because I can't do it… you know because of my religion…

Haleemah:
If I don't find halal meat then I just have vegetarian food… I haven't changed anything in my values or culture… especially everybody represents their religion, culture and family… in fact, when people see you preserving your culture and religion they respect you more…

When I first arrived to the UK I thought everybody was going to hell apart from us… now I feel I'm a part of all human beings… we are all humans… no matter what beliefs or nationalities we hold…

Sameer:
We're eventually all humans but we're still different if not in religion, in nationalities… nationalities could create more stereotypes in some cases than religions…

The brotherhood with other Muslims in the Islamic Society has led me to stick to them and not willing to make new friends such as British friends as I was willing in

the beginning… I think I failed in making new British friends but I have enough friends I think…

Identities exist today and we can't ignore them… religion made black and white people similar… Arabs and non Arabs similar… but we can't neglect the differences related to nationalities… why are we upset about religions for making differences between people and happy about nationalities although they do the same thing?

Religion should be the source how we establish our categories… if Islam tells us to make a distinction between men and women and that women have to wear headscarf, for instance, then we have to do it… surely there is a reason behind it…