

**Exploring Intercultural Becoming Dynamics of Change: Algerian Ph.D.
Students' Experiences in the UK.**

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Exploring Intercultural Becoming Dynamics of Change: Algerian Ph.D.

Students' Experiences in the UK.

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Intellectual Property Statement

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Signature: Nasrine Labani

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Abstract

The current research project explores the intercultural becoming dynamics (**Chapter 5, Section 5.1**) of change of eight Algerian Ph.D. students in study abroad contexts. Drawing on a non-essentialist perspective (Holliday, 1999, 2022) to culture and interculturality, and informed by conceptualizations of dialogic (Bakhtin, 1981) and transactional learning (Dewey, 1983/2008); the study seeks to generate a holistic understanding of the dynamics of intercultural self-positioning shifts in light of negotiated meaning making in participants' lived experiences. Driven by a narrative theoretical and methodological foundation, the study sheds light on the lived experiences of participants through narratives, documenting the intercultural positioning of self vs the other, the different perspectives and attitudes of the language-culture interplay, and the various factors affecting the course of change in a sojourn abroad.

Through a constructivist and intersubjective/subjective meta-theoretical rationale, the project followed a qualitative approach, with a longitudinal dimension to the data generation. The investigation took place over the course of 8 months, with narrative interviews conducted over three rounds, resulting in 28 interviews in total. Stimulated recall episodes were used as a technique to overtly elicit positionality perspective shifts during the period of the investigation. The research data was analysed by combining narrative thematic analysis with a refined positionality lens that broadly mirrors Bamberg's (1997, 2004) three-level positioning.

A thorough analysis of the data set featured three basic findings pertinent to the research questions. Firstly, the study introduced intercultural becoming as a process of self-negotiation whereby positioning is enacted through discrete, non-linear trajectories of perspective shifts in new intercultural settings. Participant narratives were a reflective projection of the dynamic shifts they have undergone during the study abroad experience, and the various processes negotiated including stereotypes mechanism shift, self-other positionality, and cultural background perspective re-evaluation. Secondly, participants demonstrated various aspects of negotiating the language-culture relationship which contributed to the process of their intercultural becoming and the self-positioning dynamics. The language-culture attitude, the UK experience as a super diverse context, and self-other

positioning dynamics are all entangled to introduce shifts in both the ideological and intercultural becoming. Perceiving the negotiation of this language-culture net from a nonessentialist perspective provides a holistic explanation of the inherent reciprocity of ideological becoming (Bakhtin 1981) and language learning in the intercultural (Harvey, 2016). Finally, a key facet of shaping the course of participants' intercultural journeys lies partially in the interference of distinctive factors prior to and post coming to the UK including, cultural identity effect, perceived intercultural awareness and knowledge, and the role of institutional bodies. These factors contributed to identifying the course and nature of their intercultural becoming at various levels and with distinctive degrees of interference.

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List of abbreviations

SA: Study Abroad

ELF: English as a Lingua Franca

NS: Native Speaker

NNS: Non-Native Speaker

SL: Second Language

PT: Positioning Theory

PCT: Personal Construct Theory

IC: Intercultural Competence

ICC: Intercultural Communicative Competence

IS: Intercultural Sensitivity

IA: Intercultural awareness

Chapter 1: General introduction

Research background

Driven by the proliferation of globalization, research in intercultural communication has witnessed a substantial shift to the postmodernist perspective in the scope and conceptualization of the intercultural (Paulston, Kiesling, and Rangel, 2012, p.111). By drifting away from rigid, universalizing, and minimalist approaches advocated by traditional modernist architecture to investigating intercultural communication phenomena (Duignan, 2014), postmodernism promotes an experience-based understanding of human interaction and sense-making that is intertwined with multiple complex factors (McKinley, 2015). Therefore, research in intercultural communication needs to acknowledge the processual aspect of human experience “in relation to historicity, intersubjectivity and interactional context” (Dervin, Gajardo, and Lavanchy, 2011, p.12). Although the postmodernist turn strongly emphasizes issues of complexity of human experience, and the strong authoritative voices within intercultural communication to articulate intricate relationships between social structure and agency (Holliday, 2011, 2013; Piller, 2011), the field is still suffering a reductionist consideration of the complexity of investigation. This was the starting point for this research to undergo a longitudinal exploration of Algerian Ph.D. students in a sojourn abroad, seeking to unravel the complexity of their intercultural becoming dynamics of change, including self-other intercultural positioning, stereotyping mechanisms, and the language-culture perspective. Therefore, the investigation shed light on the shift in these students’ perspectives regarding aspects of intercultural engagement in new intercultural environments.

In tune with this, the research on Study Abroad (SA) intercultural experiences has exponentially expanded in response to global mobility, which intensifies peoples’ interchange of perspectives and worldviews through connecting distant localities (Beck, 2015, Steger, 2010). Precisely, institutions of higher education globally, have been pursuing the internationalization of higher education through SA programs, leading to a highly promising augmentation of 3.85 million higher education students studying outside their home country

by the year 2024 (Jackson and Oguro, 2018). However, with such aspirations comes great responsibility to ensure a well-established understanding of how these students who are put in unfamiliar contexts would negotiate their positionalities within new cultural frames. In this regard, many scholars urge a quest to overcome the inconsistencies that contemporary SA research is still confined to (Kinging, 2013). A potential answer that I consider most relevant to the framework of this thesis is Coleman's (2013) invitation for pursuing a 'holistic inquiry' that paves the way to navigate the fluid, complex experiences of these students, which are said to "frame the way they live the study abroad experience" (p. 17). I should, however, acknowledge that the understanding of this 'holistic inquiry' does not imply perceiving the experiences of the participants in this study as homogeneous among the group. On the contrary, seeking a holistic understanding foregrounded in this research indicates multi-version interpretations that are made available through the interdisciplinary nature of the field of intercultural communication. This interdisciplinary quality opens doors for possible understandings through the lens of the intersection of three fields namely psychology, anthropology, and linguistics. Simply said, while psychology is to interpret the patterns of behaviour of individuals of different cultures cognitively, the cultural patterns including non-verbal communication are best recognized through the lens of anthropology; and finally, linguistics is where the essence of communication is interpreted through examination of the language-culture nexus (Flammia and Sadri, 2011). I believe this is the fascination of doing research in intercultural communication which I found strongly pertinent to providing multi-version explanations of complex, emergent intercultural dynamics of change sought to be uncovered through this study. Per this mindset, the principle of 'situatedness' (Jackson, 2008) also becomes handy, as Jackson suggests that the future of SA inquiry is to closely account for the complex, distinctive and individualistic nature of the environments, and their effect on the linguistic and cultural change in the experiences of a sojourn abroad. However, in dealing with significant aspects related to the intercultural such as the understanding of cultural contexts, culture, and the self-other negotiation in it, there are many theoretical debates invited into the mix between SA and intercultural communication. In this regard, I found Holliday's (1999-2022) non-essentialist understanding of culture and the interplay of social structure and agency, along with Bakhtin's (1981) dialogism to be the foundation for diving into the complex, multi-layered phenomena explored in this thesis.

From a non-essentialist perspective, culture is to be understood as fluid, dynamic, and on the go to be formed among people in any discursive practice (Holliday, 1999). By challenging the 'large culture' paradigm that assigns geo-political boundaries to identify 'culture', the 'small culture' paradigm according to Holliday (1999) "attaches 'culture' to small social groupings or activities wherever there is a cohesive behaviour and thus avoids culturist ethnic, national or international stereotyping" (p. 237). Therefore, I have found the non-essentialist perspective on culture through the analytical eye of Holliday to be appealing for investigating the complexity of the SA experiences I set to explore in this research study. Moreover, the negotiation of the self-positioning perspectives to be explored hereby is based on a self-other politics of navigation intertwined with ideological and social structures' effect on intercultural experiences. Therefore, the theory of ideological becoming by Bakhtin (1963, 1981, 1984) on language and culture as phenomena structured by the philosophy of dialogism is particularly critical to approach my research aims. Therefore, I endeavour through this research study to provide a critical analysis of the dialogic intercultural dynamics of change in SA experiences from a non-essentialist perspective. This is manifested through by weaving theoretical and philosophical lines of inquiry discussed above and in subsequent chapters, and the effect of power relations in the context of intercultural encounters.

Research aims and questions

This study aims at exploring the intercultural becoming dynamics of change of eight Algerian Ph.D. students enrolled in UK universities, through their accumulative intercultural experiences of diversity in SA contexts. By pursuing this, the research study focuses on different dynamics of shifts perceived by participants through their intercultural experiences, including self-positioning shifts in relation to the other and contexts, the language-culture perceived interplay, and the way they make sense of the intercultural. The study is designed as well to reflect upon the different factors that contribute to shaping the participants' intercultural experiences in distinctive personalized directions of change.

With this in mind, given that I embrace a postmodernist philosophical stance, and subsequently position this research within constructivist and intersubjective/ subjective metatheoretical assumptions (as will be thoroughly discussed in chapter 3), the study is inclined to conduct this research following a qualitative research method. Given this

inclination, as a postmodernist, constructivist and qualitative researcher, I developed a mindset that enabled me to dig deeper seeking the unrevealed complexities of human communication (Holliday, 2016). The narrative inquiry thereby was a perfect fit to look through its lens and focus on the sense-making process that my participants negotiate through their experiences over time (Clandinin and Connolly, 2000). Therefore, with this realization, the research questions gradually emerged as the following:

Research question 1: What are the different intercultural becoming (**chapter 5, section 5.1**) dynamics of change emerging in the negotiated experiences in SA contexts?

Research question 2: How do participants negotiate the perception of the interplay of language and culture throughout their intercultural experiences in new environments?

Research question 3: What factors do participants believe interfere and/or contribute to their intercultural becoming dynamics of change?

Significance of the study

While there have been a bulk of contemporary studies that investigate intercultural experiences abroad, yet to the best of my knowledge, there are significant findings in this research study that makes it distinctive; and contributes to the body of knowledge in the fields of intercultural communication, SA, and international education.

First, situated in a postmodernist research paradigm seeking meticulous exploration of the complexity and experiential negotiation of intercultural dynamics of change, the self-positionalities as one of these dynamics were characterised by individualised patterns and discrete directions of change. These patterns included stereotyping mechanisms shift and personal worldviews reconstructions that portrayed the complexity and multi-layered nature of human meaning-making through experience offered by SA programs. Additionally, by exploring participants' perspectives on the language-culture interplay during these experiences and self-evaluating the shifts of progress through navigating the effect of both social structure and agency, reflects the dialogic nature of intercultural learning and ideological becoming (**Section 2.3.1.**). Therefore, the insights from this study may make a potentially significant contribution to the body of knowledge within intercultural

communication and SA abroad combined, by challenging traditional approaches to explain human-culture phenomena.

A second potential contribution of this study lies at the heart of studying the intercultural, that is introducing 'intercultural becoming' as an expansion of interculturality understanding. Through this process, various complex macro (in the form of cultural structures and power relations) and micro (in the form of human agency in the construction of meaning) come into play when browsing dynamics of intercultural change that are likely to be present through cultural travel.

Methodologically wise, the methodological research design invested in this study, manifests the creativity in doing qualitative research. Based on a constructivist metatheoretical foundation, the co-construction of meaning during the data generation of this study was manifested in its best forms. It is through the use of narrative inquiry as a strong research tradition and analysis of data through a mixture of thematic and narrative procedures, along the lens of the positioning theory (PT) model (Bamberg, 1997), that the research data were uniquely interpretive of the realities narrated by participants. Additionally, the flexible opportunity given to me as a co-participant of meaning-making, not only on the site of the interview yet during the analysis of the narratives, where I was able to deliver the complex processes of the intercultural shift in perspective and learn more about human experience to understand my own. I believe this adds another voice to considering postmodernist approaches to dive into the intercultural.

Thesis structure

This thesis comprises 5 chapters following this general introduction.

Chapter 2: Explores the conceptual framework of the study by discussing the bulk of literature surrounding the conceptualization of culture and drawing upon a wide range of literature domains including intercultural communication, education, SA, and social psychology. The chapter first critically discusses the 'culture' perspective debate by presenting the essentialist and non-essentialist paradigms and introduces relevant social psychology theories drawn upon to discuss the intercultural dynamics of change explored in this research. It moves on to navigate the research of intercultural communication in SA, paving the way to unravel the

understanding of interculturality embraced in this study. The chapter concludes with a critical theoretical review of the language-culture relationship and explores the dialogic nature of meaning-making in the intercultural by foregrounding Bakhtin's dialogism.

Chapter 3: In this chapter, a comprehensive overview of the metatheoretical and practical decisions and their rationale are foregrounded. A detailed explanation of the epistemological and ontology rationale is presented along with a critical justification of situating the research within qualitative approach traditions. It also emphasizes the use of narrative inquiry and the constructivist nature of the researcher's position in the study's operationalization. Following on from this, the chapter details the methodological design and procedures in the generation and analysis of the data. Finally, it concludes with a brief justification of the way in which the current study addresses issues of trustworthiness and ethical challenges.

Chapter 4: Presents the five key research findings, the order of which fits chronologically and analytically within the story of intercultural perspectives' change and self-positioning. Each finding encompasses major themes discussing the different conceptual and intercultural dynamics of change. The first research finding discusses the various and distinctive shifts of self-positioning perspectives thematically and narratively. These self-positioning perspectives include the clashes of participants' stereotypes with the lived intercultural experiences, the process of change of stereotyping mechanisms, and the re-evaluation of personal worldviews and intercultural understandings during the study abroad experiences. The second finding features the participants' negotiations of the role of the language-culture nexus as a dynamic of intercultural becoming (defined in chapter 5, section 5.1). This finding thematically narrates, 1) participants' use of English as a global lingua franca in a native-speaking environment, 2) the perceived value and attitude of the language-culture relationship in the UK experience, and 3) the implications of participants' language perceived development on intercultural dynamics of change. Finally, the third finding discusses the different factors shaping participants' intercultural experience abroad.

Chapter 5: In this chapter, the research findings are analysed considering the thematic narrative analysis and through the lens of Bamberg's positioning model. The chapter focuses on scrutiny of participants' narratives, marking the shift in their perspectives and intercultural becoming through dynamics of self-positioning, worldviews reconstructions, and negotiations of meaning across and within boundaries, in addition to identifying factors contributing to shaping the intercultural change.

Chapter 6: Provides a summative explanation that merges the study's theoretical foundation with the emergent findings. This is where the research questions are answered along with moving towards achieving a holistic understanding of the Algerian Ph.D. students' intercultural dynamics of change in SA contexts.

Chapter 7: is the conclusion chapter where research reflections and contributions of knowledge are put forward. In addition to addressing the research limitations and providing recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2: literature review

Introduction

As a form of cultural travel (Holliday, 2014), Study Abroad (SA) involves a sense of destabilization of ideological, ontological frameworks, and identities once crossing geographical, sociocultural, and linguistic boundaries (Block 2007). Within such destabilizing contexts, the intercultural dynamics of participants become in constant shift and re-evaluation between the self-other and contexts. These dynamics are the central focus of this research study and situated at the intersection of intercultural communication and SA. Therefore, drawing on a holistic inquiry (Coleman, 2013) (as discussed in section 1.1.), and a postmodernist foundation to uncover the complexities of human intercultural negotiation of reality, the discussion of culture and its relevant theoretical controversy is particularly needed at the outset of this review of the literature. Therefore, this chapter is divided into three sections, each section engages with a plethora of culture theoretical debates.

The first section deals with the discussion of 'culture' nature and understanding in intercultural communication, by going about the debate of essentialist vs non-essentialist paradigms. The section provides critical perspectives on the negotiation of the self and other in the wider historical and sociocultural context, by introducing positioning theory (PT) (Harré and Van Langenhove, 1999) and Personal Construct theory (PCT) (Kelly, 1955) as prominent theories that provide significant insights into untangling the complexity of intercultural communication.

The second section provides a synthesis of major turns in theoretical and methodological traditions in SA inquiry, and probes historically the turn in researching interculturality from traditional studies seeking the intercultural outcomes of SA sojourns, to those exploring the various experiences on a process-based rationale.

The final section problematizes conventional perspectives on the language-culture relationship and the effect of social structures on meaning construction. It also examines contemporary native-speaker dominance in professional education and intercultural studies. At last Bakhtin's dialogism (1981/2004) of reality construction and the effect of global power is introduced explaining the processual role that culture plays in creative understanding.

2.1. Conceptualizing culture

Implicit in the extensive literature in the field of intercultural communication is the potential conceptualization of how different intercultural processes and their link to various understandings of culture can be portrayed. It is not surprising then, that a major focus of research studies in the intercultural communication arena has been forwarded to the conceptualization of culture in different domains and across times and contexts. Of particular interest has been an attempt to relate the culture conceptualization to different aspects of intercultural learning and shift processes in the intercultural. These processes might be evident when engaging in new intercultural experiences including, negotiating cultural understanding, self-positioning, and stereotypes.

To provide an engaging discussion of the literature guiding the current understanding of culture and cultural constructs, this section brings to the fore a myriad of theoretical debates about culture and the dynamic process of making sense of the intercultural experience across cultural environments. Therefore, this section introduces the two approaches to the 'culture' debate, namely, essentialist and non-essentialist perspectives, and explores the 'middle cultures' conceptualization (Holliday, 1999) as one manifestation of cultural negotiation. It then explains the concept of 'grammar of culture' (Holliday, 2011), which represents the underlying relationships between cultural processes performed by the individual and the bigger cultural structures that affect these processes (Holliday, 2018). Finally, a creative discussion is introduced around the 'self' and 'other' negotiation in context by the presentation of two of the most relevant theories namely 'positioning theory' (**PT**) and 'personal construct theory' (**PCT**), alongside a brief explanation of stereotypes as a process of positioning. The discussion of these theoretical constructs articulates the non-essentialist perspective upon which the current study draws.

2.1.1. Essentialist vs non-essentialist perspectives to culture

So, what is culture? Culture seems to mean different things to different people at different times and disciplines. Much of the debate on culture in the last fifty years reveals that it is a highly complex concept bound up in many different disciplines and aspects of thought, and historically proves that “conceptualizing culture is no easy task” (Raef et al., 2020, p.296). Indeed, when looking at attempts to define culture I found that scholars (Hofstede, 2001; Holliday, 1999; Kramsch, 2009; Bhabha, 1994, Fiske, 2011; Piller, 2017), in the wider academic domain of intercultural communication have struggled to pin it down into one concept that is satisfactory to all. For this reason, perhaps the first point that I should shed light upon, and one that is often made explicitly in all attempts at definition is that there is no black-and-white certainty about culture.

In fact, the conceptualization of culture has been a matter of hot debate in the scholarship of human sciences for decades. The inquiry into culture definitions sprung from the work established by anthropologists in the 19th century (Biernatzki, 1991). Among the early attempts to set a definition of culture was initiated by Tylor (1903) in his work ‘Primitive Culture’, where he defines it as “Culture or civilization, taken in its broad ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.” (Tylor, 1903, p.1). Perhaps this definition is a close description of what might be commonly understood as ‘culture’ by many people nowadays, and more importantly, it implicitly predicts the controversial perspectives of culture. This was evident when Tylor (1903) acknowledged the complexity of culture as a holistic, complex concept that unfolds various signs of human existence including knowledge, beliefs, laws, gestures, and body language among others. In this regard, subsequent researchers tried to categorize the elements provided in Tylor’s definition into two dimensions, an observable and an abstract element of culture. The former according to Plum (2008) is observable practices, which are reflected in people’s rituals, gestures, body language, and other concrete signifiers that appear in everyday events. The latter, however, is abstract in the form of “the organized system of knowledge and belief whereby people structure their experience and perceptions, formulate acts, and choose between alternatives” (Keesing, 1981, p.68). However, Geertz (1973) constrains the concept of culture to the realm of an abstract system whereby culture “denotes a historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions

expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life” (p.89).

Despite these divergent approaches to ‘culture’ understanding, the ontological positions to culture remained an ideological system, which undermined the concrete products of ‘culture’ that were concurrent in its early definitions. The only feature that has been newly attached to culture was the strong temporality significance, which denotes culture as an inherited system that moves from the past to shape the future, yet fluid as it changed over time.

It was not until the 1980s that scholars in intercultural communication started to construct theories about ‘culture’ by investigating cultural differences between individuals from different national cultures (Hofstede, 1980; Kim and Gudykunst, 1988). Following this nationality-driven conceptualization of ‘culture’, various scholars attempted to explore and investigate interpersonal and interactional dynamics through developing a set of explanatory models (such as Hofstede’s culture dimensions model (1980)).

However, with the turn of epistemological stances in the mid-1990 in intercultural communication towards interpretive, and lately constructivist research approaches, the conceptualization of culture as nation-defined has been challenged for being a set of predetermined attributes to an entity. Therefore, the tradition of adopting cultural value models in explaining the dynamics of interpersonal and interactional behaviours were criticized, and many scholars drifted towards an alternative, dynamic conceptualization of culture (Fay, 1996; Holliday, 1999; Dervin, 2011). These two chronological strands of thoughts regarding culture conceptualization in intercultural communication are known as essentialist vs non- or anti-essentialist paradigms.

According to the essentialist perspective, culture is a set of common beliefs, values and concepts shared between a specific group of people (Holliday, Hyde, and Kullman, 2004). As such, the idea of culture is limited and perceived exclusively in the scope of national or ethnic terms. That is, belonging to a particular culture as being American or Asian entails internalizing a coherent set of mental, physical, and social characteristics. Understanding culture as such means treating it as something we have in common or belong to as ethnic, national, or international groups.

One of the leading and most prolific applied linguists engaged in the culture debate is Adrian Holliday. According to him (2000), within the social sciences literature there are two camps to consider in dealing with the intercultural namely, essentialist and non-essentialist. Within the essentialist view, culture is characterized as being static, holistic, homogeneous, deterministic, and bounded. As such, culture is a concrete structure that restricts a particular group's behaviour within constraining geographical boundaries, which in return defines national cultures (Holliday, 2015).

Essentializing culture in such a way leads to the stereotyping of individuals, defining and constraining their behaviours according to national cultures (Osland and Bird, 2000). That is, national cultures are embodied in individuals' stereotypes who share a particular cultural identity, disregarding their agency for choice. When such notions of cultures are embedded within intercultural studies and communication, individuals are expected to behave according to what is expected of them; thus, it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy (Nathan, 2010). With this sort of notion, the various models of culture classifications are often described with predefined factors that homogenize a national culture, which constrain the understanding of individuals within a business and/or organizational context into a singular national identity (Hofstede, 1980, 2001).

Indeed, these perceptions of culture lie at the heart of early attempts at classifications developed by social psychologist Geert Hofstede (1991, 1994), in an attempt to examine employees of IBM across 50 countries. In his model, there are six dimensions of culture; namely high versus low power distance, individualism versus collectivism, high versus low uncertainty avoidance, masculinity versus femininity, long versus short-term orientation, and indulgence versus self-restraint. The most dominant dimension in his model and most representative of its essentialist conception is the individualist versus collectivist culture classification. In this tradition, within individualist societies, the individual is the one who stands in focus and dominates the characterization of a given culture and embraces a stereotypical view that their values are applicable to all cultures. In contrast, collectivist cultures stand in favour of the group and base the individual's identity on the social system to which they belong (Hofstede, 2011). Such a strong essentialist view is well presented in Hofstede's (1980) definition of culture as "the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one human group from another" (p. 21). These

cultural dimensions among others proposed in the field of intercultural communication have been greatly influential for researchers investigating different aspects of cultural phenomena. However, with the constructivist/ interpretive turn in intercultural studies, several academic researchers acknowledged the need to problematize this essentialist reading of culture within the context of globalization and encouraged seeking an alternative non-essentialist understanding. This invitation to embrace a new perspective was built upon sound theoretical justifications. Firstly, the assumption that culture is to be defined by the set of norms and values in each geographical setting, would lead to the production of unhelpful stereotypes of people according to such national and regional boundaries (Kumaravadivelu, 2003). The other concern has been raised about the Eurocentric constructions underpinning the essentialist perspective to 'culture' that would intentionally or otherwise lead to a process of cultural othering (Dervin, 2010). Finally, questions have been also raised about the validity, inclusiveness, and ignorance of human agency of choice and exitance imposed by dimensions of cultural models proposed through the lens of essentialist understandings of culture. Indeed, Nathan (2015) questioned Hofstede's dimensional model of culture:

In his initial study, he only considered four dimensions, which were: (a) power distance; (b) uncertainty avoidance; (c) individualism versus collectivism; and (d) masculine versus feminine orientation. Can these four dimensions completely determine a national culture, leaving aside the variations within a nation? There is, in fact, evidence that they cannot. Hofstede himself later on added the fifth dimension – the time orientation of short-term versus long-term – in order to accommodate value variations that emerged from the study of Chinese perspective. Obviously, this line of argument leads to the question of how many dimensions, and of what sort, would completely and holistically determine a national culture.

(p. 9).

Bringing these shortcomings to the fore, combined with new orientations posed by the emergence of globalization as a phenomenon and the move towards postmodernism and post-structuralism, resulted in a number of re-workings on cultural understandings.

Therefore, the non-essentialist paradigm challenges the notion of national cultures and goes beyond national categories, which reflects a post-structuralist and postmodernist turn in the social sciences, one which is seen to best address the era of globalization. Culture in this view is any cohesive social grouping or behaviour. Thus, it is heterogeneous, dynamic, and

changeable with blurred boundaries. In other words, culture is then recognized as applying to groups of all shapes and sizes and not only to regions or nations as a group, with an increasingly fuzzy nature of the boundaries between them. Drawing on Street (1993) who suggests that culture is best understood as a verb, Piller (2017) suggests that:

culture is an ideological construct called into play by social actors to produce and reproduce social categories and boundaries, and it must be the central research aim of a critical approach to intercultural communication to understand the reasons, forms and consequences of calling cultural differences into play.

(p. 10).

In her definition, Piller is making a call for a dynamic appreciation of culture and shifting its status from a static entity to a process. By considering this bottom-up perspective, culture is then a *'verb'*, something that we do and is not confined by any type of ethnic or national boundaries. In this vein, Holliday (2011, 2013) suggests a *'grammar of culture'*, which in turn, is developed from a small culture paradigm. Similar to Street's *'culture is a verb'* (1993), Holiday's *'small culture'* is an action, that is attached to small social groupings or activities, which do not assign boundaries to a group's members prior to an actual communication event, yet only once they have engaged in a cohesive activity or behaviour.

In contrast to the positivist large culture paradigm, which essentially signifies ethnic or national culture, the interpretive, constructivist *'small culture'* approach "...appreciates the uncertain, subjective nature of culture" (Holliday, 2015, p. 24). Given this reality, the study of *'culture'* has shifted its focus from identifying differences between prescribed cultures in terms of national ideology or global politics to the investigation of how people from different cultural backgrounds perceive, construct and negotiate cultural meanings to make sense of each other in the event of intercultural communication (Holliday, 2016, 2017; Nathan 2015; Dervin 2008). As per this mindset, Holliday (2016) argues that the shift in the two cultural paradigms opened the discussion about the two modes of thinking in the intercultural regarding *'culture'* conceptualisation, namely blocks and threads, which were articulated in his *'Grammar of culture'* discussion (**section 2.1.3.**). Blocks are grand political and ideological identifications that set cultural boundaries and relate culture understanding to *'nation states'* (Holliday, 2016). These boundaries are rigid fixed categorisations that restrict "interculturality to observing and comparing the practices and values of one's own and the other's national cultures, and to finding commonalities to enhance toleration of the other culture" (Holliday,

2011, p. 164). And while blocks are strongly bound to the essentialist perspective of culture, their comparisons are largely considered the source of differences and ultimately lead to stereotype formation. Conversely, talking cultural threads promote expansion and transcending the nation-state boundaries. They are the glue sticking the different parts of his 'grammar of culture', which spot the light on the past existent cultural and current experiences mingling (Holliday, 2016). However, emphasizing the potential negative aspects of speaking about blocks, does not deny its existence. Holliday (2016) acknowledges the fact that blocks and threads can co-exist, and each can serve its purpose depending on the contextual narrative it is pulled in. I believe this can partially feature one among endless possibilities of how 'small culture formation' can be enacted, sometimes featuring cultural blocks and at other times pulling cultural threads, all depending on the intercultural experience an individual may encounter. Nonetheless, Holliday also raises awareness about confusing these processes in his 'small culture' conceptualization with the creation of what he identified as 'middle cultures' (1999). The following sub-sections explain this notion in more detail.

2.1.2. Discussing 'middle cultures' (Holliday, 1999)

In this vein of 'small culture' discourse, Holliday (1999) also refers to and questions the notion of '*middle cultures*', as he states that it:

can be formed across national cultural boundaries between tourists and 'local' people, teachers and expatriate curriculum developers, foreign language students and 'native-speaker' teachers, and researchers and their subjects. created for long or short duration[s] to provide ground on which the dealing between the two parties takes place.

(p. 239)

These parties are individuals who happen to be in any cohesive activity or behaviour in a 'small culture' of any kind and try to establish successful communication by generating new yet mutual forms of knowing and being. With regard to this understanding of cultural being in an in-between space, a number of scholars supported the perspective of middle cultures, though with varying labels as 'third place' or 'third culture' (Kramsch, 1993, 1998; 2009), 'third culture' (Fiske, 2011), and third space (Bhabha, 1998, 2006, 2009).

To start with, Kramersch (1993) proposed the notion of 'third place' to the field of foreign language teaching, after WW2 when immigration urged people around the globe to cross the national, linguistic, and ideological boundaries. Her conceptualization revolves around the second language learning classroom being a stage for meaning making, in which both teachers and learners try to make themselves at home in a culture 'of a third kind' (Kramersch, 1993). She asserts that:

From the clash between the familiar meanings of the native culture and the unexpected meanings of the target culture, meanings that were taken for granted are suddenly questioned, challenged, problematized.

(Kramersch, 1993, p. 238)

Broadly speaking, Kramersch describes 'third place' or 'third culture', a conceptual space where learners of different cultural backgrounds create an intersection of multiple values and beliefs and behave accordingly. In this shared sphere according to Kramersch, an interpersonal process is to take place in order to understand otherness, which is of dynamic, emergent, and heterogeneous nature (Kramersch, 2009a). The notion of 'third place' for Kramersch is one way to overcome the dominant native speaker (NS) linguistic and cultural imparted knowledge to the language learner with the intention to accommodate the target culture. Therefore, her critical stance celebrates the 'third culture' as a 'creation on its own right' born out of the merge of the learner's L1 linguistic culture and the native speaker's L2 target culture dynamically emerging and continuously in a state of flux and critically challenged by language learners to construct their own new meanings (Kramersch, 1993). There is some resonance of Kramersch's perspective with decentring the native speaker (NS) cultural dominance, however, enacting a 'third place' or 'third culture' formation with her conceptualization may seem restricted to the borders of the foreign language classroom, which raises speculations on how this 'third place or culture' would be executed in real life communication, where language can be used in different *lingua francas*. However, we should be cautious about this culture merging perspective as Kramersch herself has revisited this understanding in her subsequent publications. Indeed, she recognises the problematic conceptualization of third place as an emerging place of communication between speakers from two different cultures, without paying enough attention to issues of power relations and human agency that are already undermined in intercultural communication. Therefore, Kramersch introduced 'symbolic place' (Kramersch, 2009a), a concept that celebrates "the symbolic nature of the multilingual subject

– both as a signifying self and as a social actor who has the power to change social reality through the use of multiple symbolic systems” (Kramersch, 2009a, p.200). Suffice to say is that Kramersch’s symbolic place acknowledges the dynamic nature of this third culture, which Kramersch describes as a non-stable continuum from dominant to deviant, and a confrontational map of social relations (Fiske, 2011) seems to go in line with the non-essentialist perspective. However, identifying culture as a site of struggle, differences, or confrontation evokes negative connotations and contradiction with their theoretical underpinnings. In fact, I believe the establishment of new meaning between cultural groups in a ‘third place’ is not to be considered a struggle, but rather a process of negotiation and convergence. And while I agree with her emphasis on power relations and complex social factors, I do believe that the terminology of third place altogether is too abstract to avoid the confusion of essentialising culture and cultural communication outside the borders of the English learning classroom.

While Kramersch’s ‘third place’ is enacted in the language learning classroom, Homi Bhabha’s (1994) notion of ‘third space’ with an emphasis on ‘hybridity’, is reflected in the ‘in-between’ cultural space that opens between the self and the other in an intercultural encounter and leads to hybrid forms of cultural being and knowing. In Bhabha’s understanding, when people of various cultures meet in intercultural communicative events, they tend to develop a hybrid culture where: “the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated and rehistoricised anew” (Bhabha,1994, p.37). According to him, these spaces should reflect what happens in intercultural encounters, which decolonize individuals of their pre-existent historical and ideological realities and pave the way for new aspects of identity to emerge (Kumaravadivelu, 2008). It is through the ‘hybridity’ conceptualization of ‘third space’, that Bhabha challenges the post-colonialist dynamics of socio-political powers, which “bears witness to the unequal and uneven forces of cultural representation involved in the contest for political and social authority within the modern world order” (p. 245). Therefore, Bhabha’s ‘third space’ is reified as a metaphorical space that is not subject to fixed boundaries, and not bounded to essentialist references of cultural structures such as race, ethnicity, or nation.

Although notions of ‘hybridity’ and ‘third space’ have come to be significantly pertinent to the discourse of globalization and cultural travel, they have attracted some recent criticisms raising questions about their potential to adequately be assigned to the anti-

essentialist paradigm. Indeed, it is evident in some studies where the notion of 'third space' was adopted based on the outcomes of a meeting of people as culturally defined subjects (for example, Jackson, 2008; Feng, 2009), unintentionally adhere to the essentialist perspective to culture (Holiday, 2010). Another concern related to the use of 'third space' is related to positionality and agency. Despite developing an extensive understanding of the phenomenon of interculturality and intercultural being in new intercultural environments, there is still a need for a recognition that individuals bring sets of multiple socio-cultural factors of their backgrounds to bear in their experiences in new cultures. Therefore, the notion of 'third space' still does not offer a clear view into the processes of identity formation in this in-between hybrid space, where the subject positions born out of participants' differing ethnic, linguistic, and 'cultural' pertinence will impact the self-positioning process in intercultural encounters.

Indeed, Holliday in his recent productions of the intercultural has shifted his perspective on the notion of 'third space' and whether it can be safely navigated in the non-essentialist intercultural. In his exchange with Zhou and Pilcher (2019) regarding his perspective reconfiguration of 'third space', Holliday acknowledges that the essential framing of this notion is the product of the neoliberal thinking dominating the educational structures, which attempt to pin down all terminology into fixed understandings. He added that for him 'third space' is a moment of escape to rethink and re-evaluate his self-perspective or more particularly position with regard to 'hierarchy of patriarchy' effect that is difficult to escape (ibid). The 'third space' then becomes:

a moment – a place – in which we can stand back and see things in a different way. It's a space of investigation. For a moment we said 'well, actually, this is what researchers do', but that's not enough, because it's got to be for everybody.

(Zhou and Pilcher,2019, p. 3)

This is likely to be significant in a setting such as the one reported in this study, where some participants' agency and positionality in new intercultural experiences have been relocated paving the way to form particular aspects of "trans-locational positionalities" (Anthias, 2006, p.26). These 'trans-locational positionalities' go beyond 'third space' identifications, for it recognizes the significance of the shifting and complex production of context, processes of

attribution, dialogical positioning, and agency all in the interplay. This is particularly relevant in the context and scope of this research as:

The term 'translocational' references the complex nature of positionality faced by those who are at the interplay of a range of locations and dislocations in relation to gender, ethnicity, national belonging, class and racialisation. Positionality takes place in the context of the lived practices in which identification is practised/performed as well as the intersubjective organizational and representational conditions for their existence. (Anthias 2002a). The notion of 'location' recognises the importance of context, the situated nature of claims and attributions and their production in complex and shifting locales. It also recognises variability with some processes leading to more complex, contradictory and at times dialogical positionalities than others.

(Anthias, 2006, pp. 15-16)

Therefore, it is of great importance to explore the notion of self-positioning and the 'other' from a non-essentialist lens, in order to explain the various underpinnings informing the cultural processes pertinent to the setting of this study. However, before negotiating the self-positioning process in relation to power and agency in intercultural experiences, it is at most important to go through a brief explanation of Holliday's 'grammar of culture' which introduces these notions in light of the current study's theoretical orientation.

2.1.3. 'A Grammar of culture': Holliday (2011, 2013)

As I have stated previously in **section 2.1.1**, the shift from the essentialist to non-essentialist understanding of culture has led to the re-articulation of culture as dynamic, changeable, and in a state of flux. Consequently, the focus of research in intercultural communication drifted towards a re-configuration of communication as a complex process in social contexts. In response to this turn in the field, Holliday (2013) introduced a 'grammar of culture' as a theoretical and methodological framework to address the multifaceted complexities and unresolved research gaps in the intercultural. This framework was theoretically grounded on the critical cosmopolitan approach in sociology, which suggests the creative engagement and ownership of culture in any cohesive activity; and the social action model of Max Weber (1964), which indicates the dialogic nature of individuals and social structure relations. In this theoretical framework, Holliday (2011; 2013) delves into the interactional dynamics of

communication with the interplay of various cultural domains including social and political structures, personal trajectories, underlying universal cultural processes, and particular cultural products. Holliday (2013) explains that his ‘grammar of culture’ developed from the notion of ‘small cultures’ (Holliday, 1999, 2011), which he defines as:

cultural environments which are located in proximity to the people concerned. There are thus small social groupings or activities, wherever there is cohesive behaviour, such as families, leisure and work groups, where people form rules for how to behave which will bind them together.

(Holliday, 2018, p. 1)

A salient characteristic of Holliday’s grammar of culture lies in the ability to address the multifaceted complexities of intercultural communication. The notion of ‘small culture’ is set at the centre of Holliday’s grammar (2013) to form a bridge that relates all the other dimensions in his cultural mapping. The following diagram is a visual explanatory version of the grammar:

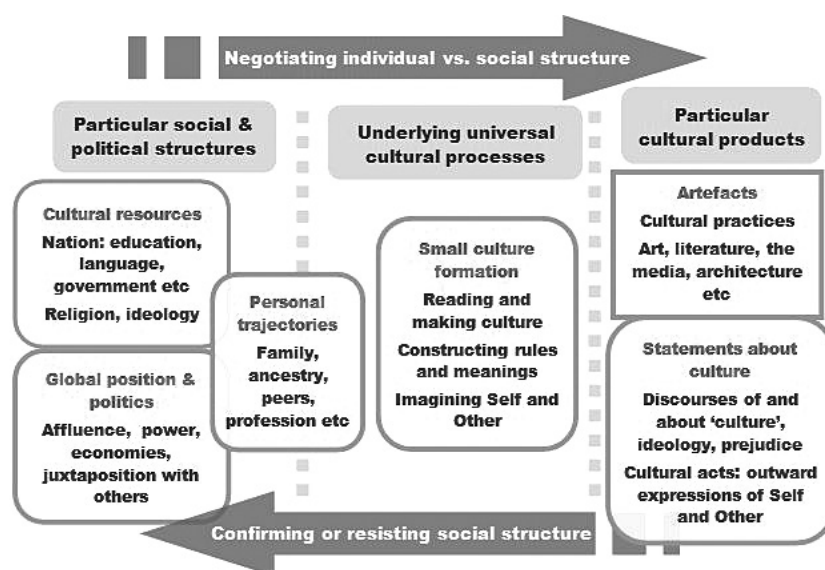


Figure 1: The ‘grammar of culture’ conceptual map (Holliday, 2013, p. 1)

The ‘grammar of culture’ presented in the above diagram is a conceptual map through which Holliday called for cautious reading and definition of culture due to the complex and deep nature of intercultural daily events accurately (Holliday, 2018). The notion of ‘small culture’ which occupies the central area of Holliday’s (2013) grammar, indicates that culture exists wherever there is a cohesive behaviour (Holliday, 1999). Simply put, ‘small culture’ is the social dynamic processes that emerge from the engagement of people in a cohesive

behaviour or activity. In fact, the labelling of culture as 'small' by Holliday is related to the imposition it makes on reality by detaching group members of any cultural signifiers as a starting point, against the monolithic large culture which categorises them under a single cultural banner (Holliday, 1999). In this central area lies the essence of the framework namely the underlying universal processes. This domain is where the common universal skills and strategies that are shared among all people are employed to negotiate their cultural positioning within a particular cohesive activity or behaviour. This participation and engagement lead to the emergence of 'small cultures on the go', where all these processes come into operation (Holliday, 2018). Holliday acknowledges the underlying cultural processes as the domain emphasizing the uncertain, complex, and constructed nature of culture (Holliday, 2016).

On the left side of the framework, Holliday maps three elements constituting the particular social and political structure, which by definition:

include nation, religion, language and the economic system, and correspond to the popular notion of culture in the national, regional, or religious sense, though they will rarely map precisely onto each other.

(Holliday, 2015, p.26).

These elements are Cultural resources, Global position and politics, and Personal trajectories. Cultural resources refer to the broader common understanding of 'our national culture'. It is associated with our national, ethnic, and institutional culture, which we supposedly born and brought up in proximity of. Looking closely at this domain, one may argue that Holliday seems to fall into the trap of essentialising culture by including elements of culture banners. However, this argument in fact helps demonstrate how the relationship between nation and culture is articulated in non-essentialist terms. Holliday throughout the non-essentialist argument of culture as a cohesive behaviour, has never undermined or denied the possible influence of big cultural structures such as ethnic or ideological background in the **small culture formation on the go**. In this regard culture and nation are not necessarily to be bounded together as an entity, rather it is up to the participants of the cohesive behaviour to decide the extent and role of their big cultural structures to play in the formation of culture. Indeed Holliday maintains that "We draw on them, but they do not necessarily confine everything we do and think" (Holliday, 2013, p. 2).

Global position and politics refer to the self-positioning and perception of ourselves and the world around us:

Examples of this are how people in the West view non-Western countries, how people outside the West view the West, at a more local level, how Britain and continental Europe view each other, how Middle Eastern nations view each other and the concept of the Arab World, and so on.

(Holliday, 2018, p.2).

Perhaps this particular element goes in line with the various theoretical, methodological and analytical underpinnings of this study, as it targets one of the significant thematic data arising from the investigation of intercultural becoming dynamics of change in the study abroad experience, namely the positioning of the 'self vs the other'. Simply put, Holliday (2015) notes that despite the established body of research on the representation of 'self vs the other' in new intercultural settings in various research fields (Urry, 2002; Said, 1978; Hahl, et al., 2015), this central area has not been given abundant attention in intercultural communication studies. This is a discursive relationship as the choice of what cultural resources to be influenced by, is greatly affected by the perspective of the 'self' in relation to the 'other' and vice versa.

Moving to the left side of the grammar and with a minor drift towards the centre, is Personal trajectories, which refer to the personal unique cultural experiences across time and space each individual encounters and may influence their negotiation process and disengagement with the particular cultural products surrounding them (Holliday, 2011). All these three elements could be manifested in different ways, via the cultural realities that an individual may encounter and present in a cultural arena.

On the right side of the framework, there are two dimensions that are related to particular cultural products namely, artefacts and statements about culture. Both dimensions are about the results of the negotiation in the current cultural arena among individuals of the group (Holliday, 2011).

- Artefacts refer to day-to-day activities and cultural practices of a certain group, which may be perceived as foreign to the people out of that group. These artefacts include the 'big-C' cultural artefacts such as literature and arts (Holliday, 2018, p.2). In fact these artifacts clearly manifest the notion of 'between as well as within culture', which denote behaviours that are commonly associated with 'us' as a culture, such as eating, clothing,

greeting and so on; yet includes discrepancies among the small groups within ‘our culture’ *per se* (Holliday, 2018).

- Statements about culture refer to “how we present ourselves and what we choose to call ‘our cultures’” (Holliday, 2015, p. 30). Holliday describes this domain as the most difficult to grasp, as our agency of choice of what we wish ourselves to be might not be compatible with our reality. I believe that on a deep level these two domains are related to the self-positioning process in the cultural arena. That is our perspective to the self does not always reflect our real self, yet our aspiration to how we prefer the other perceives us.

Now, in between the two sides of the ‘grammar framework’ are the cultural negotiation flows, which are presented as the arrows across the top and the bottom in the diagram above, moving in between the influence of the ‘big C’ structures and that of small cultural realities. Holliday (2013) explains that moving from the left to the right of the grammar framework, personal trajectories, and underlying universal cultural processes is where the personal cultural realities are introduced to the bigger cultural structures. Conversely, moving from the right to the left of the grammar indicates the extent to which the existing cultural structures are emphasized or resisted.

From the discussion above, it is apparent that the intersubjectivity of the self in relation to the other as an agency is an important facet, where all the cultural processes let it be personal trajectories or ‘big C’ structures, are manifested closely with an influence of both the underlying cultural processes and the ‘formation of small cultures on the go’. The understanding of the notion of culture, the sense of belonging, and perception of the ‘other’s’ culture are a bewildering array of variable features that help explore the cultural realities, that each individual may bring and draw upon in the negotiation of new intercultural encounters. Adding to this mix is an examination of how the process of cultural formation between the ‘self’, and the ‘other’ cultural realities interact. Therefore the next section will be devoted to exploring the notion of ‘self /other’ positioning from a non-essentialist lens, whereby the different dimensions of Holliday’s ‘grammar of culture’ are tacitly manifested and the intercultural being and becoming negotiated.

2.1.4. Negotiating the self vs other: A wider scope

As has been discussed above, in the discussion about culture in intercultural communication, there are a number of factors and aspects at play. With regard to the non-essentialist perspective to culture presented in Holliday's 'grammar of culture' (2011, 2013), we need to address the implications of positioning (section 2.1.4.1), and the perception of oneself and the other (section 2.1.4.2) within any communicative event. The interplay of these elements along with contextual and social structures is part and partial of any communicative event or cohesive behaviour. Therefore, understanding the chemistry of these micro and macro-processes is the key to a holistic understanding (Colman, 2013) of intercultural communication dynamics of change.

As has been discussed above (section 2.1.1), culture is not a static, bounded, or holistic cultural entity, but rather it promotes the agency of change by paving the way for meanings to emerge as a result of the negotiation processes with multiple intersecting identities. Holliday (2016) emphasizes the negotiation of big cultural structures (identified as blocks) and the small culture formation (as a result of threads) serves to conform to the non-essentialist intercultural understanding presented in his 'Grammar of culture'(2011, 2013). This is well articulated in a study conducted by Amadasi and Holliday (2017), where they investigated how people express their perspectives on culture and cultural identity. The latter proved to be multiple and dependent on how people position themselves in communicative events. The narratives generated in this study demonstrated the ability of individuals to shift between cultural blocks, expressing conflicting discourses of culture in the form of the 'us vs them' notion, and pulling out cultural threads at other times represented as particular cultural products. Out of this brief discussion about negotiating cultural blocks and threads, appears to the surface a number of theoretical constructs that are most relevant to human communication in a cultural site. First, is the concept of self-positioning and how it is articulated through the narratives as a discursive practice. Within which both pre-existing national structures and the set of contextual circumstances made available in the discursive behaviour, are negotiated by the mediated personal trajectories (see Holliday grammar of culture figure 1).

I believe the discussion about positioning would be best articulated through the Positioning Theory (PT) (Davies and Harré 1990; Harré and Van Langenhove 1991; Van Langenhove and Harré 1993). Related to the self-positioning notion is the personal construction of views that people hold about themselves and others, and their perception of

how they believe they are seen by the 'other'. This would be best mirrored through an explanation of the Personal Construct Theory (PCT) (Kelly, 1955). Arising from these two theoretical assumptions about negotiating the 'self' and 'other' in non-essentialist terms are the notions of stereotypes, which are believed to be cultural constructs that may or may not emerge depending on the underlying universal cultural processes. All these cultural constructs will be discussed below in the following sub-sections.

2.1.4.1. Positioning theory (PT) (Harré and Van Langenhove, 1999)

Positioning Theory (PT) was introduced into the social sciences during the mid-1980's (Davies and Harré 1990; Harré and Van Langenhove 1991; Van Langenhove and Harré 1993). It has been presented as a general metaphor to comprehend how persons "use words (and discourse of all types) to locate themselves and others" (Moghaddam and Harré, 2010, p. 2) "in jointly produced storylines" (Davies and Harré, 1999, p. 37). Therefore, positioning is manifested in discursive, reciprocal practices, whereby individuals locate themselves as observable, coherent, and subjective participants in mutually constructed narratives or conversations (Davies and Harré, 1999).

In fact, PT is developed in social constructivist psychology and was launched based on the concept of subject positions developed by Michel Foucault (1970). Similar to Foucault who posits that an individual is subject of and to discourse, Harré, and Langenhove thoroughly defined subject positions in this way:

A subject position incorporates both a conceptual repertoire and a location for persons within the structure of rights for those that use that repertoire. Once having taken up a particular position as one's own, a person inevitably sees the world from the vantage point of that position and in terms of the particular images, metaphors, storylines and concepts which are made relevant within the particular discursive practice in which they are positioned. At least a possibility of notional choice is inevitably involved because there are many and contradictory discursive practices that each person could engage in.

(Davies and Harré, 1990, p. 46).

Harré (1990-2010) and co-positioning theorists argue that central to the acquisition of meaning about the 'self' in relation to the world, is parallel to the acquisition of categories of the 'self' but not the others, then being part of different discursive practices which assign meaning to those categories. With this in mind, the 'self' then is positioned depending on the

storylines which are formed by these chosen categories. Therefore, the recognition of the psychological and emotional belonging of the 'self' in a certain discursive practice entails a worldview that is associated with the membership category. To explain better this categorical articulation is to imagine oneself in a certain social practice, say a female teacher at university. In such a practice a woman is not only assigned to her biological female category or her social occupation as a teacher, yet she is also positioned by other markers or categories such as a mother, a wife, a Catholic or Muslim... and the list goes on. In another context perhaps one or none of these categories may apply, it is highly dependent on the social context where the identity has been constructed through the various descriptions of the 'self' that give experience meaning. The assumption then is built on the fact that there is no singular, unitary version of the 'self' that is made available across time and space, rather multiple versions that are "discursively constructed in historically specific social contexts; they are complex and plural; and they shift over time" (Fraser, 1992, p. 178).

Looking at the analogy presented above, one may mistakenly confuse one self's 'role' with the 'position' in a certain discursive practice. In contrast to models that view interlocutors performing prescribed roles, Davies and Harré (1990) posit that positions :

permit us to think of ourselves as a choosing subject, locating ourselves in conversations according to those narrative forms with which we are familiar and bringing to those narratives our own subjective lived histories through which we have learnt metaphors, characters and plot.

(p.52).

Therefore, in contrast to roles which assume a static, self-contained projection of the self, positions are fluid, transient and socially constructed reflection of it and are viewed as "a cluster of rights and duties to perform certain actions" (Harré and Moghaddam, 2003, p. 5). Tightly related, Davies and Harré (1990) did not only emphasize the construction of positions, yet also a 'metaphor of an unfolding narrative', in which discourses create multiple positions within a storyline or storylines. They acknowledge that storylines are critical in Positioning Theory as they unfold as they are enacted, which in turn emphasizes the "dynamics of social episodes" and how various individuals may contribute as they unfold (Harré and Moghaddam, 2003, p. 6). In this vein, Amadasi and Holliday (2017) argue that "positioning is often achieved by employing narratives" (p. 258). These narratives according to Amadasi and Holliday are not the mere product of a single discursive practice, yet they can range from grand historical

repertoire (social and cultural structures) to small contextual circumstances made available in a certain event (personal trajectories). Within an unfolding narrative, one may experience various contradictions in the construction of multiple selves, which may be constituted in one position or another, in one narrative or another within a story; or perhaps stand in multiple positions to negotiate new ones. These possibilities imply the negotiation of agency of choice and untying the control of social structures and practices. However, these negotiations are not manifested on one side of the discursive practice, yet it involves the other as a crucial part in the construction of the self-position. Thus, every position exists with the assumption of the other position, which indicates that the process of positioning does not only involve the negotiation of meaning but also the negotiation of human relations (Widdowson 2007).

Simply put, assuming a 'position' involves the use of rhetorical devices by which oneself and the 'other' are presented as standing in various kinds of relations, including power, relations of competence (knowledge/ignorance), relations of moral standing (trustworthy/trusting) and so on...this negotiation process according to Harré (1997) and his co-researchers is where the 'self' and the 'other' actions within a dialogic space and create the social world in a discursive practice by assigning positions to each other. Taking the same example above, a female teacher at university, would negotiate different relation of her positioning, a teacher with more authoritative power over her students, who in return would give her the right to perform that duty. With this authoritative position comes the competence relation, as a teacher who imparts knowledge to the students, therefore the competence relation would be imparting and accepting knowledge from the more knowledgeable to the one who is entitled to receive information, that is from teacher to student. At the same time the moral standing relation in such a case is on two levels: from the university's authority who trusts the teacher to be in a position that allows being a teacher given her awarded academic degree, and from the part of students who in return gives the impression that they trust the teacher to be a worthy information source. These multi-negotiation of power relations may happen automatically or with an accumulation of communicative or discursive practices between these parties.

In order to explain how these positions are established as a negotiated process, Harré and van Langenhove (1999) distinguish between first order and secondary order positioning, and between interactive and reflective positioning. Both kinds of distinction here are set to explain the reciprocity of positioning while others attempt to position us in certain ways, and

our own attempts to position ourselves. While first order positioning refers to the position, that we attempt to assume to ourselves and assign to the other in a given setting, the second order positioning is adopted if the first one has been challenged or contested. This can be. On the contrary, interactive positioning is related to the 'other' attempting to position us and reflexive positioning refers to an individual attempting to position oneself. With this understanding in mind, Positioning Theory contributes to developing an understanding of the implication of both power and positional shifts in discursive practices, which affects the meanings and directions of both actions and storylines people ascribe to. These in the end generate different outcomes and consequences in the social world.

It is in light of the conceptual framework and analytical tools offered by Positioning Theory; scholars began to introduce it in the interpretation and analysis of research data in a variety of fields. In intercultural political relations, for example, Slocum and Van Langenhove (2004) explored how Positioning Theory could be used as an analytical framework to consider the meanings attributed to spaces and integration and issues such as political collaboration or sovereignty.

In business management and public relations, Zelle (2009) proposed the application of Positioning Theory as both a theoretical framework and procedure for social analysis in organizational change research. Zelle (2009) acknowledged the ability of Positioning Theory to capture a detailed picture of change, provide a better understanding of jointly constructed contexts, and allow consideration of multiple levels of social analysis of people, institutions, and society.

While Positioning Theory has found its way into an increasingly diverse set of disciplines, it simultaneously begun surfacing in literacy and language education. Perhaps the earliest published use of Positioning Theory in a peer-reviewed education journal, was Evans (1996) who applied it to consider gender-related interactions and equity in peer-led book discussion groups. In the early 2000s, a number of literacy scholars also utilized Positioning Theory for a diverse set of explorations. For example, Barone (2001) drew upon Positioning Theory to re-examine existing findings to consider the relationships between a parent, student, and researcher in classroom contexts. Similarly, Anderson (2002), by drawing on Davies' (1993) work on gender, he investigated gendered identities in a multi-age elementary classroom to demonstrate how gender, identity, and literacy interactions were represented. In a more recent study on professional development in education, Tran and Pasura (2018)

drew on Davies and Harré's (1990) positioning analysis to interpret teachers' reflective and interactive positioning with regard to their professional development needs in working with international students.

It is worth mentioning at this level that although a growing number of studies have drawn on Positioning Theory as a theoretical and analytical framework, the focus of analysis has primarily been set on either individual identity construction and individual narratives per se, or intergroup relations positioning as has been proposed in the review of studies displayed above. However, there has been limited use of Positioning Theory in the exploration of interculturality and intercultural experiences in new environments.

Positioning Theory has roots in the work of speech-act theory, following Austin (1962,1975) and Searle (1969), and the language-based theories of Vygotsky (1962), Wittgenstein (1971), and others. Therefore, it is not surprising that many writings about Positioning Theory attend primarily to spoken language. In this regard, Moghadam and Harré (2010) explain that "It is with words that we ascribe rights and claim them for ourselves and place duties on others" (p. 3). Interestingly, many of the original articles and edited volumes discussing the adoption of Positioning Theory as both a theoretical and analytical framework focus almost exclusively on words albeit in different domains such as conversation and occasionally political documentation. However, if we critically review the principles and assets of Positioning Theory, and project them precisely in the field of education and intercultural communication, it becomes very apparent that Positioning Theory is underrepresented with regard to its theoretical underpinnings. Simply put, Harré and Moghaddam (2010), and other positioning theorists, repeatedly argue that Positioning Theory is centred around "how people use words (regardless of its discourse) to locate themselves and others" (p. 2). However, most research studies drawing on the positioning have most often foregrounded linguistic signs in acts of positioning, and very few researchers have attempted to explore it in relation to the intercultural processes arising along (with exceptions in the works of Holliday (2016), Amadasi and Holliday (2017), among few others). It can be sufficient to say that Positioning Theory is about communicative practices of all kinds within different contexts and various research focus. As such, it is of great significance to point to the fact that while many positioning theorists foreground spoken interaction, Harré and his associates recognize other symbolic representations and actions as means of positioning. Therefore, it is worth making a call for scholars in domains such as education and intercultural studies to launch a

broader consideration of the use of Positioning Theory, which by far extension can and should consider how symbols of all kinds, not only speech, contribute to the process of self/other positioning within or in relation to storylines.

Given this intervention, there are a number of reasons for Positioning Theory being particularly revealing in this study. Firstly, Positioning Theory underscores the transient and dynamic nature of positioning in and through discursive practices (Van Langenhove and Harré, 1999), which in return mirrors the non-essentialist underpinnings of the current research study on the one hand, and goes in line with the ultimate goal for exploring the transient change in the dynamics of intercultural becoming of students in study abroad contexts. Secondly, Positioning Theory celebrates the self-other negotiation conceptualization through the positioning dynamics within spatial and temporal dimensions (Bamberg, 1997). Finally, relevant to the longitudinal investigation undertaken in this research, an enhanced version of Bamberg's model of positioning theory (1997) has been partially adapted into the analytical procedure for it being at the heart of narrative inquiry (Bamberg and Georgakopoulou, 2008), which considers the narrative as a revealing inductive demonstration of the self-other-context interplay. It is noteworthy to point out, that although the Positioning Theory model emphasized in the above discussion (Bamberg, 1997) is pertinent to identity reconstruction research in narrative inquiry, the so many features overlapping with the investigation of the intercultural is a foundation for a revolutionary call to consider a positioning-narrative-intercultural trilogy that this research seeks to partially utilize. A more detailed discussion on PT analytically adopted in this research would be found in **chapter 3 (section 3.4.2)**.

In the following section, another relevant theoretical and analytical framework that reflects the self-other negotiation through a non-essentialist perspective is to be explored, by introducing various facets of the theory and discussing the rationale for its relevance to the current research study.

2.1.4.2. Personal Construct Theory (PCT) (Kelly, 1955)

In the previous section, I have discussed Positioning Theory as both a theoretical and analytical framework in the field of psychology, yet proved its potential expansion to other relevant research areas including this study. It is worth mentioning here that some of the

theories that were developed a few decades ago are often understood rather as theoretical foundation stones for the establishment of new understandings in specific domains of research, yet it is empirical research that proves it to have far-reaching implications in various research arenas. Accordingly, some theories are still very influential and inspiring to apply across academic domains, which is the case with Kelly's (1955) Personal Construct Theory (PCT). The attention of researchers is primarily focused on the individual who is actively engaged in giving meaning to the *world* and the *self*. Therefore, it can be argued that Kelly's contribution is still considered to be ahead of its time, for it being able to abandon the static and reductionist traditions in psychological thinking, and it fits comfortably into more recent approaches aiming to see the individual in a holistic perspective (Winter, 2012). Perhaps one might question the use of Personal Construct Theory in a research study exploring the intercultural becoming dynamics of change of students in a study abroad context, yet the answer lies in Kelly's (1991) judgment himself about expanding his ideas to other fields "there are always some alternative constructions available to choose among in dealing with the world" (p. 11). In the following, there will be relevant explanations and justifications as to why this particular theory fits properly in the research reported in this study.

Personal Construct Psychology (PCP) or Personal Construct Theory (PCT) (Kelly, 1955) has a longstanding history of application in exploring people's perceptions of themselves and the 'other' in various fields. In fact, Neimeyer (1993) acknowledges that Personal Construct Theory is nowadays backed up by an impressive body of research of more than 2,000 mostly empirical publications; in Artificial Intelligence (Ford and Adams-Webber, 1992), Narrative Psychology (Mancuso, 1986), Thanatology (Neimeyer and Epting, 1992), Education (Pope and Keen, 1981) or Communication (Applegate, 1990). These and other related research expansions render Personal Construct Theory not only a pioneering theory in psychology yet an avant-garde among constructivist theories (e.g. Feixas and Villegas, 1990).

As a phenomenological approach, the fundamental principle in Personal Construct Theory is that "a person's process is psychologically channelized by the ways in which he anticipates events" (Kelly, 1955, p. 46). This denotes that we tend to develop our understanding and worldviews through our life experiences. As such Personal Construct Theory advocates a historical, diachronic, fluid, and dynamic nature of the self, which constructs reality in a variety of ways, making the position pluralistic. Kelly believes that the interpretation of the world around us starts by developing a set of personal constructs, which

are principally mental representations employed to interpret events. These constructs are based on our experiences and observations of them; including our education, the stories we read, and the different discourses that we are used to being exposed to in the media. It is of great importance at this level to emphasize individuality in Personal Construct Theory, given that constructs are inherently personal as being exclusive to each person's life experiences. Each person's system of constructs is unique, and it is the uniqueness of these experiences' interpretations that might form the differences between people. However, this does not rule out the sharing of some experiences, and so the opposite proposition of interest is that there will be a 'commonality' of personal constructs within a group of people in certain social behaviours.

In this regard, Kelly (1955) states that as much as we are unique in our personally constructed views, we still assume similarity with others in a certain way, which Kelly describes as 'commonality'. Commonality does not signify shared personality or character traits with the 'other', yet it refers to the psychologically similar constructs that tend to be used such as having positive or negative perspectives and assuming right or wrong judgments. Kelly, (1955) argues that "... one person employs a construction of experience which is similar to that employed by another, his processes are psychologically similar to those of the other person" (p. 90). Simultaneously, Kelly (1955) proposes the 'Sociality' aspect of constructs, which refers to the level of appreciation of the 'other's' perspective and worldview through his own eyes rather than personal judgments. Kelly identifies this process as significant in any communicative event, which potentially helps "... one person construes the construction processes of another he may play a role in a social process involving the other person" (Kelly, 1955, p. 95). Sociality is rooted in social reality in opposition to commonality which is rather cognitive. Effectively, the sociality aspect presents two forms of engagement with the 'other' 'namely to act instrumentally or assume a 'role relationship'. While the former is to overlook the 'other's' perspectives and worldviews, the latter is to act in relation to the 'other's' personal constructions and consider their potential interpretation perspectives about us or the world. It is through this style individuals are able to intimately understand one another (Reynolds, 2013).

It is important at this level to refer back to one aspect discussed in positioning theory (**section 2.1.4.1**), which is the distinction between 'role relationship' and 'position'. 'Role relationship' is characterized by a static self-contained projection of the self through given

social structures, unlike 'position' that assumes fluidity and socially constructed reflection of it (Davies and Harré, 1990). However, Moghaddam, Harré, and Lee (2008) stress that "if roles are to be dynamic representations of structural perspectives, they must demonstrate those perspectives by enacting them in the social interaction" (p.48). In fact, this was not of great impact with regard to the analytical procedure in this study, as Personal Construct Theory was subject to discussion in aspects of dynamic change of self-revaluation of this research's participants. Furthermore, one may raise an important query as to why Personal Construct Theory with a constructivist (focus on cognitive processes) (**chapter 3, section 3.1**) epistemic nature is discussed in this review of literature which praises the non-essentialist perspective that perceive cultural knowledge as a practice of both mutual social communication and individual internal processes. This is relatively significant in the sense that it relates to various theoretical underpinnings that this study is built upon.

There is some resonance as to why Personal Construct Theory is subsumed under the constructivist knowledge claims (**see chapter 3, section 3.1.**). Howard (1986) states that epistemic values are "those criteria employed by scientists to choose among competing theoretical explanations" (p. 135). The decision to choose among knowledge claims in social sciences is not to be carried out haphazardly, yet it is greatly influenced by a rational explanation as to why a particular social research practice is most suitable than another. Cunliffe (2011) explains that:

...our metatheoretical assumptions have very practical consequences for the way we do research in terms of our topic, focus of study, what we see as "data," how we collect and analyse that data, how we theorize, and how we write up our research accounts.

(p. 651)

Therefore, in philosophy for example knowledge claims are selected based on rhetorical quality, while in history epistemic values are mainly reliant on retrospective event explanations. And while crafting qualitative research is dependent on epistemic values departing from a representational conception of knowledge (Cunliffe, 2011), the quantitative however, is reliant on the authority of facts and representation of reality. With this in mind, justification of the knowledge claims in positivism would rarely give way to epistemic values questioning.

As for the nature of knowledge in social constructivism it is assumed that subjective knowledge and reality are constructed within the individual's cognitive processes. Social constructionism on the other hand focuses explicitly on the role of social processes in the construction of meaning. In this regard, Gergen (1982, 1985) rejects both exogenic and endogenic epistemologies which mirror constructionist and constructivist epistemic respectively, and he rather embraces a combination of both. Endogenic epistemologies are those knowledge claims that emphasize the role of the individual cognitive processes in the construction of meaning, unlike exogenic epistemologies, which emphasize the role of external reality.

It follows from this that the link between Personal Construct Theory and constructivism was first explicitly discussed by Mahoney (1988) as he points to the theory's emphasis on meaning as a primarily personal endeavour, which supports classifying it as a form of epistemological constructivism. However, if we look closely, within Personal Construct Theory, Kelly introduced some interconnection between meaning systems which are based on the notion of sociality mentioned earlier (Kelly, 1955). This denotes that despite the focus of Personal Construct Theory on the individual being the source of constructing reality yet being in opposition to the 'other' and assuming his perspective in accordance with the 'self' is evidence that Personal Construct Theory does not deny the interferences of a social agency. Hinkle (1970) in reviewing Kelly's psychological constructs notes that Kelly himself emphasizes that '*we ought*' to take the position of others in the act of communication; this was a moral imperative implicitly focussed upon in the theory. In addition, central to Personal Construct Theory is that the world is made or can be construed in a variety of ways, making the position of an individual pluralistic. With this in mind, despite its focus on cognitive processes, Personal Construct Theory seems to go in line with the non-essentialist perspective for being able to explain in part the intercultural self-negotiation central to this research study.

It is noteworthy at this level to acknowledge that considering Personal Construct Theory in this type of intercultural research emanates from one strong argument, that I have found significantly relevant, that is the multiplicity of reality interpretations across time and space. Kelly (1955) argues that external reality is subject to multiple interpretations, where individuals have different versions of perspective to construe the world around them, this process is referred to as 'constructive alternativism' (Kelly, 1955). Not only experiences can

be interpreted differently among different people, yet it also suggests the potential multiple interpretations of the same experience for the same individual at different points in time. Furthermore, Kelly acknowledges the significant shift in cultural understanding that can accompany physical travel, he suggests that “Looking through glasses that are not your own can permanently affect your eyesight” (Kelly, 1962, p.90). Indeed, he developed this perspective as a result of his one-year travel across Europe. It is here that it struck my attention to the open discussions that can be made possible in considering Personal Construct Theory to explain certain aspects of change of intercultural becoming dynamics in study abroad contexts, which have been emergent in this study. Although Scheer (2003) suggests a break of the Personal Construct Theory’s theoretical and analytical framework used in cross-cultural empirical research, several studies have marked its use in different research domains such as Identity and Study Abroad (Walker, 2003), Multiculturalism (Gemignani, 2003), Immigration (Mancuso, 2003) and the list goes on.

All in all, Personal Construct Theory with its emphasis on negotiating self-perspective and evaluations in relation to the other and the context, can provide in part significant insights into potential interpretations of the intercultural change brought through study abroad experiences.

Not far from the negotiation of the self-other politics discussed above and brought about by Positioning Theory and Personal Construct Theory, the following section is to present a prominent aspect where this negotiation might be executed in real-life experience and impact different aspects of an intercultural shift in perspective of self-positioning. Stereotypes are to be discussed in the following section, bringing together different theoretical and empirical explanations that contribute to our understanding of the intercultural dynamics of change explored in this study.

2.1.4.3. Stereotypes mechanisms as positioning

Having addressed significant concepts arising from the rich theoretical ramification of culture and its complex conceptual assets, discussing stereotypes is significantly relevant to the different processes of self-other negotiations featured in this brief discussion. Stereotypes can find its roots in early theories of social psychology by Lippmann (1922) and Allport (1945) the latter of which views stereotypes as “an exaggerated belief associated with a category” (Allport, 1954 p. 191). While the debate about stereotypes has been centred around the

nature of stereotypes as a cognitive, psychological, or a social process; contemporary discussions are more inclined to understand the stereotypes' effect on intercultural communication and whether they are natural or ought to be resisted and declined (Holliday, 2009). In this regard, Holliday (2009) creatively shifted the discussion about stereotypes in an endeavour to reach 'loose ends' that explain stereotypes within the complexity of the intercultural. He distinguishes two basic arguments regarding the position of stereotypes in intercultural communication, namely the *chauvinistic* and *practicality* cultural arguments. The chauvinistic argument is mainly fed by classical social, historical, and ideological categorizations of the 'west vs the rest' fallacy (Hall, 1992). It states that stereotyping is nurtured by practical divisions of a more sophisticated 'west' vs any 'rest' categorization. Indeed, these claims have been supported by Edward Said in his influential book 'orientalism' (1978). In fact, these political power-laden and ideological divisions are a direct cause of the persistence of cultural stereotypes (Crandall et al., 2011). Within this chauvinistic argument, Said (1978) demonstrates how the depiction of the orient (middle east in most representations) through a deficiency framework, has led the 'west' (representing itself as the occident) to position itself in a more superior positive side of the fence. Consequently, the binary of a superior 'west' vs a deficient 'rest' has been inherently imagined leading to negative stereotypes that in subsequent intercultural communicative events may cause prejudicial discrimination and racism. I believe the stereotyping processes in this regard have been solidified through public discourse, media, and scholarly contributions in different interdisciplinary domains (Krumer-Nevo and Sidi, 2012). In the same vein and within English educational discourses, Holliday (2014) explains how the ideology of the 'native speaker' as an essentialist conceptualization in language precisely English learning and teaching led to a solid, inherent stereotype of a linguistically and culturally deficient non-speaker non-west culture 'other'. With this fallacy, students eventually find themselves native-speaker-goal oriented regardless of language use in the context.

From another perspective, the practicality argument argues for stereotyping as a natural human trait that promotes understanding of cultural differences as a starting point (Holliday, 2009), and may serve to justify one's privileges or disadvantages (Jost, 2001). And while stereotypes in this stream of thought are personal mechanisms to avoid self-other perception bias, yet I believe it essentially recreates and perceptively reinforces the nation-state boundaries through promoting disciplines of acceptance and tolerance of differences. I

believe I go in line with how Holliday (2009) introduces his loose end of argument regarding the debate above, for a quest to shift the perspective from establishing if stereotypes are good or bad, to seeking a methodology that explores the structure and discipline of the stereotype process (Findor et al., 2020). I add to this suggestion a quest that is built upon data-driven findings in this study, that the real focus in exploring the process of stereotyping is through navigating the perspectives of individuals themselves regarding this process. I believe stereotyping as a cultural mechanism that functions within a changing, fluid cultural context, is likely to undertake the same trait of being transient, dynamic, and sustainable to change with each and every intercultural experience (Oakes et.al, 1994). I believe it is this dynamicity trait that can lead us to question how stereotyping mechanisms, can be one dynamic aspect of self-positioning in the intercultural discourse. In this regard, Langenhove and Harré (2010) explain that stereotypes within social psychology theories can be self/personal or social/cultural. While self- stereotypes are seen as generalized self-ascriptions of a person's behaviour toward the 'other', cultural stereotypes are perceived as 'generalized expectations' that are not individual-experience based (ibid, 2010, pp. 462-463). Now, I do see a bright side to establishing this distinction as it may vividly be found in real-life experiences, yet I may go cautious about the explanation referred to by Stewart et al. (1979) in considering self-stereotypes arising:

when subjects ascribe traits to others in the same manner as they would ascribe them to themselves, making the implicit assumption that others are to a large degree similar to themselves.

(p. 12)

Indeed, self-stereotypes as I have encountered in this study have proven to generate both assumptions of similarity and difference. Bearing the complexities of the discussion above regarding stereotypes and the stereotyping mechanism, it is fair to explain here that while this research study addresses stereotypes as an intercultural self-positioning mechanism, it is not my position to judge stereotypes as correct or false representations. The goal for me as a researcher here entails the exploration of these stereotypes as a process of dynamic change through the narratives.

Conclusion

This section has engaged with a plethora of theoretical constructs and discussions about the culture debate, and delved into how the individual and culture relationship has been perceived differently at ontological and epistemological levels. It further presented the 'self' vs the 'other' exploration in cultural contexts and the theoretical and analytical frameworks most relevant to this research study. The discussion foregrounded the debate, particularly in the intercultural communication field, between essentialism and anti-essentialism. It has shown how the non-essentialist perspective changes traditional understandings of cultural phenomena. It further illustrated the reductionist conceptualizations of culture and how it pins it down into national and large cultural structures. This understanding has driven a considerable body of research towards a postmodernist paradigm namely non-essentialism promoting a dynamic, fluid perspective of culture.

The section moves on to discuss the key thoughts emanating from a non-essentialist position endorsement by various researchers, with particular reference to the 'third culture', 'third place', or 'third space' (Kramsch, 1993; Bhabha, 1998). Additionally, locating this study in a non-essentialist paradigm urged the exploration of one developmental conceptualization of culture namely 'a grammar of culture' (Holliday, 1999, 2011, 2013), which delineates a central perspective that culture is a dynamic 'formation on the go' under negotiation between individuals throughout any discursive behaviour. The section concludes with a synthesis of two key theoretical and analytical frameworks discussing self-positioning processes, and stereotyping mechanisms as a process of positioning, which all cohere well with the aim of this research study. This discussion helped enrich the theoretical foundation through which an exploration of the intercultural becoming dynamics of change experiences in study abroad contexts, along with key arguments for it being a well fit in the non-essentialist conceptualizations.

2.2. Interculturality and study abroad

Introduction

Globalization has fundamentally reshaped the world as we know it. People from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds became increasingly interconnected, which inevitably leads to diversity and intercultural experiences in all aspects of life (Liu, 2015). One of the most significant contributors to the current super diverse environment is the increasing flow

of people through migration, educational sojourning, business, and other forms of intercultural exchange. In an effort to meet the demands of globalization, the educational arena has brought into the scene the internationalization of higher education. This resulted in a dramatic increase in international students enrolled in Study Abroad programs (Kinging, 2011, 2009; Coleman 2015).

Research findings have linked study abroad experiences with a myriad of areas in intercultural learning and development, including language proficiency and linguistic development (Freed, 1995; Yang, 2016; Baker 2009; Varela and Gatlin-Watts, 2014), personal development (Forsey, Broomhall, and Davis, 2012; Gmelch, 1997; Milstein, 2005.), identity development (Craig, Zou, and Curtis, 2018; Kinginger, 2013), and intercultural competence (Chieffo and Griffiths, 2009; Clarke et.al. 2009; Varela, 2017). With this bulk of research studies on Study Abroad in intercultural communication, an increasing debate as to what the 'intercultural' signifies has made considerable changes in both the theoretical and methodological foundations in the Study Abroad inquiry.

In order to unpack these various interrelated conceptualizations, this section aims at exploring the Study Abroad inquiry in relation to the various intercultural concepts. The section begins by offering a brief history of Study Abroad inquiry in the field of intercultural communication, including a review of the growing body of research studies on various aspects of the intercultural arena. It then moves into a discussion about the internationalization of higher education as a major consequence of the proliferation of globalization and global diversity. Next, a review of the main intercultural development models in Study Abroad Research research is discussed including Intercultural Competence (IC), Intercultural Sensitivity (IS), Intercultural Awareness (IA), and finally interrogating interculturality in non-essentialist terms by questioning these intercultural models across theory and reality.

2.2.1. Study Abroad research in intercultural communication

With the social (Block, 2003) and intercultural (Kinging, 2009) turns in applied linguistics in the late 1980s, Study Abroad has witnessed a new substantial shift in perspectives and purposes and started finding its way into intercultural communication as a field in its own

right. Before delving into the Study Abroad inquiry, it is significantly relevant to unpack the term intercultural communication to better articulate how Study Abroad finds its way into the field.

Intercultural Communication is a relatively new field of study which tried to develop explanations of the communication complexities of a modern world with a wide range of cultural characteristics.

Basically, the term intercultural communication is self-explanatory as it means communication across different cultural spheres. This implies that, when two or more people with different cultural backgrounds interact and communicate with each other or one another in a certain social activity across cultural dimensions, intercultural communication is said to have taken place. However, having discussed the nature of culture understanding (**section 2.1**), what counts as intercultural communication depends, in part, on how culture is theoretically conceptualized in the first place. With reference to the essentialist and non-essentialist paradigms of culture understanding respectively, intercultural communication is perceived by some academic scholars as “communication among individuals from different nationalities” (Gudykunst, 2003, p. 163). Other scholars, in contrast, expand the notion of intercultural communication to encompass communication within any type of cultural grouping in a cohesive behaviour, this may include inter-ethnic, inter-religious, and even inter-regional communication or whatsoever is the social behaviour gathering these individuals are part of. This conceptualization has been corroborated by Arent (2009) who explains that:

When we talk of other cultures, we mean not only those who speak a language that is different from ours or who live in a different country or region; we also mean those who live in the same city or region but who do not share the same social groups. For example, a 14-year-old teenager does not typically communicate the same way as an 82-year-old senior citizen. Even if they were born and raised in the same neighborhood (in the city or in a rural area), their conversation could be just as “intercultural” as two people who came from opposite corners of the globe because they are from two subcultures.

(p.2)

After all, this assumption also supports the view that each individual comes into the situ of communication with a unique experience that he/she hopes to exchange with other participants and negotiate various cultural aspects. These two theoretical approaches of intercultural communication (therefore culture) are clearly distinguishable, yet in everyday

social life and practices, they tend to co-occur or mingle depending on an array of personal and contextual factors.

Driven by the proliferation of globalization, the intensifying mobility of capital, people, ideas, information, and ideologies form our contemporary reality, with the potential to profoundly affect social identities and cultural formations. One of the ways the educational arena has responded to these changes is through study abroad programs, which offer knowledge of languages, cultures, and intercultural dimensions, integrated within such an experience (trouillot, 2003).

Research on study abroad experience is a well-established field of inquiry in applied linguistics, and it has revealed a significant variation. The launch of study abroad inquiry can be traced back to the 1990s (Freed, 1995) when the number of students enrolled abroad across the globe increased from 0.8 million in 1997 to 4.5 million in 2012 (OECD, 2015). This augmentation paralleled a shift in the scope and focus of this inquiry, which was approached according to the methodological principles of mainstream research in different intervals. Coleman (2015) states that the initial trends in Study Abroad research as a field of applied linguistics; focused on aspects of language use and contact in an experience abroad. These traditions often drew on quantitative questionnaire data to measure mobile students' language gains through pre- and post-sojourn tests (Brecht, Davidson, and Ginsburg, 1995; Celce-Murcia, Dornyei, and Thurell, 1995; Freed, et al., 2004; Johnson, 2010). The fact that many studies employing pre- and post-tests seemed to reveal high variability in terms of students' language gains abroad, has urged researchers to go further to identify what personal and social variables promote or hinder students' second language (SL) learning abroad (Kinginger, 2011). With the emergence of the Intercultural Communication field in the late 1980s, a rich body of empirical studies examining intercultural learning in study abroad contexts reflected varying degrees of critical conceptualization of culture. It also projected significant differences in the level of understanding and awareness with regard to the intercultural learning process and its outcomes. Some studies employed quantitative or mixed method approaches particularly appealing to the researchers working on study abroad cultural experience gains and intercultural development trajectories (Patterson, 2006; Salisbury, An and Pascarella, 2013; Bloom and Miranda, 2015; Medina-Lopez-Portillo, 2008; Jackson, 2010).

The use of a mixed approach unfolded the nature of the experience abroad as well as its effect on students' gains in the target culture. A major study on the impact of study abroad on Intercultural Sensitivity was conducted by Medina-Lopez-Portillo (2008), who assessed the intercultural sensitivity of 28 American university students participating in one of two study abroad language programs: 18 attended a 7-week program in Taxco, Mexico and 10 took part in a 16-week sojourn in Mexico City. By using the Intercultural Development Inventory IDI, which is a proprietary survey that measures Intercultural Sensitivity using the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) scale (Hammer and Bennett, 2002), results showed that the longer-term sojourners demonstrated a more sophisticated understanding and awareness of nuances in the host culture compared to those with less time abroad. Similarly, Jackson (2010) adopted a mixed-method case study approach using both quantitative and qualitative instruments. In order to provide an objective measure of the participants' cultural sensitivity at strategic intervals, the IDI instrument was used to measure the participants' Intercultural Sensitivity/ worldview and orientation to cultural differences. On the other hand, pre- and post-sojourn qualitative data tools included a language and cultural identity narrative, reflection journals, open-ended surveys, and interviews were used. These instruments according to Jackson trigger the participants' views concerning their intercultural awareness and sensitivity, self-conception, and intercultural communication skills prior to and after their trip to England. The results revealed consistent development of the participants' Intercultural Sensitivity during their residence abroad.

On the other hand, qualitative dimensions have appealed particularly to researchers throwing light on social networks, identity, and perceptions of self and other. Retrospective interviews, narratives, journals, and observations have been widely used to study related yet complementary aspects of Study abroad as a real-life experience, rather than simply a cognitive process emerging within the individual (Wilkinson, 2000; Patterson, 2006; Salisbury, An and Pascarella, 2013; Bloom and Miranda, 2015; Schartner, 2016). This shift does not represent a break with previous research, yet it can be interpreted as a complementary development of more general socio-cultural factors and the intercultural turn in applied linguistics. For example, in order to develop ethnographic case studies of participants' reasons for language use (or lack thereof), Pellegrino-Aveni (2005) acknowledged and evaluated the reasons why some learners are reluctant to speak: the risk of being misunderstood can result in a misperceived self-image by native speakers. She

accompanied her target group of American students to Moscow over the period of two semesters in the 1995-1996 school year and collected a variety of qualitative data using interviews, student journals, and classroom observations. She concluded that frequently, the lack of SL use abroad is the result of the threat that learners feel to their personal sense of status. Similarly, by maintaining weekly e-journals, Stewart (2010) documented the extent and development of the participants' social integration in a small Mexican community over time. The results revealed that the use of e-journals proved to be effective to follow the students' progress as well as insights into their own learning. Additionally, Stewart found that cultural conventions that conflicted with the participants' own conventions and practices were also found to hinder the process of developing a personal identity in the target community.

As a counterbalance to the prevailing assumptions on the positive effect of studying abroad, unsuccessful or limited intercultural development during a sojourn abroad has also been documented in the literature, challenging the assumption that mere exposure to the target culture is the only way for promoting intercultural learning (Wilkinson, 2000; Patterson, 2006). Interestingly, a student could take part in a study abroad program without understanding the culture of which he or she has been part of. Such a perspective was based on the support of some scholars for domestic intercultural education and training over foreign travel (Bennett, Bennett, and Allen, 2003; Paige, 1993; Pruegger and Rogers, 1994). Given this perspective, Kinginger (2015) stresses the need for intercultural training and education where study abroad is concerned so that mobile students familiarize themselves with the process of otherizing and being otherized as well.

With regard to intercultural learning per se, and if we are to consider the non-essentialist perspective, it remains challenging to pursue assessment of complex and fluid concepts such as "cultural sensitivity/proficiency," "interculturality" or "intercultural competence" in study abroad experiences. This is in part due to the fact that there has been no consensus on the definition and theoretical scope of these constructs (e.g. Byram, 1997, 2008; Deardorff, 2006; Hu, 2008; Kramsch, 1998). This urged researchers in the Study Abroad inquiry to come to clear terms with constructs such as interculturality, intercultural sensitivity, or intercultural learning. Another argument to be addressed here is whether the tradition followed in investigating these intercultural constructs in study abroad contexts itself does

adhere to the non-essentialist conceptualization of what to consider as cultural boundaries. In other words, if the studies proposed in the historical review of literature above maintained the goal of comparing pre-and post-intercultural development in study abroad contexts then it would be suggesting a geographical boundary identification to the new cultural experience, which assumes study abroad as a static cultural entity. This in turn is far from non-essentialist cultural conceptualization. Therefore, the focus in the research tradition of study abroad experiences recently has been directed to more explorations of intercultural experiences than assessing pre-post intercultural dimensions development. In fact, recent studies perceiving interculturality from a non-essentialist lens have started exploring participants' self-perception of the study abroad experience and explanations of their cultural constructs in negotiations in new intercultural environments. In a research article conducted by Holliday (2017), he explored the perceptions of nine current and recent students regarding the cultural impact of their Ph.D. applied linguistics program at a university in the south of England. The aim of the research study was to interrogate any possible proposition of a conflict between British Ph.D. study experience and the cultural orientations of 'international' students. Holliday (2017) in this study reports the significance of existing cultural complexity in the reflexivity process on self-engagement in research abroad. He also acknowledges how the results brought by this study may influence the perspectives and understanding of internationalization, and the nature of academic knowledge and process. In a similar study, Amadasi and Holliday (2017) explored the negotiation of personal narratives of five postgraduate students regarding their upon-arrival intercultural experience perspective. Findings reveal a significant shift between personal narratives based on non-essentialist threads, and grand narratives pulled out of essentialist cultural blocks.

Overall, previous research has indicated that research on Study Abroad in the intercultural communication field varies significantly depending on the theoretical, methodological, and analytical frameworks employed. Furthermore, research in Study Abroad inquiry shifted to more introspective research procedures as proposed above, which seems to promote a more nuanced and critical conceptualization of culture and intercultural learning beyond a binary model of pre-existing cultures. However, the conceptualization of culture by participants themselves is still under investigation as a very limited body of research has pointed to this matter. Therefore, research in this regard foregoes the quest for more attempts to understand how learners actually view and conceptualize culture in a study

abroad experience and as part of their increased (or decreased) interculturality. Having this elaborated, I argue that students' conceptualizations of culture and related intercultural aspects should be the starting point of investigations of intercultural dynamics of change sought by this study. However, in order to set clear how the current research study fits into the literature of intercultural experience investigation in study abroad contexts, it is of great importance to first review the internationalization of higher education as a setting through which the study was conducted followed by a discussion of the basic intercultural development models that led to the current understanding of interculturality.

2.2.2. The internationalization of higher education

Research indicates a growing trend toward internationalization as strategic planning at the institutional level, which became a strong culture in higher education. Arguably, internationalization is not a new phenomenon as universities have always been international in their forestation and keen to forge links across national borders (Altbach and Knight, 2007). In fact, the internationalization of higher education is an element of a much larger systematic institutional and national response to globalization (Knight, 2004, 2012, 2014). In light of the globalization pressures, governments at a federal, state, or provincial level, believe that studying abroad is said to promote the brand and reputation of their educational systems globally and enhance economic competitiveness (Bond et al., 2009; Foreign Affairs, Trade, and Development Canada, 2014; Hudzik, 2015). Internationalization is a term that is used differently across contexts and perspectives, which made a considerable variation in the meaning attributed to the term. Internationalization in education is a process that has been set in motion by globalization and gives its activity a national categorization, namely that national institutions of Higher Education are reaching out to other national institutions in order to reflect new commercial and political order. Interestingly, Knight (2004) defines internationalization as “the process of integrating an international, intercultural or post-secondary education” (p.2).

Arguably, although globalization forged collaboration and partnerships between higher education institutions, which celebrates interculturality across the globe, there is another side to globalization that promoted inequalities and power imbalance between central and peripheral nations, institutions, and languages. Some scholars (e.g.: Skeldon, 2005) owed this centre/periphery division to different global factors such as the spread of

English as the global lingua franca (ELF) (Pennycook, 1994) which resulted in the growing strength of the English-speaking North and EU countries in terms of traditional academic centre (Altbach, 2001). Other factor is based on economic and political powers. In many facets of global exchange precisely that of higher education internationalization; the periphery/centre division depicts the gloomy picture of the widening gap between rich and poor countries, societies and even individuals. Altbach (2005) maintains that this gap has resulted in:

institutions at the periphery in larger nations, and the academic systems of developing and small industrialized countries depend on the centres for research, the communication of knowledge, and advanced training.

(p. 66)

It is not surprising then that academic mobility and international flow of students would be one-sided with:

international student mobility remains largely a North-South phenomenon, with the majority of the world's international students from the developing countries studying in the major industrialized nations.

(Altbach and Teichler, 2001, p. 7)

As such the other side of globalization does not seem as glamorous as it generally appears at the surface, i.e. facilitating students' mobility and the internationalization of higher education.

From the vantage point of benefiting the student learning experience, internationalization should be viewed neither as the mere building of collaborative links with institutions across the globe, nor bringing large numbers of international students to the home institution. Instead, it is a matter of internationalizing the attitudes of both staff and students, in the wider community of the university (Badwan, 2015). As a matter of fact, and according to a general classification that is widely cited in the literature, Koutsantori (2006) identifies three academic-cultural, economic, and political rationales informing the internationalization of higher education in different settings and with varied perspectives.

Culturally, the most significant goal of internationalization is academic cooperation and the extension of students' values and principles to enhance mutual understanding between cultures (Koutsantori, 2006). These forms of traditional internationalization reflect the fruitful results of crossing national boundaries, which has been the primary objective of higher education since its inception. In contrast to the previous 'not for profit' form of internationalization, the economic rationale, is one that Koutsantori (ibid) associates, though

not exclusively, with English-speaking countries such as Australia, the US, New Zealand, and the UK. These countries among others took advantage of the status of English as lingua franca and globalization to attract large numbers of international students to take part in Study Abroad programs. In this sense, universities now rely on the fees of international students as a source of income, which strengthens the chances of these countries in regional and global economic competition. Significant here, is the discourse attached to international students, which is part of marketization that circulates in contemporary Higher Education. In this sense, international students are viewed as part of the commercial aspect of universities and at times this marginalizes discussion of their personal, social, and individual purposes in pursuing their degrees abroad (Mann, 2001). At last, the third emerging rationale for internationalization is generally associated with non-European or non-English speaking countries (Koutsantori, 2006). Such a categorization according to him is manifested by attempts to encourage students and professionals to travel abroad or in the form of collaboration between home and foreign universities.

Given this classification, it might be the case that one or more of these reasons would be considered for pursuing the internationalization of higher education institutions or even one might dominate over the other rationales. As it is evident in the ways in which internationalization is manifested in the UK higher education institutions. Despite the fact that academic-culture orientation is given due attention in many UK higher education universities' policies, the urgent need for universities to establish firm financial viability imposes the dominance of the marketization discourse of internationalization (Bolsmann and Miller, 2008). This reality has been evident in the research undertaken by Bolsmann and Miller (2008), who interviewed senior figures in sixteen universities in the UK. Their findings suggest that despite existing discourses of internationalization in the external-facing activities of most UK universities investigated, the dominant discourse is economic and market-oriented. This is well illustrated in their own words:

...in theory internationalization is a process for the education of planetary citizens. In practice; internationalization is about income generation for cash-strapped higher education institutions.

(Bolsmann and Miller, 2008, p. 427).

Perhaps another form of internationalization strategy besides Study Abroad programs is evident in international service-learning courses and projects, co-operative education abroad, and even, international internships or placements for professional programs (Teichler, 2017).

Broadly speaking, these programs are best labelled as international 'study away' programs in the sense that they involve mobility, to another country and institution for a period of time to boost the educational experience (Sobania and Braskamp, 2009). Overall, higher education systems are still trying to find ways to cope with globalization by undertaking various internationalization strategies. Even universities that claim to be international, do not necessarily provide a clear vision of what it is that makes them international, apart from the number of foreign students and academic staff that are recruited. These claims may raise the question of what are the standards of an internationalized higher education, whether these standards are applicable to internationalization per se or is subject only to the marketization aspect?.

2.2.3. Intercultural learning in study abroad contexts

Given the perceived potential of intercultural encounters with individuals and groups from culturally diverse backgrounds to lead to positive intercultural learning, it is not surprising that a major focus of research on intercultural learning in study abroad contexts has been devoted to intercultural learning outcomes. As has been previously discussed in the previous section (2.2.1), studying abroad with the increasingly diverse intercultural encounters that has to offer is said to help students develop their critical thinking skills, be more creative and receptive to new experiences, improve their problem-solving and decision-making competences, and be more empathetic and understanding of cultural differences (Martin et al., 2015).

Evidently, of particular interest, has been an attempt to describe these skills in terms of the potential intercultural learning outcomes, which are said to be couched in terms of competencies and awareness (Deardorff 2006; Byram, 1997) and sensitivity Bennett (1993). The acquisition of the skills advocated in these competencies and cultural abilities is said to identify a person as interculturally competent through acquiring the ability to achieve effective communication. The interest in intercultural competence has resulted in a large number of definitions and models, yet surprisingly, there was no consensus of identification that is satisfactory to all. Indeed, there has been a longstanding body of research on learning outcomes in an attempt to generate lists of traits and structural models (Rathje, 2007).

However, Spitzberg and Changnon (2009) indicate that despite variations, the models tend to demonstrate similar components, namely attitudes, knowledge, and skills. This leads us to a more detailed discussion of the three common, interrelated intercultural abilities in relation to their theoretical articulation into model conceptualizations.

2.2.3.1. Intercultural competence IC (Byram, 1997)

Intercultural competence (IC) is a multi-layered and complex construct, which generated inconsistent terminology and oftentimes some sort of conceptual confusion. It is not surprising then, that attempts to define it have generated increasingly divergent approaches, definitions, models, and operationalizations. Although IC provides a strong foundation upon which intercultural communicative competence (ICC) was built, the two are not to be used interchangeably or synonymously. IC is the individual's ability to become an 'intercultural speaker' who "crosses frontiers, and who is to some extent a specialist in the transit of cultural property" (Byram and Zarate, 1997, p. 11). Similarly, Deardorff (2006), defines IC as " the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills and attitudes"(p. 247). Deardorff acknowledges that this definition is derived from Byram's (1997) framework of ICC, who made a clear cut between the two in subsequent works. As a matter-of-fact Byram (2000) proposes a distinction between IC as "the ability to interact in their own language with people from another country and culture and intercultural communicative competence which means performance in a foreign language" (p. 298).

Following Byram's definition the disparity between the two terms lies in the use of either the first or second language. People with IC interact successfully with other people using their first language. However, those with ICC do so in a second or foreign one. Furthermore, individuals with ICC may play the role of mediators between language and culture since they manage various complex communications as a result of both foreign language proficiency, and analysis of their own culture and that of the target one as well. In this sense, ICC incorporates an understanding of cross-cultural communication along with the development of communicative competence models. Similarly, Fantini (2010) considers the role of language in this competence, but in a general sense; whether it be the first, second, or a foreign language, he argues that:

Intercultural communicative competence is a complex of abilities needed to perform effectively and appropriately when interacting with others who are linguistically and culturally different from oneself.

(p. 1).

What is notable in Fantini's definition is his use of the term IC instead of ICC despite his reference to the role of language, which Byram considers a component of ICC. This delineates the fine line between the two terms according to both perspectives and uses purpose. Let us bear in mind that Deardorff's definition of IC is most relevant to Byram's, in the sense that it drops the word 'communicative' in the name of competence, which explains the exclusion of language proficiency as an element of the construct. Therefore, for the purpose of a detailed explanation of IC, the use of ICC would be much more focused upon in the following for its inclusiveness of linguistic traits than IC does not. There are numerous models of ICC, many of which draw upon the dominant idea that human competencies consist of Attitude, knowledge, and skills, with intercultural awareness being acknowledged as a significant dimension of the construct.

Byram's (1997) model of ICC, is mostly drawn from a foreign language education perspective and combines both the idea of communicative competence and intercultural/cultural awareness. The latter has been acknowledged as a separate intercultural construct in its own right as will be explained in the following sections. The conceptualization of Byram's ICC comprises five dimensions: knowledge, attitude, interpretation and relational skills of discovery and interaction, and critical cultural awareness. Under this framework, learners create a balance between the cultural experience and the required skills to interpret, relate, and utilize that knowledge in intercultural situations, which encounter language learning along the process (Baker, 2009). Putting it briefly, Byram assumes that the attitude of the 'intercultural speaker' represents the maintenance of curiosity and appreciation of different cultural tendencies; in my understanding, this requires him to undergo negative stereotypes and prejudices about external realities. This will eventually allow him to relativize himself and value the other. The knowledge dimension includes two types of understanding and awareness. General cultural knowledge includes the political, historical, and economic factors; this means possession of a critical view of the other culture. Specific knowledge is related to the interaction itself and

how those general factors affect communication, in addition to an understanding of how people from other cultural groupings are perceived. In fact, this specific knowledge is closely related to the next dimension, that of skills. As for the skills of discovery and interaction, these are based on the ability to use the specific knowledge about the other culture to ensure a smooth interaction we have to face and to discover existing connotations to avoid dysfunction. However, the skills of interpreting and relating come into play when recognizing the foreign culture phenomena and making relations with one's own phenomena. At last, is the critical cultural awareness; this dimension is one that ensures an effective engagement in different cultural contexts. This includes critical thinking skills to be able to compare and evaluate norms, behaviours, and values of others with one's own. This dimension will be discussed in the following subsections.

Looking closely at Byram's conceptualization of ICC, rises two important significant Questions: firstly in what ways this competence could be acquired? And the second is related to its internal consistency i.e. how do the different dimensions interact internally for achieving effective communication?. Putting it differently, despite receiving considerable attention and application in both language teaching and intercultural communication, there is still a lack of understanding of the ways in which this competency is acquired, and if ever acquired how it functions in an intercultural encounter where reciprocity of negotiated meaning is a prerequisite. With regard to the jointly constructed nature of communication that intercultural competence seems to overlook, another model has been proposed to explain human communicative behaviour in more of a developmental process. In the following Intercultural Sensitivity (IS) as a more social model will be unpacked.

2.2.3.2. Intercultural sensitivity (IS) (Bennet, 1993)

In its general sense, Intercultural Sensitivity is the individual's capacity to engage constructively with people from different cultural backgrounds and differing worldviews, through conscious self-mediation of one's own cognitive, affective, and behavioural states (Bennett, 1993). Theoretically, Intercultural Sensitivity rests on the constructs of culture and cultural groups as has been pointed out previously. Arguably, the key predictors of success in different intercultural encounters include an interest in other cultures, a level of sensitivity sufficient to notice cultural differences, and the willingness to adjust behaviour to understand

people of other cultures. Bhawuk and Brislin, (1992) conclude, "A reasonable term that summarizes these qualities of people is intercultural sensitivity" (p. 416). Despite sharing the conceptualization of the IC model, a distinction between the two concepts is inevitable. Whereas IC refers to the internal behaviours that an individual manifests when living in another culture, IS refers to the developmental process that dictates the degree of an individual's cognitive ability to deal with cultural differences (Hammer et.al., 2003). This denotes that IS is a complementary model to IC rather than a subcomponent. This is supported by Hammer et. al. (2003) who acknowledges the discursive relationship between IC and IS, which assumes that any increased level of IC synchronizes the development of IS. With regard to the developmental nature of IS, Bennett (1993) suggests that it is composed of six developmental stages: denial, defense, minimization, acceptance, adaptation, and integration of cultural differences. These stages formed what is labelled as the Development Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS), which formed the basis for various IS development measures of the impact of SA on related intercultural constructs. Bennett argues that the process of IS requires the individual to understand, create, and experience differences which will eventually lead to an increase in perception and acceptance of cultural differences. When students study abroad, they tend to develop their levels of IS which in turn contribute to developing IC. Ideally, students will reach a point at which their behaviour becomes fluent and natural, allowing them to blend sensibly into multiple cultural settings without having to be constantly being aware of the other behaviour (Medina-Lopez-Portillo, 2004). Unlike IC which suffers a lack of practicality, many scholars tried to measure the effect of SA experience on IS using an array of measuring instruments, among which are: The Intercultural Sensitivity Inventories (ISI) (Bhawuk and Brislin (1992); Starosta (2000); Hammer et. al. (2003); and Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) (Hammer, 1998) among others.

Despite efforts to introduce IS as a strong intercultural domain in its own right, in which an individual's development of IS occurs through a process of understanding, constructing, and experiencing cultural differences. One major criticism of IS as a concept or as part of ICC lies in the essence of the construct itself for it assuming a difference prior to the actual intercultural event. This essentialist consideration by anticipating cultural differences prior communication goes against the dynamic nature of intercultural practice where there is no room for anticipation, yet only meaning-making on the go. IS, and despite its widespread use to explain in part the Study abroad experiences, is suffering a reductionist representation

of the complexity of human processes in relation to the other-self relationship and contextual factors effect (Dervin, 2010).

2.2.3.3. Intercultural awareness (IA)

Pennycook (2007) emphasized the manner in which both linguistic and cultural aspects and practices are prerequisites in effective communication. The importance to negotiate these complex and dynamic cultural references across cultural sites foregrounds the need to take into account attempts to set clear conceptualizations of ICC. The recognition of the cultural dimension in the composition of ICC is known as cultural awareness. In reviewing the terminology, intercultural sensitivity and intercultural awareness (IA), they seem to share a common understanding of effective communication through the realization of cultural differences. Intercultural sensitivity emphasizes the need to be aware of the differences between our own and other's cultures and negotiate them in a constructive practice, resulting in acceptance and tolerance. However, IA implies the ability to become aware not only of own cultural values, beliefs, and perceptions, yet also those of other cultures, with an open attitude toward change rather than only tolerating or accepting. Cultural awareness becomes essential when people of what we commonly perceive as different cultures communicate. As people observe, interpret, and evaluate things in different ways, what is considered appropriate in one culture is probably inappropriate in another, which may lead to misunderstandings on the site of communication. Communicating with others is a task that demands sensitivity and creativity, given that in spite of many similarities, people have differences in the way they do things. It requires understanding and reconciling these differences to function effectively in a group. Although cultural awareness as a dimensional construct of ICC has been defined by many scholars in various ways (Jones, 2000; Risager, 2004; Guilherme 2002), The most detailed conceptualization of cultural awareness is that offered by Byram (1997). In his understanding, central to critical cultural awareness of ICC is the understanding of the relativity of cultural norms which leads to "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" (Byram, 1997, p. 101).

With this in mind, Byram associated cultural awareness with the 'our' vs 'your' culture, which remains essential in its understanding of communication effectiveness. Baker (2016) suggests that:

Given the variety and heterogeneity of English use in such settings, a user or learner of English could not be expected to have a knowledge of all the different cultural contexts of communication they may encounter and even less so the languacultures of the participants in this communication.

(p. 4).

Such an assumption poses the quest for reframing cultural awareness into intercultural awareness, which accounts for more understanding of the dynamic cultural formation with the identification of fluid boundaries between cultural groupings. With this in mind, intercultural awareness is perceived as an extension of cultural awareness, with more dynamic non-essentialist conceptualizations of intercultural communication through 'English as lingua franca settings' (Baker, 2016). Baker (2011) like many others believing in the effectiveness of model competency in understanding student intercultural development, introduced a model of IA that incorporates three levels of development. This framework attempts to set a developmental course for students' IA by moving from basic cultural awareness to advanced cultural awareness and finally IA. The first level of basic cultural awareness involves a conscious understanding of one's own culture and how it influences his behaviour, beliefs, values, and consequently future communication. At this level, there is an awareness that other cultures may be different, but this awareness may not include any specific systematic knowledge of other cultures. This is combined with an ability to articulate one's own cultural perspective and to make general comparisons between one's own culture and that of 'others'. Level 2, advanced cultural awareness, articulates more complex understandings of cultures. There is an awareness of the dynamic nature of culture, combined with specific knowledge of other culture or cultures. The final level would be IA, the perspective of a rigid bounded entity of culture is eliminated and altered with the ability to mediate and negotiate between different cultural frames of reference.

Despite attempts to defame IA from the constraints of rigid cultural boundaries effect, looking closely at Baker's (2011) model it appears that there are no practical guidelines to how the move from one level to the other can be effectuated. It also assumes the homogeneity of individuals with no reference to the effect of social factors in the development of IA. Indeed, this is a common drawback in the operationalization of examining intercultural development through model frameworks in the first place. Not only does it drift away from non-essentialist considerations of unique intercultural experiences and the joint construction of knowledge in communicative behaviours, yet it does not match the realistic

intercultural processes that include various factors at play. Putting it plainly, the examination and classification of human intercultural learning under competency models, reveals an oversimplification of students' journeys with reductive descriptions. Assumptions such as these lead to an essentialist view that undermines the complexity and diversity of these individuals concerning their intercultural understanding or learning in the new academic life they encounter. Holliday (2020) as a prominent leader of non-essentialist centralization of culture argues that:

I'm not inspired by the notion of intercultural competence if it is anything to do with one 'culture' learning to interact with or be tolerant of another 'culture'. If the critical approach is that the culture in question isn't as narrow as we thought it was, I don't think that goes anywhere near far enough. I'm more interested in how we can all carry our own backgrounds into and then find ourselves in other cultural domains, whatever they may be. It is not then cultures that are the issue, but how we construct the whole idea of culture.

(p. 17)

Midgley (2009) acknowledges that we cannot deny that more recent literature tackling international students' interculturality has to a certain extent distanced itself from creating this stereotypical, mostly essentialist, view of their lived experience overseas (see Holliday, 2016). Nonetheless, some research frameworks are still oversimplifying the abroad experience, ignoring the diversity of backgrounds, and lived experiences of these students that distinguish them from each other (Koehne, 2005).

Dervin (2006) takes a critical position with regard to the idea of becoming interculturally competent through teaching or measuring using intercultural competency models. He argues that the theory of intercultural communication competence in language learning and teaching particularly generates psychological and intellectual problems, as other types of learning may occur outside the borders of the educational setting. In this sense, individuals are merely developing IC than 'becoming' interculturally competent. This actually goes in line with the aim of the research at hand, proposing an exploration of '*intercultural becoming*' dynamics of change rather than development, the former leaves room for the interplay of various intercultural circumstantial variables, while the latter assumes a one-way examination that may or may not be evident, which Nynäs (2001) argues against when it comes to the predictability and rationality of intercultural encounters.

As such, this leads me to interrogate the ability of these competency models to mimic the realistic intercultural learning process. Furthermore, it also urges a query for whether the

acquisition of these competencies if ever been taught appropriately, would create an intercultural competent learner. In the following section, I will attempt to explore the conceptualization of interculturality in intercultural scholarship in order to set the scene for ‘intercultural becoming’ as a new term proposed in this study (see **chapter 5, section 5.2.**).

2.2.3.4. A quest for intercultural becoming dynamics exploration

The discussions above have highlighted some of the various conceptualizations of what intercultural learning and outcomes comprise. In what follows, I will consider the different assumptions of interculturality which said to underpin these different notions of intercultural learning.

As already indicated in the opening section of this chapter, it is apparent that there is considerable debate concerning the conceptualization and understanding of what culture might mean. Therefore, different perspectives on culture are likely to have different implications for how interculturality might be envisaged and defined. In light of this, the emergence of the term interculturality has generated considerable attention in an attempt to set a clear definition of what it signifies. This is not surprising given the lack of consensus on the nature of culture as discussed earlier. In this regard, Layne, Trémion, and Dervin (2015) claim that “interculturality is too complex to be grasped entirely” (p. 7). However, it is of great importance to be clear about how interculturality is operationalized in this thesis following Dervin and Risager (2014) who believe that “we should focus on how we use the concepts that we choose” (p. 234). Therefore, interculturality in this research is to be used from the lens of non-essentialism. However, the notion of interculturality is relatively less common than the notion represented by the adjective ‘intercultural’ (Cots and Llorca, 2010). Holiday (2020) defines the intercultural as such:

The intercultural is to do with interaction between people with different cultural experience. This difference is more obvious where the experience is markedly divergent as a result of histories, grand narratives and practices that are specific to particular societies with their economies, political systems, geo-graphies and events. The particularities of societies can make us very different to each other in many ways dependent on where we were brought up and come from on a global scale. However, the intercultural is also to do with the movement between small cultures which is common to all societies. Our common experience in small culture formation provides

us with the experience and skills to move through and between societies. Small culture formation on the go is at the core of these experiences and skills.

(p. 49)

Following Holliday, the intercultural is then a dynamic encounter, where both grand and small cultures come into play. These encounters are a site of dialogic negotiation of national cultural structures and the personal trajectories that are pulled out in the situ of any cohesive activity. With this understanding in mind, interculturality can be understood as a dynamic process, whereby, both personal and larger cultural structures come into play, and leading to constant small culture formation.

Furthermore, interculturality has been conceptualized by different scholars as pedagogy, a process, a site of engagement and an encounter, as well as competence (if to consider opposing views). Zhu (2013) defines interculturality as representing a:

language and culture learning pedagogy which believes that the goal of language learning is to become intercultural speakers, mediating between different perspectives and cultures, rather than to replace one's native language and culture with 'target' ones.

(p. 209).

While Byram et.al (2009) conceptualize interculturality as the capacity to experience the other in different cultures and act as a mediator to reflect upon these experiences, other scholars perceived interculturality:

as a dynamic process by which people draw on and use the resources and processes of cultures with which they are familiar but also those they may not typically be associated with in their interactions with others.

(Young and Sercombe, 2010, p. 181).

Similar to Bhabha's (1996) "hybridity", Kramsch's (2009) conceptualizes the intercultural as "the third space". With this understanding in mind, this third space then is perceived as a process, involving variation yet a stable community membership where interculturality becomes a process within this third space. However, considering interculturality and the intercultural as such may lead to falling into the trap of essentialism for denoting the meeting of two national cultures to create a new third culture (Kumaravadivelu, 2008). One way to detach the idea of third place from the essentialist consideration is to alter the view of this

culture as a dynamic “in-between space” that reveals the meaning of the marriage of two national cultures (Bhabha, 1994), with the spirit of the term as a meeting space of dynamic, fluid and emergent “cultural” understandings (**see section 2.1.2.**). As such the “Third Space” could become a useful conceptualization resulting in new perceptions of interculturality and intercultural learning as dynamic processes with emergent outcomes, which are in contestation with the acculturation outcomes. In this regard, the essentialist non-essentialist understanding of culture discussed in the opening section poses a quest to whether interculturality is best understood to entail a process of acculturation or third space.

Drawing upon an essentialist understanding of culture, acculturation is defined as:

a process of interpenetration and fusion in which persons and groups acquire the memories, sentiment, and attitudes of other persons and groups and, by sharing their experience and history, are incorporated with them in common cultural life.

(Kumaravadivelu, 2008, p.67).

With this in mind, interculturality as acculturation is to be perceived as the concession of old norms and values and embracing the new ones introduced in the new cultural group in which an individual seeks membership. This representation assumes interculturality as a process of adjustment to a new cultural experience which includes learning about the ‘other’ through the acquisition of discrete knowledge or skills that can be passed from one person to another (Bennett, 2013). However, recent researchers have challenged the concept of the acquisition of culture as a list of behavioural patterns and promotes an individualized understanding of culture whereby “individuals create based on their own personal experiences” (Vitanova, 2010, p.106).

Informed by the non-essentialist understanding of culture discussed previously, Bhabha’s (1994) ‘third space’ conceptualizes interculturality as a meeting place for generating new forms of knowing that transcends those generated from our own ‘cultural’ experiences, whereby the meeting with the ‘other’ is effectuated in a ‘third space’. This denotes that interculturality in this sense emphasizes the meeting of people in spaces rather than the crossing of imagined borders of any kind. As such, intercultural encounters are perceived as spaces with the potential for people to be liberated from their histories and to negotiate and lay claim to new forms of individual identity (Kumaravadivelu, 2008). However, with such an understanding of interculturality in ‘third spaces’, there is a lack of attention to power

relations as important constituents at play in an experience of interculturality. Holliday (2011) argues that it is a prerequisite to consider power relations in any theory of interculturality. This indicates that a theory of interculturality is one that needs to acknowledge the ways in which the subject positions in the form of large cultural structures and affiliations will impact the cultural products emerging in an intercultural encounter.

Indeed, this resonates with the *intercultural becoming* conceptualization this study attempts to promote. *Intercultural becoming* is believed to be a process of change that is self-evaluated before all. It is a dynamics' trajectory negotiation where all aspects of shift occur in relation to different contextual, ideological, on the moment factors to take place. Precisely, *intercultural becoming* challenges competency models for being product goal-oriented, and instead being an intercultural dynamic process, where realizing the shift of perspective is part and partial of self-evaluation in the intercultural, rather than grading the extent to which an individual is interculturally competent. There is no doubt here that dynamics of change in *intercultural becoming* are to be explored through an interest in individuals' perspectives and where human agency is prioritized as the source of understanding an intercultural experience.

Conclusion

This section has delved into the inquiry of Study Abroad in intercultural communication, by first presenting a review of literature of major research studies relevant to the current conceptualization of intercultural communication. Next, driven by the proliferation of globalization and diversity of the world, internationalization of higher education became a strong culture in education at the economic, educational, and cultural levels. The discussion enriched in part the understanding of the marketization of international universities. Following on from this, a critical theoretical review of intercultural learning as operationalized in study abroad contexts, through presenting and examining major competency models of interculturality across theory and application and its deficiency in exploring the intercultural experience. The section concluded with interrogating the term interculturality from a non-essentialist vantage point, paving the way for *intercultural becoming* to be introduced in this study.

2.3. Language and culture interplay in intercultural communication

Introduction

There is a long-standing belief that learning a second language means learning a second culture. In the case of learning English this has sometimes led to a belief that learning a Western culture is in conflict with the culture of the language learners. This paper argues that there is no conflict for three reasons: (a) English can attach itself to any cultural reality; (b) we all share the ability to engage with culture wherever we encounter it; and (c) this enables language learners to carry their own cultural experience into English and stamp it with their own identities. This argument is based on a social action model of culture. Claims of cultural incompatibility must not therefore be taken at face value, but be converted into learning opportunities which encourage deep exploration of the complex relationship between language and culture.

(Holliday, 2014, p.1)

There is no doubt that the relationship between language and culture in intercultural communication is one that needs to be explored with caution. This relationship cannot lend itself to a fixed conceptual consensus, as “the link between language and culture is created in every new communicative event” (Risager, 2006, p. 185). Suffice to say that Holliday (2014) stresses the quest for a non-essentialist conceptualization of culture as an emergent dynamic process in a communicative event, the language-culture nexus, where language is not a culture-exclusive attribution is far from simple descriptions. In fact, the longstanding belief that learning a language automatically entails assuming a culture (Kayman, 2004) has been challenged with more dynamic and flexible perspectives on both language and culture in use. Within these perspectives language is a linguistic engagement that is:

endlessly dynamic and generative, grounded in sociohistorical contexts, socio-culturally constitutive and constituting – a living tool through which speakers create and shape their worlds

(Harvey, 2014, pp. 58-59).

With such an understanding, the linguistic practice is not neutral, rather it involves appropriating the relevant cultural context with its historical and societal signs for an individual to establish meaning-making and interpretation, and at the same time assuming his own space as an agent in this process (Bakhtin, 1981).

Risager (2006) believes that the conceptualization of the language-culture relationship is to be examined at two different levels, namely, ‘the generic sense’ and ‘the differential

sense' (p.3). The generic sense is a depiction of the long history of prevailing one language/one culture traditions, where language and culture are inseparable and exclusive to one form. The differential sense, however, celebrates the possibility of considering language and culture as separable, where:

We are dealing with specific forms of linguistic practice, such as 'whole' languages, language varieties, registers and loan words, as well as with specific forms of cultural practice: various meanings and meaningful forms...

(ibid, p. 4)

It is in the differential sense that linguistic practices are said to assume new cultural significance, which Risager refers to as "languagcultures" (ibid, p. 115). With this in mind, languages such as English, tend to be flexible within these languagcultures, which results in endless possibilities of meaning-making depending on social and contextual experiences, and an emergent identity at the interplay (ibid, p.115).

This aligns exactly with what postmodernist paradigm is promoting to, that is one language does not reflect a single culture yet can be subscribed to multiple cultural realities and vice versa. In a similar vein, Baker (2015) proposes a three-level approach to the language-culture interplay, namely, general, micro, and a macro level. On a general level, the perspective to language and culture is based on general theorization of culture and language as causally inseparable, given that "language in general is a cultural tool or process" (Baker, 2015, p. 238). I believe this mimics the traditional generic sense discussed above by Risager, which invades the educational profession of teaching one language is committed to teaching its national culture. Baker (2015), continues to explain that the second level, perceives language and culture at the level of the individual being the one taking manoeuvre in constructing and negotiating the two through processes of socialization. This indeed centralises the notion of 'languacultures', where previously held sociocultural associations of language are to be retrieved and negotiated resulting in new forms of learning (ibid). Finally, language and culture from a macro level are understood to be largely affected by large sociocultural structures and ideological identifications including the everlasting Native Speaker-western -culture idealization fallacy (Phillipson, 1992).

Although both Baker and Risager's suggested perspectives are well articulating the possible angles for general analytical purposes of language and culture in interaction, these levels does not explicitly explain how it can find its way to be operationalised in the language

teaching and learning context. I believe the discussion surrounding the operationalization of language teaching and learning goes beyond generalising what relates language to culture, yet rather is what Scarino (2014) calls for, that is, reciprocal understanding of the dialogic process of both the teacher, and learner self and other interpretation to their communication needs. It is not a one-day endeavour for understanding, yet it is a dynamic process to conceptualise culture and language in an interplay for meaning making in wider and distinctive contexts than the classroom. Indeed, this brings us back to the need for a fluid, dynamic conceptualization of culture understanding, that is strongly emphasized in this research. There is resonance in what has been discussed above with regard to perspectives to the language-culture in the wider communicative contexts. I believe one of the most challenging fallacies to overcome for successful establishment of a healthy realization of language-culture operationalization is the Native Speaker (NS)/Non-Native Speaker (NNS) fallacy or what Holliday labels as 'native speakerism' (2006). In the following subsection I will endeavour to rationally present the invasion of this power-laden ideological fallacy and its effect on cultural meaning making in the intercultural.

2.3.1. Negotiating the Native Speaker (NS): a language achievement or an ideological fallacy

It is strangely convincing that one may think that the NS-NNS distinction is originated in language teaching. However, having discussed the language-culture relationship and its operationalization within the wider superdiverse sociocultural contexts, I believe it is only convenient to acknowledge that the Native Speaker/Non-Native Speaker fallacy "is classically, social, just as culture is" (Davies, 2003, p.214). Although the division of NS and NNS is pertinent to English language teaching and learning, Holliday (2006) emphasizes that native speakerism is primarily ideological and that it is:

...characterized by the belief that 'native-speaker' teachers represent a 'Western culture' from which spring the ideals both of the English language and of English language teaching methodology.

(Holliday, p. 385).

In fact, I find it highly problematic to look back into the history of language teaching and learning and find that the Native Speaker fallacy among many other concepts are deeply

rooted in the profession with a political dimension effect. Indeed, Mahboob (2010) asserts that this arbitrary terminology comes with its problematic package, as it bares “a hidden ideology that privileges the NS... [and] helped give authority to the NS model in SLA and, by extension, in language teaching models” (p. 3). I believe the hidden meaning Mahboob referred to here may have different interpretation not only at the level of second language teaching, but also culturally wise. This is well articulated in Phillipson’s (1992) ‘linguistic imperialism’ where the centre/periphery of the power relations becomes dominant in language teaching and learning. Not only at the level of the classroom, yet I believe it is more entangled with how the ‘the west’ (the centre) attempts at imposing one imagined perfection version through exerting power on the language use and leaning on the periphery (the rest of the nations). These perspectives create self-doubts about language proficiency status, particularly for English learners due to setting up a high standard of the native speaker, which in return creates stereotypical beliefs and prejudicial practices in moments of communication interculturally. As per this mindset, the ‘Native Speaker’ so-called language perfection, inherently expands to other traits that the ‘west’ is privileged with, for no other reason than being attributed to them by birth (Lowe, 2017). Therefore, with its ideological imposition, and hence socio-political origin the ‘Native Speaker’ fallacy becomes deeply imbedded and shared among people of the same cultural group or otherwise.

In this regard, Kachru (1986) explains that these inherently transmitted beliefs are essentially related to more ideological notion of superiority of the west in domains of modernization and development. In fact, these ‘western model’ superiority standards were promoted to by contemporary globalization forces of political discourses. The latter of which force the Non-Native Speakers (or the ‘rest’) to subconsciously adhere to these fallacy impositions, uncritically accepts, and even believe the inferiority sentiment attributed to them in terms of knowledge and intellectual capabilities vis-à-vis the western world. In fact, I have seen this vividly through the project in hand, as these notions of superior-west/inferior-orient (Said, 1978), become much more apparent in contexts of cultural travel, where individuals come to put these fallacies into test when living in the western territory.

It is highly critical to think here, that these inequalities created and injected through individuals by western hegemony (a systematically applied plan of mind compliance used by western political powers to spread certain ideologies), can be vividly observed in discussions about marketisation of higher education. In fact, in contexts such as the one discussed in this

research, studying abroad can highly reflect the western-eastern dichotomy. That is to say, participants in these programs embark on this experience with various and distinctive stereotypical beliefs on their positionalities as inferior to the context of the west. Suffice to say is that, unless these fallacies are subject to both critical experiences and re-negotiation of one's self-perception to the world, it remains deeply rooted and then manifested in intercultural communication. I believe this can be further explained through Bakhtin's theory of dialogic self and ideological becoming (1981) below.

2.3.2. Dialogism and the process of ideological becoming (Bakhtin 1981)

The particular attraction of Bakhtin's theory of dialogism (1981) to various interdisciplinary scholarship is its foundation of dialogic nature of experiences and leaning through language use in context (Hermans, 2001). Similar to Dewey's transactional learning theory (1997), Bakhtin (1981/2004) states that learning is a transactional dialogue between the individual and contextual factors through language. Bakhtin uses the term 'dialogism' to refer to the dualistic nature of discourse that happens between people and lead to new mutually constructed meaning of each experience, all depending on larger contextual factors. According to Bakhtin (2004) each new discourse taking place between people bring about new forms of knowing, which is a process taking place through utterances. These are packed with previously held sociocultural and historical associations and come into play resulting in the creation of new frames of reference. This conceptualization attracted many scholars interested in the meaning making through social interaction. Emerson (1997) explains that Bakhtin's understanding of human communication is not limited to a naïve understanding of a group of people exchanging utterances about a topic, yet it is the dynamic process of meaning constructed through those utterances in a mutual dialog with the self across temporal and spatial dimensions. In addition, Bakhtin with his focus on the continuity and dynamicity of this process emphasizes that "There is neither a first not a last word and there are no limits to the dialogic context" (Bakhtin 1986, p.170). With this in mind, I believe it reminds us of the fluid nature of culture in communication as advocated by Holliday's (2011) 'grammar of culture'. I have been able to make a critical connection between the dynamics of 'culture formation on the go' as explained in Holliday's grammar of culture (2011) and Bakhtin's dialogic understanding of human communication. Interestingly, Holliday's notion of

'small culture formation on the go' summarizes human communication as a formation that happens all the time, as a "continuous process of constructing and dealing with cultural realities, every day, everywhere, with whoever we meet or even think about" (Holliday, 2018, p. 2). In the same line of argument, Bakhtin understands culture as dynamic, where intercultural dialogue entails building new forms of meaning and understanding of reality, through negotiating past, present and environmental factors. Additionally, Bakhtin stresses this continuity with a conviction that "a dialogic encounter of two cultures does not result in merging or mixing. Each retains its own unity and open totality, but they are mutually enriched" (1986, p.7).

Therefore, my interest in following threads of Bakhtin's dialogism to examine partially the self-other politics emphasized in this study, emanates from its theoretical contribution in analysing and conceptualizing human communication and its representations (Cunliffe, Helin and Luhman, 2014). Interestingly, the language-culture interplay is central in this study's aspirations, as Bakhtin's challenges the:

...very strong, but one-sided and thus untrustworthy, idea that in order to better understand a foreign culture, one must enter into it, forgetting one's own, and view the world through the eyes of this foreign culture.

(Bakhtin, 1986, pp. 6–7)

Such a perspective gives multi-version angles to explain the self-positionality in the intercultural. Interestingly, Bakhtin explains that the notion of dialogue, necessarily imply that it is impossible to consider understanding a 'self' that is not dialogically constructed with the 'other' and context. Therefore, the self is in constant internal and external dialogue where meaning is generated in a dynamic engagement of self-other-context positioning (Hermans, 2001).

To sum up, considering the intercultural dynamics of self-positionality and personal reconstruction of worldviews through the eyes of Bakhtin's dialogism theory, contributes partially to unpacking the complexities of intercultural experiences that need more than just one lens to dig in. It also allows the emergence of new insights on the learning and meaning construction in the intercultural, and the transactional nature of these multi-layered processes.

Conclusion

This section discussed the significant interplay of language and culture in the process of self-positioning and the dynamics of intercultural change. Firstly, the section engaged in a brief introduction on the major perspectives regarding the nature of language-culture nexus, and how it shifted along with major educational paradigm shifts. It then moves to discussing 'Native Speakerism' fallacy, as a challenging ideologically rooted concept, that was inherently embedded into language and intercultural learning. It also surfaced its deeply impact on language learning and intercultural positioning. Finally, the section delved into the process of dialogic construction of the self and other through Bakhtin's dialogism and ideological becoming in intercultural communication, signifying the self-other-context interplay in communication.

Conclusion

This chapter engaged in a plethora of theoretical foundations, where several concepts and rubrics relevant to intercultural communication were introduced to establish a conceptual framework based on which this study operates rationally. The chapter composed of three sections, each elaborating on significant rubrics for understanding the intercultural. The first sections dealt with major conceptualizations of culture, through introducing paradigms shift of perspective, namely the essentialist and anti-essentialist cultural paradigms. It moved on to situating this research focus through a detailed explanation of Holliday's 'grammar of culture' (2011), paving the way for the understanding of the intercultural embraced in this study. The section also highlighted the interdisciplinary nature of intercultural communication in explaining the self-positioning dynamics through presenting Positioning Theory (Davies and Harre, 1990) and Personal Construct Theory's insights that were most relevant to unpack the complexity of intercultural processes.

The second section engaged in a discussion narrating the shift of researching the intercultural in the Study Abroad field. It also questioned the competency models tradition and its constraining and oversimplistic perspective on understanding the complexity of communication. The section concludes with a quest to go beyond product-focussed research traditions and move toward mor process-oriented exploration of intercultural communication in study abroad contexts.

The final section was a critical discussion of the language culture-interplay in intercultural communication. The native speakerism fallacy was presented as a form of ideological effect on the self-other negotiation of positionalities in intercultural encounters. The section concludes with a brief rationale for considering Bakhtin's dialogism (1981) in accounting for intercultural dynamics of change explored in this study.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

Informed by the theoretical genesis of the current study and its ultimate focus to uncover the *intercultural becoming* journeys of Algerian Ph.D. students in the study abroad context, the aim of this chapter is to detail at different levels the meta-theoretical underpinnings and the methodological practices associated with them. In what follows I first begin with an overview of the epistemological and ontological underpinnings of the study. I then discuss the choice for locating the research within a qualitative, participatory, longitudinal approach as a tradition within intercultural communication literature, as well as the decision to utilize the narrative inquiry as a complementary strategy in the data generation and analysis. Next, I report on a detailed narration of the data generation process starting from participants' recruitment procedures to conducting narrative interviews, and the generation of the data strategy. Following on from this, I shed light on the operationalization of the data set analytical approaches including the merging of thematic (Braun and Clarke, 2012) and narrative analysis along with segments of the positioning theory model (Bamberg, 1997). The chapter ends with a note on trustworthiness and ethical issues.

It is worth mentioning that this chapter mainly tackles the procedural operationalization of the study's investigation, through a detailed description of the methodological journey, that is occasionally justified by the theoretical foundation from which the study arose.

3.1. On epistemology and ontology informing the study

The choices made with respect to the research methodology are deemed important to developing a coherent and systematic research method. Collis and Hussey (2003) define research methodology as "the overall approach to the research process, from the theoretical foundation to the collection and analysis of the data" (p. 55). With regard to the philosophical position mentioned here, the ontological stance, and the epistemological claims of any research are prerequisites to state the appropriate method clearly and unambiguously to be used. Typically, while ontological assumptions describe views on the nature of reality,

epistemological underpinnings refer to the nature of knowledge, where it exists, and how it is generated (Cunliffe, 2011).

There are three distinct ontological perspectives, which are typically distinguished and embraced by researchers to position their works. These are objectivist, subjectivist, and intersubjective knowledge problematics (Cunliffe, 2011). While some researchers may tend to position their projects into one of these theoretical traditions, many of them may find themselves drifting into the borderlines of others.

The objectivism problematic, also referred to as naïve realism, holds the view of an independent reality, which exists out of our social interactions. Researchers in this paradigm tend to investigate cause and effect relations of concrete structures. In the field of human sciences, objectivist researchers tend to detract human behaviour, identity, and discourse from the social experience. These variables in the objectivism stream are treated as objects under study (Crotty, 1998). Conversely, and based on substantive interpretations, the subjectivism problematic believes in the plural nature of truth reflecting multiple perspectives of different social actors. For this reason, researchers (such as Searle, 1995; Watson, 1995) embracing this paradigm believe that knowledge is co-constructed among people and aim at developing a deeper understanding of how people make sense of their reality, through an emphasis on the centrality of human experience (Cunliffe, 2011). Slightly different, intersubjectivism frames knowledge and reality as enacted through social practice and investigated through interpretive procedures. Perhaps there might be no clear cut between the two recent problematics since they hold similar perspectives on knowledge and truth. However, conducting research in the intersubjectivism paradigm requires the researcher to enter a cyclic process of interpretation, which entails interpreting the participants' interpretations. As such aspirations of both the researcher and participants must arrive at a common ground, to enable the researcher to construct a theory out of their dialectical interchanges (Crotty, 1998). Badwan (2015) clarifies that "the role of the researcher in the interactional event determines the blurry boundaries between the two knowledge problematics: subjectivism and intersubjectivism" (p. 72). However, given that the aim of this research is to explore participants' lived experiences and dynamic processes of *intercultural becoming* in study abroad contexts, it is one that is closely aligned with both subjective/intersubjective problematics. Put it another way, the current study's focus is not

limited to an interest of only knowledge and understanding that participants ongoingly generate in their lived experiences in relation to the context, rather, it also accounts for the reciprocity of perspectives and shared opinions in the situ of meaning-making. Therefore, jointly constructing the data with participants, and generating narratives of their lived experiences based on external research criteria, locates the current study in an in-between position of intersubjective and subjective ontologies.

Having explained the focus of the current research as one which explores the ways participants make sense of their intercultural experiences in the UK, especially through sharing these with others, the epistemological view of the nature of knowledge in this study is to be defined as social constructivism. From a social constructivist perspective, there is no absolute truth; instead, social reality is perceived as the product of everyday conversations and actions. In other words, truth is to be created not discovered (Crotty, 1998). Researchers in this stream include ethnographic paradigms, use autobiographies, interviews with a focus on narrative analysis, and so on and so forth. However, Young and Collin (2004) point out that current discussions on the constructionist epistemology in the social sciences present two forms: social constructivism and social constructionism.

While Social constructivism foregrounds that subjective knowledge and reality are constructed within the individual cognitive processes; social constructionism focuses on the knowledge and reality as jointly created between individuals in everyday discourse and/or communication (Sommers-Flanagan and Sommers-Flanagan, 2015). Nonetheless, given the non-essentialist theoretical underpinning I laid out in the current study, which emphasizes the dynamic subjectivity of both internal individual experiences and joint construction of knowledge in a cultural arena, I would merge social constructionism and constructivism under the generic term constructivism as both adhere to the subjective nature of knowledge and reality. Therefore, in simple wording, I would position the current research in a subjective /intersubjective ontology with a constructivist epistemological foundation.

In what follows, I proceed with methodological considerations based on the research metatheoretical assumptions and epistemological philosophies discussed here, which justifies the research's practical procedures along the way.

3.2. Situating the research study

Given the complex nature of the phenomenon being explored and the aim of approaching intercultural becoming journeys as holistically as possible, the study embraces a longitudinal participatory qualitative approach that would allow for a deeper exploration of the rich intercultural lived experiences the participants would reveal.

3.2.1. Qualitative research in intercultural communication

The decision to stand on the qualitative method side of the fence exclusively is aligned coherently with the philosophical stance of this study, which first-hand celebrates the constructionist approach where social realities and knowledge are socially co-constructed, and the intersubjective/subjective pluralism of reality within the context (Cunliffe, 2008, 2011). Therefore, the main focus of this study is to explore the quality of the intercultural becoming dynamics of change of participants in study abroad contexts, and jointly construct and understand the 'story of change' with multi-layered interpretations of jointly revealed realities. The most relevant quality that elevates qualitative inquiry as most relevant and applicable to this study is the fact that qualitative research in social sciences is rather to take place in natural environments, which ensure dynamic and interactive events and experiences (Creswell, 2003). As a researcher whose aim is to keenly dive into exploratory narrative accounts of the participants' intercultural experiences in study abroad contexts, a narrative inquiry with self-reflections on the journey was a prerequisite, that only a qualitative approach would support. Furthermore, there is a resonance in doing qualitative research in intercultural communication despite its interdisciplinary nature that generates a variant and rather blurry scenery of theories and methods, which is "Due to the niche-character of this field, there is a lack of clear parameters that could guide the way through the methodological and conceptual roots of this academic and intellectual galaxy" (Otten and Geppert, 2009, p. 5). I have found my way through this fuzziness of selective methodological decisions by focusing on the far-long objective of this investigation, which is partially seeking a holistic understanding of my participants lived experiences and change through the narrative element. This narrativity character proved to unfold an array of social, cultural, and linguistic perceptions, and demonstrate the complexities of knowing, understanding, and reflecting on the social reality around participants.

With this in mind and the focus on the change of intercultural self-positioning as a segment of intercultural becoming dynamics among participants, a longitudinal element has

appeared to be necessary. The current study took place over the course of 8 months with regular contact with participants on a 4-month interval basis over three rounds of interviews. Indeed, this procedure is in line with Holland et al's (2006) definition, which states that "Qualitative longitudinal research is predicated on the investigation and interpretation of change over time and process in social contexts" (p.1). The element of longitudinal research in the current study rigorously reinforced the process of documenting the narrative experiences of participants, their shifts of intercultural self-positioning, and change in self-value and perspective during a study abroad experience over the course of 8 months. In fact, deciding on the length of the investigation time, was one of the challenges I have encountered ahead of the operationalization of the research study, as the duration of a longitudinal research tradition within literature varies and can take place over months, years, and even decades (Cordon and Millar, 2007). There were two basic reasons for deciding the timeframe of 8 months, namely, the accessibility factor and preserving participants' interest. As for the accessibility factor, the only timing that ensured abundant first impressions and upon arrival perceptions of participants in the study abroad context was only as early as April 2019. The delay was related to administrative and ethical considerations the study has to obtain approval for, which could not let an early launch of the study. The second reason is found in the challenge to keep a group of Ph.D. international students engaged for a long period and ensure continuity of data flow. That being said, deciding on a prolonged period of more than eight months seemed to be a risk that needed to be avoided at all costs.

Therefore, I opted for 8 months timeframe with three standpoints in time, which make the total of three interview rounds, which ended as early as the month of November 2019. It is noteworthy at this level to acknowledge that conducting this research longitudinally served the non-essentialist vantage point embraced in this study, which emphasizes the unpredictable, descriptive trait of cultural phenomena. Indeed, the events, feelings, and most relevant narratives were interpreted differently from different standpoints in time by both the participants and the researcher as well. All that being discussed are in line with Holland et al (2006) who:

...identifies the three foundation principles of QLLR [Qualitative longitudinal research] as duration, time and change, he also emphasizes the importance of time and change processes as contextual: 'Since time is and our social actions and circumstances within it are contextual, change is contextual' ([Saldana], 2003, p. 9).

(Holland et al 2006, p.5).

It was only after the data generation period ended, and the analysis phase starting that a more holistic- understanding of the process of intercultural becoming dynamics of change has been attained.

Same wise, in the attempt to find the most relevant qualitative research tradition to apply in the current study, I have found myself facing the challenge of choosing between three qualified traditions, namely, ethnography, case study, or narrative inquiry. Creswell (2006) demonstrates the broader distinctive features of each tradition in the following:

True, one may approach the study of a single individual from any of these three approaches; however, the types of data one would collect and analyse would differ considerably. In narrative research, the inquirer focuses on the stories told from the individual and arranges these stories often in chronological order; in ethnography, the focus is on setting the individuals' stories within the context of their culture and culture-sharing group; in case study research, the single case is typically selected to illustrate an issue, and the researcher compiles a detailed description of the setting for the case. Our approach is to recommend—if the researcher wants to study a single individual—the narrative approach or a single case study because ethnography is a much broader picture of the culture. Then when comparing a narrative study and a single case to study a single individual, we feel that the narrative approach is seen as more appropriate because narrative studies tend to focus on a single individual whereas case studies often involve more than one case.

(p.103)

The process of selection was by eliminating the theoretical and procedural characteristics of each tradition that do not comply with the research aims and questions. Firstly, despite the longitudinal element the current study undertook in the data generation and the use of in-depth narrative interviews, the actual procedure was not meant to meticulously observe nor document the daily events of participants, which does not comply with the standard definition of ethnography proposed by Creswell (2006) as a process that:

...involves extended observations of the group, most often through **participant observation**, in which the researcher is **immersed** in the day-to-day lives of the people and observes and interviews the group participants.

(p.68).

Another reason for drifting away from the ethnography label as a qualitative strand in this study is lying in its basic theory on the description of the culture-sharing group, a conceptualization that opposes the non-essentialist perspective to culture adopted in this study, which emphasizes the heterogeneous nature of cultural groupings.

Secondly, following Creswell (2006) one may consider a case study as most suitable to undergo in the current research for it being an in-depth understanding of a case or cases based on one single pattern, however, the research aims clearly demonstrate the thematic plurality of intercultural becoming change over time for 8 participants. With this being said, case study as a label was also problematic for it potentially limiting the expansion of a rich thematic cross-examination that could have contributed deeply to the understanding of the narrative accounts with more rigor.

Therefore, I was left with the option of narrative inquiry (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000), which appeared to go in line with both the theoretical and procedural plans intended by the research aims and questions. Narrative inquiry (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000) was most suited for many reasons among which being creatively incorporated for both the data generation and analysis. This was attainable through conducting narrative interviews and an open possibility to analyse the narratives both thematically and narratively, a quality that only the flexible nature of narrative inquiry would serve. Furthermore, Narrative inquiry stresses “not only on individuals’ experiences but also on the social, cultural, and institutional narratives within which individuals’ experiences are constituted, shaped, expressed, and enacted” (Clandinin and Rosiek, 2007, pp. 42–43), which has been practically proven existent through the participants’ narratives on several occasions throughout the interviews. Another reason lies in the fact that narrative inquiry requires the active participation of the researcher in constructing data, with an urge for instant reflection of participants on their own ‘personal and political background’ (Creswell, 2006, p. 57), a procedure that was planned and executed on the site of interviews. However, as each research tradition poses a set of challenges, the narrative inquiry in this study has been adapted to go in line with the study’s focus and orientation as a multi-disciplinary research contribution. In the following section, I will elaborate in detail on the use of narrative inquiry as the driving force of the qualitative method used in this research.

3.2.2. The narrative inquiry strand

As I have already explained in the previous section, from the very beginning of the study I wanted to prioritize the qualitative approach, given that the lived intercultural experiences are the driving unit of both data generation and analysis. Using the 'narrative inquiry' label for the longitudinal qualitative dimension of 8 months, which yielded in-depth interviews exploring the complex, variant lived intercultural experiences seemed to be a well-established decision. The key characteristic of qualitative research is related genuinely to narrative inquiry, in the sense that both are based on the ontology of constructionist multiple realities (Creswell, 2007). The aim of qualitative and so narrative inquiries when studying the multiple meanings individuals attribute to social or human phenomena is to generate data in naturalistic settings and establish relevant patterns or themes through inductive engagement. In such cases, the actual narratives of individuals are the sources of all data and perspectives (Clandinin, 2007; Creswell, 2007).

Narrative inquiry is an approach to data collection and analysis, which has been aligned with "the study of experience understood narratively" and "a way of thinking about, and studying, experience" (Clandinin and Huber, 2010, p. 436). Indeed, narrative inquiry is a form of qualitative research that involves gathering narratives (written, oral, visual) and focusing on the meanings that people ascribe to their experiences; based on the premise that, as human beings, we come to understand and give meaning to our lives through the story (Andrews, Squire, and Tambokou, 2008). However, narrative inquiry is not the mere uncritical gathering of stories, rather it gives analytical attention to "For whom was this story constructed, how was it made and for what purpose? What cultural discourses does it draw on—take for granted? What does it accomplish?" (Reissman and Speedy, 2007, pp.428-429). In this sense, Clandinin (2007) indicates that it is a prerequisite to go beyond the words and the talked-about from the narrators to recognize the links between narrators and their culture. Thus, narratives can demonstrate the transformation or change, with an interest in both the content of the stories and the active process of storytelling about real experiences.

One of the recent divisions in narrative inquiry and most relevant to this paper is the debate about pitching small stories against big ones (Bamberg and Georgakopoulou, 2008;

Georgakopoulou, 2014). The emphasis on full-fledged stories can be traced back to Labov's (1972) influential model, "...which was based on researcher-prompted, personal experience, past events" (Bamberg and Georgakopoulou, 2008, p. 381). Narratives in Labov's terms are 'big' stories following a predefined plotline, which encompasses a beginning, middle, and end. By predefined, I meant what Labov (2006) recognizes as a process of preconstruction which:

begins with a decision that a given event is reportable ... and proceeds backward in time to locate events that are linked causally each to the following one, a recursive process that ends with the location of the unreportable event.

(p. 37).

On the contrary, Georgakopoulou (2014) acknowledges that the departure of 'small' stories' orientation was empowered by the need to overcome the all-or-nothing criteria of big narratives, which excluded many details about activities. Small stories focus on naturally occurring, everyday activities, which may embody past, ongoing, or currently unfolding or hypothetical events and experiences. It can be about a small incident that may or may not happen but used out of the need to share or back up another incident. Bearing these characteristics in mind, Georgakopoulou (2014) argues that "small stories research is to be found in anti-essentialist views of self, society and culture which stress the multiplicity, fragmentation, context-specificity, and performativity of our communication practices" (p. 3), which is something well suited to this type of study.

It is important to acknowledge that the narrative inquiry in this study was adjusted (with adapted techniques) in both procedural and analytic operationalizations. Putting it differently, the unit of data generation and analysis in this study was put in advance as "the narrative" in the 'small story paradigm', which did not pose any complexity during the data generation phase, given that the narrative interviews were conducted with a focus on "the narrative" detailed side of the intercultural experiences. One way to understand what a 'narrative' represents in this study can be found in Amadsi and Holliday's (2017) definition of narrative as a constructed causal employment ranging from grand-historical to a small personal set of events within temporal and spatial dimensions. However, narratives in this research are not the mere narrating of a series of stories of experiences solely, but they emerge with a conscious interpretation and personal evaluation of these experiences as Bruner (1990) confirms that "Obviously, 'the-story-of-a-life' as told to a particular person is in some deep sense a joint product of the teller and the told" (p. 124). The understanding of

'narrative' kept being unravelled throughout the study, as its meaning developed more through the collaborative construction between the participants and me on the site of the interviews (see **sections 3.2.3 and 3.3.3.2**).

As for the analytic procedure, once the dataset has come to its full and final shape at the end of the investigation period, it was deemed important to settle on a stream of analysis strategy with regard to the meaning of narrative inquiry the study draws upon, i.e. deciding a potentially modifiable mode for considering the narrative. A useful distinction in this regard was made by Polkinghorne (1995) namely, "narrative analysis" vs "paradigmatic analysis of narratives" (p.12). The former is based on the configuration of one individual's narrated experiences into a plotline that ties these events to create a contextual meaning. The latter, however, is an inductive analysis of noted similarities existent in the data that lead to emergent themes out of a collection of small instances (which can be well-referred here as a small story). Whereas the narrative analysis mode seems to seek a more classic version of a story plot to give meaning to an experience, the paradigmatic analysis of narratives was most suited as it paved the way to merging a systematic thematic analysis alongside the analysis of narratives into one thematic narrative analysis technique as would be explained in **section 3.4.1**.

To this end, the turn to the narrative inquiry as a flexible methodological strand with a focus on pitching small story mode (Georgakopoulou, 2014), and a non-essentialist negotiation of narratives understanding (Amadasi and Holliday, 2017), woven with a subsequent paradigmatic analysis of narratives, is one that enabled me to get the most out of the participants' experiences. Indeed, it offered a springboard to critically inform and deepen my understanding of the participants' intercultural becoming journeys in the study abroad context.

3.2.3. The mediated researcher role

At the early stages of conducting the narrative study and precisely at the outset of the baseline interview, I was cautious about the manner with which to elicit narratives, and the degree of interference I should undergo during the narrative interviews. While I was interested to generate participants' own narrative accounts of their intercultural experiences, the decision to either "plan my tactics in advance", or "let them unravel as life does" (Gabriel, 2003, p.181) was challenging. I believe this is one of the most challenging yet vital skills for a

narrative researcher. In this respect, narrative inquiry studies distinguish two forms to conduct a narrative interview. Some narrative interviews undergo a strict methodological design starting with one broad narrative-inducing question followed by questions relevant to the initial narrative, and then following the order of the topics freely associated by the participant. The other way is to 'go with the flow' and let the participant lead the conversation without interruptions, no matter how incoherent or off the point certain accounts may seem (Riessmann, 2003).

In this respect, Amadasi and Holliday (2017) (following Weber, 1968) contribute to the development of a non-essentialist narrative turn by operationally distinguishing grand and personal narratives. They indicate that “within a complex mix of creative autonomy, reflexivity and conformity” (p. 243), this distinction helps seeing how the different grand and personal narratives are negotiated and feed upon each other. The following explains the architecture of narratives negotiation:

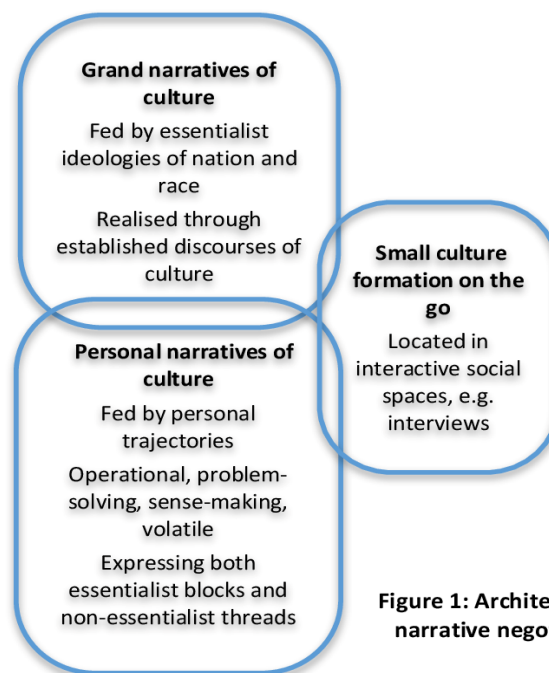


Figure 1: Architecture of narrative negotiation

Figure 2: Architecture of narrative negotiation

I believe the figure presented by Amadasi and Holliday (2017) above goes beyond a methodological practice that takes place on the set of narrative interviews, it is more of a theoretical foundation based on which the analytical procedures emerge. This architecture indicates how individuals negotiate grand narratives as inherited traits of the social group we belong to, and personal narratives as the creation of everyday experiences. The negotiation

of these aspects leads to a small culture formation on the go, which is characterized by a transient engagement to construct culture on a daily basis (here represented as the narrative interview). Putting it differently, based on Holliday's (2013) 'grammar of culture', Amadasi and Holliday (2017) point out that grand stories emerge from inherited large ideological, social, and political structures, that otherize us culturally and contribute to how we construct reality. Personal narratives as presented in the figure are what Holliday (2016) refers to as 'personal trajectories' (p.4), which are resilient personalized filters to how we negotiate the wider environment we are brought up in and the small culture we form on the go. At last, 'small culture formation on the go' is where all these elements overlap in everyday experiences, whereby both grand and personal narratives engage in discursive effect and 'arrives' at creating an on-the-set culture formation.

Strongly relevant to this study, and the quest for a holistic understanding of intercultural journeys, Amadasi and holiday's (2017) study is relevant in the sense that it promotes a new turn in conducting narrative interviews and the perspective the narratives should be looked upon. They were largely concerned with:

how stories about culture and cultural identity can be multiple and competing depending on how people position themselves in interaction, sometimes creating essentialist blocks and at other times drawing non-essentialist threads in interviews with two of the students.

(p. 2)

Therefore, what was of interest to them is how both the researcher and participants positioned themselves in the interview, which significantly resembles one of my concerns about the perceived position of the researcher vis a vis the participants, and what impacts this could have on the presentation of the findings.

Given the social constructivist epistemology of my research, it is likely to view the research process as co-constructed between the researcher and the participants; the former gives some voice, while the latter becomes active informants to the research (Patton, 2002). As such the researcher is more likely to conduct the study with rather than on the participants. However, standing on the borderline of a subjective/intersubjective ontology, made me rethink the role I occupy as the researcher in my study who shares qualities with the participants in this research. In this regard, Clandinin (2007) confirms that the narrative researcher performance is dependent on a dual role, that is a close friendly relationship with

participants and an academic responsibility towards the research community. In the same vein of argument, Hewitt-Taylor (2002) distinguishes the role of the researcher in the interview site as either an insider or outsider researcher. To be an insider researcher, denote some sort of belonging to the group being studied, sharing some common characteristics, role, or experience under study with the participants. On the other hand, an outsider researcher would be less personal, and more detached to the commonality shared by participants. The issue of researcher membership in the group or phenomenon being studied is relevant to all approaches of qualitative methodology, as the researcher plays such a direct and trust-building role in both data generation and analysis.

Thus far, being an Algerian Ph.D. student in the UK who explores the intercultural dynamics of change in a group, with whom he/she shares the same common features such as program membership and academic endeavours (not that we are similar because we live different lives), strengthened my license to occupy the role of an insider researcher. This role gives the right to intervene whenever I feel the need to go beyond the narratives explicitly revealed by participants. Simultaneously, given the distinct academic background, I possess along with the professional responsible role in the scholarly community I occupy, in addition to ethical considerations and trustworthiness challenges, urged me to consider an outsider researcher stance as well. However, making these choices with respect to what counts as interference and/or an 'authoritative voice' (Chase, 2005, p. 665) depends largely on the fact that:

While the researchers set up the interview with the agenda of researching the students, and are expert in academic research and discussion of intercultural issues, the students are expert in their own intercultural trajectory experience. This is a major factor in why we chose to research them.

(Amadasi and Holliday, 2017, p. 245).

Moreover, on the set of the interviews, I was sensitive to these complexities as they were inevitably woven into the process, as much as I was interested in ensuring that the findings in subsequent phases of the study be presented in a way that would increase their trustworthiness for the intended audience. In the following excerpt from the second interview round, for example, the participant 'Fares' was asked about the reason behind enjoying meeting people from new/different cultural backgrounds, he referred to the fact that correcting his misconceptions changed his views on the new intercultural environment and to the way he initiates and maintains his social network:

Fares: "I always had this misconception that ...I wouldn't say British...but all non-Muslim people they are partying, sleeping around... you know like they do all those things that we Muslims consider notorious but that's not the case ... actually you can find a non-Muslim who does like really Islamic stuff...(pause)..."

Researcher: "you mean like someone who is non-Muslim but he acts with Islamic values?"

Fares: yeah ...yeah... yeah... that's it...that was really heart touching for me... so my friend is Indian...but ...like the way he talks to me... the way he treats me as a friend...like in so many situations the things that he did to me... I am sure a Muslim friend may not do it".

(Interview round 1)

It is apparent in the above piece of conversation that the participant was trying to deliver a concept and find straightforward words to make me understand his intentions. However, as he was making this attempt, I immediately sensed that he needs a boost from my side to assure him that I understood what he means. Although my momentary aid was in the form of a question, it helped in boosting his confidence that he is well understood and simultaneously I did not violate the narrative in a way that stops him from talking. On the contrary, this act provided extra explanations in more clear words on his part. Another technique that I used during all the interviews is drawing on my own experience and my minimal share of perspective occasionally concerning general topics or ideas. A move that always proved effective in eliciting prolonged significant narratives, as a tool to remind them of extra experiences related to what is being discussed.

With these insights in mind and with great sensitivity to the anti-essentialist stream through which I considered all the theoretical and practical foundations in the study, I decided to mediate my role as both an active participant who jointly construct the narratives in the site of interviews, and a narrative researcher who controls ethical and analytical considerations subsequently. Furthermore, because neither being part of the group studied denotes complete sameness with it, nor does holding no membership denotes complete difference. A position where noting the ways in which we are different from each other is as much important as noting the way in which we are similar. I cannot deny that there are complexities inherent in embracing an in-between position, yet my perspective is shaped by my status as the researcher who has knowledge of the research topic, and by being a member of the group studied. Thus, I could not occupy one or the other of the positions, rather holding the space between in the role of a mediator.

3.3. Research design

Now that I have established qualitative approach with the narrative inquiry as both method and methodology to exploring the participants' Intercultural becoming journeys, in this section, I report on the techniques and strategies I adopted starting from participants' recruitment to conducting the data generation tools.

3.3.1. Participant and recruitment criteria

The initial recruitment process was largely informed by the decided longitudinal qualitative tradition and narrative inquiry I adopted in this study. However, it was one of the daunting challenges, especially at these early stages of the project. My early concerns prior to the recruitment itself were how should I manage the participant number as:

...There are cases, however, where it is not always easy to decide what the actual number of participants should be in ethnographic studies, for example, what difference does it make if five or eight or 12 participants are interviewed? Should three schools be investigated or just two? In a large-scale questionnaire-based study, how much difference would it make if 190 instead of 250 respondents completed the questionnaire? Sometimes answers to questions such as these depend more on practical matters, such as accessibility to participants (Does the researcher have permission to enter a school site? Does the desired site even exist?), their availability (Do participants have time to take part in the study? Do they wish to?), and who they are (teachers, learners, policy-makers).

(Barkhuizen, 2018, P. 120).

Barkhuizen (2018) himself provides some advice with regard to the dilemma of participant number to be included in a research study, by emphasizing the contribution of a range of factors within and outside the control of the researcher. As far as those factors within the researcher's control, the prior setting of the research goals and questions, the plans for monitoring the participants' accessibility, along with the researcher's own skills and knowledge, contribute largely to the recruitment decision-making process. On the other hand, and outside his sphere of control, the availability of participants along with the lack of human resources and/or time constraints may also influence his decision. Therefore, participants recruited in this study were 8 Algerian Ph.D. students who were newly accepted into UK universities. It was deemed important for the participants to meet certain criteria in order to best answer the research questions.. My decision to work with 8 participants

reflected my interest in highlighting a multiplicity of perspectives among Algerian Ph.D. students, with regard to implicit correlations between cultural factors and intercultural becoming experiences. With the interplay of these factors, I have decided on purposive sampling as a strategy for participants recruitment (Patton, 2002), as I was interested in unpacking the lived experiences of these newcomers. 'Purposive sampling' or 'purposeful sampling' (Patton, 2002) is a research sampling technique through which participants for a study are purposefully selected for being information-rich cases related to the phenomenon of interest. It is based on selecting individuals who have enough experience or knowledge about what is being under study (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011), easy access to participants in terms of availability, ability to reflect on their experiences meaningfully, and articulate their perspectives in an expressive manner (Bernard, 2002). Therefore, the deliberate choice of an informant using purposeful sampling is due to the qualities the informant possesses (Bernard 2002). The goal of 'purposive sampling', also called 'judgment sampling' is not to randomly select participants from a population with the intention of generalization, rather, is to focus on significant characteristics of a population that are of interest and enable finding answers to the research questions (Bernard 2002). However, the use of this sampling strategy can be highly prone to researcher bias. The fact that a purposive sample would be selected based on the researcher's subjective decision, is not a good defence when it comes to overcoming possible researcher biases, especially when compared with other probability sampling techniques that are designed to reduce them. Nonetheless, this judgemental, subjective component of purposive sampling can be a target for criticism only if the researcher's decisions have not been informed by clear criteria, whether the theoretical framework or the research goals and questions, which I gave abundant attention to meet.

It is worth mentioning as well that the accessibility factor has greatly influenced the sampling criteria in this research. Since the study focused on tracking the lived experiences of participants from the very first beginning, access to new Algerian comers has been only possible to 8 students. I owe this confounding number for a longitudinal investigation to the Algerian scheme regulations that specified the number of Ph.D. candidates as 100 in the cohort of 2017/2018, which was not all in reach for various reasons. This scheme is the first initiation of an Algerian-British higher education collaboration, where the two governments established a 5-year contract in 2014 to host 500 Algerian master's graduate students to pursue their doctoral studies in different UK universities.

The participant recruitment phase for the interviewing process started in early March 2019. Choosing to start on this date particularly was not within my control as I was restricted by several administrative and ethical permissions to launch this research. However, I assume this has greatly served the sampling criteria based on the fact that the study required the involvement of first-year students, along with my interest in capturing participants' early impressions of their intercultural experiences. In other words, getting early perspectives and self-reflections on intercultural experiences assume the existence of one. Therefore, starting the data generation phase in April gave some time to prepare freshly, yet, in progress participants who were able to reflect on upon-arrival intercultural experiences to date in a new cultural environment.

The most effective possible way to approach the 8 Algerian Ph.D. students was via an invitation post that I have added to the Facebook group "Algerian EFL laureates in the UK (DP)". The newcomers were expected to join this group, as it helps with building social networks and finding academic support from previous Algerian laureates. Participants interested in taking part in the longitudinal investigation over the course of 8 months were advised on the post to express an initial tendency to participate in the study in the comments section, where I have privately messaged the research participants with a formal email to be a medium of communication. It took around 3 weeks to receive all 8 participants' consent, shortly after they have been approached with formal participants' consent forms and information sheets and organized a realistic schedule for conducting the interviews. However, ahead of the actual launch of the eight months investigation, a set of 8 baseline individual interviews was organized as a way to break the ice and ensure familiarity between the participants and me.

Given that qualitative research does not demonstrate any concrete, restricted specification on the number of participants to be included in a research study (deMarrais, 2004), having only a few participants seemed to be appropriate and does not affect the intended investigation (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Therefore, the recruitment of 8 participants solely was deemed appropriate to consider the significance of participants' ongoing intercultural experiences, over the life span of 8 months. It is important to acknowledge that the major reason for hesitating to participate in the study according to some Ph.D. group users' comments on my invitation post, was the inability to maintain a long commitment to a longitudinal investigation for the period of 8 months with regular contact

in the form of an interview. A period that was described as confusing for them as Ph.D. students with overcharged schedules. Furthermore, at the early planning phase of the participants' recruitment process, I opted for possible equal gender involvement among participants, however, I was aware that access to male students in this program was very limited, given that the program itself is composed of approximately 90% females over 10% males only. Although the involvement of males was not possible through the invitation post, I decided to contact male participants on an individual basis. This has only resulted in recruiting 3 males, one of whom withdrew prior to the first interview for not meeting the research criteria. After all, I ended up with 6 participants females and 2 males. In fact, following the data generation and by reaching the analysis phase, there were no implications on the research findings when it came to gender involvement. I was not mightily concerned with not having equal gender involvement in the study, as my utmost attention was directed towards the journey itself rather than any other gender representation. Using emails as the most convenient medium of communication between us, approved interview dates and locations for both parties were scheduled.

In the following section, I introduce the basic description and pseudonyms of the recruited participants for the longitudinal study, which I prepared as a result of the baseline first interview.

3.3.2. Participants in the study: who are they?

As I have previously explained in **section 3.3.1.**, at the time of being my participants, all 8 informants were Algerian Ph.D. first-year students, who were newly accepted into UK universities. The following table demonstrates the pseudonym of each participant with respect to gender, traveling history in and outside Algeria, ethnicity, and spoken language, as identified by the participants themselves.

Pseudonym of each participant	Gender	Ethnicity	Travel history		Spoken languages
			Inside	Outside	
Siham	Female	Arab	Yes	None	Arabic/French /English
Meriem	Female	Arab	yes	Tunisia	Arabic/French/English
Sadja	Female	Arab	yes	None	Arabic/French/English
Rym	Female	Arab	Yes	None	Arabic/French/English
Nadia	Female	Arab	Yes	None	Arabic/French/English
Tarek	Male	Arab	Yes	Germany	Arabic/French/English/
Amina	Female	Amazigh / Shawi	Yes	None	Arabic/French/English
Fares	Male	Arab	Yes	None	Arabic/French/English

(Amazigh/Shawi: is an ethnic and cultural label of the middle land provinces' tribes in Algeria)

Table 1: Participants' pseudonyms

In the above table, I have listed some basic information that arose from the baseline interview conducted ahead of the actual study (see **section 3.3.3.1**). These baseline data were extracted and listed based on the participants' identification of themselves solely, without any descriptive or interpretive interference on my part. The aim of this was to let participants' cultural and personal self-perceptions and salient self-categorization emerge, which subsequently as the study proceeds moved the lens of focus away from essentialist descriptions of participants' persons to the actual process of dynamic change sought to be explored initially. Although this may seem to go in the opposite direction of a non-essentialist perspective to heterogenous grouping of culture and the standpoint of downsizing the effect of large culture construct, it was righteous to the core of ethical research to deliver the initial vantage point of participants of their sense of cultural background, without the academic knowledge of me as a researcher being in the middle. Furthermore, although it was not my place to deliver my understanding of culture nor to teach how large culture notions have an effect on intercultural change, "When dominant large-culture definitions are put aside, small

culture formation on the go reveals culture as a seamless and shifting extent of human behaviour” (Holliday, 2022, p. 322). In fact, it was on the site of this interview, that I established a mediator insider/outsider position, where I did not seek to “...indulge in the practices and values claimed by essentialist statements about culture, but instead seeks to understand the positioning behind them” (ibid, p. 370). Although my sampling procedure did not seek any kind of generalization of the group studied, yet participants had a consensus that as Algerians they were exposed to a unitary sociocultural value regime. Despite acknowledging the super diverse nature of Algeria on the level of geo-cultural and customs levels, they stressed a single ethnic belonging labelling it as Arabs and Berbers occasionally. Therefore, by the end of the baseline interview, I sought to establish a narrative identification of the participants’ persons as declared by them. Each participant was sent a copy of his own pseudonym description to express his opinion. All participants approved these descriptions and demonstrated a clear understanding of how it will be used in the thesis.

Fares: got his Master’s degree in Algeria. He was occupying a teaching position in an elementary school at the time of being granted the scholarship to pursue his doctoral studies. His family rejected his travel to another country but his determination to study abroad and get a Ph. D title overwhelmed any obstacles. Because he never travelled abroad or inside of Algeria except to the capital which he did not consider as traveling, Fares described his beginning here in the UK as a totally new experience and in fact difficult. He was living in shared accommodation with people from different nationalities and cultural backgrounds including an Indian, a Moroccan, and an English guy. He described meeting new people as new lessons for him, and he learned to ‘accept people as they are’. Fares expressed that he got culturally matured as he learned to ‘be open-minded’, and his readiness to meet new people from new cultural backgrounds, which was not something possible for ‘the old Fares’.

Siham: an introverted conservative person she described herself. Siham is the elder among her brothers and sisters in a relatively large family. She was granted her BA in education and Master’s degree in literature in Algeria and perused her Ph.D. in the same field. Studying abroad was always her dream and she got advantage of the opportunity as soon as she was granted the scholarship to study in the UK. When she came to the UK, Siham described herself as someone who denies meeting new people or tolerating them, however after some time she learned how to accept other people especially other religions as she considered it a

'sensitive topic to be discussed'. She was happy with her experience that far because she found out that even if she is different from other people here in the UK, she can still enjoy being there.

Meriem: was an honour student all along her BA and Masters degrees in Algeria. She always wanted to study abroad but never expected to. She was happy to pursue her Ph. D and more importantly to live in an English-speaking country. However, by the time of reaching the UK lands, she felt unwelcomed and described herself as being deceived by the media that promoted an open-minded, accepting, and welcoming image of the west. Meriem was diagnosed with social anxiety after some personal struggle to accommodate in the new environment. she even expressed her dissatisfaction with life in the UK and that she is now more introvert than she was before, all of which happened because of people's attitudes towards her.

Sadja: described herself as an optimistic happy person in all aspects of life. She was granted her BA and Masters in Algeria. Sadja has never had any traveling experience prior to coming to the UK apart from Algiers the capital. She was completely satisfied with her progress in both social and academic life. Since the very beginning of her journey in the UK, she was able to make friends from different cultural backgrounds despite being surrounded by Algerian friends most often. Her tendency to meet new people motivated her to widen her social network and develop both language and social skills.

Rym: was granted her BA and masters in Algeria. She always felt 'patriotic', she expressed a strong feeling of belonging to Algeria, unlike other participants. despite she could not establish new friendships and she always owed this to the 'non-acceptance nature of the local people', She was moderately satisfied with her life in the UK but was not sure what to do to improve her friendship-building skills.

Nadia: is the middle sister among her sisters and brothers. Nadia was awarded her BA and Masters degree in Algeria. She described this change as her first attempt to be away from home for the first time. She described this experience as the one that shaped her new personality, without which she would not be able to survive her social life in the UK. At the beginning of her journey abroad, Nadia was 'living in a bobble' on her own with no social network at all until she met an Indian lady who happened to be her landlady subsequently.

She acknowledged that living in her house enabled her to learn how to break the ice with people from new cultural backgrounds. As a result of this new friendship that she enjoyed, Nadia decided to join a conversational club at her university campus, which was organized as part of the academic and social support. She learned how to open conversations and exchange experiences that helped her to develop both her social and academic life.

Tarek: was 26 years old man who lived his entire life in Algeria, where he was awarded both his BA and Masters. Once he started his enrolment in one of the UK universities, he started teaching intercultural studies at his university and private schools in addition to his part-time job as a freelancer. Being a researcher in the field of intercultural communication Tarek described himself as someone with high interculturality and intercultural skills. He was able to accommodate to the new environment and appreciated differences as much as he loved similarities. He was very motivated by his thesis and used his knowledge in the field of intercultural communication in his everyday routine, which helped him build a wide, and variant social network. Tarek was satisfied with his progress in all aspects of life abroad and showed readiness to achieve his goal in a relatively short time compared to his colleagues.

Amina: ‘we are the Shawi ones’, that’s how Amina referred to the ethnic group she belongs to in Algeria. She was awarded her BA and Masters in Algeria where she lived her entire life. She was a teacher in a secondary school and married with no children. Amina was struggling with loneliness and could not go out of her shell as she described her situation. She made no attempts to meet new people because she always felt she would be rejected and that she is not part of the UK environment. Despite her desire to widen her social network, Amina was a home person and she spent most of her time in her room and never tried to be involved in any social activities. One of her major concerns was whether she can continue living that way for the long term and she always wanted to take an action to discover a new cultural environment.

3.3.3. Data generation

3.3.3.1. Breaking the ice

As a constructionist researcher who yearns to construct the data with rather than from the participants, it was inevitable to “establish a close bond with the participants” (Creswell, 2012, p. 502). Although bonding with participants and establishing a friendly, trustworthy relationship is a prerequisite in a narrative inquiry study in the long run, especially with me as

being both a constructionist and mediator of insider-outsider researcher positions, I was cautious about the authenticity of the data elicited. Putting it differently, for one reason or more such as on-the-moment memory failure or some sort of fear to narrate the story data distortion may arise (Creswell, 2012). Therefore, I was very careful with the possibility of any data distortion and sought to bond with the participants so that they provide authentic and reliable narratives. To do so, prior to conducting any interviews I met the participants on an individual basis for a 15-minute interview as I mentioned earlier, where I had a casual conversation. During this initial short interview, I explained some broad ethical considerations such as what the study was about and what their role entails as participants, their right to withdraw from the study within the time frame specified by the researcher, and stressed the anonymity and confidentiality of their persons. I should acknowledge at this point that these interviews ended up with a strong comfortable start for both parties, as it actually went beyond ethical and research procedures explanation, yet it gave more room for future connection outside the frame of the study. In fact, I made sure to be a source of academic advice whenever they reach any important milestone that I have already gone through by sharing my experience and providing some sort of coaching for their studies. The most important aspect though was the opportunity to get to know the participants on a personal basis through some mutual eliciting questions about their background and mine as well. This procedure is one among many others I have utilized during this study as a way to ensure flexibility and reciprocity in doing qualitative research longitudinally (Saldana, 2003).

The importance of gathering baseline data lies in the potential alteration and adjustment of core concepts in the research, such as the notion of 'change' in this study which took new directions as the study proceeds. According to Saldana (2003) "baseline data include what you believe is important and what might become important in the future based on your particular research agenda". (p.18). Therefore, what was of great importance for me at the outset of the study was to have a general understanding of the participants' attitudes, their self-interpretations, and perspectives on their identity markers and cultural belonging, in order to find justifications for the unpredicted shifts that may/or may not occur. In addition to creating a warm atmosphere between the participants and me, the analysis of these casual baseline interviews was one important source upon which the first interview round guideline questions was administered. The participants were unconsciously providing cultural and

personal categorizations of themselves, through which I was able to make descriptions of their persons as illustrated previously in **section 3.3.2.** on identifying participants.

After these baseline interviews, I was able to assure certain dates for the actual launch of the investigation period and reassure the schedule for the first round of interviews for each participant. In the following sub-section, I will give a detailed description of each interview foundation.

3.3.3.2. The narrative interviews

Qualitative interviews are a commonly used methodological procedure in social sciences (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015). They are considered among the most powerful tools to elicit individuals' perspectives, attitudes, and the sense of reality to them (Punch, 2005). Interviews are usually administered and conducted in three forms: structured, semi-structured, and open-end interviews. Whereas structured interviews are a strictly pre-planned set of questions, researchers with narrative turn seeking experience-explore orientation tend to turn to semi-structured or open interview formats. In the current research narrative, semi-structured interviews were a perfect fit, as they leave room for exchanging manoeuvre over the conversation flow between the researcher and participants (Chase, 2005). Interviewing in its general sense requires creative skills on the part of the interviewer including the administration of well-targeted questions (Cohen et al., 2007), setting a comfortable scenery for the conversation to take place (Riesman, 2008), and seeking clarification with a mindful degree of interference (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). As I have already explained in **section 3.2.3.**, my role as a researcher was inspired by the constructivist research philosophy, where data are co-constructed with rather than from participants. My role was to mediate my position whenever necessary. I have been able to develop some skills along the process of investigation, including drawing on my personal experience to refresh their informative memory, rephrasing the participants' own declarative statements in the form of a question to elicit precise perspectives, and using humour to soften the atmosphere around them. These techniques among others were on so many occasions the reason to add more precision and rigor to the data elicited.

It is noteworthy at this point to acknowledge that the narrative interviews in this longitudinal research study, were the only source of data documenting the intercultural becoming process and self-positioning shifts of participants in the study abroad contexts. The

interviews were conducted over the course of 8 months at three intervals in April, July, and November 2019. The investigation period resulted in 3 rounds of interviews with 8 participants forming the totality of 24 narrative interviews. Each interview lasted in average 30-45 minutes in duration in the first round, with prolonged duration in the second and third rounds lasting in an average of 45-60 minutes. All the interviews were audiotaped and transcribed and then analyzed.

The first round of interviews was in the form of 15 guideline questions (see Appendix 4). The questions were formed in such a way that tackled the participants' cultural and personal background initially, moving to clarifications about their perspectives and upon arrival interpretations of their UK experience. The clarifications were extended individually based on each participant's narratives, which gave me some manoeuvre to go deeper into their intercultural experiences and seek prolonged detailed narratives. Each participant had his own rhythm of answering the questions and forming the sort of conversation I attempted in the first place. Although I have made sure to secure a comfortable and casual atmosphere since the baseline interviews, I had sensed some reluctance from some participants, which resulted in a relatively short interview in length compared to the rest of them. Consistency among narrative accounts was a prerequisite that urged me to move to plan B in administering the second set of interviews. After conducting an initial analysis of the first round of interviews, I was overwhelmed with the amount of dataset. The best solution was to create a more personalized second set of interviews to explore the shift in perspective of cultural and linguistic attitudes that have been noted in the first set of interviews.

Therefore, the second round of interviews has been more personalized considering the narratives of each participant in the first round on its own (**Appendix 5**). The second interview was divided into 2 sections. The first section was in the form of stimulated recall sessions (see **3.3.3** below) constructed with trims from the first interview for participants to listen and comment upon, to note the shift in perspective in a more concrete manner i.e. making the participants themselves locate the nature and quality of the shift in their perceptions within the 4-months time interval. The second section was a more casual set of guideline questions and clarifications on the latest updates in their UK experience including personal, academic, and social change or progress in their life in general. The second round of interviews was conducted as planned and the duration was prolonged an average of 45 to 70 minutes, resulting in a considerably overwhelming set of more organized data. The third

round of interviews is a set of 15 guideline questions, which were threads for more distinctive detailed narratives of experiences among participants. The nature of questions ranged between seeking narratives of the latest updates in their cultural and social events and reflective questions that led participants to more introspective evaluations, and new perspectives they held in between the final 4-months intervals (Appendix 6).

It is noteworthy at this level to acknowledge that I have assumed a role that is more than just an interviewer, being a member of the Algerian Ph.D. students' group has added a more comfortable yet organized orchestration of the interview movement. By the end of each interview round, I was eager to know the participants' opinions on the experience of being interviewed by their fellow Ph.D. candidate. There was a consensus among all the participants that the interview process was an enjoyable experience, it nourished their sense of being as it directed their attention to details about their self-existence and noted the shift of their intercultural becoming along the 8 months. These commentaries have provided an enthusiastic sense about the data generated and made me relive the participants' sense of being through the listening and transcription of their interview recordings.

3.3.3.3. Stimulated recall episodes

Given the multimodal nature of qualitative research (Flick, 2014), and the flexibility of narrative inquiry in standing with other methodological and analytical procedures, I was able to use a variety of adapted techniques that added more rigor, depth, and richness to both the data generation and analysis at a later phase. As I have established earlier in the previous section **(3.3.3.2)** the first interview's initial analysis prompted the idea of using stimulated recall episodes in the second interview, as a technique for both a prolonged duration and an attempt to extract more detailed narratives that serve documenting features of the shift in perspective and self-positioning. The stimulated recall is an introspective research technique that originated in psychology and philosophy studies (Rowe, 2009). However, it found its way into educational teaching research through the first study conducted by Bloom (1953) who described video stimulated recall as a method to investigate classroom practices and interactions. His conceptualization of stimulated recall was based on the idea of 'reflection' proposed in Dewey's work (1933). Bloom (1953) suggests that through this technique:

The subject may be enabled to relive an original situation with vividness and accuracy if he is presented with a large number of the cues or stimuli which occurred during the original situation.

(p. 161)

Although the stimulated recall technique was first utilized through video formats, and for the aim of focussing on cognitive strategies and learning processes, there is no documented goal orientation or methodological measurement on how or when this method should be utilized. On the contrary, in this study, the potential for creative methodological contribution may be considered, if the technique is to be far-reaching to other areas of research. Traditionally, stimulated recall takes place by making participants of a research watch or listen to a video/audio recording made during a specific observed teaching-learning situation. The discussion and documentation of reflections start after the participants are exposed to the stimuli (the video/audio) recorded previously. The stimulated recall discussion is most successful if conducted within a relatively short time post viewing or listening to the recording, to preserve fresh reflections and thinking of the episode being replayed. In this research, the procedure of using stimulated recall episodes was technique and purpose straightforward. Given that my intention in the investigation itself is the personal reflections, perspectives, and self-evolutions about participants' intercultural journeys abroad, stimulated recall was used in the second interview as a boosting technique to elicit a detailed shift in perspectives explicitly reported by participants in the first set of interviews. By so doing, I was able to overcome one of the most commonly known shortcomings of using the stimulated recall method, namely, that suggested by Gas (2001) on biased data arising from potential stimuli, and the indecisive purpose of stimulated recall as recalling an event or the reflection on an event. The procedure of conducting stimulated recall episodes started first by a preliminary analysis of each participant's first round of interviews aside. By focussing on the exploration of self-perception shifts, aspects of focus were cut from each participant's first set of interview recordings in the form of audio trims. Each participant had 6 to 10 trims to listen to and comment on in the second set of interviews, which were of a more personalized nature than the first set (see **3.3.3.2** on interview procedures).

It is worth mentioning at this level that participants have been well informed about this procedure ahead of the second interview to avoid arising issues of anxiety and self-conscious discomfort by participants (Calderhead, 1981). Interestingly, using stimulated recall

episodes has given its due benefit on the spot of the second set of interviews. As a start, participants were most interested in listening to themselves previously reflecting on their upon arrival perspectives about living in the UK. In most cases, they demonstrated the joy of self-evaluation during the time of listening to the stimulated recall trims, which they have elaborated with expressions such as “I can’t believe I said that”, “that definitely not me!”, or “wow, I definitely changed”. The exercise of reviving their self-reflection power has led to further explicit, focus-driven narratives that were a significant addition to the research findings. Finally, given that stimulated recall episodes were conducted as part of the second interview round, all the data generated were treated within the second interview analysis as a whole.

3.3.4. Thematic narrative analysis procedure

I began the treatment of my data with a cross-narrative accounts thematic analysis broadly following the six-phase guide proposed by Braun and Clark (2006, 2013). The aim of launching the analysis thematically instead of narratively was to orient me to the data set and to situate the narratives within the social and cultural context they negotiate including the interview site. This goes in line with my discussion of the adaptation of narrative inquiry in this study (section 3.2.2). Putting it differently, despite embracing the narrative inquiry as a driving methodological tradition, the actual procedure of data analysis did not follow a step-by-step narrative analysis as “there is no single way to do narrative research, just as there is no single definition of narrative”. (Riessman, 2008, p.155). Therefore, an inductive paradigmatic perspective of the narratives allowed the immersion of a set of themes that then required a systematic thematic analysis to emerge. After the transcription of all the participants’ interview recordings throughout the three rounds, I was overwhelmed with the amount of data yet to face. It was challenging to find a systematic narrative pattern of analysis. Therefore, the first step was to categorize the data across participants chronologically, which was integrated within the familiarisation phase of the thematic analysis. I attempted to look at the 8 participants’ shift of intercultural becoming along the 8 months for each participant aside. The exploration of that thread of individual shifts enabled me to note the similar patterns among the participants’ accounts. Shortly, those patterns of change emerged into seven basic themes that eventually required a systematic thematic analysis.

The stages of the systematic thematic analysis involved familiarising myself with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining, and naming them, and finally producing the report. I will further detail these steps in conjunction with the data treatment of this phase of analysis. It is of great importance at this point to acknowledge that although Braun and Clark's (2006) outline provides an easy guide to how to dive into the data thematically, the process was not as simple or linear as an outline may represent, yet it was a recursive iterative cycle across the dataset. This necessitates an inductive approach to data analysis whereby the themes emerge from the narrative data and are not determined prior (Srivastava and Hopwood 2009).

3.3.4.1. Familiarization with the dataset

At this phase, I read through the entire data set and was actively engaged with it by searching for patterns of meaning that arose from the initial cross-narrative mapping undertaken prior. In fact, I began the process of analysis when I started searching for these patterns. The production of transcripts was undertaken after each individual interview and was aided by making notes in a separate notebook, sketching ideas, and linking statements of participants during the process of an interview. Although a lengthy process, I avoided using any transcription tool such as "transcribe", thus I undertook manually all transcription of the interviews from the beginning, in order to be able to capture the sense of participants' intercultural becoming experiences and how these were narrated.

Furthermore, given the flexibility of thematic analysis, transcripts do not necessarily enjoy a single form nor require many details such as overlaps or speech intervals that might be important in conversation analysis for example (Braun and Clarke, 2012). Hence, I intentionally left out repeated long pauses and filler words such as 'umm, ah, like...' in places where it has no relevance to the intercultural interpretation, however, laughter and sighs were intentionally noted as they may affect the interpretation of a narrative. I also intended to remove any proper names and places that may identify the participants' persons; for example, I have replaced the names of a supervisor with 'my supervisor', friends' names with 'my friend' and university names with 'my university' (a list of transcription coding would be found in the transcripts, see **Appendix 7**). In relation to the participants' talking, I left the speech of a certain topic or story in blocks unless there was a significant pause. For this purpose, I removed any non-verbal or simple affirmative words such as "yeah" "sure" "ok",

and head nodding, wherever they add nothing to the narrative being told, however, the sequencing of narratives was highly preserved. I was cautious as well about any potential reliability questioning regarding the transcription and coding by safeguarding the original interview recordings. With regard to ethical concerns regarding transcribing the interviews, I have removed any possible identification of the participants' persons. In fact, I asked all participants to choose a pseudonym they would like to be called within the final version of the thesis.

After finishing the transcription of the narrative interviews, I had become immersed in the data through repeated readings of the transcripts and going back and forth to the recordings to check the accuracy (Gibson and Brown 2009) of the representation of transcripts regarding the narrative accounts. By so doing, I developed a general understanding of my data set, by creating a mind map of how each participant experienced their narratives, and acted as a means to maintain sight of linkages of these narratives among participants themselves and the three interview rounds over 8 months.

Given that data generation for this study was a longitudinal exploration of intercultural experiences for the course of eight months, the data were spread along three rounds of interviews every 4 months. Therefore, I was overwhelmed with the amount of data generated along three rounds from 8 participants. Once I have organized the transcripts of the eight participants chronologically over the course of 8 months, I was able to manage the amount of data by looking for the coding patterns at each round. Which lead to the next phase of my thematic narrative analysis process which is generating initial coding.

3.3.4.2. Generating the codes

As I have stated earlier the organization of the interview rounds helped in both data and time management. The next step was to focus on the first round of interviews by segmenting data and searching for patterns of meaning through referencing units of the interview transcripts including words, quotations, and sentences (Gay et al. 2006). It is worth mentioning at this level that coding in the thematic narrative analysis does not require a single form of unit of analysis. Meaning, given that I deployed the short story paradigm (Bamberg, Georgakopoulou, 2014), I have analyzed participants' narratives as a collective unit instead of breaking them down into smaller parts. These collective units could stand either for long or short stories narrated by participants, full utterances, single words... etc, and differ based on

the participant responses and the question asked. After reading and re-reading each participant’s narrative interview transcript I looked at each reply divided by question and by the participant. I have been able to generate recurrent coding segments across the 8 narrative interviews, which I have written down on 8 separate note cards. After careful scanning of those long patterns, I have downsized them into a separate document with final codes created in the form of a mind sketch. The following table demonstrates an example of how the codes were derived to its final version, followed by the mind map used to generate final codes.

Data extracts from the relevant transcripts	First phase coding: Recurrent coding segments	Second phase coding Final codes
<p>Participant 1: “there is a big difference of what I was expecting, when watching British movies, series, and documentaries. I’ve always thought that they are open and antiracists but they are completely different of what I expected”</p> <p>Participant 2: “ I used to have preconceptions.. stereotypes but I found that what was sold out in media was wrong”</p> <p>Participant 3: “I was prescriptive “</p> <p>Participant4:” my expectations were not met and found that local people are not easy to approach...British people”</p> <p>Participant 5: “my views changed in Algeria before coming to the UK,</p>	<p>-big difference of my expectations</p> <p>-different of what I expected</p> <p>-Preconceptions</p> <p>-stereotypes</p> <p>-Prescriptive</p> <p>-my expectations were not met</p> <p>-I found that</p> <p>-misconceptions</p> <p>-My views changed</p> <p>-Had no expectations</p> <p>-Was not the perfect image I had in mind</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expectations Vs reality abroad • Media is fake • Stereotypes, preconceptions and misconceptions. • Integration • Reconstructing racism as a stereotype • Rethinking own cultural background • Stereotypes reconstruction

<p>through reading in intercultural studies”</p> <p>Participant6: “ I had no expectation on the social life in the UK”</p> <p>Participant7: “ I was expecting that people from the UK are so funny and so open to other people and expected to be more integrated with them but when I came I realized that it was not the perfect image I had in mind”</p>		
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Table2: Example of the Coding Manual

The above table clearly illustrates how my coding mind map functioned. Although it is acknowledged that within thematic narrative analysis participants’ entire responses are to be treated as units of analysis (Strauss, 1987), I was mindful of how the small parts i.e. segments fit properly within the whole responses. Putting it differently, I was meticulously considering specific words or phrases within an entire paragraph, which seems significant for coding. By so doing, I was on a two-way process of being meticulous and remaining reliable to the thematic narrative approach, where the small story paradigm was fruitful.

Furthermore, with the assistance of my visual learning skills, I have produced a mind map sketch that illustrates the code grouping strategy used to downsize the data extracts across participants into recurrent coding segments and then final codes. In fact, this process of coding involved two overlapping phases to generate potential codes. I first started with grouping data extracts relevant to one potential code across participants and then reproducing the recurrent segments out of these extracts into one group of interrelated codes. As a result, 40 final refined codes for the three rounds of interviews have been generated and categorically distributed over 7 groups relevant to 7 potential emerging themes. A further explanatory outline of these codes will be presented in the following section. These codes were labelled and grouped as follows:

- Expectations VS reality abroad
 - Stereotypes, preconceptions, and misconceptions
 - Media is fake
 - Effect of stereotypes
 - Exotic
 - Us VS them
 - The other VS the self
-

- British people vs other nationalities
 - British are not openminded
 - Issue of making British friends
 - Initiate communication with British people
 - Ability/inability to widen the social network
 - Open-mindedness and acceptance
 - Accepting/rejecting differences and similarities
 - Cultural differences and similarities
-

- Integration
 - Reconstructing racism as a stereotype
 - Rethinking own cultural background
 - Stereotypes reconstruction
 - Algerian cultural background
 - Islamic/Arabic identity effect
-

- Importance of English Language proficiency
 - Understanding native speakers
 - Appropriateness
 - Language in real-life communication VS academic language
-

- Language and culture relationship
- Linguistic knowledge more important than cultural knowledge
- Cultural knowledge is a priority

- Seeking native like proficiency
-

- Cultural and personal identity
 - Intercultural awareness effect
 - Role of university
 - Academic intercultural knowledge
 - Autonomy and self-efficacy
-

It is of great importance to acknowledge that coding was both data and theory-driven, which urged me to intentionally make pauses when reading data extracts for the coding in order to make connections with the theoretical and conceptual underpinnings of the study. A connection that in return would be used in analysing the narratives at a later stage. Furthermore, generating the codes was not a linear process, rather it encountered several challenges. A key complexity was the establishment of coding terminology relevant to both theory and data representation. In this regard, I found it difficult to establish the coding terms that best represent the actual meaning of the data, without stepping out of the general theoretical framework. However, to minimize this complexity I developed the coding terminology in accordance with Bryman (2012) suggestion. First, an initial code segment emerging either from the participants' own words or my interpretation to what the participants potentially referred to was developed and, followed by assigning final code labels related to a selected segment within the data extracts. Another challenge is deciding what is worth to be coded and what is not, as too little coding may result in too simple analysis, while over-coding would risk a reduction in decision quality (LaRosa 2005). To address this complexity, I constantly made referrals of potential codes to the research questions relevant to it. I came up with questions such as: what factors affect upon arrival intercultural becoming shifts? how did participants' intercultural background influence their intercultural becoming experiences? what are the language-culture relations perspectives most prevalent? ...etc. Asking these questions not only helped in highlighting most important segments of texts to

be coded, yet also sorting out a preliminary grouping of connected codes to generate relevant themes.

3.3.4.3. Searching, Reviewing, and defining relevant themes

Following the coding phase, searching, and naming the emergent themes was not difficult given that the preliminary codes grouping I undertook in the coding process paved the way for a resilient themes' emergence. I have considered mind mapping at this phase to visualize the thematic connection between the codes and categorize them under potential themes as presented in the following mind sketch:



Figure 4: mind map sketch of coding-theme emergence

However, prior to the final version of mind mapping visualization presented in **figure 4** above, there was an overlapping phase from developing provisional themes to its final status. I returned to further refining and reviewing the initial themes on numerous occasions reassuring that they assign to the meaning behind the codes and are in coherence with the entire data set. Braun and Clarke (2006) assert that “[d]ata within themes should cohere together meaningfully, while there should be clear and identifiable distinctions between themes” (p. 91). Following on from this, I have reviewed the emergent themes at two levels following Clie (2016). First, I went back to the extracted codes and checked their internal consistency, and second, I worked on validating the themes in relation to the whole data set and grouping them into relevant broad findings. By the end of this review, I was satisfied that the themes signified the connection evident between the codes attributed to each, had a good idea of what relates and differentiates them, “and the whole story they tell about the data” (ibid, p. 38). By the end of this multi-layered, cyclic process I eventually been able to generate 7 themes as follows:

- Theme 1: Insights into sojourners’ stereotypes shifting Vs reality clashes.
- Theme 2: Stereotype shifting and self-positioning
- Theme 3: Re-evaluating personal constructs as reflections on intercultural self-positioning.
- Theme 4: English proficiency and the native-speaking environment
- Theme 5: The perceived language-culture value and attitude in the UK experience
- Theme 6: The implication of perceived language development on intercultural becoming.
- Theme 7: Factors shaping international students’ intercultural becoming dynamics during study abroad experience.

After the classification of these themes, it was deemed important to recategorize the most relevant interrelated themes that make up a chronological coherent story of the data, each within the logical theoretical and analytical explanations. Therefore the 7 themes were grouped into 3 main broad findings labelled in accordance with the analytical interrelated meaning of each theme group as follows:

Finding 1: The implication of self-positioning shifts in the dynamics of the intercultural becoming process.

- Theme 1: Insights into sojourners' stereotypes shifting vs reality clashes.
- Theme 2: Stereotype shifting and self-positioning
- Theme 3: Re-evaluating personal constructs as reflections on intercultural self-positioning.

Finding 2: Negotiating the language-culture perspectives as dynamics of intercultural becoming

- Theme 4: English proficiency and the native-speaking environment
- Theme 5: The perceived language-culture value and attitude in the UK experience
- Theme 6: The implication of perceived language development on intercultural becoming

Finding 3: Factors shaping international students' intercultural becoming dynamics during study abroad experience.

3.3.4.4. Producing the analytic report

I have dedicated this phase to the writing up. Although writing up has already started in phase one, once starting to be familiar with data, the real attempts to present well-structured analytic interpretations of the data set were only executed at this phase. Once I was satisfied with the quality of the refined themes extracted, I was able to represent the findings accurately, consistently, and logically with reference to the research questions and the theoretical underpinnings of the research. For example, although the definition and discussion in theme 3 revolved around the experience of distinguishing the self from the other on cultural bases, an analogy of what culture stands for to every participant from one part and in the study from the other was a prerequisite. This analogy greatly influences the explanation of participants' perspectives on the dynamic shifts in their intercultural becoming in new intercultural environments over time. Moreover, Braun and Clarke (2006) contend that "extracts need to be embedded within an analytic narrative that compellingly illustrates the story you are telling about your data, and your analytic narrative needs to go *beyond* description of the data and make an *argument* in relation to your research questions" (p.93). Therefore, I have produced the final report in such a way that represents the data with a sense

of established arguments to each theme, with the insertion of shots of data extracts such as participants' quotes and declarative interview questions.

In the next chapter findings emerging from the dataset, and analysis would be reported meticulously, by engaging in a cyclic analytical process that relates the theoretical background of the research to the emergent data findings.

3.3.5. Positioning theory (PT) Bamberg (1997) integrated

As has been discussed earlier (**chapter 2, section 1.3.1**) Positioning Theory as proposed by Davies and Harré (1990) with associates was the first attempt to count for positioning within a narrative inquiry stream. In its original foundation, Positioning Theory was introduced as a triangle composed of three basic constituents complementing each other namely storylines, social acts, and positions (Davies and Harré, 1990; Harré et al., 2009). Given that Positioning Theory is based on the understanding that people assume certain positions through narratives in a conversation, storylines in this triangle are the interpreted wider context, that enables meaning making out of the said. Social acts are labelled in relation to the speech act theory (Austin, 1962) as speech acts, for their illocutionary force which is socially determined. However, I agree with Kayı-Aydar's (2019) suggestion on relabelling speech acts as "communication acts" (as proposed by Herbel-Eisenmann, Wagner, Johnson, Suh, and Figueras, 2015), "given the increasing number of studies that use paralinguistic elements along with physical positions in explaining positioning in storylines" (p. 4). Finally, positions are the "momentary clusters of rights and duties to think, act and speak in certain ways" (Harré, 2010). With a minor addition to the basic tenets of Harré et.al (2009) Positioning Theory triad, other adaptations have emerged tackling the flaws of flexibility of coping with dynamic discourses, among which is (Slocum-Bradley, 2010) Positioning Theory diamond, with a significant addition of 'identity' as a basic constituent of the theory. However, the most relevant understanding of 'positioning' through the narrative in this study is the one proposed by Michael Bamberg (1997) and applied through by Georgakopoulou's (with Bamberg 2008) model. I believe it is a moral imperative to explain the reason for considering a model of positioning applied as a tool for exploring identity reconstruction, as an analytical mode in the current research that seeks an exploration of perspectives on intercultural dynamics of change (see **chapter 2 section 1.3.1** on Positioning Theory rational in this research). In its general sense, positioning refers to a dynamic, discursive process identifying a person's

perspective of the self opposite the world. Bamberg (2004) contends the constructive nature of positions within discursive practices. With such an understanding, Bamberg (2004) interprets positioning as not only the exploration of how a person perceives himself in the world, yet how the world around him influences his narratives about the self. In fact, Bamberg's positioning analytical approach explores participants' active reproduction of 'grand social narratives' (ibid), that determine different relationship positions, and creatively shift these positions as a form of dynamic change (ibid). In his model of identity analysis through positioning, Bamberg (1997, also in Bamberg and Georgakopoulou, 2008) introduces three levels of positioning analysis of narratives by trying to answer relevant questions at each level:

Level 1: Is basically achieved through answering the question "How are the characters positioned in relation to one another within the reported events?" (Bamberg, 1997, p.337). At this level, it is the relationship between characters in the narrated story that the researcher seeks to understand, and whether there is an impact of power relations that the speaker interprets. Simply said, is the position assumed by the narrator in relation to the other characters identified in the narrative.

Level 2: Answers the question "how does the speaker position him- or herself to the audience?" (Ibid, p.337). At this level, we explore how participants position themselves in relation to the scene of narration (herby the interview set). These positions are constantly negotiated as the interaction is going. It is also possible that the narrator (participants) tries to deliver to the listener (the researcher) a certain interpretation of their position in the narrative to the actual scene of the narrative being told.

Level 3: This is where we try to understand what the actual perspective of participants to themselves is, i.e. the position they understand they assume within larger resources (e.g.: the narrated context, or grand narratives). This can be approached by answering the question "How do narrators position themselves to themselves?" (ibid), or simply invoking a general wondering to the participants to answer: "who am I?".

It is worth mentioning that one may question the validity of the position representation of the actual story world of the narrator within a personal narrative. In this regard, De Fina and Georgakopoulou (2012) argue that the three-level model of positioning is a significant step in the analysis of narratives through the examination of the positioning interlocutors assign to themselves in the story world. There is resonance in this study between the told and the actual event, which my participants have mirrored in the actual event of narrative interviews. Throughout the three rounds of interviews, participants constantly positioned themselves in

the narratives told. On both surface and deep levels, the participants' narrative accounts constructed an interactive process, that represents the positioned self through various forms of personal interpretations of social events, cultural and intercultural encounters, ideological stances, evaluations, and re-evaluations, and the list goes on. This resonates with Amadasi and Holliday's (2017) study on narrative interviews being sites where "... researchers and the students are mutually involved in this process as we each make sense of each other's narratives and positions and work to establish our own" (p.6). It is important to acknowledge the role of the longitudinal nature of this research in revealing a dynamic shift in participants' self-positioning throughout the three rounds of interviews. The nature of interpretation of the perceived self in the stories of the narratives has notably and distinctively shifted, given that participants describe themselves in these narratives as:

... 'becoming', that is, as undergoing processes of transformation – as for instance from being inagentive and passive at one location and time coordinate of one's life, to becoming involved and agentive with the crossing into new spatio-temporal territory (as in immigrating to a new country or becoming a father).

(Bamberg, 2004, p. 357).

With this explanation in mind, it is apparent that Bamberg's positioning model can take a leap in considering intercultural becoming proposed in this study, and the wider field of intercultural communication if not human sciences altogether.

However, given that my ultimate focus in this research is not based on the analysis of linguistic units solely to determine intercultural change, rather it is related to the actual perspectives emerging in the narrative process, my philosophy of considering this model considers the fact that "...linguistic forms do not code positions directly. Rather, they are used to cue relevant features of context indexically" (Depperman, 2015, p.7). Simply put, given that my understanding of intercultural communication goes beyond the said in a context of communication (see chapter 5, section 5.2.), the linguistic unit as direct articulated speech is not the unit of analysis exclusively. Although, the context of the interviews conducted with the participants were direct uttered narratives, yet different communication segments have been constructed by participants as evidence of their intercultural change in perspective. Therefore, the linguistic units hereby are taken as a medium rather than a unit of analysis *per se*.

As a researcher coming from a non-essentialist perspective to considering cultural phenomena, Bamberg's model was not applied in a traditional manner, yet it is used in a way

that demonstrates implicitly the actual perceived self-positioning of participants' intercultural becoming. Putting it differently, when starting the analysis of the data set, a well-established understanding was put ahead, that through the lens of the positioning model I was exploring more than just identity reconstruction changes, yet it is a complex accumulation of perspective shifts of cultural, linguistic, personal, and historical effects and relations. Therefore, my intention was to focus on an attempt to answer in indexicality manners the questions presented at each level of the model proposed. The analysis of each theme under its broad finding took a narratology nature of the positioning shifts, explaining the fluctuation and complicated process of intercultural becoming through individualised interpretations of their dynamics of change. It is noteworthy to acknowledge here, that seeking a positioning shift exploration was most prevalent in the first and second findings, whereas the third finding was most covering factors affecting these shifts.

3.4. A note on trustworthiness and ethics

A critical consideration in conducting qualitative research is to ensure aspects of its trustworthiness. The criteria for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research have been challenged in the literature in opposite the notions of validity, reliability, and generalisability that are strongly addressed by positivists (Shenton, 2004). Among the much-cited classic criteria for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research are proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985), namely, credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Therefore, I shall discuss the most relevant criterium to my research project, through which I endeavoured to ensure aspects of trustworthiness, and demonstrate evidence of the quality and usefulness of all the project's instruments, procedures, and data (Leung, 2015).

Given the qualitative approach and the constructivist meta-theoretical assumptions this study drew upon, credibility is a vital component in ensuring this project's trustworthiness (ibid). I believe credibility in this research was highly attached to my position as a researcher throughout the study design and execution. My first step towards achieving credibility is ensuring the moral integrity of my position as the researcher (Hesse-Beber and Leavy, 2006) in this project. The first step has taken place in the preliminary phase of the research, which involved primarily obtaining ethical approval for research conduct, which I was granted by MMU ethics committee (see **appendix 3**). This approval outlined a moral imperative to meet the ethical conventions that ensure participants' and myself welfare throughout the

involvement in this project. Individual written consent forms to take part were signed by all participants, ensuring their rights for anonymity, confidentiality and withdrawal were preserved. In the event of conducting the study, I sought credibility through a prolonged engagement with my participants, in a successful attempt to gain their trust and ensure a comfortable relationship in the long run. The interview site itself was a comfortable encounter according to the participants themselves post each interview.

A major concern for me during the interviews event was to ensure total engagement of participants, therefore prior to any interview I started with a statement explaining the preference to make language shift, freedom to take a break during the interview, and pointed to the rights to pause and remove any information they feel uncomfortable to share. Indeed, this technique was significant as most participants were hesitant to share information about some sensitive topics, however, my constant reminder of the anonymity and confidentiality aspects of their person was enough for them to comment with no limitations. To ensure the total anonymity of my participants, I used pseudonyms. However, throughout the interview, there was some identifiable information that might signify their identity including names of universities, provinces of origin in Algeria, or names of supervisors. Therefore, an immediate solution to such a concern was executed in the transcription manuscripts, where any identifiable markers have been substituted with common vague labels such as my university, my supervisor, my friend (see **Appendix 7**, on transcription manual).

Another concern that any researcher pursuing a narrative inquiry approach may encounter, is the researcher's voice presence during the interview event. Simply put, a key concern of my positioning as a researcher of an authoritative voice with an independent stance and background vs being a member of the group, I was engaged in generating the data, was challenging (see section 3.3.3. above). Clandinin and Connolly (2000) stress the significance of such a concern for the audience to understand the degree of authority in narrating the story and the level of subjectivity reflected in the interpretation. I believe I have addressed this concern by mediating an insider/outsider role in both the interview and the interpretation phase. First, on the interview site, I was not hesitant to minimally express my own opinion or to draw on my own experience occasionally in some narratives, such a move made participants very comfortable to expand their narratives and add a layer of complexity to their perspectives. Second, when I reached the analysis phase it was a moral imperative to ensure authenticity in the interpretation of participants' narratives, without anticipation or

personal judgments in the analysis chapter. I believe this is well demonstrated as I have favoured postponing a theoretical discussion of the data to a separate chapter, named discussion.

Although the other criteria of trustworthiness suggested above, are classically significant in conducting qualitative research, the theoretical background and meta-theoretical assumptions drawn upon in this research have made it logical to overlook. Given the constructivist, longitudinal nature of this qualitative research, transferability and dependability issues can be problematic. Suffice to say that qualitative research is context-specific, and the replicability of such a project with its detailed design and objective orientation is not an option. One solution to address such challenges is through a meticulous presentation and explanation of the research process, design, and procedures, “thereby enabling a future researcher to repeat the work, if not necessarily to gain the same results” (Shenton, 2004, p. 71).

Finally, confirmability as a concept is strongly associated with objectivist streams, which entails total objectivity in obtaining the findings. Although it is impossible for constructivist qualitative researchers to consider such a measure to prove the trustworthiness of their findings, I believe the endeavour to attain credibility above with embedded reflexivity in every procedure (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004), is strongly addressing this issue. Additionally, the findings in this project have emerged inductively through a descriptive presentation of the intercultural becoming dynamics of change, with no anticipation or interference from the researcher in the narrated experiences (Shenton, 2004).

Conclusion

This chapter has reported the methodological and procedural evolution of this study’s design. Through an extensive engagement with the qualitative research literature, this chapter demonstrated a multi-layered complex, methodological journey, that is theoretically informed. The chapter presented rationally the different methodological decisions regarding data generation and analysis and documented the chronological progressive stages leading to the emergence of the final findings. The next chapter will engage in a theoretical discussion of the three main findings.

Chapter 4: Research findings

Introduction

This chapter presents the thematic narrative analysis of the main three findings emerging from the data treatment of the three rounds of narrative interviews, across the eight participants' intercultural journeys abroad. The three findings are listed in coherence with the three main research questions and thematically presented across the eight narrative accounts. These findings are:

Finding 1: The implication of self-positioning shifts in the dynamics of intercultural becoming.

Finding 2: Negotiating the language-culture perspectives as dynamics of intercultural becoming.

Finding 3: Factors shaping international students' intercultural becoming dynamics during study abroad experience.

Each finding engages in a thematic examination of participants' narrative accounts, which is best chronologically presented in the form of themes categorization for a better illustration of the intercultural becoming dynamics of change. A prevailing thematic description dominates the data analysis, within which narratives in the form of quotes from the dataset are provided as evidence and clarifications on aspects of focus. Although the theoretical discussion in relation to the data is placed in **Chapter 5**, the emergent themes within each finding are theoretically grounded and intertwined narratively with the dataset generated. It is worth mentioning that all aspects of intercultural becoming dynamics of shift are to be addressed through a positioning model lens (Bamberg, 1997, 2011) (chapter 3, section 3.3.5.), which are explicitly pointed at whenever pertinent to the narrative's navigation.

4.1. Finding 1: The Implication of self-positioning shifts in the dynamics of intercultural becoming

Introduction

This finding discusses the intercultural participants' self-positioning process during the study abroad experience and the various intercultural evaluations of being and becoming intertwined throughout the journey of investigation. The data set demonstrated stereotypes as one prominent aspect in the processes of intercultural becoming and self-negotiations in the new intercultural environment during the period of research. In order to present the longitudinal element that reflects the data in its developmental chronology, participants' narratives have been discussed in a chain of exploratory thematic order spread along three rounds of interviews. This chain tells a story of change and progress and even fluctuation of salient aspects of self-negotiation and intercultural becoming dynamics in the new intercultural environments. These aspects are executed in three relevant themes labelled as follows:

- Theme 1: Insights into sojourners' stereotypes shifting Vs reality clashes.
- Theme 2: Stereotype shifting and self-positioning.
- Theme 3: Re-evaluating personal constructs as reflections on intercultural self-positioning.

These chronologically listed themes together contribute to an understanding of the participants' self-negotiation in the new intercultural environment. The first theme reflects data emerging in the first round of interviews, which discuss two major transformative stereotype trajectories and self-other negotiation, namely, the move from negative stereotypes about living in the UK to a positive reconstruction, and the move from positive stereotypes about living in the UK transforming into negative reconstruction. The second theme revolves around a discussion of narrative data elicited from the second round of interviews, which brings about participants' perceived self in the UK at the time of interview in comparison to that upon their first arrival to the UK, where they were engaged in a re-negotiation of intercultural self-being and implicit progress evaluation. It investigates two salient intercultural trajectory negotiations namely, the 'Us vs Them' inferiority complex (see **chapter 5, section 5.1.**) and the junctures of the intercultural self-being in light of transformative change. Finally, the third theme reflects narrative data analysis of the third set of interviews. This theme delves into the final negotiation of self-

positioning as reflected in stereotype processes change and a re-evaluation of cultural backgrounds, all as part of intercultural becoming dynamics of change. At each interview round participants reflected new perspectives and expressed different intercultural dynamics. As part of a multi-layered *Intercultural Becoming* process, participants' narratives mirrored significant dynamics of preconception clashes with new environments, unveiled various sources of stereotypes and factors affecting its shaping and reconstruction, and demonstrated the implications of these stereotypes on each participant's intercultural experience. All of these dynamics functioned in light of participants' personal, social, and cultural self-positioning shifts throughout the three interview intervals.

4.1.1. Theme 1: Insights Into sojourners' Stereotypes Vs Reality Clashes.

Whilst the focus is on participants' intercultural becoming dynamics of change, the dataset demonstrates that the cultural, ideological, and political tensions between countries in the Middle East and North Africa and those in Europe generated some fears of the unknown, which led to the formation of negative stereotypes by some participants. Nonetheless, other participants positive preconceptions were also noted. However, the shift in this perspective in relation to the intercultural experience of each participant varied significantly due to various reasons such as participants' personal growth, the degree of intercultural knowledge, and the unique upon arrival intercultural experience each participant possesses. As a result, when motivated to speak about their expectations pre-experiencing life in the UK in comparison with that after a period of time abroad, references to clashes of stereotypes with the intercultural encounters and reality were documented by all participants at differing time intervals and with varied impact on intercultural and personal self-perspective.

4.1.1.1. Negative to positive trajectory

Launching life in the UK with pre-existing negative stereotypes was a common feature that was declared by three out of the nine participants; these were: Sadja, Siham and Fares. They have explained that exposure to negative broadcasted information about the west and the perception of the west to other ethnic and religious groupings particularly, created some sort of fear of living abroad and being part of their society. These stereotypes according to them were the result of misleading media coverage. Once coming to the UK their stereotypes

clashed positively and proven to be reconstructed contributing to a change about their attitudes toward otherness and reduced their prejudices and biases about the other in general as a start.

Racism and islamophobia were the main two concerns Fares held in mind prior coming to the UK. He explained that these preconceptions were the result of first: his family fear of the west and second the image that media depicted especially in the recent few years because of occasional attacks on the Muslim community. The following narrative by fares is an exemplar of the negative misconceptions he held prior his arrival to the UK:

Researcher: “What were your expectations about living in the UK?”.

Fares: “ I thought that we’re gonna have non-stop studying hours, I thought we’re gonna face a lot of those people who are Islamophobic and all... that we will face a lot of racism issues, I thought stuff like it is not gonna be easy in general, some really negative thoughts... and about the positive thoughts the fact that I am gonna see a new city ..especially London...the fact that I’m travelling to a different country to see another culture. it was mysterious... I had those misconceptions and fears but still as an adventurous person I didn’t think of them in a really bad way”. **(Interview round 1)**

Despite holding these misconceptions in mind, Fares explained that most of his negative stereotypes about racism and islamophobia were not real or at least not to the extent he pictured in his mind once he spent some time in the UK. At this point he assumed a position in relation to the characters he mentioned in his narrative in the form of fears of a racist Islamophobic western society, which clearly reflects level 1 of Bamberg’s model (1997) of positioning in relation to other characters in the narrated event (see chapter 3, section 3.3.5). On the contrary he explained that some of his positive preconceptions especially autonomy and freedom of lifestyle pretty much resembled his expectations.

In the first interview Fares continuously referred to his religious identity and expressed that he was positively surprised that even within a non-Muslim environment and in a relatively short time he was able to meet some people from different religious streams who acted like Muslims without even realizing that. This according to Fares made him rethink to a certain extent those negative preconceptions about an Islamophobic, racist British context. I was able to locate the level of positioning he was engaged in at this point in the interview, as negotiated self-positioning has been clearly demonstrated in his narrative. (reflecting level 3 of

Bamberg's model that is positioning in relation to the self). I was keenly interested to understand how he negotiated this religious identity considering the different encounters he lived at the beginning of his life in the UK. The fact that religion was a recurrent segment in his narratives, made me go deeper by re-constructing his thoughts into an additional question to clarify more on this self-negotiation. In the following excerpt Fares explicitly expressed how correcting his misconceptions helped him become more open to the different/ similar other and his curiosity to know how people from the west see him as a person coming from an Arab background:

Researcher: "do you enjoy meeting people from new cultural backgrounds?"

Fares: "yeah, I become like... much more open minded ever since I came to the UK."

Researcher: "why?"

Fares: "first out of curiosity to know how British people think of me as an Arab or as person...or like as Muslim or someone who is foreigner and he is here in the UK and obviously to know about them, where they are from what do they do like ..."

Researcher: "so basically is for you to know what they think of you and for them to know what you think of them..."

Fares: "yeah exactly!" **(Interview round 1)**

The idea of classifying people in the UK into British and other-nationalities was apparent in most participants' perspectives to the other. Fares for example in the above excerpt was mainly interested at the beginning in what British people think of him as a foreigner or someone new to their society. This perception comes from the inherited belief that anyone from a European country is considered to be of a higher social status in comparison to one coming from a north African or middle eastern country. Such perspectives were reinforced by media bias, which created some sort of underestimation to oneself coming from an Arab or Muslim background, which is exactly what Said (1978) refers to as 'orientalism', that is the inherited idea of a western upper hand over the orient who "...themselves reiterating European superiority over oriental backwardness" (ibid, 1978, p.7). In the case of Fares, being in the UK meant exploring the new environment and trying to leave an impression for the British people to reflect upon as them being of higher status simply for belonging to the west on a geographical basis. At this point I was able to note Fares's implicit indication of his position in relation to the narrative itself, and his effort to explain how he perceives himself in relation to what is being narrated (level2 of Bamberg's positioning model: position in

relation to the narrative). However, previously held stereotypes of this kind by Fares were corrected after spending some time in the UK and meeting people from different cultural backgrounds (not only British according to Fares) adjusted the manner with which to perceive the other (as British or from other cultural backgrounds). And by the time I interviewed him for the first time he has already started rethinking his preconceptions. When I asked Fares about the reason behind enjoying meeting people from new cultural background, he referred to the fact that correcting his misconceptions changed his views to new intercultural environment and to the way he initiates and maintains his social network (level1 of Bamberg's positioning model: position in relation to other characters). In the following excerpt, I purposefully added a layer of complexity to my question to Fares, and I intentionally delivered the question in a way expressing my own reflection on the fact that I have seen Islamic values among non-Muslims I have met:

Fares: "I always had this misconception that ...I wouldn't say British...but all non-Muslim peoplethey are partying, sleeping around... you know like they do all those things that we Muslims consider notoriousbut that's not the case ... actually you can find a non-Muslim who does like really Islamic stuff...(pause)..."

Researcher: "you mean like someone who is non-Muslim, but acts with Islamic values?"

Fares: yeah ...that's it...that was really heart touching for me... so my friend is Indian...but ...like the way he talks to me... the way he treats me as friend...like in so many situations the things that he did to me... I am sure a Muslim friend may not do it" **(Interview round 1)**

In the above excerpt Fares's narrative was about his Indian flatmate, whom when he met for the first time, was already holding the idea that he would never be friends with an Indian, knowing that their religion is completely different from his, as they worship cows according to him. However, with time Fares realised that this guy respected his religion, cooked halal meat for him, and treated him with values that even some Muslims would not treat him with. At this point Fares explained that this guy and other like him, whom he met in different circumstances changed a lot of his misconception about other people's religions, and even the way he initiates communication with new people he met afterwards. He clarified that meeting such people made him rethink that Islamic values of sympathy, respect and honesty are not Islam-exclusive, yet are humanity trait dependent. At this level, I was in a position

where Fares was explaining the shift in perspective, values and beliefs about a sensitive topic like religion. Where necessary, I was not hesitant to reflect my own opinion on a minimal level without intruding into his narrative, yet with a manner that gives him confidence to be more explicit and rigorous. Therefore, I was able to sense the tone of his positioning level as he was delivering what he feels on the site of the interview to me as an audience he trusts, an act that mirrors his position on level 2 of Bamberg's (1978) model (level 2: position in relation to the narrative) (chapter 5, section 3.3.5). For Fares living a new intercultural experience did not only reconstruct his positive and negative stereotypes, but also paved the way to a new mechanism of considering the other, which helped him achieve some satisfaction about his life in the UK so far.

Similarly, yet with a different stereotype shifting progress, Siham had negative stereotypes about the west and how islamophobia affected her perspective prior coming to the UK. She conveyed on several occasions during the interview the contradiction she always thought it would be in relation to her religion and the actual intercultural life she expected to encounter in the UK. However, once she started her new intercultural experience abroad, Siham expressed a minimal shift in perspective (compared to Fares) and in comparison, with her preconceptions. She actually narrated her shift as such:

Researcher: "What were your expectations about living in the UK?"

Siham: "I had many expectations, I thought being a female Muslim hijabi alone in a western country, especially with this problem of islamophobia ...so it was a bit scary, but I was surprised some people were really open and we became friends even ...so.... Perhaps I was afraid for nothing...you never know". **(Interview round 1)**

According to Siham islamophobia was also one of her main concerns especially with the fact that she believed female Muslims tend to be recognized easily in western countries than males because of the scarf. At this point, Siham was in a process of positioning herself in relation to people she would meet in the UK, which is a clear reflection of the first level of Bamberg's (1978) positioning, that is assuming a position in relation to characters in her narrative (level 1: position in relation to other characters). In most narratives of Siham, she referred to a clear distinction between a conservative Algerian background and the UK culture, which has generated a fear from all signs of Islamic identity. With this perspective in mind, Siham considered herself an exotic to the British culture. Although she confessed that

her fears and negative stereotypes have been partially falsified after spending some time in the UK such as the existence of racism acts and islamophobia; the feeling of being a foreigner remained the same based on the belief that the Algerian and British cultures are distinctively different. The position Siham assumed here, was mainly in relation to the narrative, where she explained to me her perspective on distinctive features of the group she belongs to and other people she met in the UK (this reflects level 2 of Bamberg's positioning model in narrative interviews, that is a position in relation to the narrative being told) as she clarified in the following quote:

Researcher: "do you enjoy meeting people from new cultural backgrounds?"

Siham: "yeah I love that..."

Researcher: "why is that?"

Siham: "it's one of the best things you get to do here, you get to know new cultures...new food... yeah ...it's interesting something exotic... for example for them we are exotic... but they are the same for us". **(Interview round 1)**.

From what the participant said, it is clear that the perspective of being different is not exclusive to how Siham perceive people in the cultural environment but also presuming that the other people in the UK perceive her different from them. This assumption (whether being real or not) demonstrates Siham's self-positioning in what she described as a western country which assumedly is perceiving her as exotic, and therefore assuming a position in relation to the self and questioning her perceived self upon answering the above questions (reflecting level3 of Bamberg's positioning model that is expressing a position of the self in the narrative in relation to herself). There is some resonance here with Kelly's (1955) suggestion on personal constructs being the interpretation of the other 'validation' to the self, where Siham in this case was able to alter some of her stereotypes with new ones and tried to follow a new strategy in experiencing and sensing the new cultural setting. When I asked Siham in the first interview about what have changed in her perspectives, she explicitly explained that after coming to the UK she learned to be a little bit resilient and give some room for establishing new connections without pre-existing doubts or fears and experiencing the other on the mere situation. As I was vividly constructing this narrative particularly with Siham, I was not hesitant to deliver my knowledge about her religious orientation and gave more explicit information to reassure that I have understood her well. Therefore, Siham was clearly expressing a

position she is assuming in front of me as an audience, and in relation to the story of her resilient attitudes after living in the UK. Evidently at this point she reflected Bamberg's level2 positioning in relation to the narrative she was narrating on the set of the interview, the conversation was as follows:

Siham: "I always had this with the veil so they ... I have one friend from Ghana who is also a friend of my flatmate (who is Christian she explained in a different quote) ... he was like "I am your brother why don't you let me hug you" (she laughs) ... and my friend told him don't touch her she's untouchable (laughs) ..."

Researcher: "Ok it has to do with an Islamic rule that women do not shake hands with man".

Siham: "Exactly yeah ..."

Researcher: "Can you describe what have changed about your views to new cultural backgrounds after coming to the UK?"

Siham: "I learned that you don't have to be always careful, you just let people in and get to know them....so... I learned to be a little bit less conservative".

Researcher: "Were you conservative before?"

Siham: "I was that kind of people who, if don't know you, I wouldn't talk to you".

(Interview round 1)

Being conservative for Siham was not only associated with a personality trait of hers yet is much of an inherited ideological and religious concept in her background, which she occasionally addressed in her narratives. In the above quote Siham explained that despite her being open to know people from different religious streams after she spent three months in the UK, preserving her Islamic identity was not a choice, yet it was part of her social network establishment strategy and was keen to make people she meets aware of, to avoid any kind of misunderstanding. Therefore, looking at her positioning in this narrative, Siham reflected level 1 of Bamberg's model, as she was narrating her story in relation to other characters in the context of narrative, hereby the people she met in the UK (level 1: position in relation to other characters).

On a deeper level the course of stereotype reconstruction and rethinking the new environment for Siham was slightly different from that of Fares, who tried to minimize all the barriers to establish new connections without trying to establish some kind of pre-agreement on how to treat or being treated from new people he meets. Perhaps this slight discrepancy might be gender-based as Siham was very cautious when it came to matters of greeting or

other sensitive behaviours from new people and experiences she encounters. In fact, it is hard to decide on what kind of justifications behind this discrepancy, as “those experiencing multiple re-entry, whether in the form of transnational migration or multiple sojourns, report experiencing a compounded sense of confusion with their place in the world. Personal identity, interpersonal relationships, and societal norms for these individuals are heavily affected (Onwumechili, Nwosu, Jacksinn, & James-Hughes, 2003)” (young et al., 2014, p3). This sense of destabilization can result in different reactions from individuals experiencing life abroad, and there is no doubt that they try to negotiate their identity existence in this new environment through the communicative events and the new people they meet. In the case of Siham, finding a communicative medium was one way of her identity negotiation, through setting certain boundaries and being flexible in other cases.

Like Fares and Siham, Sadja’s negative stereotypes emanated from the Algerian vs British comparison with tipping the cuff in favour of a superior British culture.

Researcher: “what were your expectations about living in the UK?”

Sadja: “Academically, I expected it to be really hard for me to cope.... because I was expecting it to be different from the Algerian universities and the Algerian program and all that ...soo.... I was really afraid ...I was like.... can I meet the expectations there? ...is it going to be easy for me to study in a foreign country? [...] socially....it is like ...and culturally and how will I cope here I also expected it to be hard, as I said this is my first time away from home... [...] it’s a totally different country in another continent ... so yeah... I was expecting it to be really hard for me, I was afraid, I was scared to be here in the first time”. (**Interview round 1**)

It is clear from the above quote that Sadja had some negative preconceptions about living in the UK based on the ‘differences’ stereotypes. Her idea about living abroad was mainly about the geographical distance and how different this country would be from hers. So basically, her fear was revolving around the differences that she might not know about and whether she would be up to the challenge of being in a foreign country that is projected by media as economically, culturally, and politically of higher status than Algeria as a third world country. In fact, when discussing Sadja’s expectations prior coming to the UK, she was very meticulous which encouraged me to go deeper and try to understand the different reasons to these fears she was referring to. This deeper conversation made Sadja in attempt to define her self-positioning to me as an audience on the interview set, which is clearly level 2 of positioning

in relation the narrative (level 2 of Bamberg's positioning model, that is positioning in relation to the audience the narrative was told to). By so doing, I was able to understand the media influence on these participants' stereotypes formation, particularly when cross-examining Sadja's perspectives with other participants' narratives.

As I have explained previously in Fares's narrative, the fear of not being up to the challenge and expectations of a much higher cultural environment was one of the negative stereotypes that Sadja held prior coming to the UK. However, after a while Sadja's negative stereotypes clashed with a different reality leading to the alteration of preconceptions of a hard life in the UK with positive perspectives and an elevated self-esteem. I was able to detect this as sadja was involved in a self-evaluation episode in the narrative down below (which reflects level 3 of Bamberg's positioning: position in relation to the self). This was clearly apparent in Sadja's expression of her biggest doubt regarding language and communication skills with new people, particularly the idea of not being understood by people or her failure to understand the British accent. These stereotypes according to Sadja are the result of a whole linguistic program in Algeria that English is not part of, and watching English spoken on media added some complexity to her stereotyping process. This was mainly the result of spoken English in everyday communication being completely different of that used within the borders of the classroom. However, despite all what she had in mind, Sadja expressed her satisfaction with the intercultural reality she encountered after coming to UK, and that she was able to communicate with people and being understood without much complexity as was expected. Sadja explicitly demonstrated some of the anticipated difficulties or easy aspects about living in the UK, which was in response to my direct question on these difficulties:

Researcher: "What did you find easy or difficult about living in the UK?"

Sadja: "What was easy for me...or what was easier than I expected was communicating with people. I didn't find a problem in the language as I expected. I thought language will be a problem for me when I travel to the UK...because English is not really spoken in Algeria ...I just learned it from TV ...it was mostly from American movies. So thought maybe the accent will be a problem for me... [...] so it was easier than expected, maybe this is because I am generally an independent person [...], perhaps because I was really afraid, I wasn't really disappointed ... perhaps if I thought it is going to be so easy for me perhaps, I would meet more difficulties, that is more disappointment." **(Interview round 1)**

In response to my question about what changed about her perspective to experiencing new intercultural environments, Sadjia explained that living in the UK even for a relatively short time back then:

Sadjia: “makes me appreciate more my culture and maybe question some aspects of my culture [...] I learned to be more open and not to take everything as offending ...just chill and try to understand the other’s perspective, it’s better for the communication”. **(Interview round 1)**

Linking the two previous narratives, made it clear that after experiencing life in the UK, getting rid of the fear of inferiority, and raising self-esteem through overcoming the communication barrier, Sadjia was able to correct her misconceptions through intercultural experience. Indeed, she used her previous negative stereotypes about a better west VS a worst east culture to learn openness to the other through appreciating her cultural background and being resilient in accepting other people’s worldviews to ensure a successful communication. As Sadjia was explaining these altered perspectives I was simultaneously trying to locate her positioning level during these narratives. Adding more follow up clarification questions made Sadjia portray herself in front of me as someone with new self-perspectives (clearly level 2 of Bamberg’s 1997 positioning model: which is positioning in relation to the narrative being told in front of me as the audience).

4.1.1.2. Positive to negative trajectory

Moving from positive to negative stereotypes was also documented among the nine participants. Meriem, Rym, Nadia and Amina are four examples of how exposure to media and perception of information is different. In the previous three narrative accounts of Fares, Siham and Sadjia, media was confirmed to be the source of negative stereotypes (mainly islamophobia and racism) held by participants. Surprisingly, the other four participants mentioned above have explained that media was also the source of their positive stereotypes about living in the UK, which for them projected an open, understanding, and welcoming environment. This brought to my attention how the same source of stereotypes was exposed to, treated, and talked about differently by participants. The information imparted by media to the participants over years, saying that written and broadcasted, have contributed to the

construction of various types of stereotypes, each depending on his own worldview and the critical analytic level each participant possesses.

I interviewed Meriem for the first time when she had been in the UK for approximately five months. By that time Meriem described herself as still struggling to go out of her own bubble, which she was not enjoying it that much. When I asked Meriem about her expectations prior coming to the UK, she was assuming an in between position expressing uncertainty about how much she was expecting about living in the UK and in what way she thinks she would be.

Meriem was uncertain about how cultural life in the UK would be to the extent that she expected too much in her opinion. One of the most notable features in Meriem's preconceptions is optimism. She had an optimistic perspective about life in the UK and the British people as she referred to them, and that was evidently explicit when she said: "...I realized that there is much to know and there is a good chance for me to become a whole new person".

With regard to Meriem's upon arrival intercultural reality, I asked her about what was similar and what was different to what she expected. At this point she was a bit hesitant and clarified if she is allowed to say anything in this interview and whether she would be identified in the thesis. At this point Meriem was on a level 2 positioning in relation to the audience, that is me the researcher (meaning level2 position in relation to the narrative in Bamberg's 1997 positioning model). Precisely, Meriem was trying to establish confidence about perspectives she anticipated are highly sensitive to be expressed in an interview. My reminder of the confidentiality and anonymity of the interviews encouraged Meriem to express her disappointment about certain aspects and the sameness of some others. Therefore, I was on a level 2 positioning, which is placing myself through narratives to identify the connection between me and the participant. This mutual positioning in relation to the audience established a more trusting relationship that resulted in rigorous data elicitation and meticulous narratives.

Researcher: "What did you find similar or different about living in the UK in comparison to your previous expectations?"

Meriem: "...it's a bit similar and a bit different at the same time ...again (laughs). Similar in the fact that most of the things that I have learned about by myself through

Google, YouTube and so on and so forth were pretty much exactly the same... so I found myself kinda ready to...and prepared to... live my life, to shop, to do the groceries without any difficulty...the thing that I have found different however ...is the fact that...and I don't know if I am allowed to say this out loud in an interview or not.. is the fact that I think...British people are racists. This is a big difficulty that I have faced... and a big difference in what I was expecting...because when watching for instance British movies, series, documentaries.... I've always thought that they are openminded, and antiracists but the fact is they are completely different of what I have expected them to be. However, this is not a generalization ...I'm talking about those people whom I had a conversation with or whom I have dealt with in a way or another." **(Interview round 1)**

The sameness in Meriem's expectations were substantially related to dealing with everyday basic life requirements such as grocery, shopping, and studying, which she learned about by herself through reading and watching British related shows. However, her disappointment was greatly related to the intercultural life and engagement in the new cultural environment. Meriem's stereotypes were mainly positive preconception about the 'other' she was expecting to meet in the new cultural setting (expressing narratives about herself in relation to other characters, which represents level 2 positioning in Bamberg's positioning model). Her main source of these positive preconceptions was media. However, racism was the first negation to her positive preconceptions as she was surprised that what was depicted in the media about the open-mindedness and antiracism of western life was delusional. I was keen to explore what was the effect of this confrontation in Meriem's new reality on her intercultural upon arrival stance. Therefore, once proceeding with the interview I was triggering how she started dealing with the new people she kept on meeting once her positive stereotyping was met with disappointment. Surprisingly, Meriem did not face this disappointment very well and she created a stronger comfort zone that she did not cross and did not let anyone in especially those whom she called "local people". Another consequence to this is that Meriem refused to leave her room very often and she was diagnosed with social anxiety, which inhibited her from initiating and widening her social network. Looking closely at the narratives expressing these intercultural changes in Meriems life, made me realise the evaluation phase and reconstruction of Meriem's preconceptions leading to positioning herself in isolation (this represents level 3 positioning of Bamberg's model in relation to the

self). In the following excerpt Meriem explicitly explained how she refused to leave her “bubble” and feeling afraid of the new society:

Researcher: “and did you do any effort to leave your ‘bubble as you said?”

Meriem: “[...] it’s difficult for me to distinguish racists from antiracists ... or from normal people. That’s why I do not even try to approach British people... although I like to...because it’s a good thing to make friends from all over the world, this is a big issue for me”. **(Interview round 1).**

Meriem confirmed this tendency in a later question about why she is not attending social activities and she replied:

Researcher:

Meriem: “[...] I don’t... I hope I would, but I don’t...I have... I will tell you a secret! when coming here to Britain I felt like I was in a bubble, I wanted to get out of my bubble...my comfort zone let me say... I couldn’t... I fell into depression, [...] I then wanted to do what he (therapist) told me to do, which is to join those social activities ...but I didn’t”.

(Interview round 1)

Reading this excerpt on its own, one might mistakenly think that what Meriem is going through was just the result of her inability to cope with life in a new cultural setting. However, because this narrative was narrated as a result of questioning her refusal to join intercultural activities, she logically referred to her fear of the society, which was originated from her disappointment of the intercultural life in the UK, that she chronologically divided as pre and post arrival to a new cultural environment. This suggest that Meriem did not only reconstruct her positive stereotypes about living abroad but also lived a negative effect of this reconstruction at the beginning of her experience abroad. Suffice to say that Meriem’s positive pre-conceptions about British people clashed negatively with the reality she encountered at the beginning of her life in the UK, what is more surprising is the perspective she acquired about herself and how the new other she meets constantly presumably perceive her. Although not explicitly labelling herself as a ‘foreigner’ or ‘outsider’, Meriem considered herself different to the people in the UK, who in return consider her different as well in her opinion (this represents level 1 Bamberg’s 1997 model that is positioning in relation to other characters in her narrative). Indeed, this perspective went beyond just a matter of an opinion for Meriem, it actually had a direct effect on her intercultural experience and her life choices and decisions when it came to establishing new relations or considering social and cultural

activities. Simply said, in Meriem's projected reality, the different intercultural encounters she experienced in the UK, resulted in the feeling of isolation and not fitting in the new environment. This raises speculations on the Study Abroad experience as whole being projected in literature as one that develops interpersonal skills (Davies, 2012). Although this might be the case at the level of linguistic and pragmatic abilities, yet there is no certainty or generalization that an academic sojourn can have direct positive effect on participants' interpersonal and cultural outlook.

When I asked Meriem about whether she attends any social or cultural activities and on what basis she chose where to or not to participate, she expressed her fear of attending such events if ever she would be different to the people around her:

Meriem: "[...] I would choose them (social activities) based on the fact that those conducting the activity are of different nationalities ...because I don't like to be the only one different".

Researcher: "so are you expecting differences from people rather than being similar to you?"

Meriem: "Not rather than being similar to me, but rather than being similar to each other and me the only one different...this is my fear". **(Interview round 1)**

It is clear from the above quote that Meriem was not only afraid of being different from the others but the others themselves to be similar to each other and assuming that she would be the only one different, hence, she was very selective about the social activities and gatherings she would attend. Based on her narratives the fear of Meriem comes from the fact that she thinks being in an intercultural situation where she is the only one different, and by different she meant from other people of British origins; would make her the subject of discussion among people she meets. This clearly reflects a level 1 self-positioning in relation to other characters in her narrative (according to Bamberg's (1997) positioning model). Therefore, she tried to limit her intercultural contact to only those from non-British nationalities. Again, the categorization of the British as the other denotes her otherization process as a British vs the rest, rather than her vs the other (potentially any other nationality). Although Meriem was quite aware of the importance of avoiding such assumptions and generalization about some instances she described as racist acts, she unconsciously made predictions and stereotypical explanations of large ethnic and national cultures, which was echoed in her cultural life

decisions and trajectory. Suffice to say is that when Meriem experienced the gap between her expectations and the lived reality, the sense of 'large culture' (Holliday, 1999) appeared to the surface in her narratives and lead to an essentialist categorization of us versus them (Wodak, 2007) and therefore the formation of new stereotype that might be difficult to alter or eliminate.

Similar to the positive preconceptions of Meriem, Nadia was expecting to live in an environment full of easy friendship making and a wealth of connections with native- English speaking people. The following narrative demonstrates Nadia's preconceptions prior actually setting foot in the UK:

Nadia: "according to my previous background about the UK when I was in Algeria, I was expecting that people from the UK ...I was expecting to live with people who are so funny and so open. I don't know ...to be more integrated in the society. But when I came I realized that this is not the perfect image that I expected...for example that people are more organized... actually they are more polite and more serious for me, I expected that people here are more fun like we see in the movies but the reality is not that much, they were not that fun, they try to make themselves fun but for me I don't see them funny, I don't know why ...I don't feel it..". **(Interview round 1)**.

It is clear from the quote above that Nadia had some positive preconceptions about native people and building connections with them easily. However, throughout the first interview she confessed a view-changing process once she spent around three or four months in the UK. The change in perspective for Nadia was not only related to her previous prejudgment of British people's characters as friendly and easy going, yet it was also about a re-evaluation of her domestic life in comparison to that she encountered in the UK. Indeed, Nadia noted that her expectation of a more civilized west was not the case, and that Algeria is not too far behind as she continued in the narrative below:

Nadia: "I had a lot of stereotypes that have changed especially the UK, I felt that it is a perfect world to be honest with you... I expected that it is (the British culture) higher in everything as compared to Algeria, but the reality is different ...I realized that there isn't much difference between the cultures, between the academic system etc..." **(Interview round 1)**.

It must be emphasized that Nadia did not explicitly owe this shift to the fact that her positive stereotypes were not totally encountered in reality, yet her plans shifted from making friendships with native English speakers for the sake of acquiring their cultural and linguistic aspects, to a plan of widening her social network for the sake of understanding how other people think and speak about their cultural backgrounds. In this vein Jackson (2014) that sojourners tend to alter their intercultural objectives from sociolinguistic experiences (a focus on the linguistic aspect of the experience) to engage in more intercultural heterogeneity. Therefore, Nadia constantly tried to step out of her loneliness and isolation (reflecting level 3 of Bamberg's model of positioning in relation to the self), as she explained in the following narrative once asked about her solution to pursue a more social life:

Researcher: "[...] And what did you do?"

Nadia: "The first thing that helped me when I came in [this place] is ... the thing that helped me a lot is the conversational club that I attended as part of the coaching for academic English ...and I found it so helpful because it gathered people from different backgrounds [...] and this helped me a lot to acquire the communicative skill...and helped me to get out of that loneliness and isolation". (**Interview round 1**)

Joining the conversational club was an opportunity where Nadia was able to overcome several intercultural fears such as asking questions and initiating conversations and becoming more confident in talking about her own cultural background and representing it in social gatherings. With such a statement Nadia was positioning herself in the narrative in relation to herself, where she narrated how she overcome her fears and doubts about communication, which mad me able to sense a level 3 positioning in her narrative (positioning in relation to the self in Bamberg's (1997) model). This clearly explains Nadia's strategy in reconstructing and rethinking her own stereotypes and exploit her previous experience in a positive manner to ensure future intercultural success in any environment.

More obvious was Rym's disappointment of the new cultural context in comparison to her previous expectations prior coming to the UK.

Researcher: "How similar or different did you find living in the UK in comparison to your expectations?".

Rym: "I think it's different, I mean my expectations...they haven't been met... let's say...I mean to learn about the culture of a country you have first to engage and interact with the local...people. And the locals generally are not easy to be reached...if

you know what I mean. [...] I can refer to my previous answer ... I mentioned at the beginning that I am a very sociable person so generally I make friends very easily ...but not here in the UK...so I mean I expected to have a lot of friends from the UK but most of my friends are foreigners”. **(Interview round 1)**

Rym had high hopes to make long lasting friendships with the “British” knowing that she knows herself as a sociable person. However, her optimistic expectations were not met, as she was not able to widen her social networks and initiate any relationships with the “locals”, by that referring to the British people. Much like the previous participants’ perspective, Rym divided people in the new cultural setting to the British as those who are native English speakers and people of other nationalities including fellow international students. By doing this I sensed during the interview that Rym was in a process of positioning herself in relation to the characters of her narrative (this represents level 1 of Bamberg’s positioning model). Making these divisions was not exclusive to Rym only yet all participants have demonstrated this sense of destabilization (Pellegrino Aveni, 2007), which I believe was one way of finding a sense of belonging in the intercultural environment especially during the first-round interviews, and therefore making attempts to self-position within these categories. By the time I interviewed Rym she had already spent around 4 months, a time that she found difficulty approaching British people and decided to surround herself with fellow international students.

Therefore, when prompted to speak about the shift in perspective regarding living new intercultural experiences after spending time in the UK, Rym expressed her disappointment and clarified that despite some negative stereotypes she held before, she had high hopes for a rich social life, which unfortunately was not the case. The idea of reaching the “local” people for Rym was a prerequisite as this was what to be defined as making friendships in the UK for her. To this end, and unlike the first narrative of Meriem who completely denied any efforts from her part to communicate with people, Rym established a new plan for herself to try to get over the idea of insisting on approaching and making new connections with British people solely and focus on being in connection with friends regardless of what cultural background they are coming from. Thus far it seems evident that Rym’s perspective to herself being in a new intercultural setting revolves around being the Arab foreigner who is different from the west (this positioning reflects Rym’s perspective of

herself to herself, that is a level 3 positioning in Bamberg's positioning model). This was well established in her own words:

Rym: "I think since I'm coming from an Arab background generally, we are really different ...but this doesn't mean that we do not share similarities".

Although Rym admitted the existence of some shared similarities between her cultural background and the new cultural environment, the mode of 'my culture' and 'their culture' is apparent. Perhaps what made me relate to this concept is my observation of how much Rym was indulged in reconstructing negative stereotypes that is based on cultural differences she might have encountered and noticed after spending a short time abroad. In one of her narratives, she narrated an intercultural situation where she felt both misunderstood and offended. Rym expressed her inability to establish a successful communication with the potentially different other to her.

Rym: "I was attending a course with a teacher... she was native British ...it was obvious that she is a patriot if this how we call them, means she loves her country a lot ... it was really cold that day but you know here in the UK even it is not winter you feel cold in the morning and then it is sunny at 4 so this happens a lot here in the UK. I had a flue that day and I had a hat on my head and then she said like (ironically) ' are you feeling cold, come on it's really sunny'...she didn't even give me time to reply that I was sick and then I said: ' yeah it was a bit cold in the morning and then it is sunny now you see this happens only in the UK, you can have four seasons in one day.' I was just joking to her but I don't know how she understood that but I felt like she felt offended then she said in a very rude way: 'yeah you see this is the UK we are unique'. I felt offended as well because she answered me that way although I was really nice to her but I couldn't accept that I am a patriot as well I'm very nationalist, I love my country as well but I do not react the same way she did. I kept thinking about that all day, but...thinking about this twice made me think maybe we do not belong to the same culture we think differently" (**Interview round 1**).

Interestingly, Rym considered the misunderstanding that happened between her and the teacher the result of cultural differences. In her opinion, coming from an Arab ethnic background and settling in the UK, one should focus on learning the differences to avoid misunderstandings and communication breakdowns with people particularly British (the

narrative demonstrates Rym's attempt to position herself in relation to the characters of her narrative, which clearly reflects level 1 of Bamberg's 1997 positioning model, that is positioning in relation to the characters of the narrative). The label that Rym assigned to herself, and the teacher 'patriot' was significant in the sense that her explanation to the teacher's behaviour was related to the perspective Rym assumed the teacher has about people from outside the UK. Indeed, this gives a hint of how Rym perceives both herself and how she anticipates people perceive her in the UK as a foreigner who is different to the British culture. I believe this goes in line with what Giroux (2002) argue for regarding the impact of global discourses on the creation of social and cultural inequities, which eventually lead to people in different cultural settings to position themselves in relation to these wider social structures. In the case of Rym in the above narrative both parties in the communicative event seem to assume a position that each of them assigned to themselves and the other while constructing the mentioned cultural reality. However, what happened with Rym reflects what Butler (1999) describe as 'resistance' to these structural impositions and engaging in a process of reconstruction and renegotiation of these power laden positioning through communication. Therefore, Rym was in a process of negotiating her position as part of the dynamic dialogic construction of the self in opposition the other in communication (Hermans, 2009).

Despite confessing the existence of possible similarities between the two national cultures Algeria and the UK, Rym explicitly acknowledged her interest in considering and educating herself of the differences as they are the source of intercultural learning for her, and she made a causal-effect relationship between doing research in intercultural studies and successful communication. This is well established in her own narrative:

Rym: "I am really interested in learning these differences, not only about the body language, but in general the culture, the food, the lifestyle of the people...yeah...[.] this is actually why I am doing a study in this field...because I love the differences [...]"

(Interview round 1)

At this phase Rym's positive stereotypes reconstruction of an understanding, open, British cultural setting was met with disappointment and was tightly related to the clashes of those judgments with some incidental intercultural situations. However, such a shift for Rym was not an obstacle for her to establish and maintain social relations with new people from various cultural backgrounds.

In the same vein, although expecting a difficult academic system, Amina's expectation highly resembled that of the last three participants in being generally positive about living in the UK. In the following narrative Amina explains how her positive preconceptions about building a wide social network was met with disappointment:

Researcher: "[...] and what were your expectation at the social cultural levels?"

Amina: "Concerning about being engaged in the society I expected that I come and make British friends, I mean not international friends, and it's hard for that to be... for instance in Algeria you can take the bus and then you meet a girl and you become friends easily, you can just share your stories at the moment but here it is so so so difficult...they have to trust you first ...till now I didn't make any friend because it is so hard". **(Interview round 1)**

In the above quote Amina clarified that prior coming to the UK, she was planning a rich, easy making social circle based on the information media projected on a welcoming, tolerant west. However, the first four months in the UK made her substitute her positive stereotypes with a judgemental conclusion that making connections with British people is far from reaching. She believed that for a successful journey abroad and to get the most out of it, it is crucial to establish connections with the English native-speakers rather than those of other nationalities including fellow international students (reflecting level1 position in relation to other characters in Bamberg's 1997 positioning model (chapter 3, section 3.3.5)). Added to the surprising complexity of friendship establishment Amina encountered at her early experience, is the shift of perspective about an anticipated accepting, tolerant west. Unfortunately, Amina throughout the interview continued to express the unexpected deception of media and its effect on the formation of stereotypes that clashed negatively with the intercultural reality she encountered at the early days of her experience. The following quote from Amina is typical to the responses that appeared in the last three narrative accounts:

Amina: "On the social level my expectations was that they (British people) are as they show in media that they are open-minded, accept the other a lot! And so on. Yes, there are people who accept you as you are but not all of them... you can see that people look at you somehow different because of the way you are dressing, although they accept same-sex marriage and so on although they accept all the differences... so we are different too!... for instance, they accept transgender but they don't accept you wearing something differently so there are things I expected that it would be ok...

my way of clothing something like wearing the scarf but it is not especially on the religious level". (**Interview round 1**).

Amina made clear her alternative perspective about the west as being intolerant to people's differences and precisely Muslim differences. Regardless of whether Amina accept the differences she has mentioned above or not, it appears that she deprecated the way people in the UK accept abnormal human behaviours (according to her religious beliefs) such as same-sex marriage and transgender, and do not seem to tolerate the way she is dressing, here refereeing to the scarf. Furthermore, it seems apparent from the above narrative that Amina considers herself different to the individuals she met in the new intercultural environment based on the premise that they perceive her different as well, because of her outfit and the scarf precisely as a sign of her Islamic identity (Amina is engaged in positioning in relation to narratives, meaning in front of me as the researcher, this reflects level 2 of Bamberg's (1997) positioning model). This emphasizes Rich and Troudi's (2006) assumption on the effect of larger political and social structures on students experiences abroad and how the generated positions (imposed or embraced) in these experiences tend to either reinforce or reconstruct positive or negative stereotypes.

Overall, the four participants have made a shift in perspective after coming the UK, which included reconstructing the positive stereotypes, and substitute them with negative preconceptions mainly about a previously false representation of an accepting, tolerant and welcoming west they received by media.

Tarek's narrative account was different from all the rest of participants mentioned above. In fact, it was challenging to categorise his narrative account to fit into the two stereotype shift streams discussed in the previous two sub-sections. Tarek constantly referred to his research in intercultural communication, and in his narratives revolved around a discussion on the non-essentialist perspective to culture. I was keen to know if being immersed in the intercultural field would have a certain effect on intercultural becoming dynamics in general and self-positioning through the stereotyping process shift of Tarek. As a matter of fact, Tarek's narratives set a critical tone by linking the knowledge in the intercultural field to the actual experience of one. This was clearly stated by Tarek when I

asked him if his views to new intercultural environment changed once coming to the UK and how he faced the intercultural reality:

Tarek: “My perspectives started changing even before coming to the UK...so when I went to the UK, I started feeling that what I was reading was actually the case. So, if I went to the UK without reading those things about essentialism and non-essentialism it wouldn't be the same [...] ...so this helped me to reflect on my personal trajectories”.

(Interview round 1)

Tarek's narrative conveyed a connection between his research in intercultural studies and his ability to face the new intercultural reality with minimal effect of stereotyping. Although he explained that the shift of his perspective to living in a new intercultural environment pre-existed his travel to the UK, he admitted that he had some preconceptions, which he owed to the fact that knowing about an intercultural context and living in one is different. Hence, there was a recognition by Tarek that he had some preconception either positive or negative but dealing with them was dependent on his knowledge in the intercultural field. It is at this level, particularly when discussing studies in intercultural communication with Tarek, that I was a real mediator when discussing both my scholarly contribution through my research, and the actual construction of the narratives regarding the participant's intercultural experience. It was challenging to make a clear cut on when to interfere and when to back out, yet Tarek himself contributed to building the flow of narrative construction in a way that neither threaten his personal space nor ignoring my knowledge as the researcher. Therefore, both Tarek and I were in a level 2 self-positioning in front of each other (level 2 of Bamberg's model, that is positioning in relation to the narrative/ audience to whom the story is told). The following two narratives are taken from two different time intervals in the interview, yet they address the same idea, it explicitly explains how Tarek's stereotypes emerged and the manner he confronted his intercultural reality with.

Researcher: “What were your expectation about living in the UK?”

Tarek: “My expectations! ... my academic expectations ...I was expecting like...an intellectual environment where study and academia are given much value...because I used to think that it is a bit different than Algeria [...] but it was not the case. I was also building my own trajectory as a person and kinda revising things...I used to have like...preconceptions about many things in the UK and having many stereotypes but after that ...when you go to this new environment you find out that many things are not actually what is sold out in media”. **(Interview round 1)**

“I used to have like one version of things... there is one version of treating people... that all people are kind...there is one accent ...I don't know...everything ..like one version of everything and especially when you do research in intercultural studies which is my case, you start realising that there are many versions of everything and these versions are not place dependent they are not only in the UK...but they exist everywhere”. **(Interview round 1)**

Tarek was reassuring his perspective on the effect of doing intercultural research on his stereotyping process and living generally in an intercultural environment all along his narratives. He admitted that having stereotypes on a certain aspect or environment is part of human nature, what really matters is how to use these stereotypes in future intercultural encounters. Rethinking own trajectory and reconstructing preconceptions was part of Tarek's intercultural experience since he set foot in the UK (that reflects a level 3 position in relation to the self in Bamberg's 1997 positioning model). He was building new personal trajectories on the ashes or failure of previous ones. This was evident in facing his intercultural reality, which contradicted most of his preconceptions:

Tarek: “Some things were similar...some things were different, but they were not up to my expectations. What I expected to be similar was actually different...and what I expected to be different was actually similar”. **(Interview round 1)**

To this end, Tarek's intercultural experience in the new environment, was partially set free from the effect of any stereotypes that were previously held. This according to him did not only help in establishing a successful intercultural experience but also prepared him for future stereotypical reconstruction that is guided by a multi version of knowing and understanding. That is what made him able to treat people at the mere situation regardless of any cultural identifiers of any kind. The other for Tarek is not necessarily different and if so, he is not place dependent (reflects level 1 position in relation to other characters in Bamberg's positioning model). In the following narrative Tarek explains explicitly his perspective to the meaning of othering and how this affect his intercultural experiences accordingly:

Tarek: “My perspective started changing even before going to the UK...when I came to the UK, I started feeling that what I was reading (intercultural studies) was actually the case [...] things are different, but they are different not because I am in the UK and I have left Algeria, they are different because they are always different. So this helped me to reflect on my personal trajectory...the way I think , the way my father

thinks...the way my brother and sisters thinks...these are the closest people to me...the people I used to live with on a daily basis but we think differently and we do things differently...sometime you cannot imagine the degree of variety within one family...and sometimes you meet someone from the UK and you share similarities [...] so difference actually exists everywhere ,you do not necessarily need to travel to experience differences". **(Interview round 1).**

In this excerpt, Tarek demonstrated the essence of understanding differences and similarities. He stressed the fact that being similar or different to one another is not place or borders dependent, nor defined by the degree of closeness, yet it should be devoid of any essentialist cultural categories. The fact that Tarek started his journey with these pre-existing non-essentialist conceptualisations of culture, helped in moving his sense of understanding from 'large' to 'small' culture negotiation (Holliday, 1999). That is from talking about culture from the 'us vs them' perspective to negotiating his position as 'me' vs 'the other' with no effect of larger political or social structures.

Conclusion

All in all, the first round of interviews unveiled the most notable upon arrival shifts in perspective and the various self-positioning accounts in the new environment each participant undertaken as a result of his/her stereotype reconstruction. It highlights the complex interplay between experience (the clashed reality), reflection (stereotype reconstruction) and action (self-positioning) (Morita, 2004) as self-negotiation mechanism in the new intercultural environment. While the outcome of this interplay enabled a self-positioning change through stereotype reconstruction, yet the course of reconstruction remains dependent on different factors. This round of interviews also demonstrated the various factors affecting the alteration of positive or negative preconceptions whether it being participants personal character, the degree of intercultural situation difficulty each participant encountered, or the effect of cultural background on the perception of the other in the new intercultural experience. The following section will be a follow up demonstrating the dynamic perspective shift with commentaries of participants on themselves in two different time intervals.

4.1.2. Theme 2: The ‘Us vs Them’ Positioning Shift

The data in this section tells a story of how the participants perceived the self in the new cultural environment in comparison to that upon their arrival to the UK. It unveils various aspects of the implicit impact of the new perspective shifts on their self-positioning process and strategies of intercultural environment re-evaluation. During the second interview, the biggest part of the interview questions revolved around commentaries on the upon arrival perspectives and the effect change each participant experienced as a following phase of their intercultural journeys. It was interestingly evident that the participants trajectories took various paths and directions, where some have shown notable progress in terms of self-positioning and intercultural actions, while others demonstrated stable or fluctuation in their various perspectives. However, with reference to the first interview as the initiation of the intercultural journey in this investigation, participants engaged with making explanations and comparisons about their self-being and becoming, and the intercultural metamorphosis perceived when listening to themselves speaking in trims of their first interview recordings (**chapter 3, section 3.3.3.3**). Therefore, this section discusses the story of shift in perspective as narrated by participants about their self-positioning negotiation dynamics in the new environment.

As seen in **4.1.1.1** and **4.1.1.2** sections above, participants’ stereotypes clashes with reality revealed various intercultural stances on the new environment and perceptions of the self-positioning negotiation. All participants except Tarek explained that the belief of being a foreigner in the UK cannot be denied. Because of such perception, and in spite of the intercultural change each participant’s trajectory has turned into, the British vs the rest complex has been evident in differing shapes and degrees among the seven participants and has significantly contributed to the participants’ self-positioning processes as I explain below.

The discussion about a British vs the ‘us’ inferiority as a complex reflects participants’ perspectives to themselves in relation to people they met and continue to meet in the new intercultural environment. The seven participants were able to create three categorisations to the people they have met in their experiences abroad, those were the participants themselves as Algerian foreigners, British people as the native people of the country, and people from other non-British nationalities. This categorisation differed among participants in the sense that each of them viewed the other as either a British or someone from another

background with preserving the title of 'us' exclusively to people from Algerian nationality. Indeed, I was not only interested in how the participants categorize themselves in relation to the world, yet I was also keen to explore how this self-positionality categorization affects their intercultural journeys; and the extent to which each participant drew upon it to establish new relations and widen his/her social network.

In response to questioning her previous difficulty in approaching British people in the first round of interviews, Rym clarified that she still has the same issue owing this to the fact that foreigners tend to have the same struggles and experiences which make them easily approachable than the 'local' people:

Researcher: "So... are you still struggling to make British friends as you planned?"

Rym: "I still believe that not all of my friends but most of them are foreigners, they are either international students or other people who have been living here for a long time but still they are not locals. I feel that they are more approachable because they are in the same situation [...] so they believe this is not their country and they need someone to hang out with". **(Interview round 2)**.

Aware of this foreigner identification, Rym further explained that establishing friendships with foreigners identifies her as the other, the British people as the local people, and UK as the host country (a level 1 position of Bamberg's model, which is positioning oneself in relation to other characters in the narrative). This categorisation is manifested with the need of a sense of validation from the 'other', who for Rym and most participants was necessary as they see and evaluate themselves from the standpoint of the other (Bakhtin, 1990). Therefore, the divisions created by Rym at this point reflects the boundaries of difference she set between her and the other, where meaning negotiation takes place and understanding the self emerges (White, 2014). This is well established in the following narrative:

Researcher: "What did you mean by 'foreigners'...Are they your fellow international students?"

Rym: "For foreigner, I didn't mean only international students because I already have international students who are my friends, who are Chinese, Spanish from different countries in the world and they are international students but at the same time I have friends most of them are Italian I don't know why (laughs) who are working here some of them are musicians, some have been living here for a long time. So, a foreigner is

someone who doesn't belong to the UK, let's say UK is the host country and we are the other, we are foreigners, and we are the other". **(Interview round 2)**.

It is clear from the above quote that Rym tried to stick to a 'foreigner' community as she labelled them where she felt more comfortable with people whom she might share commonalities, such as being away from home and having the feeling of a 'foreigner' in a foreign country (Rym was positioning herself in the narrative, which level 2 positioning in Bamberg's positioning model). She further stressed the difference between communicating with a native British and a foreigner:

Rym: "Communicating with a non -British mean u can complain about anything but with a British even if he asks if you are satisfied here you go like 'yeah, yeah' you can't complain, you don't know if this person is ready to hear something negative about his country". **(Interview round 2)**

Even though Rym was decisive about her self-positioning perspective in the second round of interviews, listening to herself elaborating the reasons of avoiding establishing British connections made her surprised of her previous perceptions. In the previous interview Rym commented on limiting her social network to international friends solely, based on the difficult nature of British people whom she assumed they have a rigid perspective about being in contact with others from different cultural background. She explained her shift in perspective explicitly in the following narrative:

R: "Why do you think you had difficulty approaching British people previously?"

Rym: "To be honest when I was listening to this, I was like... did I actually say that before! did I feel that way before! because I think now this happened only in the beginning, because I was new to the area, but after almost eight months in (this city) I think they are also approachable, but it depends on you. For example (this city) is a multicultural city a lot of nationalities so in a small area there are hundreds of nationalities, so it really depends on you if you meet a British or not... because if you don't meet a British doesn't mean he is unapproachable but because you simply didn't meet one". **(Interview round 2)**

Rym did not only made this comment solely, yet she explained that it was a great opportunity listening to her views at the beginning of her journey and feeling the transformative perceived change in her intercultural stances. This technique helped in more projections of the self for

participants, and particularly for Rym her is the execution of a level 3 positioning in Bamberg's (1997) positioning model, meaning a position in relation to the self. Furthermore, she highlighted her current intercultural state as not making efforts to widen her social networks with whatsoever people for the existence of other reasons:

Rym: "I think by almost the end of my first year, at this stage I'm not doing any efforts to know someone, to make friends with locals or whatever I'm just focusing on my submissions" **(Interview round 2)**

It is of great importance to highlight that Rym's intercultural self-perception have changed significantly from a rigid perspective of 'us vs them', as 'them' being non-accepting and less approachable in her opinion, to a more resilient perspective of 'them' as being the other, that she could or could not be in contact with depending on the opportunity of communication. Surrounding oneself with a foreigner community was Amina's choice as well. She explained that she preferred to stick to friends from different cultural backgrounds other than British of origin as they share the same struggles and feelings. In this regard Schartner (2015) argues that international students tend to experience a lack of social support in the host culture, whereby the establishment of a social connections with the local people becomes a daunting task for them and they choose to stick to their fellow international students.

Amina explained that:

Amina: "To be honest I didn't have the experience to chat to people from the UK just some short discourses but yeah I may consider it that way because I don't know, I feel that they have so many interests that are different from ours ... and for us international students ... even from turkey or Tanzania we all have the same interests ... so we have our families we need to talk to them from time to time, we miss them, we feel home sick so we share many things[...] but for natives they don't share with us the same struggles, they've been living here since birth. So when you talk about these things, they may consider it silly, that's why I think it is important to communicate with people from different background than communicating with British". **(Interview round 2)**

Amina confessed that she is still having problems communicating with British people with a minor shift in perspective regarding the reason for this behaviour. She explained that:

Amina: "... Because I think for the first time ... I thought it is because of their personality and they don't like internationals and new people coming but later on I think it' not really the reason". **(Interview round 2)**

With an assertive stance, Amina owed the shift in perspective about non-accepting British people to the effect of social media that creates all sorts of propogandas about Muslim people. This change was well established in her narrative in the second interview:

Amina: "The social media is creating a lot of backgrounds for people because... I'm wearing the veil and it something that appears on my clothing so it's not something I can hide or lie about. So they can see that and when they see me wearing the veil, they anticipate many things and try to relate it to many incidents maybe they have experienced before, and I didn't know about. Now I don't think so... I figured out that there are very open people they know about the differences, they don't pretend they are nice or so...and u can see that in the university context for example teachers are very open and they know about you. So, there are people outside who live their life normally but for other people I don't know why they tend to spread the hate". **(Interview round 2)**

It is clear from the above quote that Amina was able to create a balance between three interrelated facts namely, the existence of islamophobia, the existence of normal people and others of abnormal behaviours (Amina in this narrative was in a level 1 positioning in Bamberg's positioning model, which is assuming a position in relation to other characters of the narrative being told). However, Amina also noted that some people she met in the UK tend to appreciate the differences, which in return she found helpful to balance her intercultural perspective and act upon that in future intercultural encounters. This shift does not deny the fact that Amina believed that the veil as a religious identifier would make other people perceive her and act differently, than that if she was not wearing it. In her opinion, her feeling about the scarf before, shifted to be normalised by herself, yet the fact that it still influences certain intercultural situations depending on the other's perspective is still existent.

Similar to the change occurring in Rym's perspective about approaching British people, Nadia commented in response to whether she still have the barrier of approaching British people as follows:

Nadia: "I think so yes... I don't have a problem with meeting British people, but I don't seek to create that opportunity to meet them anymore". (Interview round 2)

Nadia explained that she no longer has the fear of establishing connections with British people (here re-positioning herself in relation to the characters in her narrative, reflecting level 1 positioning of Bamberg's positioning model 1997), yet she just did not have the tendency for building a network with them because she believed that she "... Still have the language barrier". It is of great importance to elaborate on this comment by Nadia about language barrier as one reason for the limited social network, which does not include English native speakers, however this discussion would be detailed in the next finding on language and communication interplay. Despite surrounding herself with international students solely, Nadia expressed a sense of change in intercultural negotiation skills, based on the belief that she became able to notice the differences and similarities, which boosted her personality growth and decreased her introvert nature (making personal evaluations, which reflects a level 3 positioning in relation to the self, based on Bamberg's positioning model). In the following quote Nadia explained explicitly how locating similarities and differences between people contributed to her communication skills' development:

Nadia: "I think it is because when you know the differences and similarities you avoid misunderstandings among all cultures so you avoid cultural clash, that may happen between you and other people. The more knowledge you have about people the more the conversation will be successful with other people". (**Interview round 2**).

In her understanding, Nadia tried to maintain successful communication by widening her knowledge about differences and similarities between cultural groups. I believe that Nadia by this point have already established a new understanding of her self-evaluation, as she moved from focussing on the language skills perse, to working on the cultural knowledge side of communication.

As for Sadja, in response to questions about the significance of the 'foreigner' term in her previous interview, she made it clear that she cannot deny the fact that she does not belong to the English society as a cultural identifying marker. She explained that:

Researcher: "You have mentioned before that you felt like an 'outsider', What does an 'outsider' stand for in your understanding?"

Sadja: "An outsider for me is one who is not from this place and not from the people here. So, I am from Algeria I'm identified as Algerian and I am here in England, and

people here are identified as English so you're not an English nor born in England, so I am an outsider". (**Interview round 2**).

Aware of this clear cut, Sadjia explained that being an outsider or foreigner as she mentioned in other narratives, denotes the existence of differences between her as an Algerian and people in the UK (this reflects a level 1 position in relation other characters in her narrative, in Bamberg's positioning three level model). With this perception in mind Sadjia explained that people do make judgments about her appearance as a Muslim woman who is wearing hijab; however, she expressed her discomfort with these judgments. She further detailed that she wouldn't blame them for these judgments as apparently; coming from a different background for her denotes that she would be different and anticipates the British people's perspective to be the same.

However, Sadjia emphasised that although she is aware of her intercultural learning phase as being "still in progress", yet she acknowledged an intercultural learning process in terms of openness and acceptance of people's differences:

Researcher: "... what exactly this learning entails?"

Sadjia: " I learned to be open, to listen to others, to not judge, to accept more other's practices, other's cultures because we tend to think that our culture is the best one or our way of thinking or looking to the world is the best one and that's it, but when you come here you find all these cultures and all these practices and all these people's ethnic and cultural groupings living together in harmony and it's fine. Then you realize that no one is better than the other we are all equal" (Interview round 2).

Sadjia gave another explanation about her new perspective to the world around her after spending some time in the UK. The shift in her perspective seems to emanate from a humanitarian worldview, where considering self-superior over the other, results in conflicts and tensions among people. Sadjia owed her shift in perspective to two significant factors namely mobility to the UK and her personality as an open-minded person, with readiness to change and flexibility in perspective (Sadjia is in a level 3 positioning in Bamberg's 1997 model, which reflects a position in relation to herself when expressing the narrative). In this round interview with Sadjia, the construction of the narratives was simple and friendly, as she was very open to expressing her perspectives without hesitation. Therefore, I aimed at rigorously investigating her deep thoughts about how she describes herself. I was not hesitant myself to express my own reflections on the thoughts she proposed at different levels of the interview,

in which we shared manoeuvre over the flow of narratives. By so doing, we were at mutual construction and negotiation of our positionalities in both the narratives and the interview site.

Much like Sadja, in the following narrative Siham was assertive about her stance in the UK as a non-English person, and emphasized the need for an Algerian community to surround her in order to feel a sense of home, especially in significant occasions as 'Eid' or 'Ramadan' as common cultural identifiers of her Algerian background:

Researcher: "... why do you think you want to surround yourself with an Algerian community as you said? "

Siham: "Well for natural reasons one wants to feel a sense of home, no matter what you do... we are not English we're never gonna be English. We are always gonna be Algerians...so finding a place in between like a third place I think...so having Algerians would help you cope more they would always give that sense of country when there is Eid ... when there is Ramadan ...there is something in common you share with these people that you don't share with the English or with any other people" (**Interview round 2**).

Despite referring to the need for an ethnic community with whom to share certain cultural aspects in the UK, Siham did not identify fellow international students as the community she would ask for (Siham is positioning herself in relation to characters in her narrative, reflecting level 1 of Bamberg's model). In fact, she used the term 'exotic' instead of 'foreigner' and owed this to the way the 'other', meaning British people perceive her:

Researcher: "... so by 'exotic' here you mean... I mean do you consider yourself exotic to the UK cultural environment?"

Siham: "...so it depends also on the way they see us, for example for Saudi Arabia or Kuwait they see us as Africans and the English see us ... as all like third world [...] it depends on what might be exotic for me might not be exotic for them" (Interview round 2).

The dichotomy of 'us' and 'them' for Siham here is significant, as she is considering the Algerians as one whole entity that stand against the rest of the other whether British or even Arabs from the middle east. Despite Arabs from the middle east share common similarities with Siham' cultural background as she explained above, her existence as an Algerian foreigner remains solid with whatever cultural background. She acknowledged that the meaning of a foreigner for her does not only signify the geographical boundaries

identification, yet it lies in the 'other's' perspective to her as of an Algerian background, which the 'other' in her opinion stands for any other non-Algerian individual. I was keen to understand what the term 'exotic' or foreigner stands for Siham, which made me follow the guideline question with more detailed clarification. At this point I was in total manoeuvre of the flow of narratives for focussing on Siham's understanding of her position as a 'foreigner', while I was contributing to the construction of meaning in the interview site.

As part of her intercultural self-evaluation Siham referred to her Islamic identity as an effective factor in her intercultural decisions, for embracing it as a lifestyle rather than just a religion. On several occasions Siham explicitly defined her intercultural being as tightly related to her Islamic orientation:

Researcher: "so do you still consider yourself conservative as you described yourself before?"

Siham: "I am still conservative I don't hug; I don't shake hands... I don't tell you personal things about me if I don't know you just hi, hi no more".

Researcher: "so conservative for you is related to religion?"

Siham: "Yeah, it could be a type of personality... some people who do not open up easily to people [...]".

Researcher: "You mentioned previously that you became less conservative in the first interview, how about now?"

Siham: "Non-conservative I don't think so, but now I think I have met more people from different cultures, different nationalities, and I learned how to deal with them... I mean... what to expect from them so I think that helped...it is called experience I think" (**Interview round 2**).

This is a critical turn in Siham's perspective to herself and the intercultural life surrounding her. She was able to create a balance between her Islamic identity as an influential factor in her experience, and a more open strategy to communicate with people from new cultural backgrounds (reflecting level 3 position in Bamberg's poisoning model, which is positioning the self in relation to the self). There is some resonance to the social network effect on self-positioning perspectives here. Siham in the above narrative has explicitly acknowledged the role of meeting new people in shaping her perspective to herself and identity primarily, and the way with which to perform these social relations subsequently. In this respect, Norton (2010) explains that:

Every time we speak, we are negotiating and renegotiating our sense of self in relation to the larger social world [...] Our gender, race, class, ethnicity, sexual orientations, among other characteristics, are all implicated in this negotiation of identity. (p. 350)

Fair to say is the effect of intercultural experience with all the communicative encounters it has to offer would alter, reshape, and re-negotiate our identity influence on our general intercultural positioning, which in the case of Siham was primarily related to her religious identity.

The sense of being a 'foreigner' for Fares differed significantly from that of previous participants. Therefore, when asked about the significance of the term 'foreigner' in his previous interview, Fares explained that:

Researcher: "Fares... you mentioned earlier that you are a 'foreigner', what do you mean by foreigner here?"

Fares: "To be honest I had a thinking about it last time, actually in the last interview cause ...because I am staying here temporarily, if I was meant to stay for a longer period of time... for instance if I got citizenship or something I wouldn't feel this way ... cause... it would be my home like for long term... not like temporarily this what make me feel like a foreigner now... besides being away from family" (**interview round 2**).

In the above quote Fares explained that the feeling of being a foreigner for him is more of a state of the mind that is place and time dependant. Being in the UK temporarily does not give him the sense of belonging unless he is entitled to stay for the rest of his life, in that case the UK would be called home. Fares and unlike the four participants above did not make efforts to surround himself with friends from specific cultural backgrounds nor categorize himself with foreigners as his fellow international students (Fares reflects level1 positioning of Bamberg's model, which is a position in relation to the characters in his narrative), rather his stance of being a foreigner is related to his intercultural worldview to the 'other' as being different to all who are in the UK as the new intercultural environment.

Fares was the kind of person who was certain about his intercultural perspective shift and acknowledged the role of experience and his critical thinking played in developing his new worldviews. In response to questioning how he became aware of his open-mindedness; Fares highlighted the transformation of his stance to certain behaviours that contradicts his religious and natural instinct beliefs:

Researcher: “How did you realize that you became openminded?”

Fares: “Well, I am not thinking the same... I’ll tell you why... at first, I remember that time of my life I hated people who are different ...homosexual ...I hated those people, but now I am kinda in different about them. I understand that they might have genuine problems, but I do not sympathize with them... but no more hate them just in different with them” **(Interview round 2).**

When I followed this comment by Fares by a clarification request on what factors helped him develop this sense of differences understanding, he explained that experience has to do a lot with his perspective change (at this point Fares was poisoning himself in relation to the narrative, meaning on the site of the interview, which is level 2 positioning in Bamberg’s model), however it does not stand alone it was accompanied with critical reflections on his own trajectory as a person:

Fares: “Well yeah... yeah it is definitely not only experience... when I said experience, it doesn’t stand on its own it is accompanied with some critical thinking like From me. Because you start thinking ok... I’m more accepting these things now, and also, I have friends who told me that I’ve changed my views about many things ... and I said it’s ok to change as long as it’s for the best ...so it needs some critical thinking as well” **(Interview round 2).**

With this perception in mind Fares explained the need for change to cope with differences surrounding him without necessarily absorbing those differences. Critical thinking in his opinion opened up his eyes on many intercultural aspects he ignored previously out of rigid rejecting stances and alter them with a flexible mechanism of understanding and acceptance. I believe this accumulation of factors appearing in Fares’s narratives seems to contest and challenge the over-simplistic understanding of development and learning arising in intercultural experiences. These processes of change are far from a linear process of adaptation, yet are the negotiation of “a complex set of shifting associations between language mastery, social interaction, personal development and academic outcomes” (Gu et al, 2010, p.20) (level 3: position in relation to the self).

In quiet the opposite direction, Meriem’s perspective to the new intercultural environment did not witness quite of a change. In her narratives about racism incidents, she encountered in the first interview, Meriem continued to feel unaccepted in the British society until she eliminated the reasons of differences, she anticipated would be the reason for

people's negative perception to her (a process of self-negotiation reflecting level 3 of Bamberg's poisoning, which is positioning in relation to the self). In the following narrative, Meriem reported her feelings of rejection from British people and how it was associated with her Islamic identity:

Researcher: "Are you still struggling with communicating with British people as you declared before?"

Meriem: " I would say yes I still face some feelings that there is racism but the degree differs from before, meaning, well...before as I told you I was wearing the scarf which shows my religion to other people so they can easily identify me as Muslim ... so they were really and pretty racist towards me... but since I have removed the scarf I kinda felt I belong to them in one way or another and they felt the same. so, they kinda treated me in a respectful way if we can say so. But there is still some kinda looks because I do not look British 100% but compared to what I faced before it is much better" **(Interview round 2)**.

In her opinion, Meriem attempted to develop a sense of belonging to the 'British people' in opposition her cultural background, which required letting go some of her cultural identifying markers, that might be the reason of people's perspectives towards her. She believed that she starts having that integration feeling only by giving people a different impression about her cultural background. When I asked Meriem if she thinks the scarf is the only reason for what she believed was racism, she positively confirmed that it was definitely the reason as she clarified below:

Meriem: "Yes definitely, because I am the one who was wearing it... and I am the one who removed it ... so I am the same person, so I know how I have been treated and I know how I am being treated now" **(Interview round 2)**.

In the same vein of argument Meriem continued to explain that approaching British people is still an issue for her without being able to understand why. She elaborated that:

Meriem: " I still have the issue of making friend (laughs) and always comment about this other people ... I always say that British people do look at me they share smiles but when it comes to speaking, they don't speak to u... they don't approach you and you feel like they are not open ... so it is still an issue for me".

Researcher: "Is this case only with British native people or with all people?"

Meriem: "I would say only with British based on my experience ... because when I talk to people from other nationalities Pakistanis, Algerians, and so on and so forth... I feel

like we can share the same way of approaching one another [...] I would say that all people are easy for me but British” (**Interview round 2**).

According to Meriem the more focussing on the way people are similar to her the more she ensures successful communication. Thus, despite stressing the fact that she never felt as an outsider in the UK, the feeling of extreme differences with British people and finding no common features, prevented her from initiating or maintaining connections with them becomes harder for her (reflecting level3 position in Bamberg’s poisoning model, that is assuming a position in relation to the self). On the contrary, feeling so much in common with fellow international students, Meriem acknowledged the establishment of a wide circle network with them.

The only exception that needs to be acknowledged at this level regarding the self-categorisation opposite the ‘other’ is that of Tarek. Similar to the first interview, where the responses of Tarek were academically driven, his narratives in the second interview revolved around his understandings to certain intercultural aspects, by acknowledging the positive effects of doing research in intercultural communication on his experience thus far:

Tarek: “I don't think when it comes to my UK experience, I don't think that I held a lot of like... of stereotypes. Once I'm here in the UK. Yeah, I have stereotypes throughout my years, like, for instance, my adolescence and stuff... But before even going to the UK, I think I mentioned that in the previous interview, like I started reading about the field of interculturality. And how to perceive culture in a different like... following a different paradigm or different approach. And I started questioning things like even... like before coming to the UK. Yeah, which actually helped me navigate the environment already without like, the interference of my preconceptions ahead of me... yeah... without using the preconception to navigate the place... without saying oh, I will not do that I will not go to a pub because I have a Muslim background for instance... I will not do that... Because of that. So not putting those preconceptions ahead helped me navigate all places ... be familiar with places easily or in get to go beyond it. Go beyond stereotypes” (**Interview round 2**).

In his understanding, stereotypes for Tarek were a reality and continued to be, however, he kept attempting the minimization of its effect on his experiences to be able to widely navigate the experiences to its optimum. Tarek was not only able to re-produce certain preconceptions that he confessed existing despite his attempt to ignore them, yet in his opinion was able to

acknowledge the power of personally constructing a worldview that untied him of the effect of big cultural structures, which in return would deny him an optimum exploration of his life choices (reflecting level 3 positioning in Bamberg's model, which is positioning in relation to the self). Such a perspective according to Tarek was empowered through his reading in the field of intercultural communication, which opened the possibility of exploring multi-versions of reality.

Conclusion

Thus far it seems apparent that the shift in intercultural perspective varied significantly. All participants whether explicitly or on a deep level acknowledged the foreigner perspective in light of a 'British vs internationals' or as 'us vs the British' categorizations. The depth and strength of self-positioning shifts in most participants narratives occurred with the interference of various factors including personal perspective to reality, the nature of intercultural encounters, mobility, and the depth of self-awareness for a need of change.

4.1.3. Theme 3: Re-evaluating personal constructs as an intercultural self-positioning Dynamic

The third-round interview is a sum up of the intercultural trajectory tracking of the eight participants along eight months span. As I have already explained in the methodology chapter that (**chapter 3, section 3.3.3.2**) questions of the third interview targeted the narrative aspect more explicitly through straightforward requests to narrate aspects of intercultural change or growth throughout the investigation time intervals. All the participants declared that change in perspective to the self and environment was undeniably witnessed, though with varying degrees and in different directions. There are two prevailing aspects that participants intertwined with re-negotiating intercultural self-positioning at the end of this investigation, namely, the awareness of stereotype mechanism shift and a re-evaluation of the domestic life perspective in the process of intercultural self-positioning. These aspects were not only addressed by participants as part of their commentaries on the intercultural change they felt they encountered in the study abroad experience, yet they explained how these aspects can be both factors and outcomes of intercultural self-positioning renegotiation over time. In the first section of this final round, part of the participants self-positioning negotiation was the ability to reconstruct stereotypes in such a way that serve their co-existence in the new

environment. This has contributed to a renovation of perspective to the self and the new other they meet, which impacted their future behaviour and worldview in new intercultural situations. Another aspect that is discussed in the following section is participants' awareness of their previous and present perspective to their intercultural background which has been distinctively variant among participants. These views ranged from those who started appreciating and changing the degrading perspective to their cultural background as a non-developed country, to those who focussed on the belief of human equality despite different life opportunities.

4.1.3.1. Stereotypes mechanism shift as personal re-constructs

There was a great consensus among all the eight participants about the transformative potentials, that intercultural exposure brought into their previously held stereotypes. Despite having distinctive intercultural experiences and different personality traits; there was a new way on how to anticipate new intercultural situations, people, and worldviews.

Prompting the participants to speak about the way they used to be affected by and reconstruct stereotypes prior and post the experience abroad, all participants acknowledged a shift in stereotype construction and reconstruction after living what most of them called "the UK experience". The data set suggests that this shift did not enjoy a single form or direction, yet every participant expressed a unique stereotype transformative trajectory that was influenced by all sorts of factors including personal, educational, intercultural, and even emotional factors in some cases. Interestingly, when asking participants to describe the stereotype re-construction mechanism change, they encountered and still develop at the time of the interview, all participants expressed their interest in speaking about stereotypes as an intercultural aspect they have never given much thought, which the interview questions brought their attention into.

Indeed, Fares explicitly confessed that it was nice to ask him about how he treats stereotypes formation and reconstruction, which I labelled as "mechanism" to make it more close to their minds. He noted that there was a definite change, which is at different levels of perceiving the world now and the way to perceive it in the future:

Researcher: "What are the stereotyping mechanisms you were able to develop after living in the UK?"

Fares: “It is a really nice question talking about stereotypes, cause having spent the time in the UK, mingling with people, getting affected by their culture...getting to know that people shouldn’t be judged based on certain stuff, this changed the whole thing (meaning his stereotypes reconstruction mechanism) ...this change the whole perspective. My perspective to people and how I perceive them...I figured out that in Algeria we are racists too, for instance let’s just mention the thing about black people, we say like ‘ او شوف هاداك كداير كحلوش ’ (meaning: look at that person he is black)... you don’t get to say this in the UK, if you say this black thing, if someone hear you ... you could end up in jail. I become like more considerate [...] I never say that for instance I went to the prayer room in (university name) campus and lot of girls were coming there...they did not cover their hair, wearing skinny jeans and stuff...but they go there and pray. See ... like this change the whole thing for me ... I think now that those who doesn’t wear hijab and they wear skinny jeans...it really unlikely to view them praying and doing religious matters but for me I started to be considerate about people. It is like never judge and look at things by its cover ...like be less judgmental to stuff like that” **(Interview round 3).**

It is clear from Fares’s narrative about the way he changed his stereotyping mechanism, that he reached an advanced level of perceiving the world according to him. Making comparisons prior coming to the UK and current perceptions to the world around him, providing detailed narratives on actual falsifying events to his previous preconceptions, and the ability to notice the junctures of intercultural change, were all signs of stereotype mechanism change according to Fares. Not only he was able to notice the change himself and then elaborate on it, yet Fares was also aware that the reconstruction of his stereotypes was not a linear process. He was referring to different preconceptions on certain cultural aspects and relate it to factual experiences that corrected the misleading stereotypes he held prior the abroad experience (positioning in relation to the self, level 3 of Bamberg’s positioning). There was also a nascent realization in Fares’s narrative that learning how to minimize the effect of stereotypes comes with experience. For him living in the UK was one important aspect of learning how to deal with new intercultural situations without making complete reference to pre-existing ideas about people and environments, this was well established in the following narrative:

Researcher: “How can you describe yourself on intercultural level now that you have spent almost a year in the UK?”

Fares: “a whole new person”

Researcher: “... so there is a change?”

Fares: “There is a change obviously I am not the same person as before, I feel like before I was close-minded I...I won’t open to many things ... the thing is...let me say it

in Arabic 'مكنتش شايف بزاف فحياتي'. I haven't seen much in my life, so basically when I came to England my eyes they were like wide open to new things I haven't seen before...to experiences I haven't had in my life before... meeting new people...getting to know how things are done here...the use of technology...how to treat people...how people expect me to treat them... these are all new things which ever since I came to England I started to take into account" (**Interview round 3**).

Mobility as a factor was an aspect that Fares among other participants acknowledged on several occasions and responses in the final interview. I owe this to the participants' awareness of the intercultural being and becoming dynamics of change. Saying it differently, participants were able to relate many aspects of transformative perspectives to their intercultural learning prior and post the UK experience, including the interference of stereotypes in the formation of new worldviews. In the case of Fares here, he was decisive on the aspects of change occurring to his perspectives and the manner with which to face new intercultural environments with minimal interference of previously held general judgements. According to him, living abroad with all what it holds of various intercultural encounters, contributed to a new strategy of how to create, substitute and occasionally eliminate stereotypes in the favour of new situations. Fares continued to explain that he learned to not making judgments based on larger structural images that have been created by the effect of cultural conventions, yet to deal with people and experiences on the moment of occurrence. I believe this shift in understanding the effect of wider global structures has led Fares to unconsciously change his conceptualising of culture and arriving to the point where culture for him is dynamic and 'small' (Holliday, 1999).

With all this in mind Fares reached a stage where he realized that he is part of an environment where it is important to mediate his perspective and behaviour to achieve a satisfactory intercultural life and communication, where culture is relative, mediated and often contested (Jackson, 2014), as he clarified in the following:

Fares: "I become kinda more...sensitive maybe... I don't know ... to think before you act because the way I am living is not necessarily the way they (people in the UK) are living. So, they've got their life. They have the right to do everything because it is their culture. I become more comprehensive to that... you become less judgmental to people." (**Interview round 3**).

The ability to self-negotiate in the new environment according to Fares is both a factor and result of the reconstruction of stereotypes. He stated that being less judgmental about people comes from the realization of the different other and his right (reflecting level 1: position in relation to the other characters, in Bamberg's 1997 positioning model), which simultaneously minimize the frequency of recreating stereotypes about people's behaviours and intercultural experiences in future similar situations.

Similarly, Sadjja seems to go in line with Fares's views on a decisive awareness of the new stereotyping strategy and how it interferes in the reconstruction of perspectives on new intercultural encounters and the 'self' in relation to the new environment. In fact, Sadjja defined her stereotyping mechanism as a '*reflection process*', where she gives time and space to new intercultural situations and let it unravel the best way to deal with it, or substitute related pre-judgments with what actually occurring rather than anticipating it in advance. This was explained in the following:

Sadjja: "I think now I learned I should give time and space to be sceptic ... kinda surprise you...because for example you think...ok...this is a white person he is racist...but not all white people are racists. So, I think that even if I have a stereotype about some people, I always leave space for: maybe this person isn't as I think" **(Interview round 3)**.

In the narrative above Sadjja defined a strategy that includes instantaneous analysis of the new situations and people she encounters in her life, and letting it unravel the most suitable manner to handle it based on what actually happening rather than relying on pre-judgments. With this in mind, Sadjja considers this as one way to minimize the effect of stereotypes on her current and future behaviour. Moving to the UK according to Sadjja was one significant factor, which contributed to her current understanding to the new intercultural experience and learning to be part of it. She stated that:

Sadjja: "I think after living almost a year here... I feel like I developed a sense of cultural sensitivity for me ... for so many people... for so many cultures and all. I think I learned so many things about different people, different cultures. I feel like I am now more open to accept other people from other cultural practices than I used to before in Algeria" **(Interview round 3)**.

Learning to accept the other for Sadjja is an outcome of the rich intercultural environment she found abroad (reflecting level 1: position in relation to other characters, in Bamberg's

positioning model), which strengthened her ability to be less judgmental about new experiences she encounters and new people she meets. Again, a cyclic cause and effect relation is created in Sadjia's intercultural becoming dynamics including stereotyping as both a factor and outcome to her intercultural self-negotiation. This supports Oakes's et al. (1994) perspective on stereotypes being of flexible nature and subject to change depending on the type of intercultural interactions.

Nadia and Amina demonstrated a similar approach to developing a new stereotypes' perspective, that is based on minimizing its effect in the moment of communication. Nadia explained a multi version perspective on handling new intercultural experiences. In her understanding people coming from similar cultural backgrounds do not necessarily enjoy a single form of life practices (reflecting a level 1 position in relation to other characters in Bamberg's positioning model). Evidently this demonstrates Nadia's move from talking about culture as 'large' to indicating the 'small' version of it, where she became involved in a process of small cultures co-formation depending on the situation and context rather than relying on previously constructed stereotypes. Therefore, Nadia's cultural negotiations became functional as "... a dynamic, ongoing group process which operates in changing circumstances to enable group members to make sense of and operate meaningfully within those circumstances" (Holliday, 1999, p.248). Indeed, Nadia illustrated the multi version of Islamic religion as an example, which unfolds distinctive practices among people of the same religious stream:

Nadia: "There was some sort of stereotyping of course, for example all white people (she means British) are not appreciating family gathering. But when I came to the UK I get to know people...people from the same culture can have different ideologies...withing the same family you find this girl doing this and the other is not accepting that...so ... it depends on the person .Even as Muslims I noticed that there are some versions of Muslims here in the UK...they say they are practicing Islam but they drink... it depends...Muslim countries have different versions...so what have changed is that I don't stereotype people on whole country under one...one... طابع (she means pattern and trait) I have to اتعامل معه حتى اعرف (deal with him) this person how he is" (**Interview round 3**).

In this narrative Nadia appeared to embrace a different mechanism of treating stereotypes after several attempts to mediate her position in the new intercultural environment (positioning herself in relation what is being narrated, that is level 2 of Bamberg's three level

positioning model). According to her relying on stereotypes and pre-judgments to people who are assumedly different to her results in communication conflicts. On the contrary, she tried to mediate a common ground that helps her achieve successful communication:

Nadia: “When communicating with people from different religions or cultures or languages or so...I try to find a third place if we can say...that gather and brings the other culture and my culture into one place, and I try to focus on the thing that can work for me as well as the other one. I build an understanding between me and other people even if they have totally different ideologies ...I don’t force them to follow my ideology” **(Interview round 3)**.

Looking closely at Nadia’s narrative above, it can be argued that her self-positioning shift was negotiated in terms of expected differences (negotiating the self in relation to the self, reflecting level 3 position in relation to the self in Bamberg’s positioning model), that is intertwined with a level of stereotype minimization through finding the common ground of communication and ignorance of pre-judgments.

Another way of negotiating the self in between the stereotyping mechanism shift and the actual experience of using one, comes in Amina’s ability to be in doubt about stereotypes; until she actually experiences the new environment, then decide to strengthen or drop what she had anticipated previously. Amina explained that pre-existing judgments in her opinion are just strong ideas that can be strengthened or eliminated through living the situation. When asking Amina whether her stereotyping strategies changed after living in the UK, she explained through the following narrative that there is no single form of constructing or reconstructing stereotypes, rather only experience can be the clear cut between an idea and reality:

Amina: “...a bit... for instance we know before coming to the UK that British people are famous for queuing and I could make an image of that when I was in Algeria... but when I came to the UK I could see that and now I feel that this concept here in the UK is actual... for the stereotype of queuing it really became stronger [...] generally I don’t trust stereotypes I wait until I experience to confirm it...so it is just an idea that is not strong, and at first but I experience things and then I make the decision about the stereotype” **(Interview round 3)**.

Tarek and Siham on the other hand have developed a different perspective about stereotypes by the end of the investigation times span. They both believed that stereotypes as abstract

constructs are hard to ignore or rebuild separately from human subjectivity. This was well established in Tarek's narrative on the intercultural self-positioning based on the stereotype degree of effect:

Tarek: "Actually to start with, you cannot get rid of stereotypes... I always engage in this process to define myself in juxtapositions to the other or how to define it positive or negative [...] so basically I think I engaged in the process of creating stereotypes about people in Algeria before even coming to the UK [...] I had stereotypes on how people would be... stereotypes from a religious point of view...stereotypes from of the way they dress...the way they think... the way they eat food... and so on... so basically when I came here I wouldn't say I changed the stereotypes but I realized that at first it was very reliant on structures [...] on the same time those stereotypes actually exist as realities... but they are just one single version of reality of countless numbers of realities. So in terms of stereotypes will continue... I think ... the most important part to consider here is not about whether you should create a stereotype or not because I think as process it is inevitable, the thing is how to deconstruct the stereotype, you do not just through sentences and go away... if you have a stereotype about something, start thinking about it and do not ascribe it ...the problem is not in the idea you have ... the problem is when you start share it, and that idea becomes a form of truth, and it becomes a stereotype among people" **(Interview round 3)**.

The approach to constructing, reconstructing, or deconstructing stereotypes for Tarek, is not to learn how to stop or avoid stereotyping, as it is part of human subjective nature that cannot be denied or defeated (Holliday, 2009). There was a larger scope for Tarek to perceive this process, he suggested that one way of developing the stereotyping strategies is to try to deconstruct the idea at its cradle, without being one step of the ladder to reinforce it into a truth, that develops into a stereotype by the interference of various factors (Tarek attempts to reflect his position in the interview, reflecting level 2 position in relation to the narrative within Bamberg's positioning model). It is quite interesting how Tarek was able to detail a more sophisticated strategy to minimize the effect of stereotypes based on the larger scale that stereotypes generally are constructed and deconstructed according to. It is through linking the larger cultural structures as one source of stereotypical beliefs to the role of the individual in strengthening ideas that commonly form truths ending up into stereotypes (Jost, 2001). Obviously, Tarek realization to this hierarchical stereotype construction and/or reconstruction, and deconstruction was one way for him to be able to define himself in co-existence with the new other or situation he encounters. Once again, my interviews with

Tarek were sites for meaning co-construction, where we both were engaged in a small culture formation, and negotiating our positions in terms of scholarly power on my side and his knowledge on the other. These positions for me were negotiated at many levels moving from the insider to the outsider position (see chapter 3, section 3.2.3.) depending on the flow of narratives and the shared manoeuvre over it.

Close enough to Tarek's understanding, Siham also believed that stereotypes are an unconscious process that an individual cannot just stop or pause with a press of a button, yet the awareness of doing the stereotype process is the key to minimize its effect (Harré, 2010). Indeed, Siham was able to notice the development in her general intercultural mechanisms including stereotypes. She explained that the more she learned about new people and situations she encountered in her experience abroad the less ignorant about people's differences and similarities and so the more she learned to open herself to accepting the new other. At this level, Siham was reflecting her perspective in relation to herself and trying to deliver it on the site of interview, which reflects level 3 positioning in relation to the self. (level 3 in Bamberg's three level positioning model (1997)).

Siham: "I don't think I stopped stereotyping; it comes like unconscious ...but I've learned many things about other people that I didn't expect I would know about them. For example, about Christians, my flatmate told me that Christians they are supposed to fast for 40 days from Easter to ... I don't remember exactly... she told me about like many things about the bible [...]. We were talking about praying on time, that I always awake early for prayers and all that... and she said that they're supposed to go to church early and almost the same similar time during the day and I didn't know that. So I learned many things, I know I can't stop stereotyping because it comes unconsciously, but I am more aware about doing that and try to be like more open to ideas"

Researcher: "Do you mean acceptance?"

Siham: "Yes definitely, yeah". **(Interview round 3)**

For Siham stereotypes are not an issue as long as she becomes aware that people might be similar as much as they can be different. She promoted a self-negotiation pattern based on understanding the differences and similarities, which minimizes the effect of stereotypes on a satisfying intercultural experience (she was in a process of positioning in relation to other characters in her narratives level 1: positioning in relation to the narrative (Bamberg poisoning model)).

Rym's perspectives though, do not actually reflect as much awareness of the strength of stereotypes as the other participants. Although Rym explained that she generally does not engage in the process of stereotyping, her reliance on media as one source of information about the new 'other', and then confirm or reject the information seems to be one way to construct a stereotype, which Rym was not aware of, as can be inferred from the narrative below:

Rym: "Generally I believe that in every culture there are good and bad people of course... we are all different... if you see someone doing something doesn't mean every person in this culture does the same thing or think the same way. I learned that everyone is different from the other, I don't generally stereotype that much but I kinda confirm things through YouTube for example how British people think when it comes to their culture... how they do things ...about their behaviours and how they act in certain situations. I made my research on this on YouTube and then confirm this later through direct contact with them" **(Interview round 3)**.

However, it is clear as well that Rym stressed the effect of realizing the differences on her intercultural experience in general and the process of stereotyping in particular (understanding the self, therefore she was reflecting a level 3 position in Bamberg's positioning). Simply said, Rym explained that awareness of the multi version of one cultural environment, that is based on differences between people involved in it, is more likely to ease the process of confirmation or rejection of her stereotypes, given that she already anticipated a different other prior any judgments or expectations.

Conclusion

To conclude participants' experiences of shifts in their perceived stereotyping process in the final round of interviews, was distinctively variant and had an effect on both the self-negotiation shifts in the new intercultural environment and awareness of the existence of a pattern of change in the stereotyping process itself. These dynamic processes are triggered by various factors of mobility, intercultural encounters, and the willingness to intertwine these aspects of awareness in the favour of successful intercultural communication. This section detailed how developing a stereotyping process can arise from various factors and contribute to finding a unique pattern of intercultural co-existence in the new environment for each participant. This sense of co-existence leads to constant intercultural self-negotiation

throughout the investigation time span. The next section explains how reevaluation of domestic cultural background perspective was executed in the final round as a sign of self-negotiation dynamics after spending that time in the UK.

4.1.3.2. Re-evaluating the cultural background perspective as a self-positioning dynamic

One common feature across the eight participants' narratives throughout the three rounds of interviews was the engagement in comparisons between Algeria as the home country and the UK as the host. These comparisons were constantly brought into their narratives by the effect of questions relevant to the intercultural change experienced by participants, which assumedly was the consequence of mobility from the home to the host country. Revealed from these comparisons was the pre and post perspective to the cultural backgrounds of the participants throughout the interviews time intervals. The perceived shift in each participant's narrative was driven by the whole intercultural set of experiences at different domains, including academic, social, religious, political, and human subjective nature. Although noting the discrepancies by participants was based on socio-economic grading of the geopolitical structures of the cultural background and the new intercultural environment; still the shift in perspective whether positive or negative contributed significantly to the self-positioning process. A process that participants constantly engaged in, as one way of co-existence in the new intercultural environment.

To start with, Rym and Nadia experienced the shift in perspective as moving from an inferior to a fair attitude towards their cultural background. Putting it differently, given the inherited belief of the socioeconomic status of Algeria as a non-developed country vs the UK as a western developed world, these two participants launched their abroad experience with an inferior attitude towards their cultural background. Therefore, both were and consequently underestimate themselves in comparison to western people. However, this attitude according to Rym and Nadia have evidently changed after living the actual experience of being in the UK, and was substituted with a more confident perspective of equality between their cultural backgrounds and the UK.

When prompted to describe her perspective to her cultural background after living in the UK, Rym explained the inferiority complex she believed she and her fellow Algerian

students have suffered from prior the study abroad experience. In this, she was in process of positioning herself in relation to other characters in the narrative, which evidently reflects level 1 of the positioning model (Bamberg (1997) three level positioning). This complex is the result of larger political and economic structures that have been imposed on the world, in the form of a backward Arab and middle east vs a developed modernised west (Said, 1978). This feeling of inferiority according to Rym has accompanied her at the beginning of her journey in the UK. However, she continued explaining that this feeling of inferiority gradually vanished with the intercultural experience she encountered after some time in the UK, and was substituted with an appreciation of her cultural background. Rym explained her point in the following narrative:

Researcher: “Do you feel a change regarding your perspective to yourself and your background after spending almost a year in the UK?”.

Rym: “Yes of course it changed (perspective). So as Algerians we don’t feel...compared to the west we always looked at them as the best part in the world ... they have this modernity... they are more respectful... I mean we always looked at them as perfect people but like in return we looked at ourselves as we are less than that. But based on my experience I see that they are not that modernized or more polite or something ... they are just lucky to have a non-corrupt government... I mean if we in Algeria have their government ruling us, we would be even more modernized than they are. So now I appreciate my culture and I don’t see Algeria as less than any other country anymore, and I’m trying to make it clear to people that we are so much better than they think” (**Interview round 3**).

Despite Rym’s inferiority feeling comes from a larger set of cultural and political conventions that were passed through worldwide (Holliday, 2015), she made belief in equal opportunities if given to less developed countries, would result in the same if not better Arab and middle east cultural backgrounds. In this interview, Rym and I were engaged in a socio-political discussion where each of us was in a process of positioning the self in the site of the interview and in relation to each other, where we co-constructed an understanding of the effect of these global structures on our perspectives to the reality around us. By doing so I was able to notice that we reflected a level 2 positioning regarding Bamberg’s positioning model (that is assuming a position in relation to the narrative or the audience to whom the narrative was told)

Similarly, Nadia reported that the perspective to her cultural background as an Algerian, Arab, Muslim, which she believed she did not appreciate, has come to shift after her experience in the UK. She found that other people of similar background to her tend to depict a better image of their religion, therefore why not she. In the following narrative Nadia noted that:

Nadia: "I think it has changed, in different manners if we can say, I was not appreciating my culture but now I am so proud of it especially concerning religion. I used to be back in Algeria everything negative is owed to Islam... because we are Arabs or Muslims that's why we are not developed country. I am proud of being Muslim [...] when I came to the UK, and I met a lot of people who are Muslims but the image of Islam they promote in a positive way [...] on the other hand sometimes when I compare religion in Algeria and the UK ...when I meet other different religions, I feel so proud of my religion" **(Interview round 3)**.

It seems apparent from the narratives of both Rym and Nadia that the 'Arab vs the west' or as I have explained in the two previous rounds the 'us vs the British' inferiority complex has been a major factor in self-positioning negotiation in the new intercultural environment. It is a natural human instinct to compare their cultural background to new experiences and situations, which at times results in negative attitudes and underestimation of the self and their cultural ties. However, at other times it boosts self-esteem and confidence about one's cultural background. This was quite evident in Rym and Nadia's attitudes shift towards their cultural backgrounds and enabled them to re-evaluate their perspectives, which contributed to a confident positive self-positioning in the new intercultural settings according to them. In fact, reevaluating perspectives in this case are a process of personal constructs being revisited, where these "Constructs are abstractions from the concrete world of events" (Kelly, 1955, p. 110) and experiences that proves our old perspectives, falsify it and/or alter it. Therefore, the reconstruction of Nadia and Rym's perspectives of their cultural background was the process of renegotiating their new cultural reality against what they already have in the form of stereotypes.

With a steadier perspective trajectory on her cultural background, Amina confessed that her appreciation to her domestic cultural world have never changed. In her opinion, living the abroad experience contributed to raising her awareness to how she really felt about her cultural background rather than changing it:

Researcher: “have your perspectives about your cultural background changed after living for quite some time in the UK?”

Amina: “Of course not, cause generally speaking... when you see the differences you know more about your culture ...it is there when you figure out what your culture is for real. You know about it but because you are living there every day you can't see it... but when you experience different cultures you appreciate your culture, see it more clearly” **(Interview round 3)**.

For Amina appreciating her domestic life was always there, yet living another intercultural experience once she travelled to the UK made her realize how she perceive it previously, and there is where she holds on to that perspective even more.

Completely opposite to the direction of shift in Rym, Nadia, and Amina's perspectives on their cultural background, Sadja moved from highly appreciating her cultural ties to nationality and ethnic belongings, to doubting the status she assigned to her cultural background prior her experience abroad (reflecting a level 2: position in relation to the narrative, that is in front of me as the audience). According to Sadja the experiences she encountered in the UK in the form of new people and situations, made her engage in multiple comparisons of various cultural aspects. The discrepancies as well as similarities understanding that arose from such comparisons made Sadja realize that she was in a way excessively appreciating her cultural background, over other or new environments, to the extent she ignored the co-existing world around. I believe this destabilising sense of identity appears to the surface when the self is “... constituted in the recognition of difference rather sameness” (Delanty, 2003, p. 135). Sadja explained this explicitly in the following narrative:

Sadja: “well I think there has been some changes. I am not now as... how to say it... egocentric or something as I'm used to be. I know now that there is not only Algeria in the world... we are all similar. Now when I speak about Algeria... yes, I am proud to be Algerian and all ... but know that there are other people in the world who feels the same about their country. I did not used to think about that much mostly because I think in Algeria there isn't as much diversity as here... here you find people from all over the world and so now I'm not... say...as proud as I was but not egocentric as I was... now I am more open to different cultures, to diversity, ...I know that in every culture there is good and bad things so I am critical to my culture more than I was before.”

Researcher: “What did you mean by egocentric in simpler terms please?”

Sadja: “I meant nationalist or... patriot maybe ...yeah I guess that’s the right term” **(Interview round 3)**.

Sadja believes that over appreciating her cultural background, which she summed up as Algeria- was driven by her nationalist nature. By nationalist she signified the excessive love and appreciation to her country. However, coming to the UK with all what it unfolds of various experiences and intercultural encounters, Sadja started a criticality phase, where being proud does not mean ignoring the world around her (positioning herself in relation to herself during the narrative construction, which echoes level 3: position in Bamberg’ positioning model), which could be full of similar and even better aspects. However, mutual respect and appreciation to both own and others intercultural backgrounds is required according to her. Fares on the other hand was less judgmental with regard to his post UK experience attitude towards his domestic life. In fact, he acknowledged a wise comparison that did justice to both the positive and negative aspects he inferred through time and experience in the UK as follows:

Fares: “Well I still belong to Algeria as my culture... my nationality has not changed. In a way I see it different...I don’t know... I haven’t thought about that...but I think it depends on what point you are talking. For instance if you are talking about relationships with family, I do appreciate how our relationships with our families are in our culture. The UK as an example when you turn 18 or 20 then you should leave the house and start becoming independent. It’s good to become in a sense independent but to be forced to leave the house that’s not really good... and also most people that I lived with here in the UK, they don’t have good connections with their families... and when it comes to religion as well, they don’t have this good connection ... regardless of what they believe in... so this is one thing I do appreciate in my culture. The bad side in my culture I always noticed...but it became more apparent when I lived in the UK... we talk a lot about people there... I don’t know... people are the centre of any conversation...however if I go to the UK [...] they discuss ideas but not people, they don’t talk about people ...in this is something I appreciate in them” **(Interview round 3)**.

Fares re-negotiation of his domestic world paved the way for reflection on different cultural communications and behavioural styles. It can be understood from Fares’s analytical understanding that the cultural difference of communication styles and behaviours is pertinent to larger structures in comparisons of national cultures. This was evident in his terminological definitions to his cultural background and the UK as the new intercultural

environment as 'Algerians vs British'. The concept of appreciation for Fares is pertinent to what is right and wrong rather than what cultural environment it belongs to, whether it is originated from his own cultural repertoire or encountered in the new cultural environment. Indeed, Fares continued to explain in the following narrative how reevaluating his cultural background perspective, contributed to both his self-positioning negotiation in the UK and personal interpretations of intercultural encounters. All these intertwined in a process of shift from a rigid one-way acceptance or rejection strategy to constant critical evaluation of intercultural situations. In fact, this shift is what Sole (2007) has described as 'positional shifts' (p.206), where significant intercultural encounters with the 'other' promote the generation of new perspectives on the cultural, social, and personal subjectivities of individuals, which in return make them assuming new positionalities and act upon it. Fares further explained that:

Fares: "...you become more considerate to other people's culture whatever their cultural background...their ethnicity... you become more sensitive... you respect what they have cause ... were' not the same, it's a different country ...different race... different ethnicity... different lifestyle. You start seeing things from their point of view too, and you start thinking 'oh that's how they seem then'. You start realizing that concepts of right and wrong are very subjective, what I consider as something accepted ...something as right ... something that I appreciate from a different perspective from that person who's in my culture should be taboo...I start to putting myself in the other person's shoe" (**Interview round 3**).

Perhaps this narrative is more than just the result of a perspective reevaluation to Fares's cultural background, yet it appears to be the gist of his whole self-positioning negotiation dynamics, where all elements of intercultural evaluation are blended. What is of great significance in the above narrative by Fares was his readiness to put further challenge to traditional 'us vs them', negotiation seeking mutual respect to each other's differences. This was evident in his confession about what he appreciates in the home cultural world as glorifying family connections and faith, and what he devalues as gossiping and interference in people's lives. On the contrary, appreciating the UK peoples' behaviours of minding own business also opposed his degrading view on their weak family relationships and religion negligent. This reflection illustrates Fares's new intercultural divergent self-positioning shift, which intertwined his domestic life re-evaluation together with a level of intercultural

sensitivity development. All are based on acceptance and seeking mutual respect of differences rather than the concept of what you have is wrong or what I have is right.

Slightly similar, Siham engaged constantly in a process of comparisons during her experience in the UK. The quest for change was one aspect Siham believed emerged from this cultural arbitrage, which accompanied her prior coming to the UK. More acute this perspective became after she spent some time in the UK, due to the differences she was able to locate out of 'my culture vs your culture' opposition. Although Siham's intentions for change in the host cultural setting was pertinent to religious orientations, yet the quest for change in her cultural background was mainly academic, which generally is the result of the inherited belief of low academic level in Algeria as a third world country. This is where I sensed a level 2 positioning (in Bamberg's positioning model 1997), where Siham engaged in portraying what position she assumes as an Algerian opposite the audience the narrative was constructed with me as the researcher. In fact, Siham explained this in the following:

Siham: "Yes it has changed... I turned into like...I compare everything I see here with what I have back in Algeria my country... so just like there were things I wanted to change here...mostly to change the religious impression on Islam maybe... now there are things I want to change back there in my country. So I will always say it would be better if we do this instead of that [...] mostly in the academic domain" **(Interview round 3)**.

Despite Siham's perspective when elaborating on the re-evaluation of the cultural background was based a reciprocal perspective of change in terms of what seems to be missing in both the home and the host cultural settings, she explained that the need for change in her opinion remains arbitrary. Indeed, she confessed that she learned to moderately accept the other as he is but taking advantage of every opportunity to create a change or transmit a new idea:

Siham: "I think sometimes we have to accept the idea that we can't change people. We just have to accept them as they are and if there is an opportunity to...not change... but leave an impact on them then take it. Otherwise I'll just take them as they are. I realized when I came here...you know... I came with this perspective that I want to make a change... now I realized that was a naïve idea... I was naïve. I have more experience now and you don't get to change the world or the people you just do your best to live with them." **(Interview round 3)**.

Adding this commentary made the picture on Siham's shift in perspective even clearer, as experience made her develop a more accepting self that believe differences are not made for change yet for acceptance and co-existence (reflecting level 3 in Bamberg's poisoning model, that is assuming a position in relation to the self in the narrative). Moreover, Siham also realized that the differences she felt exist between her domestic cultural environment and the new UK experience do not necessarily impose a degrading view to her cultural background compared to the UK, yet change is for the best of any situation that needs improvement whether it be Algeria or the UK according to her.

Tarek's explanation of the intercultural shift in perspective poured into a completely different stream. He rejected the notion of cultural encapsulation by explaining that potentially new perception to his cultural background is not because he moved to another geographically distant setting, yet it only boosted that change and set it into a certain direction. Tarek explained the effect of new experiences rather than UK experience on the shift of his perspective in the following narrative:

Tarek: "Well basically I think the perspective will change as you grow and experience many things in your life and this does necessarily apply to your background. So I think there is no direct link or causality between going to the UK and changing my intercultural perspectives... of course meeting new structures and new social and new particular way of doing things, different institutions, different behaviours and so on and so forth enrich the experience and make the process of this metamorphosis regarding the perspectives we have it make it go fast or faster than expected. On the same time this also applies to Algeria as well like for instance being a student and then moving to something totally different, meeting different people this will change your perspective [...]. So basically the change is there but not place related. Maybe the UK made the change in a certain direction but this is not necessarily true but on the same time it made it richer because you are in a totally different environment" (**Interview round 3**).

Tarek was assertive about his perspective on the role mobility to the UK played, which was just boosting the process of intercultural perspective change yet not entirely the cause behind its nature. He explained that the experience in the UK as a completely different environment to his cultural background, boosted the process of self-positioning as to where he was and where he is currently yet did not necessarily imply an engagement in a detailed comparison

of the home and host cultural environments (assuming a position in relation to the narrative being told, which is level 2 of Bamberg's positioning model). He owed this vision to him denying large cultural structures identifications where 'us' are different from 'them' where self-positioning negotiations would be pertinent to national cultures (Holliday, 2017):

Tarek: "I question structures wherever I go, I don't care about the vision of the other if they are still dependent on structures to define me. But for me I always try to put those structures aside, to question the 'them' and then define who I am in relation to the other and who the other is in relation to me" **(Interview round 3)**.

Denying the large cultural structures in the form of national cultures as identifiers of self-belonging shaped the perspective of Tarek, in such a way that enabled him to negotiate his intercultural positioning with no reference to 'my culture your culture' dichotomy (Amadasi and Holliday, 2017). Instead, he developed a new self-negotiation strategy where defining who is in relation to the other whether in his cultural background or the UK supposedly, should be liberated from cultural ties and dependent on the person per se not where he is coming from or where he is heading to.

Conclusion

Thus far it becomes apparent that re-evaluating the domestic cultural background perspective contributed significantly to the intercultural self-negotiation after spending some time in the UK. This re-evaluation made explicitly or implicitly does not enjoy a single form or follows the same trajectory by all participants. Despite having common aspects of change, the data set proves the unique transformative trajectories each participant's experience unfolds, in terms of intercultural self-positioning and re-negotiation of the self and environments as dynamics of '*intercultural becoming*'.

Conclusion

This finding addressed the metamorphosis of '*intercultural becoming*' dynamics of self-positioning negotiation of participants in light of transformative stereotype mechanisms, and constant revaluation of home and host cultural environment along three rounds of interviews. It has come clear through the data set discussed in this finding that studying in the UK had significantly variant impact on each participants intercultural perspective to the self and other. These perspectives appeared to be pertinent to factors of personality, the unique

intercultural experience each participant lived, and the large cultural structures degree of effect on the direction of the intercultural self-positioning in different environments.

4.2. Finding 2: Negotiating the role of language-culture perspectives as dynamics of intercultural becoming

Introduction

Given the prominent role that language plays in any intercultural learning experience (Jackson, 2008), and because the study draws upon the intercultural becoming dynamics of change; the narratives of the research participants featured various attitudes and reflections on the language element interference in their intercultural experiences in the UK. Therefore, my overarching chronological exploration of participants' intercultural experience over the course of three interview rounds, unfolds various thematic explanations on negotiating the role of language intertwined with the cultural experience each participant has encountered.

The aim of exploring the language element effect was built upon the fact that language is the vehicle for intercultural communication and the data proved its significant interference in *intercultural becoming* dynamics. Therefore, the analysis of the participants' narratives in this finding focusses on the effect of the individual's self- evaluation of linguistic ability perspective shift on the *intercultural becoming* process. Consequently, the first theme in this finding discusses the use of English as a foreign language for participants in a native-speaking environment. Participants' narratives in this theme revolves around two basic elements namely, pursuing English language learning in an English-speaking environment as a motive, and negotiating the reality of English use in the UK experience. The second theme is complimentary, as participants reflected various attitudes on both; seeking the native speaker proficiency as goal for intercultural blending, and the perceptions to the language-culture mixture. Finally, the third theme sums up the effect of the language negotiated role on the *intercultural becoming* process.

4.2.1. Theme 1: English as a lingua franca use in a native- speaking environment.

During the first interview, seven out of the eight participants have spontaneously discussed their English as a foreign language adventure as a key element in their intercultural experiences. Perhaps one of the most significant reasons for the strong appearance of language effect on participants intercultural experiences, was the status of English in Algerian higher education. Despite being a global linguistic bridge of communication across the world, and despite efforts of Algerian educationalists to give prominence to English as a second language for both higher education and other national institutions, the francophone colonial history still has its rooted effects on the Algerian educational decision making. This socio-political influence gives the French language the status of the second most used language across the country after Arabic. The seven participants explained that their use of English prior coming to the UK as the subject of their higher education academic domain was limited to the department and even classroom communication. Therefore, exposure to authentic language use (using this term to avoid the native speaker understanding (see **chapter 2**) was a motive and goal for the study abroad decision for participants. However, participants explained distinctively the reality clashes that each of them encountered upon arriving to the UK, which revealed the discrepancy (either positively or negatively clashed) between the linguistic package that these participants brought with them, and the real use of English in the UK experience. This section embarks on demonstrating how English as a lingua franca for participants was negotiated as a goal for study abroad and shift of its use in a native-speaking environment.

4.2.1.1. Motives for studying abroad.

During the first round of interviews, and in discussing the language element in various clarification points, 6 out of the eight participants narratives foregrounded one consensual aspect of language learning that is the motivation to study abroad for the aim of language use in an English-speaking country. Despite being on the same scholarship program that chooses students on a testing scale that may or may not result in a potential study abroad opportunity, two of the eight participants explained that study abroad chose them not the other way around, and they just took advantage of the opportunity at its most possibility. However, the remaining six participants demonstrated their tendency to study abroad prior their selection for the scholarship testing motivated by being part of an English-speaking environment.

4.2.1.1.1. English use in an English-speaking environment as a motive

In response to asking about the reason for choosing to study abroad, Rym for example reported that as a student of English for five years in Algeria, using her linguistic capacity in a real-life situation, where English is the official language was always interesting to her. Rym states that:

Rym: “Well... choosing to study abroad was mainly because I was studying English so I was really interested in studying like... in a country whose people speak English as a native language so the UK was the best choice for that [...] I wanted more like to learn the British accent and also about the culture of the country ... because you know...using English outside the classroom borders in Algeria was not a choice for us as English is not commonly used in Algeria ... like in real life... so I was very excited to speak a language that I have learned academically for five years in a country of majority English native speakers” **(Interview round 1)**.

The educational background for Rym like many other participants was one motivational reason to study abroad. Studying academic English as the subject of specialty for five years in higher education, gave her some sort of passion to put her learning into practice and broaden her linguistic use into authentic cultural settings other than the classroom and amphitheatre, which was exclusively with teachers and classmates only (Rym in this narrative assumed a position in relation to the characters in her narrative, which reflects level1 position in Bamberg’s 1997 positioning model). This goes in line with what Abukhattala (2013) suggests regarding the teaching of English as second language in Arab countries being “decontextualized knowledge of vocabulary and grammar” (p. 34). Rym also emphasises that acquiring British accent was also tempting as the widely used accent across her department in Algeria was American, which made it slightly difficult in her early days in the UK (this to be discussed in the next sub-section). The cultural aspect was also a study abroad target for Rym as she added that experiencing the cultural life in the UK was also one of the motives to embark on this experience, yet with prominence of the language learning goal, which will be clearly evident in her second interview round.

Similarly, although with little elaboration on language in the first interview, Meriem also emphasised her tendency to use the language she learned in an English-speaking environment for being deprived from it in her home country due to the socio-political reason I have discussed above. She believed that moving to the UK would ensure a progressive linguistic development through constant exposure to English as used by ‘native speakers’.

Mentioning native speakers in this narrative by Meriem denotes her assumed position in relation to other characters in the told story, which reflects a level 1 positioning in Bamberg's (1997) positioning model. She clearly states:

Meriem: "When I was a little girl, I had that passion to learn languages, learning English in fact was by choice and I am so grateful to have this experience in the UK. Also... that love of living abroad... I mean I wouldn't...love to learn languages without using them. Let's say that I always dreamed to travel and study English and use it in its native country besides I was pretty much sure that my English will be much more perfect when I come to the UK, because you know you are speaking it more frequently and also working on it as my PhD subject".

Researcher: "And did you feel it improved up to this moment?"

Meriem: "Of course it did, I am very aware of what kind of language problems I had before, and I have been able to fix them through speaking English most of the time here... you know in the shops...in the university with my supervisors, and so on and so forth...so I can really feel the difference. I think language is best developed when used in its real context" (**Interview round 1**).

Clearly Meriem's perspective to language use in the UK experience was part of her general development plan. She reported that her self-assessment of language development prior and post her arrival to the UK revealed a positive effect of the experience on her English proficiency (assuming a position in relation to the self, reflects a level 3 positioning in Bamberg's positioning model 1997). Now, considering this explanation by Meriem separately, one might mistakenly believe that the effect takes a one course direction, however the coming two rounds of interviews with Meriem demonstrate how her language development affected her *intercultural becoming* dynamics and vice versa.

In the same vein of argument on language being a strong motive for embarking on a study abroad experience, Sadja and Siham both considered studying abroad a positive investment in their linguistic capacity, with UK being the most suitable environment for this achievement as a majority English-speaking country. Sadja reported that:

Sadja: "I studied English literature and civilization in Algeria, and it was a plus for me to live and study in a majority English-speaking country to acquire more the language... to also acquire the culture because you cannot separate language from culture ...they are both important. For me to further study English in its original context is giving me more credibility in my English use, which in the future when I go back to Algeria and teach at university ...I don't know there will be more credibility from both

administration and my students as well... I mean they will trust my teaching”
(Interview round 1).

In fact, Sadja added one important element to her motivational reasons to pursue her studies abroad. She pointed out that for an Algerian student of English, getting a degree from an English-speaking country adds more credibility or kind of a mark of honour to her, among the Algerian educational institutions and students to be under her instruction in the future. By elaborating on that, Meriem was in a process of positioning in relation to the characters of her narrative, namely, Algerian fellow educationalist and students, which echoes a level 1 position in Bamberg’s (1997) positioning model. This reminds us of the role of internationalization of higher education in both Algeria and other European countries, which have differing driving reasons depending on economic, cultural, and most importantly educational grounds (Koutsantori, 2006).

Likewise, Siham commented that:

Siham: “ It’s been my dream to study abroad, I studied literature basically English literature ...so well England is a good chance as an English speaking country so it is like a chance to practice a language I have been studying for ...five years at university to get the feel of a new experience... in the middle of a new culture, an English culture to be more specifically... new educational system...I thought it will become stronger and richer...my English I mean and... it was the case really...I can’t deny that I moved to the next level of proficiency...native-like maybe (laughing)” **(Interview round 1).**

Siham emphasized the role of study abroad experience on her language proficiency as well. Indeed, she explained that being in the new cultural experience supported her language learning and boosted her linguistic use confidence as she gave herself credit for a ‘native-like’ proficiency. By evaluating herself in such a way, Siham was in a process of self-positioning with regard to her language development, which rests at level 3 of Bamberg’s (1997) positioning model namely assuming a position in relation to the self.

For Nadia and Amina, going abroad was motivated by a desire to learn language just as the other participants, yet adding on top the need for language to have access to culture which they are most interested in.

Nadia: “first of all my subject ...I was studying English in Algeria and I think the suitable thing for me as a language student is to study in a country that is native in the language, I am studying...so the UK is one of the English speaking countries...maybe this is the first reason...I have been given the choice to study in Jordan but I chose England because it is a developed country and also an English speaking country [...]. I am very interested in learning languages and dialects and I am more into communicating with other people in order to know the similarities and differences between my culture and their culture” **(Interview round 1)**.

Nadia believes that being in an English-speaking environment is the best way to have access to cultural aspects of people she meets. She explained that learning languages and put it into practice is what gives her access to the cultural understanding by undergoing comparisons and locate similarities and differences between her and the other cultural being (positioning herself in relation to the narrative being told reflects level 2 positioning in Bamberg’s 1997 three level model of positioning).

In much the same way Amina wanted to experience the real life of English ‘native speakers’, witnessing the real practice, or as she defined it ‘real picture’ of English ‘native users’:

Amina: “Of course study abroad is an opportunity that everyone want to get especially that we are studying a second language, we want to be there... we want to see the life of native speakers, to see how language is used in its like... native background to be with people there [...] so to see the real picture there. You can see also the differences in the language, that there are variations because when you are watching BBC for example or watching series you see that actors and journalist are using sophisticated language... in accents also... but when you came here you are aware of different things for instance we have been last year to Canterbury and here in (this city) the accent is totally different, it is similar yeah but there real differences ..also in Liverpool I travelled there, it is different too they don’t pronounce the ‘K’ and they pronounce the ‘KH’ (the Arabic sound خ)... so I am aware now of many things” **(Interview round 1)**.

Amina sought a real-life experience through the study abroad opportunity, where language can be seen as used by layman rather than sophisticated language that is broadcasted in media. She believes that experiencing the real use of English by its ‘native speakers’ is what enabled her to sense practically the language variations she used to study theoretically in her

courses at university. This reminds us of the intricate connection between language and culture and its role in meaning negotiation in sociocultural contexts (Risager, 2006).

4.2.1.1.2. 'Study abroad chose me'

As I have stated earlier two of the eight participants have different motivations to study abroad. In fact, Fares and Tarek used a self-explanatory expression, which demonstrates how being given the opportunity to study abroad is more likely to be the reason to embark on the UK experience. Fares states in one of narratives that:

Fares: "I have never imagined coming here to the UK to be honest, that was a dream but never part of a plan ... to be honest study abroad chose me I wouldn't say I chose to come here ... it was a chance that shouldn't be neglected or missed" (**Interview round 1**).

Now, despite the fact that Fares did not explicitly elaborate on what was the source of motivation to study abroad other than exploiting the opportunity provided to him, yet he referred on several occasions to realizing what he wanted after coming to the UK in the two following interviews. language learning appeared to be a sound reason to study abroad for him, which he did not realize until he actually set foot in the UK. Fares also appeared to share one aspect with Sadjia with regard to credibility and higher status of a UK degree than that obtained in Algeria (which reflects his self-positioning in relation other characters in his narrative, a level 1 position in Bamberg's 1997 positioning model). He reported that his parents opposed his coming to the UK, yet he managed to convince them by simulating the academic honour he would receive after getting a PhD degree from the UK:

Fares: "well I told my parents that I know it's gonna be hard, but you will be much proud of me when I am back with a PhD from a UK university" (**Interview round 1**).

Tarek, however, explains that studying abroad was part of his carrier planning yet he needed a much stronger reason to go for it, which came in the opportunity provided by the scholarship program. When asking him why he wanted to study abroad Tarek pointed out that:

Tarek: “ It is difficult to say so because study abroad chose me not me choosing to study abroad... because , well during my last master degree ... no my first master degree I was already planning to go abroad so I started looking for studying in France...done some procedures and I passed the test, and then started to look also in Hungary and these were the two options available and after that there was kind of a competition to go either to the UK, China, or Jordan to study a PhD degree, and I decided to go for it and I got a palace to go to the UK and that’s why the UK chose me to study...because after getting that contest and getting a place at a UK university it was really tempting but on the same time I got a job in Algeria as a teacher, and I was in between whether to stay and start my professional life or go for another three or four years as a PhD student ... cause I was fed up of studies I wanted just to study and settle to start my professional life ...but then I decided to go for the UK and I said I studied for twenty years so three years is nothing to add” **(Interview round 1)**.

Despite planning for a study abroad experience prior getting the scholarship program opportunity, Tarek explained that he was swinging between starting his carrier as an English teacher in Algeria or pursuing his higher education degree in the UK. The choice of studying abroad for Tarek though did not emerge from academic motivations of language or intercultural learning, yet it was a consequential decision emanating from the marriage of a coincidence with well exploitation of a lifetime opportunity.

Conclusion

To this end, all participants’ motivation to study abroad varied distinctively yet overlapped at being an opportunity for academic advantage for seven of them excluding Tarek. Narratives by Six of the eight participants revealed that embarking on the study abroad experience has rooted in three major motivational reasons; the desire for a genuine linguistic sojourn in an English-speaking environment, achieving native like proficiency through genuine exposure to English in everyday use, and gaining a degree from an international institution that receives more credibility in Algerian educational institutions. Other than the motivation of a linguistic capital, the remaining two participants’ motivation emerged from a life choice for a better carrier opportunity.

4.2.1.2. Negotiating the reality of English use in the UK experience

With regard to participants upon arrival perspective to their linguistic package in comparison to the real use of English in its native-speaking environment, narratives revealed two

directions of shift to the perspective of the self and other language use. The first shift included three participants who found minor difficulty for language understanding, which were mostly related to accent and pace of the linguistic real communication. The second shift however, which was undergone by five other participants had negative expectations on a difficult language in communication perspective, which eventually turned to be an aspect of strength rather than an issue to overcome.

4.2.1.2.1. Upon arrival linguistic limitations

To start with, Nadia has clearly indicated that at the beginning of her experience in the UK, she encountered difficulties in both speaking and understanding English, which was mostly associated with native speakers' pace and accent. The first encounter that made Nadia reach the conclusion that she needs to work on her linguistic skill more, was the meetings with her supervisors. She reported that in most their meetings she remained silent because she was unable to catch their speed nor understand their British accent. This resulted in Nadia being uncomfortable during the meetings and even avoiding communication with people inside and outside the academic setting. The following narrative illustrates the direction that Nadia's linguistic ability progress perspective has undergone at the beginning of her study abroad experience:

Nadia: "when I first came... first of all I mean I used to have problems communicating with people especially my supervisor. Especially if she speaks quick so I couldn't understand her well... so I kept silent in our meetings, so it was awkward in our meetings. Then when I started developing my language by communicating with people, our discussion was more fruitful... like I can discuss with my supervisor more about my ideas... I can express them more than before, because before I couldn't even understand what I'm struggling with" (**Interview round 2**).

Researcher: "What did you do to overcome these communication difficulties Nadia? Did it just disappear with time? Or have you done any efforts to go through it?"

Nadia: " The first thing that helped me when I came in (this city)... because I came alone and did not come with my friends they came later on... the thing that helped me a lot was the conversational club that I attended as part of the coaching for academic English, and found it so helpful because it gathers people from different nationalities... and they try to speak in the language that is the only means of communication between us... because for example I am Arab, the others are Turkish, Spanish, Italian... the only means of communication is English this helped me a lot to acquire the communicative skill" (**Interview round 1**).

Despite being a real obstacle that may confront international students in any new intercultural environment (Sawir,2005), Nadia was able to go out of her comfort zone of avoiding communication with people, to explore her linguistic potential, and develop her language proficiency to the required level of a Ph.D. student. Her efforts started by taking advantage of the university coaching facilities that it has to offer for supporting students' needs. The conversational club according to Nadia was her first step to go out of her shell and start exploring her linguistic potentials, which eventually helped making her understand and being understood without any difficulties, neither at the level of accent nor speed of her supervisors or other users of English. In this narrative with Nadia, I was able to introspectively elicit that initial self-image she held about herself, and particularly language. By discussing difficulties, she went through at the beginning of journey, Nadia assumed a level 3 position in relation to herself (based on Bamberg's three level analysis of positioning), which I was part and partial of constructing given the follow up questions I deliberately focussed on in this narrative.

In a similar vein yet with less severe linguistic difficulty, Rym and Fares stated that they had slightly less difficult language reality clash at the beginning of their experience abroad, which resembled their expectations to a certain extent. Despite elaborating on the same issues of native speakers' pace and British accent, Rym and Fares explained that it was nothing more than a matter of time to get used to how language is actually used in everyday communication. For Rym, the issues of accent and speed of native speakers' language was occasional and with minimal effect that fade away instantly after the incident passes:

Rym: "I don't remember an exact example but... yeah, I think sometimes in the stores for example they ask if you want this or this and you just say yes because you couldn't catch up especially with the British accent, he will do something you don't want [...] you don't feel embarrassed but you stay confused what to do like this is not what you wanted. But at the same time you are the one who said yes to that... I mean better to look confused than to look stupid (laughs)...but it's fine you just ignore it...I mean that was at the beginning and after few days and practice of course that just gone"
(Interview round 1).

In this narrative Rym believes that her image as a user of English was at most importance. The need for a good-self perspective for Rym was largely dependent on how a native speaker

would perceive her linguistic ability. Indeed, Rym depicted a behaviour that was commonly narrated by most participants at their early days in the study abroad experience, which is an expected 'other' perception that is said to determine their self-value (seeing the self in eyes of the other, Kelly, 1955). Rym in this narrative demonstrated the need to position the self-value through the eyes of the other, which reflects a level 1 position in Bamberg's analysis of positioning model (1997) (level 1: positioning the self in relation to the characters in her narrative).

Fares's narratives featured a similar linguistic reality negotiation when he described that his expectations of a fast-difficult British accent were not as realistic as expected. Despite having some hard time in catching up with speed of language use by native speakers, Fares was able to overcome the situation and it was a matter of getting used it:

Fares: "At first, I had a problem in understanding people in the beginning. I know I watched a lot of movies, series, and all, but still when you face a real situation...when you talk to a person like in person... it is different. So I had this idea that British people they speak so fast... and personally when I get anxious I speak like so fast... so this was a misconception for me...I thought speaking fast... that's how good should be... like it depends on how fast you are when speaking, but that's not it, that's not reality I mean not as I expected ...they speak like really gentle...like slower than I do maybe (laughs)...it depends on the person really [...] so for people I dealt with in the university in the academic place, they speak like in real slow pace... I understand them, they understand me. However, if we talk about some people, I've dealt with like bus drivers, people in supermarkets...some of them not all of them were fast and honestly, I couldn't understand a thing (laughs)... but that was only in the beginning" (**Interview round 1**).

Fares insisted on the existence of a language reality clashing with his expectations and his linguistic ability acquired in Algeria. He explained that (with minimal efforts) he could overcome the fact that the English he acquired as part of his language learning courses is different from that used in a real -life situation in an English-speaking environment. British accent and the speed of English speakers were two main aspects that he failed to cope with at his early days in the UK. However, through experience and constant exposure to the communication patterns Fares was able to re-establish a new understanding of linguistic reality in English-speaking environment (positioning himself in relation to the narrative being told in front of the audience, which is level 2 position in Bamberg's positioning model of analysis).

4.2.1.2.2. Upon arrival successful linguistic agency

In the opposite direction of language use and reality perspective shift, the remaining five participants stated that their upon arrival linguistic package was sufficient to the linguistic reality in a native-speaking environment. Sadja, Amina, Siham, Meriem, and Tarek expressed their satisfaction with their level of language proficiency and perspective at the early stage of their UK experience, although they have expected quite a difficult time in both understanding and being understood due to their lack of confidence concerning their linguistic ability.

Sadja expressed that one of the easiest aspects she encountered and was expecting to be hard in the abroad experience, was communicating with native speakers. She had some fears about her linguistic skills concerning pronunciation and fluency, given the fact that English is not a commonly used language in everyday communication in Algeria. She pointed out that:

Researcher: "What were the easy and/or difficult aspects about living in the UK".

Sadja: "What was easier than expected was communicating with people. I didn't find problems in the language as expected... I thought that language will be a problem for me when I travel to the UK, because English is not really spoken in Algeria. I just learned it from Tv or...it was mostly from American movies... so I thought maybe the accent will be a problem for me... so communicating with people maybe hard... understanding them might be hard. There were situations where I found difficulty to understand but they weren't as much as I expected... it was fine ...I could understand the language... I could communicate with people so that was easy that was fine"
(Interview round 1).

Despite some occasional minor difficulty in understanding real life language use in the UK, and fear of failure in communication, yet Sadja elaborated on her satisfactory linguistic skills which enabled her to have an easy upon arrival experience concerning language proficiency and communication with people. She also emphasised that the lack of English practice in real life situations in Algeria was her main fear of facing the linguistic reality in a native speaking environment. The fact that the language learning process for Sadja was limited to the acquisition of English media broadcasting and minimal practice at the level of academic and professional contexts solely, resulted in a fear of a less appreciated linguistic capacity by the 'other' in the native speaking context (reflecting a level2 position in relation to other characters, according to Bamberg's analysis of positioning model (1997)). According to Sadja this was not enough to boost her proficiency to the level of native speaker users of English

and generated negative expectations of failure once being in the real-life situations. Luckily, Sadjja's fears were only some sort of self-underestimation of her language proficiency value and some abstract exaggeration preconceptions of extremely higher competitive language use by native speakers. The conceptualization of the native speaker as the ideal user of English (which is mentioned in most participants' narratives) is a myth that dominates the teaching profession and strengthens the fallacy of inseparable language and culture (as nation-state). Baker (2015) explains that "...the global use of English as a Lingua Franca in a huge variety of scenarios brings to the fore the limitations of associating a particular language, English, with any one culture or even group of cultures, i.e., the Anglophone world" (p. 17). However, as we can see from Sadjja's narrative above the unconscious conceptualization of native-English-west vs non-native-English-rest has a strong effect on the inferior self-perception (Holliday, 2006) of these participants especially at the early stages of their experience in an English-speaking environment.

Being aware of an intense linguistic competition in the English-speaking environment and little underestimation of her perceived linguistic ability, Amina also expressed her negative expectations about failing to communicate properly:

Amina: "I thought it is going to be hard, I was not sure even if they are going to understand me at first, maybe ... yeah, I am learning the language ...I have a good level.... I am speaking English but what about people ...natives... how are they going to understand what I am saying...how to deal with them... you know all these fears I had. However when I first came it was not that hard...I know from the first conversation I had in the airport that I need more words, more good accent...but it was fine ...understanding was ok...their language was not that hard as I expected ...but sure needed more to make... you know a better impression for them is to be more sophisticated in language" (**Interview round 1**).

Positively clashing with her negative expectations, the linguistic reality was not intimidating as Amina feared. However, Amina believed at the early moment in the UK that she needs to expand her English vocabulary and work more on her accent for a better communication (Amina tried to position herself in relation the narrative being told to the audience, which is level 2 positioning in Bamberg's positioning model). This was not to undermine her linguistic value, yet she clarified that it was a prerequisite to learn more English for a better

communication, and to leave a good impression about her linguistic ability when communicating with more competent users of English (a level 1 positioning in relation to other characters, as proposed in Bamberg's positioning model).

With similar expectations of the fear to fail in communication because of speed and accent of native speakers, Siham negated her negative preconceptions once encountering real life communicative events, where she was able to unexpectedly understand and cope with British accent and pace of speaking:

Siham: "Because I didn't encounter like situations where communicating was difficult ...I could communicate ...people could understand me and vice versa... I thought when I come here people will find my language strange and difficult to understand ... my pronunciation... and because I thought they are native speakers they will speak faster in a different accent of course because we used to American accent in university. But to be honest I found out that I underestimated my English ...I turned out to be good actually ...in most situations I communicate well... I even started to imitate their accent ...British accent...so generally it went well..." **(Interview round 1)**.

For Siham the linguistic reality in the UK was one factor to boost her confidence in her language proficiency perceived value. According to her, the negative preconceptions of a highly problematic native speakers' language and accent, was only a consequence of undermining her linguistic package (self-image elaboration, which reflects level 3 positioning in relation to the self, as stated in Bamberg's 1997 model of positioning analysis). The communicative events that Siham encountered at her early experience in the UK, boosted her confidence to believe in her linguistic potentials and even develop a coping linguistic strategy, by embracing the British accent as a second choice. The aim of which according to her is to be able to fit in and establish successful communication with native speakers.

Meriem expressed her upon arrival linguistic perspective from a different angle. Meriem commented as follows:

Meriem: "To be honest I didn't feel I was not proficient enough. The thing is ...I found (this city) a very diverse community...there are people from every nationality with different languages...for me they are the same case as mine ...English is not their native language ...it made me confident you know... cause wherever you go you find both native speakers and other speakers ...it gave me some confidence about my

language ...and sometimes I even find mine better in some situations ...” **(Interview round 2).**

Experiencing a multicultural environment for Meriem, where non-native speakers of English can be found in every cultural domain, made her confident about her linguistic capacity as she shared one common feature with them for English not being the official language in their home countries (Her attempt to assume a position as being similar to these characters as narrated above, reflects her level 1 positioning with regard to Bamber’s positioning model of analysis). This feeling of a perceived intercultural sympathy Meriem has created, did not only boost confidence about her linguistic package yet it was a practice of language competition with similar non-native speakers.

Interestingly, Tarek’s only comment on his perspective to the linguistic reality of English use in an English-speaking environment was:

Tarek: “It was not my first time meeting a native speaker...so it was not a problem” **(Interview round 1).**

Commenting on this, Tarek believes that his experience in dealing with English native speakers made him kind of ready to face a new linguistic environment, given that he already tested his language use with English speakers he met prior his UK experience (assuming a level 1: position in relation to other characters mentioned in the narratives, based on Bamber’s positioning model of analysis).

Indeed, the fear of a difficult British accent was a commonly problematic aspect that was expressed by six of the eight participants apart from Meriem and Tarek as explained above. There were two driving factors for such conceptual apprehension among them, namely, educational backgrounds, and media exposure. Despite adhering to British teaching methodologies in the Algerian higher education curricula, yet the most commonly used accent among instructors and so students was American. Therefore, students find themselves immersed in American accent learning materials and rarely exposed to other varieties, which developed a conceptual tendency to avoid or being exposed to British accent in favour of the American variety. Consequently, participants expressed the tendency of exposure to learning

and entertainment materials with an American accent, and ignore British variety broadcasted shows, movies, documentaries, and even social media. With such oriented learning, when discussing the linguistic difficulties that participants may have encountered upon their arrival to the UK, linguistic related difficulty in the form of British accent complexity seemed to be a common concern that appeared on the surface in most narrative accounts.

Conclusion

The insights reflected in the first-round interview indicates that pursuing English learning in a native English context is one main reason to embark on a study abroad experience. Detailed linguistic motives varied significantly from developing a native-like proficiency, experiencing the use of the acquired linguistic package in an English native-speaking environment, to gaining successful access to the cultural aspect through language use. Other motivational reasons were a highly qualified professional and carrier degree for a language student is better obtained from a native language speaking context. With this in mind, the linguistic experience with regard to perspective on linguistic reality clashes vs the participants language learning abilities, varied from those who encountered communicative difficulties in the early days of the UK experience, to those who had enough perceived linguistic package to communicate successfully.

4.2.2. Theme 2: The perceived language-culture value and attitude in the UK experience.

The narratives in this section were generated in response to whether language proficiency was enough for participants in achieving successful communication in a native-speaking environment. The responses varied significantly, each assigning to his/her own experience and perceived values of language proficiency vs cultural knowledge. There are two sets of arguments; the first believed that language and culture roles are acting interchangeably in a cycle where the participants' linguistic capacity gives access to the cultural aspects of the target intercultural environment, though with tipping the cuff in favour of language prominence. Participants who embraced this perspective were: Sadjia, Siham, Meriem and Rym. On the opposite side were Fares, Nadia, and Amina who argued that having access to cultural knowledge is a priority, and successful communication cannot be achieved on the mere command of linguistic skills.

4.2.2.1. Language and culture on a continuum

The discussion with participants on the language-culture relationship evoked critical insights on the role of linguistic capacity and cultural knowledge, which was driven by the actual experience of the perceived value and effect of each aspect. Participants' perspectives in this sub-section were driven by the common belief of language being the vehicle of intercultural communication. However, cultural, and intercultural knowledge are also undeniably prominent aspects without which communication breakdowns are likely to occur despite high command of language skills.

In line with this argument, Sadja explained that the two elements of communication are both prerequisites for a successful intercultural journey abroad. However, each has a different effect on both the interlocutors involved and the communicative event. Commenting on this Sadja reported that:

Researcher: "... Does this tell you anything about the relationship of language and culture, which I think you have talked about previously?"

Sadja: "So I think the two have different effects. I think first they are both important but let's say for example I was proficient in language but not in culture...I think it would have more like a psychological effect ...for instance if I say something or do something in that culture, I will offend someone else or they offend me in another way it will have psychological harm... And you cannot be proficient in a culture without the language because language gives access to the culture. But if I was very knowledgeable about the culture but I'm not really good at the language... the effect will be different it will not be psychological perhaps really not in offensive ways ... as I just seek clarification without offending in cultural aspects...I think it having culture and not language would be easy but slow ...but if you have the two that would be the best" (**Interview round 2**).

Central to Sadja's perspective on the language-culture relationship as being both a cause and consequence, was the anticipated dialogic effect on the communicative event. Sadja pointed out that what is most important in any intercultural encounter is the reciprocity of understanding and awareness of her and the other in communication. In this regard, Bakhtin's (1984) argues for the dialogic nature of human communication and what it means to be human, where meaning is negotiated when the individual "[...] communicates dialogically....one voice alone concludes nothing and decides nothing: two voices is the minimum for life, the minimum for existence" (p.213). According to Nadia, having command

of cultural knowledge is one way to avoid psychological harm, even with little linguistic capacity. On the contrary, having the two in the opposite way wouldn't have psychological influence, yet it would slow the awareness of each interlocutor involved, and either ways communication is in conflict (reflecting a level 2 position in Bamberg's positioning model, which is positioning in relation to the narrative/audience to whom the narrative was told). Therefore, Sadjja's perspective suggests the need for both elements in intercultural experience to establish successful communication.

Similarly, Meriem described the language-culture relationship as a cycle. In other words, she clarified that being in constant exposure to the cultural element helped improving her linguistic capacity, and with language confidence she gained, she became curious for more cultural knowledge. She acknowledged her quest for more intercultural learning, which according to her self-evaluative comparisons, Meriem believed that she needs more cultural knowledge despite being satisfied with where she is now (level 3: position in relation to the self, according to Bamberg's 1997 positioning analysis). The following narrative clearly demonstrates her linguistic-cultural perspectives:

Meriem: "So I will start from the beginning of learning English. What made me learn the language was the culture...actually... because I was watching a lot of movies ... it was a totally different culture from mine... a new world... I was so curious about it...I had an exposure to culture that led me eventually to learn the language, because I wanted more access to the culture ...it is like a cycle...it's culture language and then language culture [...] but now I consider myself to know the language more than the culture, I don't think I understand the culture as much I do in the language but I think I'm fine... I know some of the cultural aspects but I feel that my language is better than my cultural knowledge" **(Interview round 2)**.

Meriem appeared to maintain a balance between her cultural knowledge and her current linguistic package. According to Meriem, despite knowing little cultural aspects of the new intercultural environment, she seemed to be in satisfaction with her little knowledge as it is complimented by the language capacity, which she believed saves her face in potential communicative events. Such a view by Meriem supports the complex relationship between language and culture as dynamic and transient in different contextual frames including local, national, and global (Baker, 2009).

The remaining two participants' perspective delivered similar consideration to how language and culture are blended in a new intercultural context. Rym states that:

Rym: "I think language is already encompassed within the culture it's part of it... so to understand the culture of the country ...the host country ... you're living in you have also to master the language" **(Interview round 2)**.

Rym also explained that language is part of the cultural component. And there is a necessity of their co-existence in one's general intercultural knowledge to ensure a successful journey. Likewise, emanating from actual incidents in her study abroad experience, Siham's perspective goes in line with her fellow participants on the need for a balance between her language and the cultural knowledge. However, Siham explained that the presence and dominance of one aspect over the other is place and circumstances dependent, where some communicative events require high command of the linguistic skills, while in others knowledge of the cultural aspects is highly required. As she states below:

Siham: "In some situations I wasn't proficient enough but I could communicate...ok it is complicated ... let me say it this way... so I think proficiency is really important definitely but it is not the only thing needed...I think if I wasn't proficient enough, I would have a different experience, perhaps a bad one because of that. But in some situations, I found myself not proficient... I found myself struggling with finding the words and all... and in that case I used my body language to make myself understood...like I want this or that... so they can understand me...and sometimes I know the words but I am hesitating to use in the wrong context ... this generally happened outside I mean not at university. In the university I found that what is most important than using cultural aspects is having good English..." **(Interview round 2)**.

Variation of attitude of language value and cultural aspects interference is dependent on the communicative setting. According to Siham academic settings require higher command of linguistic than cultural aspects. While other social life events urge the need for more cultural awareness and competence. Therefore, the communicative event according to Siham is what decides which way the cycle should go.

4.2.2.2. Cultural knowledge is a priority.

As seen above, the four narratives in the previous section perceives the mutual effect of a linguistic capacity and one's cultural knowledge, where both are engines of a successful

communication. In this section however, the remaining three participants expressed a one direction flow to the success of any communicative event in a new intercultural environment. Nadia for example relied on her experience in joining the conversational club. Despite the fact that Nadia joined this club for the purpose of developing her linguistic capacity yet experiencing communication with individuals who all share a limited command of English language; and succeeding to establish well understood conversations was enough for her to tip the cuff to prioritizing cultural knowledge over the linguistic element. She commented with the following:

Nadia: "I think language is an essential component in communication but not necessarily the whole thing. It can be part of it about language...I saw this in my experience in the conversational club where even people who do lots of mistakes in language but they still can be communicative...so language can be substituted with non-verbal elements like mentioning keywords...however I think if none of us in the conversational club had enough cultural knowledge we wouldn't stand communicating for long time and over several episodes" **(Interview round 2)**.

In the previous interview Nadia narrated how language was one obstacle in her ability to explore her intercultural potentials. However, the benefits of the conversational club were not more vocabulary terminology or a better accent, yet it was learning the pattern of communication in the UK experience, including initiating communicative events, and learning to establish long term acquaintances. As Nadia explained before, the conversational club gathered students from different national cultures, which she had a sense of comfortable belonging with (assuming a position in relation to the characters in her narrative, which represents a level 1 position according Bamberg's analysis of positioning (1997)); as those national cultures included were non-British of origin. When Nadia was delivering this narrative, it was in fact a bit challenging for me to precisely specify which culture they were drawing on when using English as lingua franca in this conversational, is it British culture? Is it university academic culture? And many other possibilities came around. However, through out many other hints in her narratives, it was clearly stated that since her struggle started with the linguistic aspect in her intercultural experience with her supervisors, the major cultural understanding she drew upon was mainly academic cultural setting.

Amina expressed a similar perspective pointing to the need for cultural knowledge for the appropriate use of language:

Amina: “Communication involves many features not only language even language itself you need for instance to know the culture more like when people use idiomatic expressions...in their speech...if you are not familiar for why that language was used...which is culturally related of course...you won’t be able to understand them even if you translate them because they are related to culture...for this reason knowing about the society comes before mastering its language” **(Interview round 2)**.

Amina raised an interesting point that drifts towards the pragmatic appropriateness use of language in context. She raised awareness about the significance of cultural signs that has been historically inserted in language use across cultural domains, such as facial expressions, body movements, non-verbal cues, idiomatic expressions, and many others. Therefore, mastering a language for Amina without being culturally aware of its use would be useless, if not leading to misunderstanding and/or communication breakdowns. There is some resonance in Amina’s perspective here, as language is dynamically grounded in sociocultural contexts, rooted in sociohistorical practices, and manifest as tool to reality construction (Harvy, 2014). Therefore, it is logical that linguistic engagement is not a neutral practice rather, it is an accumulation of macro and micro processes that operates within sociocultural and ideological frames to establish meaning making (Bakhtin, 1981).

Fares provides another example of the need to be culturally aware than linguistically proficient. He explained his perspective based on a real story of a friend who came to the UK with no linguistic resources, yet he survived living and securing a job:

Researcher: “... So what makes successful communication in your opinion?”.

Fares: “Let me tell you this... I have a friend who came from Italy... I mean the man is zero English I mean with very small linguistic resources ...like few words only he can manage ...but he was able to secure a job ...rent his house...doing his every day grocery by himself ...so he still communicative ...and even when we talk to each other I still don’t know how we understand each other (laughs) but we do ...facial expressions ..pointing ...whatever...I mean he is way good now but still this make me rethink ...maybe you don’t need proficient English or to learn whatever is in the dictionary to have successful communication ...as long as you get your thing done ...then you’re ok” **(Interview round 2)**.

In his opinion, Fares supports the need for a culturally aware communication, rather than a perfect linguistic proficiency. He believes that communication purposes can still be achieved

among people regardless of their language ability. What happened with him in the above narrative regarding his Italian friend who had little if no access to English at all, made Fares rethink the value of cultural understanding, and how language can be substituted with many other non-verbal features. Indeed, this may lead us to rethink the notion and perception of language use altogether. In fact, this indicates the concept of 'translanguaging' (Canagarajah, 2013) which emphasizes the multi-modal nature of human communication that transcends the 'said to be all communication' concept. Canagarajah (2013) acknowledged the diverse semiotic resources and contextually based components being blended in human interaction.

In addition to that, Fares supported the view that similar geo-cultural environments tend to be easier to explore and being culturally successful in. He backed up his argument based on the belief that European countries tend to have the same cultural features of living, which made his friend able to practice his everyday life smoothly and effectively. Simultaneously, Fares acknowledged that the situation would be significantly different if the same friend came from an Algerian cultural background with limited linguistic capacity:

Fares: "[...] If the same guy came from a different place like Algeria for example he wouldn't survive life in here because generally the culture in Italy and other European countries tend to be the same as in the UK. In that case he wouldn't have only the difficulty of language but worse at the level of mastering culture...that's like...two different layers of difficulty of understanding" (**Interview round 2**).

In the above narrative, Fares also related the degree of cultural differences to the geographical distance and national boundaries. Perhaps his understanding is not only a hint to him still in the phase of a national culture mode (Holliday 1999), but also an understanding of the dynamics of communication as nation related rather than an individual endeavour.

Conclusion

To this end the variety of perspectives on the effect of language-culture relationship reported by participants in the second-round interviews, paved the way to a conclusive understanding to the implication of language-culture perceived value on the general *intercultural becoming* dynamics of change.

4.2.3. Theme3: Implications of language perceived development on intercultural becoming.

In the previous two rounds of interviews, participants' narratives revolved around explanations and clarifications on the linguistic capacity use and perspective in new intercultural experiences. Analysis of this round's interviews demonstrates the implications of negotiated linguistic perceived development, in light of the UK experiences (as reported in the two previous interviews), on participants' *intercultural becoming*. Narratives in this round were generated in response to a straightforward request for clarification, on the effect that language self-evaluation development in the UK experience if any, has brought to their general intercultural becoming dynamics. There was a consensus among all participants that linguistic development is one conclusive outcome of practicing their English in an English-speaking environment. Their narratives on this outcome have put forward three domains of *intercultural becoming* dynamics namely, perceived self-esteem, successful communication, and shift in the perceived self-value. It is at most importance to acknowledge that these categories were not necessarily present across all the participants' narratives, yet they overlapped across one or more narrative account. In other words, each participant reported at least one of the listed domains. Therefore, the three domains are listed categorically by assigning each participant to the outcome that was mostly addressed in his/her narratives. Another point to raise attention about, is the nature of the narratives themselves as they take the form of short declarative statements. This was mainly due to these domains being all together in one response to the same straightforward question, in which participants relate to the three domains in one wholistic narrative. This urged me to spread each narrative across the three categories for a better illustrative presentation of the data.

4.2.3.1. Intercultural self-confidence

Boosted intercultural confidence, was a recurrent outcome of linguistic development effect on *intercultural becoming* among most participants. Indeed, participants acknowledged that once they started being aware of a developed linguistic capacity, they have been able to communicate with confidence and situate themselves securely in any intercultural encounter. Therefore, some participants became more confident to attend more social activities, widen their social network and learn to be initiative in communicative events.

To illustrate, the following narrative by Fares states that developing his language skills was one way to boost his confidence about being interculturally satisfied:

Fares: “As I said last time, with language proficiency you can have really good supportive experiences with different people so it will increase the interculturality aspect, and all...so yeah...having spent some time in the UK by now, helped me make progress in my language skills for sure ...and using those language skills helped make more connections, and I become more confident by the way I use language ...I started asking people in the street ... I start like communicating more...asking questions ...attending more events yeah...so there is this influence that language skills on me being intercultural giving me access to the other culture” **(Interview round 3)**.

Fares’s view of himself after three rounds of interviews represents the perceived awareness of his language development and therefore its effect on his intercultural becoming at different levels. He stated that the linguistic skills progress after a relatively short time in the UK, boosted his confidence in the actual use of the language in intercultural encounters and the perceived value of himself as an intercultural competent person (reflecting a level 3 position in relation to the self, in Bamberg’s positioning model of analysis). With this in mind, other intercultural advantages came along according to Fares, paving the way for him to have more access to the other cultural existence, such as widening his social networks, attending social events, and acquiring some socio-communicative skills of being initiative and encouraged to ask questions. For Fares, such outcomes are signs for his interculturality development and individual maturity, which enhanced the experience abroad and added more layers of understanding his positionality shifts to himself and the world around him. This suggest that self-confidence is socially constructed and rooted in the lived experiences, with a dynamic nature that is subject to change as cultural context does (Norton, ,2000).

Sadja experienced similar positive effect of developed language skills on her intercultural journey. She went in line with Fares on the fact that being aware of her linguistic capacity progress, boosted her confidence in any communicative encounter and encouraged her to widen her social circle:

Researcher: “Do you think your linguistic ability have changed since your came to the UK? if so, what do you think the effect of this change on your intercultural experience?”

Sadja: “I think it did because it allowed me to talk to other people more ...to have more confidence in approaching other people and speak to them. I think this wouldn't develop if I didn't have a good level of English... I wouldn't have the confidence to speak to people or to widen my social network ... so language has and still have a good great impact on my intercultural development” **(Interview round 3)**.

Despite her previous opinion on the language proficiency and cultural knowledge having equivalent value in the second interview, Sadja in this round seemed to tip the cuff in favour of language prominence. Such a shift in perspective occurred as a consequence of the remarkable intercultural development Sadja has achieved as a result of her perceived linguistic progress. She believed that after spending almost a year in the UK, she was able to achieve higher levels of linguistic ability, which helped in boosting a lot of positive aspects in her intercultural experience abroad. Among these benefits was the ability to widen her social network and boost her confidence about her position as an individual living abroad (reflecting a level 3 positioning in Bamberg's positioning analysis model which is in relation to the self).

Meriem's self-confidence as an outcome was associated more with self-perception issues, as she explains in this narrative:

Meriem: “...you know my favourite thing as I started noticing my language was better than the first time I came...was me starting to be initiative...I mean me as a person I am not that kind who comes and talk to you...even when I was in Algeria ...using Arabic I wasn't like that...but now I can initiate a conversation easily with anyone...because I feel more secure ...I don't know more confident maybe...that no one will laugh at my language” **(Interview round 3)**.

Meriem's linguistic development appeared to have a deeper effect than enhancing her intercultural becoming processes, yet it even altered one of her personality facets, which she associated with her native language identification. Happily expressing this, Meriem explained that being initiative is a new skill that resulted from the development of her English language proficiency and being aware of these changes boosted her confidence in any communicative encounter. She believed that as a result of her linguistic progress awareness she became more sociable than she ever was, through establishing new relationships with new people, ignoring issues of social anxiety, and fear the other she has expressed at the beginning of her experience in the UK. All these positive changes in Meriems life were expressed with confidence on the site of the interview, as was producing all kind of communication support

and encouragement to proceed with her narratives. Meriem was one of the participants who kept on questioning the confidentiality aspect of what she says, this is where my mediated role was concretely executed as I made her feel safe in communicating by assuring anonymity and sharing significant narratives about my own experience. Therefore, we were both in a process of self-positioning vis a vis each other, which reflects a level 2 positioning in Bamberg's analysis model, that is positioning in relation to audience to whom the narratives are told.

In another situation, in her previous interview, Siham expressed her perspective of the Language-culture relations as being of a cyclic intervention. She maintained that being aware of her linguistic development, encouraged her to take part in volunteering as an English teacher for refugees. Being aware of them as non-native speakers and assessing their linguistic skills as relatively weak compared to hers, boosted her confidence based on the fact that they were all non-native speakers of English:

Siham: "It did yes language developed my confidence...I did some volunteering work helping refugees learn English [...] it did help...we're not native users of English so I always knew that I should learn more and try to get better speaking English...so when I met those people ...for them I was almost like a native speaker ...so it helped my confidence to be honest (laughs) ...I realized I'm not that bad...there are people who are worse than me(laughs)" **(Interview round 3)**.

This narrative by Siham explains how being aware of her linguistic level boosted her confidence to be part of such a cultural activity. Therefore, it is fair to say that the increased sensitivity about the 'other' and the increased self-awareness (linguistic or otherwise), with a deep sense of identity contribute positively to more confidence and development of social skills (Campbell, 2003). Simultaneously, Siham was able to boost her linguistic confidence in return through the cultural evaluation of the people she met in that cultural activity. Siham also confessed that ironically the limited linguistic ability of the refugees she was in charge of teaching, made her feel better about herself linguistically (in this narrative Siham positioned herself in relation to the characters in her narrative, this falls in a level 1 positioning in Bamberg's analysis model 1997). Perhaps this reminds us of the effect of the way perceiving the other could reconstruct the perception about the self (Kelly, 1955).

4.2.3.2. Achieving successful communication

Reaching satisfaction in the event of communication was an outcome of satisfactory linguistic progress as explicitly expressed by Nadia, and Siham.

Nadia: “Normally my language ...I feel it has developed because the communication with people especially with people who speak only English... become better...I think the more language developed the more communication developed as well...I can understand the other easily than before...and this what happened with my supervisor...I used to have problems communicating with her...but after I developed my language skills... I can communicate better, and I can understand and make myself understood” **(Interview round 3)**.

In the above narrative, Nadia explicitly stated that her linguistic capacity development and achieving successful communication are in a discursive relationship. This was evident from her own experience, as after attending the conversational club she was able to exploit its outcomes at the level of *intercultural becoming* dynamics in further experiences. Nadia also emphasized that what a successful communication entails is mutual understanding between people, both linguistically and culturally in a certain communicative event (reflecting level 2: position in relation to the narrative as proposed in Bamberg’s positioning analysis model).

Besides boosting her self-confidence, Siham also insisted on the multi-layered outcome of a high command of linguistic capacity:

Siham: “I think yes ...when you be able to communicate well with people you could understand their culture and their background ...so it is a double effect...you have good language ...you become more communicative and you get good access to culture” **(Interview round 3)**.

Clearly, the linguistic development for Siham goes beyond enhancing the communication nature and quality, yet it opens the door for more intercultural awareness of the ‘other’s’ cultural environments, backgrounds, and worldviews (assuming a position in relation to the characters of her narrative, which is a level 1 position in Bamberg’s positioning model). In fact, this conform with what is suggested in the literature of language in study abroad contexts, which primarily suggest that awareness of language use in different cultural setting, greatly contributes to mobile student’s intercultural learning (IEREST, 2015).

In fact, establishing this cause-and-effect relationship was common among participants, with differing expressive degrees. Whereas some participants were explicitly expressive about how their linguistic development played a straightforward role in enhancing the communicative quality of their interactional events; other participants acknowledged this positive interference implicitly when emphasizing the success of their *intercultural becoming* dynamics, which in return entails necessarily the existence of a high communicative ability. This was evident in the case of Tarek who did not make any straightforward comments on his linguistic development and his intercultural being, yet he expressed on several occasions the need of various communicative aspects for a successful intercultural development including the significance of the linguistic element in communication.

4.2.3.3. Positive shift in the perceived self-value (reflexivity)

Negotiating the 'other' perspective to oneself, has been already indicated in **finding 1**, where participants discussed the expected perspective of the 'the other' to themselves at different levels. In this section some participants indicated how achieving high command of linguistic capacity developed a positive recognized perspective of the 'other'.

According to Meriem, awareness of her linguistic development did not only reinforce the quality of communication with native users of English, which eventually helped in persistent attention from their part in certain communicative events (level1: positioning herself in relation to other characters in her narrative, level 1 in Bamberg's positioning analysis model 1997)); yet it also improved her feeling of how people perceive her. This reflexive process is what Burke et al. (2003) explain through identity theory to be an attempt of individuals to validate their social, personal, and other identities to elevate self-esteem in interpersonal communication. Precisely, this may occur in the case of members of perceived minority groups (participants with perceived deficient English proficiency) feeling the need to assume self-positions in relation to dominant or superior perceived group (in this cases native speakers).

Related to her comment on self-confidence as an outcome, Meriem continued:

Meriem: " [...] I am more secure ...I don't know...more confident maybe ...that I will be understood and no one will laugh at my language...and sometimes even I feel I am

taken more seriously...people pay attention to my talk...I didn't really have problems in the language before as I told you, but because I became more fluent with better accent...so they listen with interest because I don't waste time finding words or...at the end of the day I have good communication as a confident young lady...this gives a good feeling to be honest" (**Interview round 3**).

Meriem explains that one of the reasons that trigger self-security issues, is having less than expected linguistic capacity. She believed that a good command of English at the level of fluency and pronunciation gives a good impression of her being professional, which eventually reinforces her status in a communicative event by being listened to with interest from others involved in communication, which confirms that self-perception is tightly related to how we anticipate the 'other' perceives us (Howarth, 2002). Meriem again was positioning herself in relation to other characters reflecting level 1 in Bamberg's positioning analysis model.

Similarly, Rym supported the need for a sophisticated language to leave a good impression for native speakers and bring their attention:

Rym: "Speaking a good American accent at the beginning was a very good way for British people to approach me and accept to talk to me. So as a student of English for five years at university I didn't really have a problem of language ...I used to interact with people in a normal way and I think people generally don't deal very much with someone who doesn't master the language ...so as now I try to speak British accent make me bale to understand native speakers better which is good...I could go interculturally good" (**Interview round 3**).

Speaking American accent in her opinion was one coping strategy to attract native attention to the fact that her language is up to expectations. Stressing the role of high language proficiency, Rym emphasized the negative perspective native speakers might have if the person interacting with reflects a weak command of English (reflecting a level 1: position in relation to other characters, in Bamberg's positioning model 1997). She also stressed that pursuing more British accent learning, with using the American variety as an attraction factor, helped her unleash her intercultural success. Once again, the conceptualisation of social power inequalities (Said, 1978) appear to the surface, given that Rym in this narrative has stressed the negotiation of linguistic and cultural frames of reference being 'identity strategies' of self-perceived minority group adopted to cope with hegemonic cultural identities of the dominant group (Camilleri, 1990).

Amina experienced a stronger positive shift of the perceived intercultural self-value as a result of her linguistic capacity development. She believed that the smooth communication with native speakers after her communicative skills developed, gave her a sense of integrity in the native-speaking environment.

Amina: “At first when I used to go to shops, I think people tend to look at me as a stranger but later on when my communication and language skills got better, I know how they talk to each other in some instances, so I use them and they talk to me as if I am one of them...so you feel when your language develops people pay more attention to you than when you are talking as we used to do in our university in Algeria... when we used to struggle to pronounce each word separately in a sentence. So, when language develops you motivate people to pay more attention to you”
(Interview round 3).

In fact, Amina raised attention to an important linguistic-culturally related debate about the difference between language use in classroom and real-life communication. She explained that developing language outside the borders of the classroom is necessary to acquire communicative patterns that instructional learning cannot provide. Evidently, Amina’s security about a well-developed linguistic ability gave her a sense of belonging to the native-speaking environment (representing a level1: position in relation to other characters in the narrative, based on Bamberg’s positioning model of analysis), which she believed in return evokes the other positive perspective to her.

Conclusion

To this end participants in theme 3 demonstrate a positive effect of language development on their *intercultural becoming* dynamics of change. They experienced these advantages in different ways including boosting self-confidence in English use, developing a rich social life, achieving successful communication, and positively shifting perspective on how the ‘other’ perceives them. These outcomes did not necessarily rise together nor have the same effect on all participants. Each participant experienced his own linguistic effect trajectory in relation to his own intercultural encounters.

Conclusion

To conclude, **Finding 2** has looked at the implications of the linguistic capacity in light of cultural and intercultural experiences abroad. Negotiation of the language-culture

relationship led to the emergence of various sites of influence on participants' intercultural being and becoming dynamics. All depending on the motives for embarking on a study abroad experience, and the linguistic-cultural knowledge values as perceived by participants. Fundamentally, participants' experiences of the role of language development have distinctively affected their *intercultural becoming* dynamics at various levels of self-confidence, social networking, achieving successful communication and the shift in intercultural self-value as perceived by the native-speaking environment.

4.3. Finding 3: Factors shaping international students' intercultural becoming during the study abroad experience

Introduction

This finding discusses the various factors that affect participants' *intercultural becoming dynamics* (chapter 5, section 5.2.) in their sojourn abroad and demonstrates the nature and level of interference of these factors on each participant's intercultural experience in general.

Delving into each participant's narrative has contributed to a broader understanding on what influences their *intercultural becoming* processes. Given the longitudinal nature of the study in hand, the tracking of elements under investigation has been presented in terms of a narrative thematic analysis carried out across the three rounds of interviews. However, realising and elaborating on the factors affecting participants' *intercultural becoming* processes was not fully apparent in the first round, where narratives still lack evidence of comparable experiences and intercultural evaluations, that require time intervals to be developed. Therefore, the current finding emerges from the analysis of narrative data elaborated by participants starting from the second round of interviews, where critical comparisons have been made by participants about their intercultural developmental aspects throughout sufficient time. To this end, the narrative thematic analysis of the dataset in the two final interviews has revealed six factors contributing to the *intercultural becoming dynamics* of change of participants namely:

- Cultural and personal identity effect
- Intercultural awareness as embedded in mobility and experiential factors.

- The role of the university
- Academic intercultural knowledge
- Self-sufficiency and independence

It is worth mentioning that the effect of these factors varied significantly at each round and across participants' experiences. In other words, the effect of these factors in shaping participants' *intercultural becoming dynamics* was both time and experience dependent, where each participant acknowledged each factor interference at least once in either round. Therefore, the following factors will be presented coherently in relation to each participant rather than chronologically across interviews.

4.3.1. Cultural and personal identities effect

The effect of cultural and personal identity on shaping participants' *intercultural becoming*, was revealed as a common factor among all participants. During the interviews, participants' narratives on their intercultural being and becoming in the new environment, were constantly expressed with reference to themselves prior coming to the UK. These narratives were mostly comparative images of their intercultural being with reference to bigger cultural structures of nationality, religion, and ethnic grouping. The understanding of participants development in a new intercultural environment through their narratives, was the superposition of both the cultural and personal packages they brought with them and the intercultural encounters where these packages were executed. Therefore, the cultural and personal identity as defined by participants themselves proved to have a significant role in shaping the nature of the intercultural experience abroad.

To start with, participants engaged in comparing their religious and cultural attitudes to that they encountered in the new environment, which affected their life choices and the way of living in the UK. To illustrate the following narrative by Fares highlights how his religious and cultural beliefs affected his social circle choices, where 'gays' are a specific group of people that he wouldn't consider establishing any kind of relations with:

Researcher: "[...] do you mean your religious background have an effect on this? (Speaking about his perspective shift).

Fares: "Certainly Sure... I don't have to read the transcript of the Koran... to say that ...say it is not appropriate because this this goes against nature. And this goes against my system of belief too, because I wasn't raised on the idea that two guys will be

married, or two girls get married. Yeah, so it was against my system. I do tolerate if that makes sense because they are living in their country it's their way of living, I don't care because as long as they are not hurting me and I'm not hurting them... then they should stay on their side and I'm gonna stay at mine. but I don't necessarily need to mingle with them or to start a conversation with them... they just exist as I exist ...as long as we exist in different places that's okay for me" (**Interview round 3**).

Despite his self-perception as someone who expresses acceptance and tolerance to these people's sexual orientation, Fares's communicative choices excluded this specific group of people (assuming a position in relation to other characters mentioned in his story, this is level 1 position in Bamberg's positioning model of analysis 1997). This reveals that his intercultural communication choices are strictly dependent on his cultural and religious orientation, which is a constituent of his identity overall. However, Fares explained that he constantly tried to maintain balance between his whole cultural and religious belief system, and the various unmatching practices and orientations he encounters in new intercultural situations (assuming a position in relation to the self in the narrative being told, this is level 3 in Bamberg's positioning model). Such a balance requires respect of the other differences without eliminating his identity markers. I owe this endeavour by Fares to what Block (2003) identifies as a 'destabilisation of identity' once crossing geographical, cultural and linguistic borders. Identity in this case becomes contested, while individuals attempt to find an equilibrium given that "the new and varied input provided to the individual serves to upset taken-for-granted points of reference" (Block, 2003, p. 3), in this case are Fares's religious beliefs and orientation. The process of reaching this equilibrium for Fares was neither adding new values to his existent ones nor eliminating his identity package, yet a place in between that can be labelled here as 'third space' (Block, 2003).

In a similar vein, Siham explained that her Islamic identity defined various aspects of her intercultural becoming dynamics and life choices. When commenting on a previous narrative by Siham, which stated her social activities choices, she reported that:

Researcher: "... is it a matter of fear of the unknown?"

Siham: "Not a matter of scared... is just caution, and it's like, it's more religious. So if he's a man I wouldn't go with a man ...Yeah, but if my besties, like, I've been to picnic trip to Liverpool with my girls...and others like with Dounia and nehla and it was an

event organized by the International Society. So it was safe for the girls, so it was fun. Otherwise I'll just pass"

Researcher: "So by saying this ... do you feel like your Islamic identity is affecting your choices of living or your lifestyle?... I mean do you think it affects your experience in the UK generally?"

Siham: "Yeah, definitely. Because I don't consider Islam just a religion. It's more of a lifestyle. Yeah, like a choice. So this is what you do. This is what you don't do...and how we do it" **(Interview round 2).**

For Siham, social activities and relationship establishment is tightly related to her Islamic identity, which affects all her intercultural choices. In the following narrative in a different interview, she further commented:

Siham: "...For example, if let's say, you were going to go to a pub, for example, and for me as the Muslim person I am and the Algerian person... I would not go to a pub. So I would never learn what's going on inside that place. And so yes, but if someone invites me to a mosque, I would go to a lecture in the mosque and things. So I would learn about that. So my identity that I grew up with defines my choices and those choice define what kind of experiences I would go through and then learn from" **(Interview round 3).**

According to Siham the type of intercultural learning she may encounter in her abroad experience, was largely dependent on her life choices, which were in return defined mostly by her cultural and religious identity. I believe this can address Baynham's (2015) clarification on whether identity is 'brought along' or 'brought about'. The answer lies in the dynamic continuous nature of identity (Davies and Harré, 1990), where it can be 'brought along' when negotiating those large structures' effects and impositions in repeated encounters, in which identity becomes performatively 'brought about' Baynham (2015, p.84). Therefore, the fact that going to a pub is rejected in Siham's religion, was enough for her to pass on embarking on the experience regardless of what she might learn or encounter interculturally (positioning herself in front of me in relation to the narrative being told, this reflects a level 2 positioning in Bamberg's model of position analysis).

However, in one of her narratives, Siham narrated a story of an incident where she crossed some of the religious boundaries in her opinion. She stated that she felt the need to know more and was curious to understand that type of mysterious 'other' she never met

before in Algeria. In the following conversation me and Siham were discussing how some intercultural incidents contributed to her general development:

R: "So you, you seem like you had a lot of experiences with new people from new environments ... do you have any stories in mind that you feel have left an impact on your intercultural experience in general?"

Siham: "Well yeah... so there is this story ... ahh... I was in Lancaster...It was like, after I presented at the conference... or the study day, I went outside to wander around. And yeah, do some sightseeing. so I met this guy who was in a miserable situation because of some girl (laughs)... And then we started to talk about religion. And he gave me his hand to shake. And I refused. And I said I am Muslim, and this is how we started all the whole religion conversation. And then I asked, like, what do you do? Like, what are you? (laughs) ...Like, oh, my God, it was weird for me, because I always thought there was an ancient religion pagan. Yeah. So he was like, this is a new paganism... they worship the sun and the earth and all that. And so he explained to me all about it. It was fun... It was fun. And I mean, I know in Islam we're not supposed to be, like, open to those.... But for me, it was a new thing. How come a person believes something like that, that he comes from the earth?! And we go back to ...I mean, it's true that we come from Earth, and we go back to Earth, but we don't worship Earth... that was new for me and Interesting"

R: "So after this incident... do you think it helped you shaping your intercultural experience? For example, when you meet these situations again, do you think you would act differently?"

Siham: "Yeah, yeah... Well, I think if someone says, Now, I'm pagan, I know that it's not that ancient thing. I was thinking about it is something new, it could have different concepts and all that. And I learned that we should not really categorize people, because they would. I mean, we're different from them. You would think that you would never think about like this paganism, or I remember I was talking to... you know, Chris, from our office.... I was talking about religion. And then he said, I am humanitarian. I didn't know that. Yeah. And like, what that is supposed to mean...that was new too. So if I hear again that someone else is humanitarian, or something, I would understand what he means" **(Interview round 2)**.

The quest for knowledge is an irresistible human nature feature. According to Siham conversations about religious topics with people who does not share the same religious orientation as her, especially pagans or atheists was an unacceptable thing to do in her religious understanding. However, when she went to Lancaster, and had the chance to discuss

religious views with this group of people, she did not reject it despite knowing that it goes against her system of belief (positioning the self in relation to the narrative being told, reflecting level 2 of Bamberg's positioning analysis model). Nonetheless, Siham acknowledged that what she learned from these experiences, as it helped her develop herself and get interculturally ready for similar intercultural encounters in the future (positioning the self in relation to the self, this level 3 of Bamberg's positioning model), which she assumed is likely to happen in the UK as a multicultural environment that is expected to make her different in many ways (Marginson, 2014) .

In line with Siham's perspective on the role of cultural and religious ties in defining her intercultural choices, Nadia clarified that she relied on her Islamic rules with regard to what to do or not to do:

Nadia: "For example...as a Muslim I cannot make relationships with boys, for example. Yeah, so this cannot be like, I can follow it in Algeria, but here I cannot do it"

R: "Is it a matter of acceptance? Is it a matter of not accepting everything and refusing something? Is this what you meant by it has an effect?"

Nadia: "I think, my identity of religion...and ... my cultural identity... Like guides me not in the way that it prevents me, but guides me towards the right thing for me, in a way that I don't harm people, but I still keep my identity in this new context, in this new, different culture... so I try to find myself within this multiculturalit**y**" **(Interview round 3)**

Nadia insisted on preserving her identity in the new intercultural environment, with maintaining balance of respect and understanding to the 'other' (position in relation to other characters in the narrative, which is level 1 of Bamberg's positioning analysis). However, Nadia also pointed to a quest for identifying herself in the new intercultural environment. She emphasized on different occasions in the second and third interviews, that despite being able to make some progress in her interculturality (narrative perspective to the self, resulting in self-positioning, which is level 3 in Bamberg's positioning model), she was still in need to identify her status across new people and places, which is a process consuming both time and efforts.

Amina goes in line with Siham above on maintaining religious and cultural boundaries in her intercultural experience in the UK. She explained that living in the UK was governed by the system of belief and cultural norms she brought with her. These systems of belief or

cultural norms as described by Amina are the general label of her cultural and personal identity, which are subject to subliminal effect of bigger cultural structures. In the following narrative Amina explained how living the UK experience is subject to her cultural identity influence:

Researcher: "... So... do you think that your cultural and personal identity has affected your experience here in the UK?"

Amina: "Um, yes, of course. Yeah because as I've told you, for instance, by being a Muslim, it really affected my experience in the UK because if I am wearing the veil for instance, it will make a lot of problems for me... a lot of struggles., If it is allowed for me for instance, I can talk to males that I would do that easily but it wouldn't make much difference for me, and it is clear in our culture for instance that a married woman can't talk to boys for instance, at night or go to hang out with guys. It's almost forbidden let's say. and even for me, it's not that it's a must for me and that I should do that with pressure but not ...No, it's for me. This is the way I think and like to behave...living In the UK did not make me live their life but I have my own"

R: "So you don't think this was negative...I mean did this have a negative impact on your experience?"

Amina: "No...not at all...it affected my choices in this experience yes, but not negatively, I mean I tried something new but hold on to my identity and that's a strong effect for me...a good stance and my experience went the way it was supposed to ..."

(Interview round 3).

Interestingly, when clarifying the nature of effect of her identity on her intercultural experience and learning, Amina explained that maintaining her cultural and religious beliefs was never a barrier to intercultural learning. She confirmed that these beliefs are her identifying markers in the new intercultural environment, which never affected her intercultural choices negatively, yet it was a lifestyle that she lived with and preferred to maintain in the new intercultural setting.

Sadja and Rym also stressed the existence of a subliminal effect of their cultural identities on their intercultural experiences, yet this effect can be manipulated to make a balance between the new experiences and their identities. They explained their perspectives in the following:

Researcher: "... Talking about the development... talking about... let's say the progress of your trajectory as a person like you said...do you think that your personal and cultural identity have had an effect on your intercultural development in the UK?"

Sadja: "I think it did, yes, I think definitely it does. Because I think, coming from a country like Algeria, for instance, a country where you rarely meet someone different, who is not Algerian, or like from different religion or anything like that, I think also, so I had certain upbringing, certain way of thinking, like way of thinking, and that I think, many Algerians shared with me. So I think, coming here, from that particular culture, from that environment, definitely had a particular impact on my intercultural competence, or whatever. So, I think, for instance, if someone comes from France, it would be different, because their upbringing and the culture where they live and stuff. It's, it's different from the Algerian one. I do a lot of things here and I lean from these things but I also think of what I am allowed to do and not if I were in Algeria for example...but this never ...how to say this...never prevented me from living new experiences or learn ...it's just who I am...I try to be fluid but also there are limits to everything" **(Interview round 3)**.

Sadja promoted to an equilibrium of who she is and acting in the new intercultural environment. She described herself as 'fluid' in the sense that flexibility in new intercultural encounters is required yet maintaining her identity should also be there as it is what identify her as a person in certain new experiences (expressing perspective to the self is a level 3 position in relation to the self in Bamberg's positioning model 1997). Sadja also engaged in national identities comparisons, where her being an Algerian invites a different kind of intercultural experience than if she was French (a level 1 position in relation to other characters, as proposed in Bamberg's positioning model). Perhaps Sadja at this point ascribed her comparison to common geo-cultural comparisons, where European or western countries tend to share common cultural being that is different from that of an Arab, African, or middle eastern one.

Rym also explained that her cultural and personal identity played an important role in her intercultural experience, yet she stressed the need for mutual understanding of differences between her and the 'other', which can minimize cultural clashes:

Rym: "I wouldn't say my identity whether cultural or personal affected my life here to the extent I do nothing...but it is there of course when deciding to do something...you know it is complicated ...I mean ...what I do is...whenever I am about to do something

or going to a new event or meeting new people, I try to be me ...I don't hurt people of course ...but as much as I do efforts to respect and accept everyone's differences... I expect the same. We are different you know... and it is difficult to be someone else every time...just be you and other people should accept you like you accept them” **(Interview round 3)**.

In her understanding, Rym explained that any intercultural experience requires mutual understanding of the self and other's differences in order to avoid renunciation of the real person each brings to the new intercultural setting. By so doing according to Rym, she succeeded to maintain her identity and engage in new intercultural experiences with minimal confusion to how to place herself. Such an understanding by Rym goes in line with the dialogic, emergent nature of cultural identities, that take into account the contextual reality where these identities are manifested (Young et.al, 2017).

In line with the other participants, Tarek explained that intercultural experience is shaped by different influential factors including the cultural surrounding, stereotypical images, and the upbringing circumstance:

Tarek: “I think, like, everything surrounding your life will affect your intercultural experience starting from, like, for instance, you're sitting in in the living room, and you have two friends over. And then the two friends, they are like one of them is checking the news. And then he sees, for instance, that something happened somewhere, like a catastrophe. Let's say this catastrophe happened in country A let's say in Syria. So let's say it's in Syria, and maybe that person, they have a Western kind of background, and they have some essentialist preconceptions about the Middle East, for instance, as a base maybe of bad things. Maybe they perceive the Middle East as bad. So they will start engaging in discussion with the other friend in front of you, talking about how they deserve how those people deserve all the war they are getting, maybe because they are bad people, maybe because their religion is bad or something like that, and you're there and you're just sitting there. That one of the things that affect your intercultural experience is not only what you bring, what you believe in what you not believe in, the preconceptions that you develop yourself, or you subscribe to or you think they are true or not true, is not only these things like all the factors surrounding your life kind of affect you in a way or another to articulate your intercultural experience in a certain direction” **(Interview round 2)**.

Tarek believes that intercultural experiences are shaped and directed by different experiential factors including, the cultural background, your personal efforts of cultural evaluations, which

results in certain preconceptions, the others' cultural evaluation and the intercultural experience itself where all these aspects come together. In fact, he stresses the nature of effect of his cultural and personal identities on his intercultural experience in the following narrative:

Tarek: "I think my cultural background or the set of identities I developed in there... definitely affects everything in my life including my intercultural learning and development obviously, because when you grow up in a certain family... that family will probably have different views about things like the view of religion. So, some people are very conservative, others are bit conservative, others are very liberal ...so for instance this is when it comes to effect of the structures in the country which is religion on peoples perspectives. Same for education and how education is perceived, like stress up their kids to get education... other keep directing their kids that you have to be this and this and you do that and that...and the same applies for marriage for everything in life there's always many ways perceiving things in different places...there are certain ways that are more prevalent in certain places. so, basically my cultural background really affected my intercultural learning and development and make it kinda change... including views towards people who come from different places who like to be distinctive... because of their...I don't know...their accent... because of their colour or because of race ethnicity and so on and so forth. Well, before I used to think that this change is kind of fixed, it is there and it exists it makes us totally different and it is because of the surroundings and how they affect me... and shape me... because of a school that went to; because of the friends I had before; because of my parents, my family because of television and media, and because of the government, how they perceive the other or the foreign in general. so basically, these images affected me ... and these images may in a particular point may invite cultural identity. at the same time what allowed me actually to change is the shift from one identity to another, to search from one perspective to another...is the agency... is your ability to critically examine things... to reflect things... and to be able to actively say oh...i agree with this point...i don't agree with this point...that I have different ideas and this psychologically allow you to make your own version of things" (**interview round 3**).

What can be inferred from Tarek's narrative is that cultural and personal identities, inevitably contributed to shaping his intercultural experience and setting it in a certain direction. However, he was able to develop an intercultural navigation plan, whereby the set of background effects is transitional in the sense that he became able to shift between his identities at each different intercultural experience. Consequently, Tarek was able to direct his intercultural learning trajectory through a transient agency of his identity, and this is what

can be described as moving across “multiple identities’ (Davies and Harré, 1990; Norton, 2010). In this dynamic process, identities tend to be negotiated and shifted depending on the various positions assumed by the individual in the different storylines that they can be involved in (Davies and Harré, 1990).

Interestingly, Meriem was the only participant who acknowledged that effect of her cultural and personal identity was minimal:

Meriem: “ I don’t think that it affected my life here really...I think change is needed...you can come to the UK for instance with the mentality of an Algerian ...nobody will understand you or even want to be with you...I removed the scarf and one of the reasons is that I felt people here avoid me...but now they see me as one of them ...so change is important ...but my identity is for me between me and my self...but dealing with people is something else”. **(Interview round 3)**.

From the narrative above, it is clear that Meriem worked hard to eliminate the effect of her cultural and personal identities in order to achieve intercultural success. According to her, removing the scarf as one of her religious identity markers was one way to acquire a sense of belonging and being accepted in the new intercultural environment (assuming a position in relation to the other characters in her narrative, which is level 1: position in Bamberg’s positioning model).

Referring to the second finding (**section 4.2.**), Meriem explained that she only gained a sense of belonging when removing the scarf. In the second interview Meriem narrated her feeling of being socially avoided because of being of an Islamic orientation, which made her encounter several racist acts experiences. Therefore, the only solution for her was to attempt elimination of perceived difference between her and the different ‘other’ in the new intercultural environment. However, it can be implicitly noted that Meriem’s cultural and personal identities had a subliminal effect on her *intercultural becoming* processes after all, in the sense that attempting to avoid this effect set her intercultural experience to a certain direction, whereby her experiences became relatively dependent on what she does and does not prefer. In other words, assuming the existence of an effect of cultural and personal identities may set the intercultural experience in a certain direction as much as purposefully eliminating these markers may interfere in shaping the experience.

To cut a long story short, cultural and personal identities may influence an individual's *intercultural becoming dynamics* of change in the abroad experience. It becomes apparent that the research participants have different experiential identity effect including the religious, cultural, national, and social backgrounds. However, coming to the UK was one way to experience the degree of effect of these identity forms and thus identify the course of intercultural learning and becoming.

4.3.2. Intercultural awareness as embedded in mobility and intercultural encounters

Mobility embodied in moving to the UK and the various intercultural encounters that this experience has to offer, is an important factor that has contributed to shaping five of the eight participants' intercultural development. These research participants, although at different time intervals, explained that living in the UK, meeting new people from new cultural backgrounds, and encountering various intercultural experiences contributed to them being self-aware of their intercultural potentials, and act accordingly in the new intercultural environment. In response to asking about the factors contributing to her intercultural development, Sadjia explicitly reported that mobility and exposure to various cultural events contributed significantly to her general intercultural awareness:

Researcher: "What factors do you think helped in this development?"

Sadjia: "Moving to UK, definitely... meeting so many people, and having the chance to speak to so many people, I think going to cultural events as well. And like, some events, like for instance, in the Chinese New Year, or even here Christmas, and you know, some... even Eid, for instance, and meeting some Muslims from other cultures, not like not the same as me in Algeria. So I feel like these cultural events really helped as well, developing my cultural learning... and awareness of the experience as well. So, I think yes, these are the factors that really helps me to develop it" (**Interview round 3**).

According to sadja, intercultural learning comes by experience, which in return contributes to shift in perspective and self-awareness of the experiences she encounters. Sadjia was able to explain how encountering so many situations helped in thinking out of the box and develop a sense of criticality about her attitudes toward people and environments (depicting a level 3: position in Bamberg's positioning model which is positioning in relation to the self). In fact when asking her about the impact of certain incidents she narrated previously, sadja explained that:

Sadja: “I think it made me think... it made me think because... I used to take it superficially, you know, someone for example asks you where you are from, guess it's not, it's not a big deal. But it might be actually a big deal for some people. Now, I learned this because I changed my view in the sense that sometimes you can be very judgmental and stereotypical without even noticing it. So now I'm more self-aware or conscious about my prejudices and my prejudgments of people. It means that, for instance, if someone looks like this way, then he's from this place, which might not be true, because people come in all shapes and physics from all over the world. So, it definitely developed my way of looking at things now and be more aware more self-conscious about my own prejudices” **(Interview round 3)**.

The shift in perspective according to Sadja needs both experience and thinking about the experience for the favour of future incidents. She suggested that intercultural awareness helped her perceive people and their environments without relating to her prejudgments and stereotypes that could reinforce the fixed rigid representations of the new ‘culture’ (Baker, 2015), and realising this shift is one step towards intercultural learning.

Similarly, the following narrative by Fares, represents (a) the need for intercultural experiences to develop intercultural awareness and (b) developing awareness to achieve intercultural learning:

Researcher: “What do you think helped you make this change in perspective about your interculturality as you said?”

Fares: “Me as a person, and if you are willing to change if you come with some sort of open mind, you can reach to this level of tolerance. Also experiences seeing things because the more experiences you live, the more things you see in life, the more conversations you have with different people who are different from you not people are just like you. Then the more you see things which you see differently. And it makes you think, yeah, it makes you think and develop culturally and use this development in the future”

Researcher: “Was is it experience alone? Are there any other factors you believe contributed to your intercultural change?”

Fares: “Definitely, when I say experiences, it doesn't stand on its own. it is accompanied with some critical thinking and awareness of the change. Like for me as a person... because yeah, because you start thinking about, okay, I'm more accepting these things now. And I feel mature. I also have had some friends who told me that I've changed my opinions about many things. Yeah. Like friends told me this. And I

said, what it's okay to change. And it's okay to change. Because it's for the better. And you know, it's for the future, it's okay to change... So it does need some critical thinking as well" (**Interview round 3**).

Fares believed that intercultural learning is the product of mobility, living new intercultural experiences, and reflecting upon these experiences accompanied with the attitude of acceptance to change. All these elements can be critically blended to act successfully in future intercultural incidents. There is resonance in Fares's view on the fact that as humans we tend to be sensitive to our critical experiences, where we engage in a mutual process of 'coming into being' (Dewey, 1929) with our social world, and these all results in learning taking place along this process (Biesta and Burbules, 2003).

Fares stressed on the fact that moving to the UK opened doors for a shift in perspective and reflective thinking on intercultural experiences. He labelled this shift as moving from a "village guy" to a "cosmopolitan city guy" (reflecting level 3: position in relation to the self in Bamberg's positioning model of analysis). This shift for Fares is place dependent where mobility played an important role in broadening his perception to people and the environment around him. He stated that:

Fares: "I was like a village guy. Now I'm More of a cosmopolitan city guy. when I first came, I was like very close minded, with very narrowed vision of things. And things should be done in this way. Otherwise, they're not right. However, living in a different city mingling with other people living in a place where interculturalism happens. And this gives you like, millions and millions of perspectives, and it gives like hundreds of visions to not only people but also to life" (**interview round 3**).

From a different perspective, Meriem and Nadia explained that new intercultural experiences they encountered in the UK boosted their intercultural awareness to differences and similarities they perceive between them and the new other they met. For Meriem realising and being aware of the beauty of differences and similarities between her and the new other she meets is the essence of positive change interculturally:

Researcher: "You have mentioned earlier that you feel more interculturally developed, what in your opinion helped to achieve that?"

Meriem: "Well, experience... life experience and being aware of this experience. each day I'm learning new things...I'm meeting new people. I'm getting to know and realize

how people are different from me... how people are similar to me. Seeing that not all people are happy. Not all people are sad. And getting to know that differences makes us beautiful. Yeah. And whenever we accept that we can live a happy life even if we are different ...that's my principle of life. Yeah. So, I think that many things changed in me just because I think and realise ...I mean...I am aware now of differences if I am not aware of them, I think there wouldn't be a change" **(Interview round 3)**.

Meriem acknowledged the importance of being aware of the environment around her. Meeting people from different cultural backgrounds is one factor in developing an awareness of her critical thinking regarding the differences and similarities between them, which in return make her journey more positive and influential. According to her, the differences are not to be a source of dispute between people, rather are best understood as the beauty of life experience. In such a way, Meriem was able to establish successful mechanisms of intercultural existence and making a balance in her perspectives to how to consider the 'self' and the 'other' in any intercultural encounter (reflecting a level 3: position in relation to the self, according to Bamberg's positioning model).

Like Meriem, yet with focus on differences exclusively, Nadia commented on how awareness of the differences and learning to accept and tolerate them is one key towards intercultural learning:

Nadia: "Well, first of all, I think being exposed to different cultures, what made me feel or being aware of the tolerance, I think I didn't have any problem with differences, but not being exposed to that, that differences cannot make you like tolerant until you... you encounter these differences... and then you can determine whether you are tolerant or not. If you have a problem with communicating or you have any problem raised from that conversation or the differences...only then you know that you are tolerant or not [...] I think tolerance, acceptance, being aware that people are different...your awareness yeah... like people are different, and we cannot like... put rules upon everyone. Everyone is free in their lives. Even with brothers or sisters, we have differences within the same family. How about the whole world...understanding all that makes you able to live in harmony in a world filled with differences ...so I think I become like more intercultural..." **(Interview round 3)**.

Awareness, tolerance, and acceptance of the differences for Nadia are prerequisites for co-existence. This mutual intercultural being of herself and the other in an intercultural

environment is the result of realizing and then reflecting upon these differences between them (positioning herself in relation to other characters in the narrative, which reflect level 1 in Bamberg's positioning model). Therefore, understanding the clear cut between realizing the possession of an intercultural awareness and its execution in intercultural encounters for Nadia, ensure successful communication and leads to new understanding of the other as different yet acceptable culturally. It is worth mentioning that both Meriem and Nadia have experienced a shift with regard to considering the differences and similarities, given that both expressed difficulties in dealing with the new intercultural settings they have encountered and narrated in the first round of interviews. It is instances as these, that are existent in the narrative accounts above that pave the way for understanding the dynamics of *intercultural becoming* change and shift in different directions, which here are demonstrated through intercultural awareness shift in perspective.

Another example of how her UK experience enabled realizing the differences comes from Amina, who believed that experiencing new cultural environments contributed to boosting awareness of her being different from the new/different other she meets; therefore learning to co-exist culturally.

Amina: "experiencing the other's cultural life, let's say, yeah... and even the experience that you are in the new culture, it really gives you the cultural... to be more culturally aware and know what to do in certain events...Yeah, you'll be culturally sensitive to the new experience. And that it's not only about one difference or two, there are a lot of differences that you can judge all of them. Yes, we just, you just accept it and move on. So, you don't stick on it...or focus on it and keep talking about it...Everyone's free to do whatever he or she wants. So you can't just judge everyone. And especially in the UK, there are a lot of religions, a lot of customs. You see every day new things that you can't keep judging them. So you just be aware of them, you know that they exist. And you just keep your own beliefs and that everyone lives the way they want. So I think experiencing life in the UK make me more culturally aware about how to live and deal with people" (**Interview round 3**).

The importance of differences awareness according to Amina, lays in the ability to develop acceptance and tolerance of the assumedly different other (position in relation to other characters, which reflects level 1 positioning in Bamberg's model of positioning analysis). This correlation in return is one way to achieve intercultural learning through letting go critical

judgments, which lead to dispute and miscommunication. Amina explained that acceptance and tolerance does not necessarily mean to melt in the other cultural being, yet it is a two-way process whereby the other is expected to tolerate and accept what he perceives different from her end. This perceived difference is one form of identity that both have the right to preserve.

It seems clear that mobility, the nature of experiences and intercultural awareness (whether it be awareness of differences and similarities or awareness of the experience itself) has contributed significantly in some participants' perspectives shift and hence intercultural learning. They believe that mobility along the unique intercultural encounters of each participant, did not only broaden their perspective about the other; yet it added to their intercultural learning and dynamics of becoming. In addition, achieving progressive levels of intercultural understanding, enabled them to learn how to accept and tolerate the new/different other; henceforth, establishing a successful intercultural life.

4.3.3. The role of university

Given the fact that moving to the UK for participants was for academic purposes to pursue their Ph.D. studies abroad, yet the university promotes support for international students and plays a significant role in the intercultural becoming for some participants. This role has been explicitly articulated by three out of the eight participants. These students acknowledged how the different activities and institutional support bodies the universities have to offer, helped in developing both academic and social intercultural leaning through overcoming upon arrival difficulties and ensuring continuous general development.

At the beginning of her journey in the UK, Nadia narrated that she had some difficulties related to language performance, which affected her intercultural learning by being isolated and avoiding new people and settings. She acknowledged that the conversational club organized by the coaching for academic English at her university, was the first step towards achieving intercultural development:

Researcher: "So during this time that you were attending the conversational club, you said that it was an important factor for you to go out of your isolation... especially at the beginning ...was this the only factor? Was the conversational club, the only mean, that helped you go out of your isolation?"

Nadia: “I think it was the first step. Because before that, I didn't have any friends from like, from outside the University campus but then when I have that experience, I found that not only me, who is struggling with the language, struggling with communicating with people.... so when I had that opportunity, I felt that I can speak...to other people. Not necessarily British, but I can speak with international students or international, like, people from outside the university. It was an essential step for me to go forward with my... expressing myself ... maybe to other people outside the university. Yeah... So it helped me a lot” **(Interview round 2)**.

During the first interview, Nadia described herself as a non-sociable individual, who avoids establishing new connections. However after spending some time in the UK, she developed a feeling of loneliness and isolation in the new intercultural environment. This urged her to seek help through the university support activities, which proved to take her out of her isolation, and developed a tendency to meet new people.

In addition Nadia acknowledged the role of her supervisors’ support in developing self-confidence about her linguistic capacity and opening doors for communicative abilities to emerge (reflecting a position in relation to the self, which is a level 3 positioning in Bamberg’s positioning model) as she reported below:

Nadia: “[...]also my supervisor who supported my learning of the language and never picked up on my mistakes she never makes me feel less or my language is not perfect ...she gave me time to develop which is something I appreciate” **(Interview round 2)**.

Not only activities organized by her university were of great help to develop intercultural, yet academic opportunities organised by different universities in the UK contributed to Nadia’s intercultural change. Additionally, she pointed out that attending conferences as well boosted her confidence to be initiative in establishing intercultural connections:

Nadia: “I have attended some conferences in different universities, where I had to initiate with other people. So, that time I felt that I still have that quality of introducing myself, which, I did not used to be that back in Algeria. So, when I attended the conference, I was like successfully been able to speak with other people from different backgrounds... this was also helpful” **(Interview round 2)**

Similarly, throughout the interviews when asking Siham about the different social activities she usually attended, she explained that most of the social and intercultural events that she participated in were university based:

Siham: "I do some activities that are related to university thing and the volunteering, there are now broader because I got to meet other people and do different activities with different charities and all that. But it's still related to university. Because I know that it's safe. There is the ISOC ...Islamic society at university ...I attended some of their events...also events organized by the student union...I activated my email alert to receive their latest events so...these events make learn things meet new people ...explore life opportunities... especially when doing volunteer work ..i think it make me feel I am doing a change and it is a great feeling. For other things that are not related to university I still go on, with people that I really, really trust.... people, even Algerian students, our colleagues, or people that my classmates introduced me to. so even there are some things that I would never do, for example, last week, some friends proposed that will take me to Liverpool. So I said no, because I don't know them, even though they were like, with good intentions" **(Interview round 2)**.

Attending these university-based activities according to Siham helped in her general and intercultural learning, through the intercultural opportunities that can be there. She stated that meeting new people and learning about various cultural backgrounds is one aspect that the university social events would provide rather than other out of campus activities she might be part of. In fact, choosing to be engaged in university-based activities was not only for the wide range of intercultural benefits it has to offer, yet it was related to security purposes. For Siham the university organised events are safe cites to explore interculturality, while other activities that might be proposed by other people that she know superficially were a source of doubt and fear (assuming a level 2: position in relation to the narrative being told, in Bamberg's positioning model of analysis). Therefore, she tends to pass on invitations to events outside the university's campus.

For Amina, knowing about the role of university in her intercultural becoming processes, was in response to asking about her social network and the efforts she made to widen it:

Researcher: "Did you do any efforts lately to... I mean, generally not just lately, do you do any efforts to widen the circle of your friends... widen your social network to other people from other cultural backgrounds rather than just Algerians".

Amina: "Yeah, I've attended two to three sessions of international society events they are in... I mean, in (my university). Yeah, it was really exciting to know about other people's culture. And they were people from France, Italy, Spain, the United States, Australia, China. and it was there where I made my Turkish friend, because I watch a lot of Turkish movies. And I know that their culture is so close to ours. So, it was really

easy to make new friends. So to make her as my new friend. until now we still talking and we still asking about each other. They are fasting, also, they are Muslims. And it was really enjoying, I was really enjoying her friendship. so being part of these events organized by (my university) of course was of great help to widen my social friendships” **(Interview round 2)**.

For Amina university activities were the only source to widen her social network. Throughout the interviews Amina constantly referred to herself as not being a sociable personality, and that she doesn't have the tendency to establish new connections (positioning herself in relation to other characters of her narrative, which is a level 1 position on Bamberg's positioning model). However, through attending activities organised by different university bodies she found opportunities to initiate and establish new friendships and connections with people from new/different cultural backgrounds. Consequently, widening her social network through these activities helped in more intercultural learning opportunities.

Based on the narrative reported by these participants, it is obviously understood that university as an academic body that provides academic, social and emotional support, has a significant role in shaping the course of intercultural becoming for these students. Attending university-based events, academic coaching activities, and emotional and instructional support provided by university staff such as supervisors, contributed significantly to shaping and promoting intercultural learning throughout these participants' study abroad journeys.

4.3.4. Academic intercultural knowledge

Following the role of university and academic settings in promoting some participant's intercultural learning, it is worth acknowledging these two narratives by Tarek and Rym, which emphasized the role of doing research in intercultural communication field on their intercultural dynamics of change. For Tarek and Rym doing research in interculturality helped them shaping their intercultural knowledge, raising their awareness to certain intercultural aspects that is not apparent to others who are ignorant about the field, and helped them deal with intercultural encounters professionally.

Rym: “I think my awareness that people are different that we are not the same ...maybe my curiosity to know...my study is also related to culture because I'm really interested in learning about people's cultures and identity, how people think and stuff. So, I'm not just doing that because, I mean, to learn these things, I'm not going to read

some articles just to write my PhD but I am really interested to know about differences between all these people and how to deal with them and to be honest those articles I read about intercultural study did help to understand how to deal with people ...with certain events or misunderstandings” **(Interview round 2)**

Rym explained that knowledge in the field of intercultural communication raised her intercultural awareness to the extent of successful execution of this awareness in real life situation. She further elaborated that the readings that she made, transcends the purpose of drafting her Ph.D. to being actively engaged in real life problem-solving, which in return helped her in establishing successful communicative events (positioning herself in relation to herself in the narrative, which reflects level 3 positioning in Bamberg’s analysis model).

Tarek: “I don't think when it comes to my UK experience... I don't think that I held a lot of like, a lot of stereotypes. Once I'm here in the UK...I have stereotypes throughout my years, like, for instance, my adolescence and stuff like that. But even before going to the UK, I think I mentioned that in the previous interview, like I started reading about the field of interculturality. And how to perceive culture in a different like... following a different paradigm or different approach. And I started questioning things like even like before coming to the UK...which actually helped me navigate the environment already without like within my preconceptions ahead of me...without using the preconception to navigate the place without saying oh, I will not do that I will not go to a pub. Because I have a Muslim background for instance, I will not do that. Because of that...So not putting those preconceptions ahead helped me navigate all places be familiar with places easily or in get to go beyond it. Go beyond stereotypes that I already overcome thanks to my knowledge of the interculturality” **(Interview round 2).**

It is important to note at this level that most of the conversations with Tarek throughout all the interviews took a more professional direction. He used and executed his research related to interculturality during our conversations to elaborate on the various aspects of his intercultural experience from an academic perspective. However, going deep while analysing his narratives, Tarek was able to reflect his ability to exploit the knowledge he acquired while doing his research, in his intercultural experience abroad. In this regard, Byram, Holmes, and Savvides (2013) suggest that interest in the intercultural dimension in Study Abroad can be associated with the learning process of becoming aware of differences and act accordingly in future intercultural encounters.

Looking at the above narrative, Tarek explained that he was able to minimize the effect of stereotypes and move towards establishing a successful intercultural journey, where

he constantly resorted to evaluative comparisons of intercultural knowledge and real-life experiences (reflecting level 2: position in relation to the narrative in Bamberg's positioning model).

Therefore, these two cases acknowledged the importance of intercultural knowledge in shaping the process of intercultural success. The theoretical intercultural knowledge according to Rym and Tarek transcends the educational and academic purposes to be subconsciously utilised in real intercultural learning trajectories.

4.3.5. Self-sufficiency and independence

Living the study abroad experience offers international students the opportunity to act as fully independent individuals at various levels. Being responsible for aspects of their financial, academic and other circumstantial life experiences; offers them the opportunity to explore their potentials and act upon them in their intercultural encounters. Fares, Tarek and Nadia stated that one of the benefits of study abroad is to achieve autonomy, which in return has allowed them to be independent in expressing their perspectives, broadening their social and cultural life freely, and embarking on various experiences that was not made possible previously.

To start with, Tarek explained that living the UK experience was an opportunity to live independently, which in return helped him get rid of cultural and financial ties that used to limit his perspectives and ability to express them:

Tarek: "...Being in the UK and having scholarship from the government makes me feel really independent to the point where you can have an idea, you can have a thought and you can Express yourself easily. Unlike being for instance home, and you don't have a job, you don't have a house, you don't have the ability to get a job, which means that first you do not have the resources that can actually make you more critical in a faster way and the second thing is that you do not have the ability to speak up and say whatever you want... because this will affect you negatively ... maybe because the person you are living with is not as tolerant as going to the point where they will allow to be totally against those who provide you with shelter, with food... with money...So basically, my cultural background affected my intercultural development in many things but on the same time being independent and being able to feed myself without depending on anyone or any intervention kinda allowed me to change my perspectives" **(Interview round 3)**.

For Tarek, change of perspective was dependent on loosening ties with the cultural belonging, where self-expression is restricted due to financial dependency. However, being in the UK offered the opportunity to experience autonomy and financial independence, which in return helped the willingness to express himself freely and therefore develop his learning resources (reflecting a level 2 positioning in relation to the narrative on the site of the interview, according to Bamberg's positioning model).

Fares on the other hand, explained the role of independence in his intercultural experience from a different perspective. In the following narrative, Fares argued that being independent in the UK, gives him a sense of belonging to the new intercultural environment, given that independence is a common life feature among people in the UK:

Researcher: "So in what ways being independent helped your intercultural experience in the UK?"

Fares: "My independence has helped my intercultural situation in the UK... it makes you feel that you can survive it, the culture and the country as much as they can survive it, you know? Because, yeah, for instance, now I can find a room on my own, I can do shopping on my own, I can cook on my own. And if I, if I'm gonna be in a group where they are doing this stuff when they are living, because it's their lifestyle, this something I'm not used to, but they are used to... Yeah, so if I'm in a group, and they say? Okay, I found a room. For myself, it was a good price, and it was cheap. And I had this bargain and all. And like, I still can relate to this... this situation...I think I have something to talk about this morning. I would say, I don't know how to do this stuff. And I've got someone who does this stuff for me. I can contribute to the conversation by an experience of my own...Yeah. It makes you included in their culture?!... Because they are independent themselves. And being independent feels like you belong. Not just belong... but it doesn't make you feel different. When it comes to their lifestyle... you just can imagine a situation where someone coming from Algeria not knowing how to do anything. And he is putting it in. As I said, the stuff I said before they are talking ...they are having a conversation and this guy is within them. And the guy he just came from Algeria, for instance, then he's used to have stuff done for him... how would this make him feel ...it wouldn't feel like he belongs to that culture where everyone is self-sufficient. Everyone is doing things on their own. Everyone is figuring things out on their own..." **(Interview round 3)**

Performing his own daily chores and fulfilling his basic needs for himself according to Fares, was not commonly experienced in his home country, which gives family full responsibility and

control over a big part of his life (a position is assumed here with reference to characters in the narrative, which reflects level 1 in Bamberg's positioning model of analysis). However, the study abroad experience offered Fares abundant opportunities to feel free of family and culture ties, which in return encouraged him to embark on new intercultural experiences, getting to know new people, and be independent in expressing his opinions (a self-description in relation to the self, which indicates positioning the self in relation to the self, this is level 3 of Bamberg's positioning model). By so doing, he was able to get rid of being different and helped him develop a sense of belonging to the new intercultural environment.

Another important reference to the effect of independence on intercultural experience becoming dynamics, was made when Nadia started feeling confident about herself in the new intercultural setting:

Nadia: "Well I think I really like my new lifestyle, although I know it's like for three or four years, but I really appreciate that because I get to know so many people, I experienced so many challenges, and I felt that I know myself more and more, because I'm living in a different country in different circumstances that then when in Algeria, so this reveals some parts of my personality as well. Being here in the UK... it made me learn some independence, some autonomy especially financially it gives strength to do everything by yourself and this applies to all sides of life [...] in general, I feel that I'm more confident... more independent in a way. Like... keeping my own life... my principles as they were in Algeria, as a positive thing is that ... I get out from my comfort zone" (**Interview round 3**).

The feeling of independence both financially and culturally for Nadia, helped in broadening her intercultural experience by being able to embark on activities that were not made possible for her in Algeria. Therefore, there were high chances for her to get to meet new people, live new situations, and get to explore herself and her potentials (this a level 2 position in relation to the narrative being narrated, as suggested in Bamberg's positioning model of analysis). All these aspects intertwined together were believed to improve her intercultural learning.

Conclusion

Overall, this section has discussed the factors that occasionally intertwined together and influenced participants' intercultural becoming dynamics. It first demonstrates how the participants' cultural and personal identities have influenced the nature of the intercultural

experiences each would embark upon by defining their intercultural choices. Secondly, it explains how moving to the UK, and intercultural awareness affected the course of intercultural change in participants' journeys. Additionally, the university as an academic body in the study abroad experience proved to play an important role for some participants in boosting their intercultural learning and development. Finally, the analysis of some participants' narratives highlighted the role of Independence and academic knowledge of the intercultural domain in broadening the intercultural experience for them.

Conclusion of chapter 4

This chapter focusses on analytically communicating participants' intercultural perspectives shift on their study abroad experience, through exploring the *intercultural becoming dynamics* of change throughout their journeys in the UK. The findings presented in this chapter reflect a process of perspective shifts of *intercultural becoming dynamics* including intercultural self-positioning through stereotypes' mechanisms shift, a language-culture relationship perceived value negotiation, and the factors shaping the nature and quality of these dynamics in the abroad experience. Each finding promotes a narrative reflected process of change across and within participants' narrative accounts, which tells a story of self-perception and positioning vis a vis the other' and the cultural environments. The next chapter is to shed light on the theoretical foundations and related explanations of the research findings presented above.

Chapter five: Discussion of the findings

Introduction

The overall aim of this study is to gain a better understanding of the intercultural experiences of Algerian Ph.D. students in the UK, from being to becoming interculturally in study-abroad contexts. It is hoped that a better understanding of *intercultural becoming dynamics* of change can provide exploratory insights into sojourners' self-perception and positioning in relation to both their intercultural backgrounds and study abroad experiences, the understanding of the language-culture interplay perspectives as a dynamic of shift, and the various factors intervening and/or contributing to the intercultural becoming journeys at distinctive levels (**section 5.1**). Such insights initiated my interest in what was and continue to be a matter of hot debate in intercultural communication studies, namely the non-essentialist perspective on intercultural phenomena (Holliday, 1999, 2011, Nathan 2010). Therefore, the over-arching aim of this project is to explore the intercultural being and becoming of sojourners in the study abroad context from a non-essentialist perspective, through an exploration of participants' narratives across three rounds of interviews along the course of eight months of their early sojourn in the UK.

Although the exploration of a whole intercultural experience may unfold intensive aspects of focus, the data set generated in the narrative interviews enabled me to narrow down my focus to answer the following questions:

1. In what ways does the study abroad experience affect Algerian Ph. D students' intercultural positioning processes?
2. How do participants negotiate and describe the interplay of language and culture throughout their intercultural experiences in new intercultural environments?
3. What factors do sojourners believe to interfere and/or contribute to their *intercultural becoming*?

The purpose of this chapter is to provide interpretive explanations for the results presented in **chapter4** and to consider the implications of these findings for understanding the *intercultural becoming* experiences through participants' self-perceptions and descriptions. As such the discussion chapter shall demonstrate the study's analytical outcome in relation to established theoretical frameworks. It is structured in three sections, each per

corresponding finding emergent in the analysis chapter, and respectively addressing the research questions listed above. In the first section of this chapter, I will reflect on the findings regarding the process of intercultural self-positioning in different intercultural settings, with respect to the conceptual understanding of culture and existing literature on the positioning and self-reflection notions proposed in **chapter 2**. Following that is a discussion of negotiating the role of language-culture perceptions among participants in their intercultural encounters in study abroad contexts. Next, to provide deeper insights into participants' intercultural becoming, I will renew my attachment to a non-essentialist explanation of factors contributing and/or interfering in shaping the various trajectories and cross-paths the participants have encountered in different intercultural environments.

5.1. The process of intercultural self-positioning

Participants' narrative accounts featured a wide range of intercultural encounters prior to and during their sojourn abroad, which were deemed important to the generation of significant insights on participants' *intercultural becoming*. As seen in **finding1**, throughout the three interviews, participants' narratives constantly signified a process of cultural perspectives shifts prior to and post-arrival to the UK. These shifts were represented in the form of a stereotyping mechanism change, which had significant implications on sojourners' intercultural self-perception and positioning, in relation to the other particularly and new environments broadly.

It is clearly apparent that **finding1** indicates that the process of sojourners' prior stereotyping process stems originally from a common essentialist belief of a distinct culture that limits the understanding of the 'other' culture values as different to 'ours' (Holliday, 2020, p. 14). In fact, the focus on differences designated by large cultural structures, which promote the abstract 'our culture'- 'their culture' binary was common among all participants at different levels and with various degrees of impact (Holliday, 2020, p.33). However, it is of great importance to note that the participants' narratives emerged in such a way, where a movement between essentialist and non-essentialist cultural discourses in the form of blocks and threads descriptions were also documented (Holliday, 2016) starting from the second set of interviews. By means of no denial of participants' cultural origins or backgrounds, and more precisely at the beginning of their journeys abroad, **finding 1**, suggests that referring to large national structures (Holliday, 1999) can find its way into the narratives of any kind of

conversation revolving around intercultural discussion, including topics of religion, politics, educational endeavours and prospects in study abroad contexts. When talking about the intercultural-related experiences at the time of arrival, the participants showcased a binary of opposition of culture as 'us Algerians' vs 'them British' (Bakhtin, 1963) without references to other groups of different nationalities. For these participants the cultural boundaries between the imagined two nations 'Algerians' and British' remained uncrossable at this phase, resulting in the comparisons process of the practices and values of the self and the other in new settings (Holliday, 2011). Indeed, their use of this essentialist mode of thinking acted as a form of prejudice (Allport, 1954) about the people they are expected to be communicating with, which resulted in confining the 'other' into solid national categorization (Dervin, 2016), hereby the British. In the case of Sadjia, Siham, and Fares who experienced a shift from negative to positive stereotyping about the west, the comparisons seemed to be unconsciously made and was explicitly resulting in the 'British vs Algerian cultures' mode of perception of the 'other'. Siham for example, expressed the two poles mode of 'us Muslims' vs 'them western' with direct expressions "female Muslim hijabi alone in a western country, especially with this problem of islamophobia" (section 4.1.1.1). However, by the second and third round of interviews, participants started showing signs of awareness of cultural heterogeneity of the abroad experience, and that there are multi versions of that rigid cultural binary of 'them vs the British', i.e., the existence of potentially similar others, supposedly from other nationalities (this showcased a softer version of essentialist thinking or neo-essentialism).

Attempting to identify the similar other in the large cultural categorization set in advance, is a form of pulling a smaller cultural thread that appears in the continuous effect of encounters novelty. One possible explanation for such a shift can be linked to a point made by Zaharna (1989), who explains that there is an identity shock caused by immersion into new critical intercultural experiences. She argues that "the idea of a "new identity" and personal change appears to be implicit by the product of intercultural experience" (p.505), and that by this phase the most significant task for the sojourner "becomes not so much [about] trying to make sense of the Other [...] but rather the Self" (p.505). Block (2007) goes in line with this suggestion as he supports the understanding that "the Identities are about negotiating new subject positions at the crossroads of the past, present, and future. Individuals are shaped by their sociohistories, but they also shape their sociohistories as life goes on. The entire process

is conflictive as opposed to harmonious and individuals often feel ambivalent” (Block, 2007, p.27). Block brings to the fore the possibility of the study abroad early experience is a destabilizing environment, which results in self-negotiation bias. He suggests that “... when individuals live through geographical and linguistic border crossings, they find that their sense of identity is destabilized and that they enter a period of struggle to reach an equilibrium”. (Block, 2002, p.2). Seeing this in terms of Block’s demonstration of identity destabilizations in study abroad, identity in this situation covers more than just the ‘identity’ itself. Block’s definition of identity hereby is used as an umbrella term covering different related notions employed by applied linguistics scholars and theoreticians, including ‘subject positions’, ‘subjectivities’, and ‘self’ (Block, 2007). With this in mind, he argues that the initial struggle and contestation of the individual’s identity at this phase is the result of ‘hybridity’ and ‘third space’ (Bhabha, 1994), whereby achieving cosmopolitan identities in critical cultural experiences entails negotiation of the differences. However, if I am to look closely at the participants’ trajectories of intercultural negotiations over the three rounds of interviews, negotiation of differences did not take one single form nor could be generalized across individuals themselves over their distinctive intercultural encounters. Fares for example was self-aware of the shift in his perspective to differences as he mentioned in the second interview “I am not thinking the same anymore [...]” and again in the third interview “my perspective to people and how I see them [changed]” (sections 4.1.2. and 4.1.3. respectively). However, Siham on the hand, in her second interview that she is never going to be similar to the British and she explicitly stated “we are not English we’re never gonna be English. We are always gonna be Algerians...” (section 4.1.2). This denote that even in her second interview where she mentioned that a lot of aspects have changed about her intercultural understanding, Siham was still strongly embracing the ‘differences’ perspective.

Putting it differently, Bhabha (1991, 1994) suggests that the notion of ‘third space’ is an in-between place where the crossing over time and cultural differences takes place, in the form of pre-existing cultural codes redefined, and negotiated through the conditions of contingency and contradictions. This denotes that the third space is again an imagined confined movement between national cultures, which is again defined by imagined boundaries emergent out of the interweaving of elements from both cultures in singular “essentialized time-space units” (Zhou and Pilcher, (2019), p. 1). One attempt of Zhou and Pilcher, (2019) to reconfigure the boundaries of the ‘third space’ (Bhabha, 1991, 1994)

metaphor, was through an exchange with Adrian Holliday, in which they interrogate his shift in perspective regarding third space and its relation to his notion of 'small culture formation on the go'. Holliday acknowledges that unlike language learning which entails the mastery of certain pre-defined skills that makes it safe to navigate in a 'third space'; the fluid, dynamic, and open nature of culture, makes it unsafe to navigate the cultural negotiation in the 'in-between' that third space evokes (Zhou and Pilcher, 2019). However, Holliday suggests that the only way that makes third space a non-essentialist point of reference for researchers and educationalists is to look for the de-Centredness "disciplines of trying to separate yourself from the beliefs, then you are trying to acquire a third space" (Zhou and Pilcher, 2019). Third space in this case should be perceived as a time or moment of unexpected ways of threads and blocks negotiated, a process of minimal de-centredness from the hierarchy of patriarchy (Zhou and Pilcher, 2019), mixed with the engagement into a small culture formation on the go, in which engagement or non-engagement in understanding the complexities that all of us encounter as we strive to make sense of the intercultural.

Indeed, along with **4.1.2. and 4.1.3. (Chapter 4)**, the research participants exemplify a self-negotiation process in new intercultural settings, where the large cultural structures are contested with agency, choice, and multiple intersecting identities. Simply put, the research participants by the third interview reflected another level of cultural blocks and threads negotiation via minimal realization that culture is not a stable solidified unit, but rather an emergent, co-constructed, and mediated process that mirrors the dynamics of power and ideological assets of indexicality (Silverstein, 2003) that operate across the spaces. In many narratives, Fares for example was able to narrate some intercultural encounters by demonstrating an attachment to his ethnic group as an Algerian Muslim who refuses certain behaviours and values he assigned to the 'other' such as sexuality, religion, and political discourses. However, within these narratives, he also referred to his attitudes and reactions to these intercultural encounters as subjective perspectives that he was able to construct through the accumulation of his own distinctive experiences in the UK.

In fact, this replicates Holliday's (2015) observations on his interviews with Ph.D. students regarding their intercultural experiences in the UK. In his paper, Holliday (2015) stresses the fact that individuals in the everyday narrative construction of reality switch from one mode of cultural blocks representation as large essentialist discourse to another in the form of threads about 'critical cosmopolitan discourse' within the same narrative (Holliday,

2016, p.321). Although the research participants here did not show this ability of cultural negotiation till after some time in the UK, **Theme 2 and 3 (sections 4.1.2. and 4.1.3. respectively)** showcased that by the time of the second and third interviews, the research participants cultural points of reference started to be negotiated after the phase of initial clashes of pre-judgments about imagined western cultures, with the reality projected through actual intercultural encounters. Despite the maintenance of the cultural blocks mode of thinking which build cultural boundaries and confines intercultural self-positioning, participants by this phase started negotiating their identities across different spaces in different manners. There was no single form or direction of change, however, the process of self-positioning drifted towards a more distinct self than the British people -as having some features of the other, i.e., rather than purely 'us vs them' it became me vs the other. Sadjia for example, and by third interview was able to communicate with people on the mere situation not as a person belonging to a certain 'outer group' she explicitly stated, "I always leave space for: maybe this person isn't as I think" (**interview 3, section 4.1.3.**). With the same perspective shift of 'us vs them' to 'me vs the other' Nadia commented "...so what have changed is that I don't stereotype people on whole country under one" (**interview 3, section 4.1.3.**). Therefore, participants were able to relate many aspects of transformative perspectives to their interculturality status prior to and post the UK experience, including the interference of stereotypes in the formation of new worldviews.

It is of great importance to acknowledge that having tracked the nature and the shift in stereotyping mechanisms through participants' narratives, analysis has clearly demonstrated that, as Holliday (2020a) indicates:

Stereotypes are indeed natural. We all carry them with us wherever we go. But we carry them in the same way that we carry race and gender stereotypes. They are always there; and we need every day to push them aside. (p. 14).

Whether explicitly pointing to a stereotypical image or in response to their own reflection on stereotype formation and reconstruction, participants acknowledged that carrying stereotypes was and had continued to be part of their *intercultural becoming* experiences, yet the trajectories each participant has undergone proved their perspective and individual stereotype mechanism shifts to be a developmental discipline, to set them aside or learn to reconstruct them in different manners.

As elaborated in **section 4.1 (chapter 4)** and discussed here, the participants' narratives unfold a wide range of stereotype shift directions and various reflections on their intercultural experiences prior to and post their arrival to the UK. Embarking on a study abroad experience for all the participants in this study was intertwined with curiosity about novelty and genuine interest in meeting people from the new intercultural environment. As Dolby (2004) states

...study abroad provides not only the possibility of encountering the world, but of encountering oneself particularly one's national identity in a context that may stimulate new questions and new formulations of that self. (p. 150).

Interestingly, the generated narratives marked a discrepancy of culture-specific generalizations, expectations, and then stereotype shifts after spending some time in the UK. To name a few examples in **finding 1** for Siham, Sadjia, and Fares, the common misconceptions about the 'west' vs 'the rest' that is projected and reinforced by western media, literature, and global politics (Said, 1993), have been the common factor among the three participants that lead to the formation of negative prejudgments about people in the UK as a western country. **Finding 1** showcased that these participants who embarked upon studying in the UK with negative stereotypes and fears of an Islamophobic, racist western society were able to alter them with more experience-proven judgments and perspectives after a relatively short time of experiencing life in the UK (**see section 4.1.1.1**).

On the other hand, in the opposite direction of intercultural transformative change, the formation of negative stereotypes of a racist western society has been also documented (**section 4.1.1.2**). This goes in line with Block's (2007) suggestion that "when individuals move across geographical and psychological borders, immersing themselves in new sociocultural environments, they find that their sense of identity is destabilised and that they enter a period of struggle to reach a balance" (p. 864). Therefore, sojourners find their identities affected in multifarious ways. For example, some identities, such as national identity, may become more salient as in the case of Nadia who became more appreciative of her cultural background (Algeria), while others become less available (Wilkinson, 1998b), which can be noticed in Sadjia's narrative account who elaborated on a less appreciate of that "patriot" feeling she used to have. As such Students may find themselves positioned in unfamiliar ways with respect to their newly salient national identities.

In fact, the division of the different other as British vs other nationalities that have been well articulated in participants' narratives, have not only impacted the beginning of their

journey, yet it yielded infectious essentialist generalizations to the British as a whole. This goes in line with Rozin and Royzman (2001) who suggest that negative stereotypes as such exhibit a contagious judgment whereby individuals generalize a certain negative behaviour of a single member of the 'Other' to the rest whom he views as part of the same social group. Subject to their intercultural encounters during the eight months of the study, the three participants who came with negative stereotypes (Sadja, Siham, and Fares) have not only witnessed a shift in their previously held judgments, yet it profoundly affected potential stereotype construction in the future. In this vein, Holliday (2009) suggests that focus on such a case should not be directed towards whether the stereotype has been confirmed or falsified, yet to the development of the discipline for avoiding them in future situations.

Therefore, the shift in the stereotyping mechanism has been developed in the sense that participants learned to avoid pre-judgments as much as possible and leave room for experiential effects to take place. Holding positive stereotypes was also noted in **finding 1 (4.1.1.2.)**, where four participants (Meriem, Rym, Nadia, and Amina) demonstrated an optimistic pre-sojourn perspective about life in the UK. Holding positive stereotypes in its broad sense does not necessarily denote a positive progressive shift in perspective or the stereotyping mechanism itself. Indeed, more recently researchers have begun examining the negative effect resulting from holding positive pre-conceptions (Glick and Fiske, 2001, Fiske, 2012). The four participants in the study who narrated having positive stereotypes about life in the UK, have demonstrated negative clashing with their realities once starting the study abroad experience. More accurately, the optimistic perspectives these participants came with did not confirm the actual intercultural realities encountered. In the case of Meriem for example (**finding1, section 4.1.1.2.**), encountering certain uncomfortable intercultural situations led Meriem's positive stereotypes about open-minded, understanding other (hereby described as British) as portrayed in media, to clash negatively resulting in the reconstruction of a new rigid negative stereotype about a racist, Islamophobic British society. This confirms that sojourners who encounter certain negative tension in the new intercultural environment tend to strengthen or reproduce negative stereotypes about the host society despite the positive preconceptions held before (Jackson, 2010).

By looking at the dataset analysis, it became clear that the stereotyping described in this study is a dynamic process, whereby participants socially assign certain characteristics to an intercultural out-group (the other), yet simultaneously and implicitly assign other

counterproductive characteristics to themselves (as the intergroup). This is what is known as self-stereotyping, whereby an individual engages in a process of self-define, describe, and evaluating in terms of the ingroup norms and values they believe they belong to (van Veelen et al., 2016). Given the fact that ingroup identities are likely important to one's self-perception, an individual tends to self-stereotype when his or her social and cultural identity is salient within the intergroup, they belong to (Latrofa, Vaes, and Cadinu, 2012). Indeed, this was apparent in Nadia's description of herself in relation to the national-ethnic group she belonged to, when she narrated: "I mean we always looked at them as perfect people but like in return we looked at ourselves as we are less than that" (interview 3, section 4.1.3.2.). Furthermore, Latrofa et al. (2010) suggest that self-stereotyping is not attributed to positive stereotyping solely yet negative ingroup stereotypes might be attributed to the self as well, particularly in situations of the perceived inferiority of competence and intelligence.

Related to positive and/or negative self-stereotyping is well articulated in **chapter 4 (section 4.1.3.2)** on the revaluation of participants' cultural backgrounds. Participants by the third interview reached some kind of a revaluation of their home country and cultural belonging in comparison to the experiences they encountered in the UK. However, given that reality is subject to multiple interpretations, and so, different individuals are likely to construe the world around them in various manners (Kelly, 1955), participants' perspectives shift about their cultural background (herby described as Algeria) varied significantly, making their self-positionings pluralistic. It is fair to say that participants' distinctive degrees of difference or similarity observations between their country and the UK were part of personal reality reconstruction, which was entirely based on intercultural experiences encountered by each. Rym as an example was among the ones who expressed a positive shift of perspective towards her cultural background, from an inferior perception of a less modern and civilised Algeria to a background that deserve appreciation once experiencing life in the UK. On the contrary, Sadja shifted from a previous perspective of over-appreciating her country to a more balanced perspective of coming from a background that has many negative sides, that she discovered and noticed when living out of the national boundaries of Algeria.

Within their narrative accounts, participants seem to embody the 'sociality' aspects suggested in Kelly's (1955) Personal Construct Theory (**chapter 2, section 2.1.4.2.**), which assumes constructing reality through the other perspective in two possible ways; either by ignoring the other's perspective or by looking at ourselves through the eyes of the other.

Among the eight participants, there were seven who expressed that reevaluating their cultural background and being aware of 'the taken for granted' aspects of it, was mainly the result of contrasting the unfamiliar cultural reality in new experiences with their own. Partially, within this 'self and other politics' this behaviour represents more of 'blocking threads' (Holliday, 2020 b, p.41), where each participant's unique experiences trigger the establishment of a new perspective about the self within his/her national identity (unconsciously creating another cultural block). However, by looking back to the effect of this contestation, there was only one narrative account that had negatively re-evaluated the cultural background as inferior in opposition to the western culture experiences in the UK. Putting it differently, the only case that represents a negative re-evaluation of the self in relation to cultural background was that of Sadjja, who doubted the excessive positive appreciation of her cultural background. She justified this shift as over-appreciating her cultural background prior to her experience in the UK, which was in a way preventing her from appreciating and missing the value of experiences existing out of national boundaries, existing in western cultures.

In the opposite direction, the other six participants, have to various degrees overcome the chauvinistic culturally and linguistically non-western deficient 'foreign other' embedded in the western pretence of neutrality regarding its scientific and technical superiority (Holliday, 2009, 2011), which is evident in the theory of Orientalism (Said, 1987). While Holliday (2011) suggests that "... lack of belief that the non-Western Other can be complex and sophisticated just like 'us' may certainly be due to a lack of insider knowledge of other people's societies" (p.18), participants' narratives in the third interview suggest the same perspective was evidently projected through their own self-positioning as deficient (academically, economically, politically) through the perceived image imposed by the centre ideological structure (the west). Simply put, participants at the beginning of their journeys held inferior self-perceptions that was rooted in the long-lasting ideological framing of non-western deficient other. However, by the end of the interview, participants showcased an elevated self-perception that transcends the impact of ideology, which was executed through an emancipatory practice of substituting social structures with social agency (experience). This process eventually led to an appreciation of cultural belonging notwithstanding the cultural block manifestation.

With this in mind, although Holliday (2011) acknowledges that "many of us who travel and gain insider knowledge of other places still maintain a deep cultural disbelief because of

the way we are wired through our own long-standing social narratives” (p.18). Participants narratives herby may slightly challenge this suggestion. However, through supporting assets of social action theory, that is the independence of social action projected herby as the individual’s ability to negotiate cultural resources made available (Weber, 1964); Holliday (2011) also suggests that the individual’s ability to think critically remains a universally shared characteristic. In sum, with reference to the social action theory, and through the lens of Holliday’s grammar of culture, the negotiation of the dominant cultural discourse structures, along with distinctive personal intercultural experiences is “an attempt to either extend or define our identities by entering into cultural stories that we are not currently centrally involved in” (Walker, 2003, p. 83), where these identities are emergent and evolving.

Finding1 is a clear illustration of the existence of a process of intercultural self-positioning that is taking place in a transient manner of other and self-stereotyping. In fact, as presented in **finding1 (4.1.1.1 and 4.1.1.2)**, participants’ upon-arrival stereotypes clashes with reality revealed various intercultural stances on the new environment and perceptions of the self-positioning negotiation. Seven out of the eight participants explained that the state or feeling of being a foreigner in the UK cannot be denied, with strong references to their ethnic and religious belonging being the reason for such perspectives. Among these participants were Siham and Amina, who acknowledged the role of their ethnic and religious background in shaping the course of their intercultural change and the different decisions related to their intercultural activities abroad. Aside from the trajectory of intercultural change occurring subsequently demonstrated in the study, Participants explained that being of Islamic religion has posed some challenges to how they would or have presented themselves in non-threatening and welcoming ways to others. These positionings that the participants have assigned to themselves as non-welcomed Muslims of origin are often fed by Islamophobic discourse in the media, which reinforced these stereotypes on the deep and surface levels (Baker, Gabrielatos, and McEneaney, 2013; Saeed, 2007).

Research data suggest that participants’ categorization of themselves and ‘British people’ as the ‘other’ was reflected in their narratives and along the three rounds of interviews with various degrees. Seven out of eight participants tend to position themselves in between three categories of the people they have met in their experiences abroad, those were the participants themselves as “Algerian foreigners’, ‘British people’ as the native people of the country, and ‘international students’ from other non-British nationalities. This

categorisation has taken different shapes among participants at the beginning of their journeys, in the sense that each of them viewed the other as either a British or someone from another background with preserving the title of 'us' exclusively to people of Algerian nationality. However, the sense of 'us' started to be undermined by some participants due to the distinctive intercultural encounters embarked upon by each participant aside. To start with, most participants' social network at the beginning of their journey was relatively limited to co-national Algerians, or other international students, whom participants believe share a common characteristic of being "foreigners". As highlighted in **finding 1**, participants confirmed that being surrounded by fellow Algerian students, or other international students of Islamic religion, especially during times of religious occasions and celebrations (such as Ramadan, and Eid) provided a less 'stressful' cultural experience away from home (Carr et al., 2003). Badwan (2015) suggests that:

...participants' religious identities influenced not only the choices of whom they spent their time with, but also where they eat, socialise, and study. Ultimately, all these choices imply a particular lifestyle, which could inhibit involvement in more open social circles" (p. 235).

In fact, this was showcased among most participants such as Nadia, Siham, Fares, and Amina, who acknowledged that they avoid participating in certain activities (such as going to bars or attending LGBT support gatherings), that may challenge or violate their religious preferences and orientation. Therefore, they tried to stick to co-national friends and international students of Islamic religion, with whom they believe communication is easier and religious shared interest is set a priority.

Although setting up social relations with host nationals, often in a second language, is a common study abroad experience goal for many international students; it may evoke a sense of stress and personal conflict (Trice, 2007). Bochner et al. (1977) argue that contact with co-nationals in the abroad experience can aid the process of broader social network widening and 'therefore interculturality' (Montgomery, 2010). This has been evident in Montgomery's (2010) study on international students' experience and 'voice', specifically in academic and social settings, in which she argues that her participants tend to build networks with co-international students, where these experiences afforded a substantial area of interculturality as much with that if connections with British students would offer. Arguably, it has long been suggested that interaction between all these categorised groups, helps in

reducing stereotyping, prejudices, and discrimination (Allport, 1954). Now I do support the need for a co-national surrounding for students in the study abroad experience, especially at the early phase of a sojourn abroad, yet this should not be a long-lasting strategy of culture negotiation. In fact, most participants in the second and third interviews acknowledged that with time they unconsciously started approaching British people, as a way to elevate their self-esteem about their linguistic capacity and to test the shift in stereotypical images against cultural realities.

Communication with 'British people' or British students in the academic setting was initially threatening and distressing for most participants due to; first the fear of perceived linguistic deficiency, and second, the stereotypical image of British people as difficult to approach and establish connections, with some participants going far as Meriem, for example, asserting that "British people are racists". As for the linguistic complex, all participants presupposed that communicating with a native speaker requires an advanced level of linguistic proficiency, which inhibited their tendency to initiate conversations with English native speakers. I shall discuss this in detail in the next subsection on language and culture negotiations.

Secondly, the negative sentiment of a non-welcoming British 'other' is again fed by the stereotypical images that "would become an important part of how we frame and present ourselves within this Self and Other politics" (Holliday, 2016, p.3). This in return led to strengthening the negative stereotype (Jackson, 2010) of a non-welcoming British society, at the initial phase of interviewing, where participants were still experimenting their pre-existing images against new intercultural spheres. At later stages, these positions have undergone distinctive negotiated shifts, in which participants showed more self-conscious perspectives about the manner with which to alter previously held stereotypes and the mechanism of how to reconstruct new ones in the future. This is manifested as participants acknowledging cultural heterogeneity and embracing cultures as "variable and viable constructions of reality" (Bennett, 1993, p. 66) instead of perceiving big cultural poles as one way or no other way. Having stepped into a phase of 'intercultural situations-based positioning', fed by individual evaluations of critical intercultural encounters, participants started perceiving themselves as members who co-construct and interact in different cultural formations, where culture was assigned a dynamic characteristic of "*changing circumstances* to enable group members to *make sense of and operate meaningfully* within those circumstances" (Holliday, 1999, p. 248).

There is resonance here with Holliday's (1999, 2011) 'small culture formation on the go', in which participants engage in "forming and reforming culture" in momentary assemblies with individuals from different cultural backgrounds and attempting to set "rules for engagement" (Holliday 2016, p.3). It is through these momentary get-together groupings that learning to negotiate the self and other became attainable.

Therefore, it can be argued here that the self-positioning process in different intercultural settings was not a linear process and goes beyond a trajectory to achieve a higher level of interculturality. There is a connection here that alludes to one potential domain of interculturality as a process of intercultural self-positioning, in which:

we employ our existing cultural experience to engage with new cultural domains within which we can also find ourselves, and we make new sense of the existing cultural identities of ourselves and others. (Holliday, 2017, p. 13).

However, I would go cautious about the use of interculturality as a term regarding participants' narrative accounts. Informed by a non-essentialist perspective and drifting away from essentialist discourses of interculturality as a 'third space' or acculturation discussed previously (**chapter 1**), interculturality can be referred to in this context as a 'dynamic process' in which individuals creatively and reflexively employ familiar or non-familiar cultural resources (cultural blocks and threads) leading to cultural sense-making (Young and Sercombe, 2010, p.181). With this in mind, equally important to engaging with the spirit of this term as describing the ongoing generation of new perspectives on individuals' use of cultural resources and processes, **finding 1** indicates that the dynamic negotiation of 'self' and 'other' in different intercultural encounters, led participants to generate new perspectives about cultural, personal, and social subjectivities. As such these perspectives were reformed to assume future self-positioning processes that is based on the reflections arising from the encounter per se. Furthermore, these perspectives are not subject to generalisation, which may risk an over-simplification of the participants' intercultural journeys. This is due in part to the longitudinal nature of the narrative accounts, which revealed that these positioning processes were enacted by participants with varying degrees, manifested in different ways, and led to different directions of intercultural change.

I suggest hereby, that the interculturality understanding I undertake in this discussion is more of an '*intercultural becoming*' experience exploration, as the process of self-positioning in different intercultural encounters. A dynamic process that drifts away from

focussing on the expected outcome of what interculturality would entail as a positive development or hindering of cultural negotiation skills, to the process of transient shifts of becoming interculturally, albeit unexpected directions. An approach of process-oriented understanding that places “our conception of intercultural encounters [...] in the midst of a revolution” (Dervin, 2011, p.192).

By *intercultural becoming*, I refer in this study to a divergent way of negotiating interpersonal and cultural resources, which suggests the inclusion or exclusion of various intercultural evaluation points of reference including, competence, sensitivity, awareness, and interculturality among others, for each participant in his own way within discrete non-linear trajectories. It neither necessarily requires the presence or ignorance of one over the other nor the culmination of intercultural development success. Yet, it represents the individuals’ ability to relate to these aspects in new/different intercultural situations, mark the self-developmental stages of shift, and continuously articulate what they learn from their engagement in this process in cultural negotiated situations. This spirit was prevalent among all participants who were aware of the dynamic shifts they have undergone in the study abroad experience, yet they were uncertain on how or in what manner would it be successful, an aspect they assume future intercultural encounters would determine. As such, there is no doubt that *Intercultural Becoming* is enacted as “a cultural domain with particular resources that enables a deeply reflexive, or self-interrogating interaction between the participants, who somehow become owners of the whole process” (Holliday, 2017, p.13). This aligns in a way with Dewey’s (1938) theory of transactional learning, which draws two theoretical conclusions about the learning process; first that it “has no end beyond itself”, and it “is one of continual reorganizing, reconstructing, transforming” (p.48). In this sense, the outcome of learning is more learning, and it goes on to become a process of change rather than a process of learning. Therefore, knowledge is arrived at through a continuous twirl of experiences being encountered, reflected upon, and then the outcome is deployed to make future possible decisions, and this is the essence of the experiences being about ‘the how’ more than ‘the what’ particularly what I call in study as ‘Intercultural Becoming’.

5.2. The interplay between language and culture in study abroad settings

Throughout my attempts to uncover the various aspects of participants’ *intercultural becoming* experiences, the analysis chapter indicated that the interplay between language

and culture was a talk-about aspect across all their narratives. The discussion about the perceived role of language or culture in the study abroad experiences of participants in this research is indeed embedded in the understanding of intercultural self-positioning and cultural debates proposed earlier. Having reached the understanding that participants are seen as individual beings who try to negotiate meaning making in light of their experiences in the world (herby the study abroad contexts) (Dewey, 1938), the conceptualisation of the English language value has been considerably affected by their lived experiences in both their home country and the UK. Therefore, the significance of these emergent perceptions on linguistic inclusion is rooted in the argument in favour of a shift toward a dialogic nature of interaction and the dynamic process of communication with its unpredictability character.

There is an important observation that features in the first set of interviews in most narratives, which is the very motivation for participants to undertake the UK sojourn. It illustrates to various degrees, a commitment to put to test the linguistic capital as advanced English speakers and living the real cultural aspects ascribed to a Native English-speaking country (Gardner, 2001). Adding to that to the credibility of a degree obtained from an English-speaking country as imposed by the Algerian social and economic market (power relations) (Block, 2013; Atkinson and Sohn, 2013). Implicitly, these motives mirrored the perceived effect of language proficiency value in their lived experiences and consequently “their attitudes towards it, the way they perceive themselves as users or learners of it, and further contributes to the perception of the role of English in their lives, and which type of English they would like to learn, speak and use” (Badwan, 2015, p.215). In addition, it as Harvey (2014) suggests mirrored the inherent authoritative discourse on the prominence of English, which was evident in the participants’ narratives and their ideological positioning.

Aside from the non-essentialist perspective to culture understanding embraced in this research, language is equally considered a social practice that enjoys an “open, dynamic, energetic, constantly evolving and personal” (Shohamy, 2006, p. 5), which in the postmodernist view is relational and subjectively linked to culture. As such Language is:

a social semiotic that both expresses and constructs emergent thoughts, a process in which identities are constructed through repeated subject positionings according to the demands of the situation. (Kramsch, 2015, p. 409).

In light of this identification, and given the unique subjective intercultural trajectory focused upon earlier (section 5.1.), analysis of participants' narratives regarding language and culture interplay in the study abroad experience generated two opposing arguments. First perspective was articulated by Sadja, Siham, Meriem and Rym who believed that language and culture roles are acting interchangeably in a cycle, where the participants' linguistic capacity gives access to the cultural aspects of the target intercultural environment. On the opposite side were Fares, Nadia, and Amina who argued that having access to cultural knowledge is a priority and successful communication cannot be achieved on the mere command of linguistic skills.

These perspectives are not subject to right or wrong judgments, as each represents the flow of internal dialogism (Bakhtin, 1981) in representing the lived experiences through language use and vice-versa. Subjectively, as humans, we are in constant dialogue not only with others yet also with ourselves (Bakhtin, 2004). It is through this mutual 'self' and 'other' reveals that we learn and construct the world around us. This is well manifested in Sadja, Siham, Meriem, and Rym's perspective on maintaining access to linguistic and cultural knowledge in a dialogic manner, which suggests that learning new languages entails learning new ways of being in the world, and with these ways come cultural and ideological perceptions. This perspective was well articulated in one of Meriem's narratives where she believed that learning English introduced her to a different reality, and with the excitement of novelty, she needed more language learning to access more new cultural beings.

This goes in line with Dewey's transactional learning theory (1938) which posits that educative experiences are to be achieved through two linked conditions: namely interaction and continuity. On the one hand, the process of new knowledge acquisition is intertwined with a discursive process within a unified learner/ environment construct. Therefore, the purpose of the interaction is to build new forms of knowledge from experience (ibid), hereby mirrored in participants' intercultural encounters in the new environment. Continuity, on the other hand, is portrayed in the accumulative nature of experience, where previous experiences result in subsequent ones on a continuum (ibid). Indeed, this is a manifestation of a self-positioning emergent in an ongoing engagement with the 'other' and the dialogic space, which eventually leads to our relationship with others negotiated in a dynamic process and our positions always in a state of 'becoming' (Wegerif, 2008). As such generating new forms of being in reality through knowledge acquisition is partially dependent on interactive

factors of linguistic and non-linguistic features, where language is “always ideological: the utterance represents ‘a particular way of viewing the world, one that strives for social significance’ (Bakhtin, 1981, p.31) and any speaker is automatically an *ideology*” (Tappan, 2005). Drawing on Bakhtin’s (1981) ‘ideological becoming’, Harvey (2016) explains that language is the mediator by which the self and other self-ascriptions make sense of the world and construct reality through this person-in relation equation of continuity.

On the other direction, the remaining participants who raised the prominence of being culturally aware over linguistically proficient justified this stance by elaborating on the useful power of non-verbal communication in new intercultural settings. In Nadia’s narrative for example, the early linguistic encounters in the UK imposed a challenging communicative experience as it involved the use of the English language to represent oneself as expected of an English Ph.D. student abroad. However, Nadia found herself experiencing a feeling of inadequacy, due in part, to limited language ability, which caused what Pellegrino Aveni (2005) suggests low self-esteem. In an attempt to conquer her fears of self-expression using the target language, Nadia resorted to a conversational club, that proposes some sort of cultural heterogeneity, which in a way helped in shifting her perspective towards achieving linguistic proficiency. Therefore, she started seeking to make herself understood by the ‘other’ rather than being praised for native-like proficiency. Fares also problematized the efficacy of linguistic capacity being ill-employed in its appropriate context. Where he suggested that through some intercultural encounters, he questioned whether an extensive linguistic register is enough to be successfully communicative, and emphasized the need for other modalities such as body and facial expressions and environmental clues which can be represented through pointing. As such, it becomes a prerequisite that “language practices are embedded within a wider special repertoire” (Pennycook, 2018, p. 453). In this vein, Pennycook (2018) suggests that it is imperative to move away from the bilingualism understanding where language is dependent on code-mixing, to a consideration of how different linguistic resources and modalities are deployed in everyday practice. That said, is a need for a shift toward embodiment and the importance of space (ibid).

Suffice to say, is that participants in this group experienced the plurality of linguistic modalities, and the exploitation of special segments together, which lead them to experience the new intercultural environment successfully and overcome the language barrier of suitability in context. Simply put, participants showcased a multimodality perspective on

English as the medium of communication, where they have been able to resort to an expanded totality of linguistic resources in the form of repertoires (Spotti and Blommaert, 2017). This expansion has been well demonstrated in the cases of Nadia and Fares discussed above. The use of an aggregation of gestures (Kendon, 2004), physical context (Scollon and LeVine, 2004) with its semiotic modalities of pointing, writing, and drawing, body movement, and object handling, along with language spoken are a good articulation of how participants (at minimum or maximum inclusion) negotiate the language-culture relationship through intercultural encounters. With this in mind, the relationship between culture and language goes beyond a dependency factor, to be a linguistic-spatial engagement, which the individual explores across the intercultural experience.

Turning now to the 'native speaker' terminology, a prominent point that has been brought to the fore within the discussion of cultural-linguistic aspirations in the study abroad context by all participants. At the outset of the investigation, all participants conveyed a strong sense of language proficiency as a determinant positioning factor (although a shift in perception occurred throughout the three rounds for some participants), which adheres to the traditionally native speaker privilege positioned as the 'ideal users of both the western culture and language' (Holliday, 2005). The influence of this 'native speakerism' (Holliday, 2005) was well showcased in participants' narratives about their study abroad goals. Among these goals are reaching a native-like speaking proficiency as the idealized language user (Davies, 2003; Savingnon, 2001), and/ or accent as a socially privileged form (Dalton-Puffer, Kaltenboeck, and Smit 1997).

With the prominence of this power-laden native speakerism construction, English language learners and users tend to ideologically position themselves as inherently deficient. Davies (2003) argues that the native/non-native construct, "is classically, social, just as culture is" (p.214), which suggests its explicit link to issues of race, ethnicity, cultural background, nationality, and the list goes on (Selvi, 2014). During the first set of interviews, participants demonstrated the non-native speaker's inferiority, whether in the form of stereotypical expectations of a difficult British accent or the other (herby the native speaker) perception of their English proficiency.

Hence, it is evident that by the beginning of the intercultural journey in the UK, the privilege of the 'native speaker' of English perspective was damaging for participants, not only at the level of resulting in low self-esteem, a foreigner complex, and doubts about self-

positionality rights, it also opens doors to discriminative classifications related to race and ethnicity (Flores and Rosa, 2015) (as it was the case for Meriem). Participants' concerns about the perceived 'self' by the 'other', were radically rooted in the ideological and educational merits. Ideologically, as Kubota and Lin (2009) suggest that there is a "tendency to equate the native speaker with white and the non-native speaker with non-white" which fundamentally underlies a discriminative stance against non-Centre language users, "many of whom are people of colour" (p.8). Educationally, the idea of ascribing the language competent attribute to the ideal native speaker remains a challenging construct in both SLA and TEOSL. This claim proved its existence in participants' initial commentaries based on the premise that institutional language ideologies in Algeria were conceptualising English as a foreign language over French as the second language of the national academic and cultural domains. (Although several reforms are currently taking place as predicted by Benrabah (2013) who suggests that French in Algeria's complex linguistic landscape would be altered by English in the next coming years). Therefore 7 participants (excluding Tarek) embarked on the UK experience with a stereotypical image of a deficient linguistic ability to compete in the academic and cultural environments. However, within the discourse of exploring intercultural change, these educational, stereotypical, and power-laden positionalities might be subject to shift as showcased in participants' shift of the perceived self-value (section **2.3.3.**).

Towards the end of the study, participants acknowledged the positive effect of their linguistic capital (without ignoring the multimodality aspect discussed above) development on their intercultural self-perception and positioning. Furthermore, with the UK being a 'super diverse' (Vertovec, 2007) intercultural environment in terms of both linguistic and cultural variations, participants were able to alter their previously held values to themselves, the perspective of the other to them, and the use of English itself to fulfil their communicative success. Indeed, exposure to this super-diversity enabled participants to let go (minimally) of the native speaker complex as an academic endeavour and focus on being communicatively appropriate regardless of the variety of English they embraced. Although the fear of a difficult British accent at the beginning of the journey impacted the pace of social network establishment, the so many intercultural experiences participants encountered shifted their perspective of the British accent being the standardised variety over the American one that they considered socially privileged in the Algerian context.

Overall, it is clear that participants' negotiation of the language-culture relationship contributed to the process of their *intercultural becoming* and the self-positioning dynamics. The language-culture attitude, the UK experience as a super diverse context, and self-other dynamic politics are all entangled to introduce the shifts in both the ideological and intercultural becoming. Perceiving the negotiation of this language-culture net from a nonessentialist perspective provides a wholistic explanation of the inherent reciprocity of ideological becoming (Bakhtin 1981) and language learning in the intercultural (Harvey, 2016), and might give rise to what I shall introduce here as *intercultural becoming*.

5.3. Factors influencing sojourner's intercultural becoming

A key facet of shaping the course of participants' intercultural journeys as unpacked in the analysis chapter, lies partially in the interference of distinctive factors prior to and post coming to the UK. these factors contributed to identifying the course and nature of their *intercultural becoming* at various levels and with distinctive degrees of interference. Let me shed light first on the most commonly identified factor by all participants irrespective of their *intercultural becoming* paths, that is cultural identity. Cultural identity in this research fits into Zhu Hua's (2013) definition, in which she considers cultural identity as multi-faceted in nature composed of ethnic and racial identities that intersect with affiliations of nationality, religion, gender, age, and socioeconomic status to formulate the general terminology of cultural identity. Indeed, participants throughout the narrative interviews engaged in comparative images of their intercultural experiences with reference to bigger cultural structures of nationality, religion, ethnicity, and political powers. However, it is also useful to acknowledge that identity from a poststructuralist perspective is considered to explore the links between intercultural experiences being connected to the ways participants position themselves or were positioned by others within the experiences. Therefore, identity is also to project "how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future" (Norton, 2000, p.5).

Significantly, the understanding of the shaping of participants' *intercultural becoming* quality and nature was visualised partially as an overlap of both the cultural identity packages brought with them and the intercultural reality where these packages were executed. This reminds us of Holliday's (2011) grammar of culture, in which:

In effect, this domain provides us with cultural resources – the influence on our daily lives of the society where we were born and brought up, the way we were educated, our national institutions, the manner of our government, our media, our economy, and so on, which are different from nation to nation and will undoubtedly impact in the way we are as people. These are resources in the sense that we draw on them, but they do not confine everything we do and think. (Holliday, 2015, p. 26).

Despite Holliday explaining these affiliations to be a domain in his grammar of culture, namely, particularly social and political structures, it explicitly aggregates the set of cultural identity facets described above. In no small measure, participants invoked these cultural affiliations of their cultural identity in an emergent, variable manner to shape different positional intercultural experiences choices, social networks, and practices. As observed in finding 3 (**section 4.3.1**), the examples suggested that four of the participants (Fares, Siham, Nadia, and Amina) resorted to their cultural identity as a determinant pre-decision activity for the self-positioning act required in certain intercultural encounters. However, these intercultural encounters are not an external reality for being, yet as Harré et al. (2009) suggest are constituted by the positions undertaken by participants themselves through resorting to their cultural identity and are positioned within the encounter itself. In essence, this reminds us of the dynamic, fluid nature of identity that is susceptible to change by experience. This was evident in the participants' readiness to embark upon new experiences towards the end of the study, and re-evaluate the various identities with their facets and affiliations (Braskamp and Engberg 2011).

'Fluidity' is what another three of the participants (Sadja, Tarek, and Rym) ascribed to the cultural identity as a factor in setting their *intercultural becoming* in a certain direction, through maintaining a balance between various variables of cultural background, personal efforts of cultural evaluations, and perception of the 'other' to them. Through this intercultural navigation plan, identity becomes of transitional nature in the sense that participants showcased a fluid shift between their various identities in each different intercultural encounter. In fact, this goes in line with Benson et al. (2013) who emphasize identity as *becoming*, rather than *being*, therefore it becomes "socially constructed and constrained, but also recognize the part that individuals play in their construction" (p. 18). Putting it otherwise, bearing in mind the understanding that identity is an individual endeavour accomplished progressively and continuously through various social and personal

aggregations (ibid), participants lived experiences can be uncovered with subtle dynamically changing features, some of which have a mutual effect on the positioning of the self within these lived experiences. Precisely, as elucidated by Pennycook (2001):

The challenge is to find a way to theorise human agency within structures of power and to theorise ways in which we think, act, and behave that on the one hand acknowledge our locations within social, cultural, economic, ideological, discursive frameworks but on the other hand allow us at least some possibility of freedom of action and change. (p. 120).

There was one exceptional narrative account that considered an obstructive interference of cultural identity in shaping a desired intercultural becoming, which is that pinned down by Meriem. In her understanding, cultural identity with its markers and affiliations was acting as an obstacle for her while trying to assume a specific position in the new intercultural environment. I owe this to the possible destabilizing effect of the study abroad contexts and the 'critical experiences' it has to offer on identity and the individual's sense of the self (Block, 2003). Indeed, Meriem is one case that proved the possibility for such a shift, which was remarkably evident in her attempts to eliminate markers of her religious orientation (removing the scarf). This was a mechanism to try and avoid the perceived Islamophobic imagery effect of the other on her intercultural becoming path. By so doing, she strived to "take on one or more of several different possible positions vis a vis [her] temporary [home]" where [she opted] for a total and complete abandonment of [her] home culture..." (Block, 2003, p.4). However, Block (2003) points to a significant justification that might strip the previous quote from the possible delineation of an essentialist explanation of cultural experience, he suggests that:

Importantly, it is not enough to spend time abroad for such a process to take place; one must have what we might call a cosmopolitan spirit and access to experiences significant enough to destabilize one's identity. (p.5).

Indeed, this reminds us that from-a non-essentialist perspective destabilized identities as a process is not subject to "large coherent geographical entity" (Holliday, 1999, p. 244), yet is more dependent on the 'critical experience' through which a sense of the self is likely to be negotiated. Therefore, we can establish that this connection between cultural identity and critical experiences and self-positioning contributes significantly to the course of *intercultural becoming*. Not exclusively, yet for participants coming the UK was one way among many

possibilities to experience the distinctive identity effect, and thus identify certain directions to their *intercultural becoming*.

Another factor that was elaborated by participants as prominent in shaping the course of *intercultural becoming* was intercultural awareness. The research participants, although at different time intervals, acknowledged that living in the UK, meeting new people from new or different cultural backgrounds, and encountering distinctive intercultural experiences contributed to them being self-aware of their intercultural potentials, and acting accordingly in new intercultural situations. These assumptions can only be described as intercultural awareness for it being compatible with its conventional definition. Although the term intercultural awareness does not appeal to the research focus and theoretical aspirations of this study (**Chapter 2, section 2.2.3.3**), for it confining the intercultural learning process in competency models. However, having discussed in the review of literature, the reasons for rejecting the essentialist oversimplification of individuals' intercultural journeys with the so-called 'competency models', intercultural awareness in this discussion is not to be taken as a model per se. intercultural awareness in this discussion is a terminology that is compatible with participants relevant descriptions of this factor in the data set, thoroughly explored in the analysis and proven to contribute to the *intercultural becoming course* of participants.

As observed in **section 4.3.2. (Chapter 4)**, four of the participants elaborated on aspects of intercultural awareness being among the reasons for shifting their perspectives and envisage the journey with more criticality to act in future intercultural situations. Henceforth with more acceptance and tolerance of the other differences. According to these participants (Sadja, Fares, Meriem, and Nadia), the ability to notice the differences and similarities between 'them' and the 'other' as portrayed in the new culture, made them aware of what should be done in a future situation based on critical evaluations of them and the other in previous encounters. Although this may seem convenient in a way as "A revealing intercultural awareness task is to reflect on our first unguarded impressions of people we see in cafés, restaurants or public places where there are people from diverse backgrounds" (Holliday, 2016, p.327), there seems to be a process of othering as a natural default mode along the way. This process emerges from the effect of asymmetric bigger cultural structures an individual happens to grow up with (the proper term in this context would be 'Blocks'). 'Othering' by far extension creates uncomfortable or interculturally challenging situations as

it is based on all sorts of imagery differences, which in the case of participants in this context is fed by “the dissatisfaction with the Western monopoly of key concepts of cultural proficiency such as modernity and self-determination” (Holliday, 2020b, p. 46).

However, towards the end of the study, participants acknowledged that it is the awareness of the process of othering they engaged in at the beginning of their journey, that acted as a turning point of reference for the potential learning to take place (Bakhtin, 1981). Hereby, mirrored in their being able to negotiate the context with less judgmental spirit and more intercultural awareness. This spirit was more acute and most prevalent in the narratives of Fares during the second and third interviews. Fares delivered the overwhelming effect of critical experiences and how much change can occur through mobility such as the one in academic sojourning. I believe his exact words describing this shift were straight to the point when he used the expression: “moving from a “village guy” to a “cosmopolitan city guy”, which in fact goes in line with Benson et al. (2013) who emphasize that during study abroad a learner can become “another person” (p. 41). Furthermore, adding more precision to the shift Fares introspectively elaborated upon was accentuating the fact that he became aware of a multi-version of himself, which in his opinion did not only change his perspective on people, yet also his ‘life’.

That being said about Fares, the tremendous well-observed impact of being self-aware interculturally, directed participants to work through their engagement in self-positioning and set them to a certain way of becoming interculturally, regardless of the degree or manner of succeeding in the process. There is a noteworthy acknowledgment to be stated here, which is that of intercultural awareness as a factor not being articulated by all participants. **Finding 3** as a theme of factors analysis was generated in a way that reflects the variability of intercultural journeys of participants, henceforth the distinctive factors affecting the course of its becoming. Surely enough, is that their paths have come- cross in certain intercultural aspects, yet it also drifted apart in many others. Therefore, my classification of who said what with certainty about a factor is determined by repetitive effects declared by participants.

With this in mind, the next factor was brought to the fore explicitly by three out of the eight participants only. The remaining number although not overtly stating its role in their academic and social embodied experiences, did include its existence as a site for exercising intercultural self-positioning. In responding to what social and cultural activities most

attended and the criteria for involvement, Nadia, Siham, and Amina signposted the significance of university as an academic institution sharing the responsibility of boosting intercultural knowledge. Although the decision to study abroad is generally perceived as voluntary, the academic, social, and cultural shift to a different higher education institution (HEI) may pose some challenges for students (Schaeper, 2019). However, in the case of these participants, the university was portrayed as a booster aid that promotes different activities and institutional support. This would contribute to the development of both academic and social learning through overcoming upon arrival difficulties most precisely social network widening. Nadia's narrative at the outset of her journey in the UK is a clear illustration of how frustrating academic, psychological, and sociocultural adjustment for some international students can be (Rienties and Tempelaar, 2013).

A sense of isolation was experienced by Nadia at the beginning of her journey, mostly caused by her stated weak linguistic performance as a foreigner who is ashamed to be culturally involved in any discursive activity. Therefore, in order to break away from her comfort zone (Hernandez, 2018), she resorted to a conversational club proposed by the university as part of international students' academic coaching. By so doing, Nadia was able to widen her social network, which was restricted to co-national students, to be more involved with other international students (from different cultural backgrounds as described by Nadia herself). Towards the final interview, Nadia was able to widen this network even more to local (British) students and people generally. This might actually fit, although minimally, into Coleman's (2013) explanation of dynamic socialization patterns and social networks of international students through three concentric circles of encounters, namely engagement with students from the same country (the inner circle), engagement with other international students (middle circle), and engagement with local students (outer circle). However, this is not to be generalized across participants as they have encountered different trajectories of engagement in academic and social experiences.

In the same vein, Siham acknowledged the role of university-based academic and cultural activities. She also emphasized the impacts of emotional and instructional support provided by university staff such as supervisors in promoting her intercultural learning and shaping her *intercultural becoming*. With this in mind, we might consider a resonance in the reflected interpretation articulated by some participants on the quest for raising awareness of the practical connection between the international and intercultural dimensions of higher

education (Caruana and Spurling, 2007). Although these participants' commentaries state explicitly the cultural-academic rationale for internationalization (**section 2.2.2.**) to be evidently possible, the current competitive marketization discourse is still confining internationalization to the economic viability establishment, rather than achieving international students' intercultural aspirations. Theoretically grounded, Young et.al (2017) state that:

An alternative constructivist approach sees cultural identities as emergent, dialogically constructed, and multiple, and arguably accounts for the observed reality more accurately and perhaps even ethically. However, the practical, applied implications of such an approach in HE and elsewhere are difficult to infer. At the level of policy, HE institutions tend to assume a reified 'culture as given' perspective, uncritically distinguishing between 'home' and 'international' students in a variety of ways including admission practices, fees, accommodation, and less explicit but potentially more discriminatory practices within their educational contexts. (p. 4).

Within the same discussion on academic factors being influential in shaping the course of *intercultural becoming* and perception of the self in the global cultural reality, Tarek and Rym acknowledged the impact of knowledge in the field of intercultural communication on perceiving both the self and the other throughout their journey. Tarek for example provided an exclusive, and interesting set of interviews reflecting a professional analysis rather than an introspective description of his intercultural journey. He attempted to critically execute his interculturality-related research during our conversations to reflect upon the various aspects of his intercultural experience from an academic perspective. Indeed, Tarek was able to reflect on his ability to exploit the intercultural knowledge he acquired through doing his Ph.D. in intercultural communication.

Through efforts of minimizing stereotypes effect and constantly resorting to evaluative comparisons of intercultural knowledge and real-life experience, he was able to find multi-versions of himself. Each version found its way into its suitable intercultural situation, which made him in most cases avoid confusion. It might be reasonable through these two narrative accounts to enquire about the need and viability of intercultural training in shaping the study abroad experience as a whole. Holliday (2018) asserts that 'small culture formation on the go' urges us to use our already existing competencies and experiences, and

... to working with personal cultural trajectories rather than national structures or large national cultures as the prime material. The job of intercultural education, therefore, becomes helping us to appreciate and mobilize the experiences and process that we bring with us. (p. 5).

Indeed, Tarek and Rym showcased more self-aware reflections on the intercultural self-positioning processes, explicitly explain with a critical eye the causes and consequences of their success or failure in the narrated intercultural encounters. Therefore, it can be argued that the intercultural knowledge accentuates the extent to which “Good intercultural education would hopefully have speeded up that process and reduced the pitfalls” (Holliday, 2018, p. 5).

Conclusion

There is a logical resonance in doing research in intercultural communication, which reveals the paradoxical nature of the human quest for understanding. In the above chapter, I first introduced the concept of *intercultural becoming* as a process of dynamics shift, through a non-essentialist perspective of culture (Holliday, 1999) and understanding of the nature of self-positioning and the other (Davies and Harré 1990; Harré and Van Langenhove 1991; Van Langenhove and Harré 1993). Furthermore, it explored aspects of the language-culture relationship through dialogism (Bakhtin, 1963) and how “language learning and intercultural learning were inextricably related in a process of *ideological becoming* with the other” (Harvey, 2016, p.2). Finally, factors impacting all these intertwined aspects of the intercultural journeys of participants were examined.

All these threads of investigation blended together conform with Coleman’s (2013) principle of ‘holistic inquiry’. The fascination of the non-essentialist perspective in such a study lies in the fundamental principle of the unexpected, heterogeneous nature of the intercultural experience. In both essence and surface there was no room for anticipation of participants’ trajectories, nor a possibility for measurement of the degree of intercultural development at any level, despite striking commonalities and cross paths of the narrative accounts at certain aspects. Using the narrative thematic analysis clearly presented the narrative accounts shifts longitudinally, and with strong thematic coding of the findings emerging along the investigation.

In conclusion, the discussion chapter identified and brought together a plethora of insights and theoretical grounds, upon which a meticulous, narrative focussed exploration of the unexpected, dynamic, multidimensional intercultural journeys should be conducted. In the next chapter, an elaboration on the contribution of this investigation to the wider community of intercultural research would take place. The chapter will outline the academic contribution as threefold: conceptually, methodologically, and on the pedagogical level. In addition, it elaborates recommendations for future replicability research, pitfalls, and researcher's remarks.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Introduction

The purpose of this longitudinal, participatory research study has been to explore the *intercultural becoming* dynamics of change of eight Algerian Ph.D. students during their sojourn in the UK, through a narrative engagement with their perspectives and self-reflections. Central around the non-essentialist understanding of culture (Holliday, 1999-2020) and dialogic transactional conceptualizations of learning, my intention as clearly outlined in previous chapters was to explore the *intercultural becoming dynamics* of change. This was attainable through investigating participants' intercultural self-positioning shifts, the linguistic-cultural perspective negotiations, and the various factors contributing to shaping their intercultural experiences in study abroad contexts in a certain course of change. The understanding of *intercultural becoming* informing this study was one that is grounded on the significance of unique critical experiences, reflective self-perception, and the dialogic construction of knowledge with no anticipation of the future direction of change. The narrative inquiry as a methodological procedure adopted in this study paved the way for participants' perspectives and reflection to be foregrounded, and the significance of their intercultural experiences to be revealed.

It is through this accumulation of intercultural processes that detailed forms of change and learning were explored, most significantly, the self-positioning processes and learning about the relationship between the 'self', 'other', and 'context' trilogy. Despite traces of similar research in the existing body of intercultural literature, there is a vitality element in tackling the intercultural from a brand-new perspective and introducing new insights into the intercultural experience in the study abroad context. In fact, this vitality element is well articulated in the complex interplay of various intersecting elements of intercultural experiences against a backdrop of wider ideological discourses, cultural and linguistic realities interpretations, and positionality processes through the self-other negotiations. All of these suggest that *intercultural becoming* is a process of change with multidimensional characteristics. It is fair to say then that *intercultural becoming* dynamic process that requires a holistic understanding of various internal and external agencies at play, and a focus on the process rather than the product of the intercultural journey.

In order for me to reach a systematic approach to the conceptualization of *intercultural becoming*, the research was structured in a logical plotline telling the different milestones of a longitudinal study's journey of the intercultural. **Chapter 1** revolved around setting the scene for the research theory to take place in **Chapter 2**, which discussed the theoretical landscape of the investigation at hand. **Chapter 3** shed light on the methodological design including procedures and decisions and presented my role as a mediated researcher by drawing a picture projecting the link between the participants, the data, and the theory. **Chapter 4** was devoted to surfacing analytically the research findings, which were engaged in a data-theory discussion elaborated in **Chapter 5**. The conclusion of this thesis was presented in **Chapter 6**, which highlights the emanating contributions to knowledge at different levels, conceptually, methodologically, and pedagogically. It continues to critically demonstrate reflections on the research study undertaken, its limitations, and concludes with suggestions for future research directions and personal reflections.

6.1. Research Contributions

I believe that the mixture of theoretical underpinnings informing this research, and the methodological ingenuity in approaching the intercultural from new angles, is one that can add a valuable contribution to shifting the traditional understanding of intercultural experiences in study abroad contexts at various levels, namely, conceptually, methodologically, and pedagogically.

Theoretically speaking, perhaps one of the most significant contributions of this research is celebrating the complexity of an intercultural journey, which is a wake-up call to drift away from traditional competency-based models and acculturation phasing of individuals' intercultural experiences. The complexity of participants' intercultural journeys in this study provides a useful counterbalance to the prevailing tendency in intercultural literature, which objectifies the study abroad experience outcome as positive more competent individuals. These traditional stands rather ignore the interfering details and personal interpretations of the individuals themselves as communicating with their environment, and "do not take into account the complexity of individuals who interact with each other and reduce them to cultural facts or give the impression of 'encounters of cultures' rather than individuals" (Dervin, 2011, p.38).

From that on, the study alternatively suggests a holistic conceptualization of intercultural experiences that goes beyond human agency and emphasizes the non-essentialist perspective to culture that is less reliant on categorization (Dervin, 2011, p.38) and differences focussed. In this sense, participants referred to themselves as an 'us vs them' categorization as a manner with which to account for the engagement in experiencing the other at the beginning of the investigation period. However, towards the end of the investigation, they did demonstrate a shift towards a less culture-category self-identification. Instead, participants began to demonstrate the human ability to self-evaluate and reflect upon intercultural encounters distinctively and with various directions of change. Saying it otherwise, the findings of the study suggest that the intercultural journeys abroad with all that it has to offer do not imperatively trigger a positive outcome of a shift nor result in more developed competencies as widely claimed in the literature. That being said, reminds us that the focus of research in intercultural communication should be 'process' rather than 'product' focussed. Therefore, participants demonstrated an unexpected self-positioning shift that they were aware of and able to reflect upon but not necessarily grading their development as positive or negative achievement nor marking common developmental stages to move from negative to positive or otherwise. It is the focus on what an intercultural journey abroad may unfold, that has been able to develop a more holistic understanding of the dynamic of shifts through participants' perspectives.

Another significant contribution of this study on a theoretical level is the endeavour to introduce '*intercultural becoming*' as an explorative terminology in intercultural communication. It demonstrates a merge of Bakhtin's 'dialogism' of the self-other politics (1981), Harvey's 'ideological becoming' (2016), and postmodernist thinking that goes beyond linguistic agency to interpret reality, all of which from a non-essentialist consideration to culture and cultural phenomena. Having done this, the research may become a significant endeavour to holistically explore intercultural experiences with various agentive variables at play. Throughout the narrative interviews, participants of the research mirrored a divergent manner of the self-other dialogical engagement in communication, through which co-related inquiries of language, culture, and identity were imperatively addressed. The notion of intercultural self-positioning also is one significant marker of the complexity of the intercultural journey through which participants were aware of the dynamic shifts they have

undergone in the study abroad experience, an idea that is slightly shadowed in the intercultural study abroad contexts research.

Methodologically, the ethnographic, longitudinal, participatory study design with a narrative inquiry-based investigation in this study contributed to unravelling a set of complex narrative accounts, that narrates detectable story of change. It was fascinating to encounter data as constructed concretely with rather than from the participants. The prominent role as the researcher persona played in generating the data was not in the value of the narrative questions in the interviews, nor the amount of linguistic or cultural resources drawn upon, it rather appeared in the mediated role I occupied during the investigation period, as suggested by Harvey (2014) states that “my dialogic research design enables me to practice what I theorize...” (p.281). Therefore, the study flags out the importance of generating the data in qualitative research following a dialogic meaning construction approach that goes beyond the interviewer/interviewee event in the situ of the interview. It also seeks to reach an ethical justice in the counterpart of what surrounds qualitative research of power issues using “a process to engage with the other, and not create, order and code the other” (Harvey (2014), p. 281).

More significantly the intersection of distinctive analytical procedures embraced in this study, namely, thematic narrative analysis and adjusted Positioning Theory in narratives (Bamberg, 2004) enabled me to glean in-depth participants’ perspectives and self-reflections and detangle the cross-thematic data among the narrative accounts. Indeed, the use of conventional analytical methods each aside or one over another has rendered the risk of losing significant elements of the data set. Interestingly, the use of thematic narrative analysis in a study examining narrative accounts with prevailing significant themes -through the lens of a ‘small story’ perspective (Bamberg and Georgakopoulou, 2008)- offered a strong foundation to critically engage in a deep understanding of the participants’ intercultural becoming journeys in new intercultural environments. In addition, adjusting the use of Bamberg’s three-level model of positioning (2004) in a study of intercultural phenomena was far from a straightforward linear process, as such procedure was rarely addressed in the intercultural field traditions. With the fascinating amount of in-depth examination of a complex web of narrative data following these methodological innovations, I believe it is likely to be a springboard to more innovative methodological traditions in the field of intercultural communication and study abroad future research.

Finally, as for the pedagogical contribution, the study is one that can make in part a small serviceable foundation to theorising both intercultural learning challenges in study abroad contexts and the way it can be best supported within the context of internationalization of higher education in Algeria and the world. In other words, the findings in this research study reveal that understanding *intercultural becoming* as a process of dynamic change, would contribute to developing robust accounts of what to be taught and how concerning the intercultural. This would contribute to drifting us away from competence development outcome conceptualizations in a journey abroad by acknowledging its complexity. In this sense, I suggest that my study may raise significant marking flags of elements to develop intercultural training programs and the higher education intercultural policy in dealing with the internationalization of learning in this direction. In addition, while participants acknowledged on several occasions in the investigation time the role of the UK university as an institution promoting the intercultural experience, it seems to me as a call for the policy of internationalization of UK higher education to redirect more attention toward the cultural-oriented goal of internationalization rather than the current prevailing economic driven scene.

6.2. limitations

As was already established throughout the thesis, the theoretical foundation and practical decisions that were undertaken in this study were mostly driven by the hidden force of a non-essentialist perspective to approach culture and intercultural understanding. However, despite aligning myself with the endeavour to explore intercultural communication without relying on culture categorization, the danger of neo-essentialism was a no-escape reality. Putting it differently, the quest to explore the intercultural journeys of participants in study abroad contexts from a non-essentialist perspective was at sight all along. However, there is no doubt that I could not ignore participants' own descriptions of cultural categorisations, that were based on comparisons of differences between their cultural backgrounds and the new environment. This trap is inevitably recurrent as I was experiencing a self-positioning shift and living the theory I was investigating, which rendered the risk of neo-essentialist thinking along the process.

Another limitation of the study was the limited variety criteria of participants recruited for the interviews with the females outnumbering male presence. I owe this drawback to the accessibility timing and population synchronizing of the launch of the study investigation. However, not that gender-related choices would have yielded a different understanding, yet with all participants coming from a Muslim religious background, females demonstrated different intercultural encounters than males; their encounters and their interpretation seemed to would have been more varied with higher male participation.

6.3. Recommendations for future research

Looking back at the journey of developing this research study, there are a number of theoretical and methodological aspirations that I would recommend future research investigations in this area to go about. To begin with, the conceptualization of the *intercultural becoming* process from a non-essentialist perspective is one that calls for more research to develop an understanding of the participants' reflections on culture as a non-categorized construct. I hereby place in a query on the need for a mutual understanding of non-essentialism as a mainstream for explaining intercultural experiences. This would perhaps generate more insights on self-positioning with established intercultural knowledge.

I believe that the adjusted implementation of Positioning Theory as an analytical approach in this research also opens many doors for future investigation in the field of intercultural communication. It is an open invitation to quest a wider list of constructs being under exploration through the lens of Positioning Theory including, identity, voice, power relations, and many more. Within the same research and design operationalization, I believe more attention is needed when it comes to accounting for participants' intercultural backgrounds. Throughout the research investigation, there were many intercultural justifications in participants' narrative details that could be easily reached with a focus on the super-diversity of Algerian linguistic, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds.

Finally, the period of investigating an intercultural construct longitudinally is a think-about aspect that I recommend taking into consideration in the early research design planning. Exploring intercultural experiences, especially in study abroad contexts, requires the existence of abundant intercultural encounters, which in return form the basis of self-reflection on change and positionality. These aspirations cannot be met if not sufficient time is provided for participants to reflect upon the experience in relation to the investigation, they are part of.

6.4. My own reflections

As part of the group that was under study, my journey as an Algerian Ph.D. student in a study abroad context unfolded a distinctive intercultural becoming path. The multi-version of me the researcher, me the foreigner, and me the Algerian Ph.D. student, lies at the heart of a journey of a shift in perspective and a process of self-positioning to becoming intercultural. All of these synchronized my dialogic engagement with developing my research theoretical underpinnings, my participants' perspectives, interpreting my data, reaching my findings, and finally commenting on the journey impartially. At the end of this study, I reached an understanding that there was a value arising in sharing so many aspects with my participants. Not only at the academic level as being able to conduct ethical research, generate significant data, and reaching inspiring findings in my field, yet the self-exploration joy through an academic explanation.

When I was conducting the interviews, it strokes my mind a significant wondering of why we understand 'foreignness' in different manners, despite the so many common points of reference, I shared them with my participants. Interestingly, I found the answer to this query between the lines of my thesis and my own academic understanding of a sojourn abroad. Each one of us has his own set of cultural references, personal abilities, and unique intercultural encounters that is highly distinctive from one another. Therefore, these interwoven together would result in significantly variant perceptions and interpretations of reality. And this is the fascination of doing research in intercultural communication, it is not only a matter of achieving academic endeavours, yet an opportunity to depict these endeavours in one's own reality and interpret one's own perspectives.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Information sheet



Participant-information sheet

Study Title:

Exploring intercultural becoming dynamics of change: Algerian Ph.D. Students' Experiences in the UK.

Invitation

I would like to invite you to take part in a research study. Before you decide you need to understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you. Please take time to read the following information carefully. Ask questions if anything you read is not clear or would like more information. Take time to whether or not to take part. The present study aims at exploring the Algerian students' of English intercultural dynamics of change in the SA contexts.

Purpose of the study

The study will contribute to understanding in new and more complex ways the dynamic process through which Algerian PhD students experience a different cultural context. It also unfolds the different intercultural trajectories of the Algerian students' journey.

The reason to invite you to take part in this study is the fact that you are an Algerian student studying in the UK, which confirms the needs of my research.

It is up to you to decide. We will describe the study and go through the information sheet which will be given to you. We will then ask you to sign a consent form to show that you agreed to take part. You are free to withdraw at any time within a limited timeframe for withdrawal specified by the researcher without giving a reason, which is six months after the

starting date of data collection. It means from April 2019 to September 2019.

You will be involved in the study over the course of 8 months. Your participation will involve meeting the researcher every 3 months and to engage in a narrative interview discussing perspectives on intercultural aspects of change in your experience abroad. The interviews will take in duration 60 to 90 min, and schedule can be agreed upon via emails.

We cannot promise the study will help you but the information we get from the study will help to increase the understanding of the different trajectories of Algerian students' intercultural dynamics of change. If you have a concern about any aspect of this study, you should speak to the researcher who will help do her best to answer your questions.

Your individual recorded data in the interviews, will be anonymous and given a research code known only by the researcher. A master list identifying participants to the research code data will be held on a password protected computer and on MMU drive accessed only by the researcher.

If you withdraw from the study all the information and data collected from you, to date, will be destroyed and your name removed from all the study files.

The results of the study will be used to accomplish a PhD thesis and later to be published in the academic literature. You will not be identified in any publication unless you have given your consent.

This research is sponsored by the Algerian government.

If you have any queries or concerns about the project please do not hesitate to contact the researcher on the telephone number 07575934490 or email at Nasrine.labani@stu.mmu.ac.uk

If you are unhappy with being involved in the study anymore, or have any formal complaint please refer to the ethics regulations available on MMU website.

Appendix 2: consent form



Consent Form

Date: November 2017

Name: Nasrine Labani

Course: PhD

Department: Languages, Information and Communication

Place of study: Geoffrey Manton Building, Manchester Metropolitan University.

Contact details: Mobile No. 07575934490, Email: Nasrine.labani@stu.mmu.ac.uk

Title of Project: Exploring intercultural becoming dynamics of change: Algerian

Ph.D. students' Experiences in the UK.

If you are happy to participate, please read the following carefully, tick what you think is relevant and then sign the consent form

1. I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet dated November 2017 for the above project and have had the opportunity to ask questions about my participation in it.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time within the timeframe of withdrawal without giving any reason to the named researcher.
3. I understand that my responses in the interview will be sound recorded, transcribed analysed for this research project.
4. I understand that my reflection journals will be used anonymously and without any identifiable features.
5. I understand that my responses will remain anonymous.
6. I agree to take part in the above research project.

Name of Participant

Date

Signature

Researcher

Date

Signature

To be signed and dated in presence of the participant

Once this has been signed, you will receive a copy of your signed and dated consent form and information sheet by post.

Appendix 3: ethical approval letter

**Manchester Metropolitan
University**



Dr Khawla Badwan
Department of Languages and Info Comms

**Faculty of Arts and
Humanities**
Research and Knowledge
Exchange

Manchester Metropolitan
University, Room 123,
Geoffrey Manton Building,
Rosamund Street West,
Off Oxford Road,
Manchester, M15 6LL, UK

26 July 2018

Dear Dr Badwan,

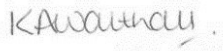
+44 (0)161 247 6673

Re: Ethics Checklist

Project Title: Nasrine Labani - Investigating Interactional Competence

I am pleased to inform you that your Ethics Checklist has been approved unconditionally. This part of the research can now begin.

Yours sincerely



Katherine Walthall
Research Group Officer

Tel: +44 (0)161 247 6673
Email: k.walthall@mmu.ac.uk
Research and Knowledge Exchange Office
Room 123 Geoffrey Manton Building

cc. Applicant

Appendix 4: Interview guideline questions

Interview round 1: generic

1. Tell me a bit about yourself? Something like your academic achievements, social background.....?
2. Have you done any traveling before coming to the UK?
 - What were your impressions
 - Did you feel any differences or similarities
3. Why did you choose to study abroad?

4. Would you narrate me the story of your how you embarked on the journey to the UK?
5. What were your expectations about studying in the UK?
6. How similar or different did you find living in the UK in comparison with your expectations?
7. What did you find easy or difficult about living in the UK?
8. Do you enjoy meeting people from new cultural backgrounds?
 - Would you explain why?
9. Do you attend any social activities, gatherings, or events?
 - What prompt you choose these activities?
 - On what basis do you decide to be part of a certain social or cultural event?
 - How do you usually know hear about these activities?
 - Do you attend alone or you prefer company?
10. Can you recall any intercultural situations where you were you developed positive or negative feeling or attitudes?
 - How do you usually react?
 - Do you think about such incidents after they happen to you?
 - What kind of thought do you develop after that?
11. Can you describe what have changed about your views to new cultures after coming to the UK?
12. Tall me a little bit about your social network ?
 - Do you like widening you social network
 - On what basis do you come to choose your friend or acquaintances?

13. How do you feel about communication in this new cultural environment?

14. Are you satisfied with your life in the UK so far?
 - What aspects are you/not satisfied with?
 - Do you do anything to change the situation?
15. What are you expecting next?

Appendix 5:

Interview round 2: Individualised interviews

Fares interview 2 guideline questions

Section 1: revisiting points (stimulated recall episodes)

“0:15-0:52”

- So basically fares, your parents were against your coming to the UK?
- did this affected you after coming here?

“2:25-3:03”

- you said here that this experience corrected a lot of your misconceptions, in what ways did this happened?
- What is the different thing about living in X city and this city?
- Why do you think are these differences?

“3:25- 4:04”

- Why did you have those fears of racism and islamophobia?
- Do you think having those stereotypes in mind affected your experience?

“6:04 –6:50”

- Why do you think you had this difficulty of understanding people?
- So was it a problem of language proficiency?
- Was this only with British people?
- Do you think to achieve a successful communication you need to be proficient in the language?
- Does this still happen?

“7:50-8:18”

- What helped you get over the issue of independence here the UK?
- In what ways did becoming independent was helpful in living here?

“10:15-10:57”

- How did come to evaluate yourself as openminded?
- What helped you become as such?

- Did this help you in building relationships with people?
- How?
- You called yourself a foreigner; is this what you think you are or what you think people see you like?

“11:16- 12:12”

- You mentioned diversity, do you think it helped you build the current you? How?
- Why did you avoid talking about sensitive topics? Was it you or them?
- Do you think mutual respect helped building a good relationship with them

Section2: generic questions

1. Let’s talk a little bit about how were the last three months?
 - Are there any significant incidents you feel you need to elaborate on?
2. Did you do any efforts to widen you social network?
 - Are there any intercultural connections you built lately?
 - Did your choice criteria of your social network changed since we last met?
 - Do you think it is important to have a wide social network?
3. Did you attend any social event or activities lately?
4. Let’s talk about some daily routine of yours lately, I know it was Ramadan and Eid, how did you live these events?
5. Do you feel anything have changed about your perspective about living in the UK since we last met?
6. What is your perspective on communication in new cultural contexts now?
7. Is there anything you want to add?

Meriem Interview 2 guideline questions

Section 1: revisiting points

“7:45-8:50”

You described British people Meriem as racists, racism in the UK is a really strong word.

- My question to you is did you really think that the situations that you have faced are really a racist act?
- What is your definition to racism then?
- Are you still feeling the same?
- Have you encountered anything similar since our last meeting?

“10:36-11:50”

- Here Meriem, you said that you find it difficult to approach British people
- How about non- British people?
- Do you think communicating with British people is different from that with non-British?
- Are you still struggling with this issue?
- Have you made any efforts to meet and talk to British people since our last meeting?

“12:58-13:22”

- So, you still like meeting new people?
- So do you think learning to communicate with people is through learning the differences between you? why?
- How about similarities?
- In any communication, are you able to notice the differences and similarities between you and the other?
- How do you view it now?

“14:26-15:29”

- Do you think the therapist diagnosis was correct?
- What was making you anxious?
- Are you still that way?

- What did you do to get over that?

“24:45- 26:30”

- So are you still unsatisfied?
- Tell me what happened since then?
- Why? did it change/ why it did not?
- Did you do any of those activities you wanted?

“26:53-27:32”

- Do you still have that fear?
- Why did/did not you have that fear?
- Are you still afraid of dealing with people?

Section2: generic questions

- Let's talk a little bit about how were the last three months?
 - Are there any significant incidents you feel you need to elaborate on?
- Did you do any efforts to widen you social network?
 - Are there any intercultural connections you built lately?
 - Did your choice criteria of your social network changed since we last me?
 - Do you think it is important to have a wide social network?
- Did you attend any social event or activities lately?
- Let's talk about some daily routine of yours lately, I know it was Ramadan and Eid, how did you live these events?
- Do you feel anything have changed about your perspective about living in the UK since we last met?
- What is your perspective on communication in new cultural contexts now?
- Is there anything you want to add?

Sadja Interview2guideline questions

Section 1: revisiting points (stimulated recall episodes)

“7:08-7:30”

You said that communication with people was easier than expected.

- did you mean here native speakers?
- So, you found that you are satisfied with your English as the core of communication with native speaker?
- Do you think that good language proficiency was enough for you to achieve successful communication?
- Does this tell you anything about the relationship of language and culture, which I think you talked about previously?

“7:45-7:54”

- Here you mentioned that there were situations where you found it difficult to understand and communicate. Can you recall some situations?
- How did you react?
- Why in your opinion that happened?
- How about now, have this changed?

“10:42- 10:58”

- So, you still like meeting new people?
- What did you mean by appreciating and questioning your culture?
- How do you view it now?

“11:25 – 12: 58”

- you said here, you learned to say please and thank you, how you come to do that?
- What did you mean by learned to be open?
- What factors you think helped you to learn?
- How did you find out that you have learned?

“13:45- 14:37”

- here you mentioned that you felt like an “outsider” in X city, but not in this city, why do you think is that?
- What does an outsider stand for in your understanding? Is it whoever cannot fit in wherever? Or with whoever?
- Do you think you can fit in easier in places where there is more diversity? Why?

Section2: generic questions

15. Let’s talk a little bit about how were the last three months?

- Are there any significant incidents you feel you need to elaborate on?

16. Did you do any efforts to widen you social network?

- Are there any intercultural connections you built lately?
- Did your choice criteria of your social network changed since we last me?
- Do you think it is important to have a wide social network?

17. Did you attend any social event or activities lately?

18. Let’s talk about some daily routine of yours lately, I know it was Ramadan and Eid, how did you live these events?

19. Do you feel anything have changed about your perspective about living in the UK since we last met?

20. What is your perspective on communication in new cultural contexts now?

21. Is there anything you want to add?

Rym Interview2 guideline questions

Section 1: revisiting points

“3:01-3:31”

So, here Rym you have mentioned both your aim to learn the language and culture.

- Do you think mastering the language is enough for successful communication?
- Which do you think is more important to achieve successful communication, language or cultural aspects?
- How was it in terms of using these 2 aspects at the time you arrived in the UK?
- How about now?

“3:46-4:32”

Here Rym, you mentioned the local people, which you meant British that are not easy to reach:

- How about non-British people who live here?
- Do you think communicating with a British is different from a non-British? Why?
- Why do you think the British set alone in the other side?
- Why in your opinion it is difficult to reach them?
- Do you usually make any efforts to get in touch with the local people as you call them?

“5:06-5:20”

- So, what is your definition to a foreigner Rym?
- Do you consider yourself a foreigner?
- Are you still struggling to make British friends as you planned?

“6:18-7:10”

- Are you still interested in the differences?
- Were you able to notice any similarities up till now?
- Do you think noticing the differences is more important than locating commonalities?

“7:17-7:36”

- Why was it difficult for you to socialize in this city than in X city?

“3:31-3:48”

You mentioned that you could not accept what the teacher has said

- Can you tell me why?
- Do you tend to react in all similar situations?
- Do you still do that?

Section2: generic questions

22. Let’s talk a little bit about how were the last three months?

- Are there any significant incidents you feel you need to elaborate on?

23. Did you do any efforts to widen you social network?

- Are there any intercultural connections you built lately?
- Did your choice criteria of your social network changed since we last me?
- Do you think it is important to have a wide social network?

24. Did you attend any social event or activities lately?

25. Let’s talk about some daily routine of yours lately, I know it was Ramadan and Eid, how did you live these events?

26. Do you feel anything have changed about your perspective about living in the UK since we last met?

27. What is your perspective on communication in new cultural contexts now?

28. Is there anything you want to add?

Nadia Interview 2 guiding questions

Section 1: revisiting points (stimulated recall episodes)

“1:42-1:58”

- Why was it exiting to change university?
- Do you think this added anything to your general development? what did it add for example?
- Did changing surrounding made you meet new people? how was it like?
- Is it the same as when you came from Algeria to the UK?
- Why?

“9:16-9:49”

- Why do you feel the need to communicate with people?
- Are you still struggling to find opportunities to communicate with people from new cultural backgrounds?
- What do you do to create these opportunities?

“10:18-11:07”

- So, you still like meeting new people from new cultural backgrounds?
- Why do you think locating differences and similarities help you learn how to communicate with people?
- So, did you learn anything recently?

“11:52 – 12:47”

- Do you think that language is the core of communication with people from new cultural backgrounds?
- Do you think that good language proficiency was enough for you to achieve successful communication with people in the conversational club?
- Was this the only factor that took you out of isolation as you said Nadia?
- Are you still attending this club?

“15:06-15:19”

- How did you become aware that you are open to other cultures like you said nadia?

- Do you think being open is what help you achieve successful communication?

“19:58-20:30”

- So, did your social life improved since this meeting?
- Are you getting socialized as you wanted? how did you do that?
- What have changed?

Section2: generic questions

29. Let’s talk a little bit about how were the last three months?

- Are there any significant incidents you feel you need to elaborate on?

30. Did you do any efforts to widen you social network?

- Are there any intercultural connections you built lately?
- Did your choice criteria of your social network changed since we last me?
- Do you think it is important to have a wide social network?

31. Did you attend any social event or activities lately?

32. Let’s talk about some daily routine of yours lately, I know it was Ramadan and Eid,
how did you live these events?

33. Do you feel anything have changed about your perspective about living in the UK
since we last met?

34. What is your perspective on communication in new cultural contexts now?

Is there anything you want to add?

Amina Interview 2 guideline questions

Section 1: revisiting points (stimulated recall episodes)

“1:37-1:54”

- So, representing yourself as Amazigh means you are different of the rest of Algerians? Why?
- Did labelling yourself as Amazigh influenced your experience here in the UK?

“3:00-4:38”

- So, here Amina you emphasized the importance of language in communicating with native speakers as you said, do you think language is enough to achieve successful communication?
- Do you think communication with native speakers is different from that with non-native speakers?
- How did you become aware of the differences between the accents as you said?
- Did this awareness helped you communicate better her in the UK?

“9:27-10:03”

- Why do you think it is hard to make friendships here in the UK?
- Have you made any recently?

“17:05-17:48”

- Are you still struggling with this amina?
- Did you make any efforts to change the situation?
- Are you satisfied that you are surrounded with Algerian friends only?
- Do you think the experience would be different if you had no Algerian friends?

Section2: generic questions

35. Let’s talk a little bit about how were the last three months?

- Are there any significant incidents you feel you need to elaborate on?

36. Did you do any efforts to widen your social network?

- Are there any intercultural connections you built lately?
- Did your choice criteria of your social network change since we last met?
- Do you think it is important to have a wide social network?

37. Did you attend any social event or activities lately?

38. Let's talk about some daily routine of yours lately, I know it was Ramadan and Eid, how did you live these events?

39. Do you feel anything has changed about your perspective about living in the UK since we last met?

40. What is your perspective on communication in new cultural contexts now?

Is there anything you want to add?

Appendix 6:

Interview 3: generic guideline questions

1. How were the last three months in the UK for you?
 - Do you feel anything have changed in you social or academic life?
 - Do you feel anything special has happened to you since we last met?
2. What were the stereotyping mechanisms you were able to develop after living in the UK?
3. How can you describe yourself on intercultural level now that you have spent almost a year in the UK?
4. What are the factors you think helped in the way you perceive your self intercultural now?
5. Now after you have spent this time in the UK, how do you treat differences and similarities between you and any new cultural settings or people?
 - Are you able notice them?
 - Does these comparisons you make affect your perception to people and cultural environments generally?
6. What is your perspective to your intercultural background now?
 - Why do you think this shift in perspective occurred?
 - Are you comfortable rebuilding your perspectives about your cultural background?
7. Were you able to widen your social network since we last met?
 - Are there any new strategies to do so?
 - Did the criteria for choosing your social network change again?
8. Do you think your cultural and personal identity had an effect on your intercultural experience her in the UK?
 - What aspects you think were most affected?
 - Do you think of the effect as positive or negative?
 - Do try to eliminate this effect?
9. Let's talk a bit about language, do you think your language development had an effect on your intercultural experience her in the UK?

- What do you think your perspective to the language-culture relationship we discussed previously have changed?
- Are you satisfied with you communication through this language-culture relation?

10. How do you see yourself in the UK now?

11. Can you recall some stories about yourself in the last three months?

12. Tell me in a short story your general reflection about this whole journey in the UK?

Appendix 7:

Transcription manual

- . The end of thought or idea
- , continuous thought or idea
- ? question with intonation rise
- ! general wondering with intonation rise
- ... pause of more than 3 seconds
- (laughter) expressing laughter
- “ ” constructed narrative
- [...] removed from intext narrative
- (...) Inaudible
- (laugh) Laughing
- Researcher: floor to the researcher
- Participant: floor to participant pseudonym
- (My university) home institution on the time of interview
- (My city) city of residence on the time of interview
- (My supervisor) supervisor's original name
- (My friend) friend's original name