

**AN ANALYSIS OF STUDY ABROAD STUDENTS: HOW THE 'SELF'  
ARTICULATES EXPERIENCES AND ENCOUNTERS IN DIFFERENT CULTURAL  
SETTINGS**

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CHNTAT002

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## **DECLARATION**

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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## **ABSTRACT**

Twenty-first century globalisation has brought with it, distinction among students through the Internationalisation of Higher Education (IHE). The effects of globalization and the IHE has been categorised as “preparing students for the globalizing world, suggesting new pedagogies and institutional settings that nurture ‘global consciousness’” (Mansilla & Gardner, 2007: 56.) With the increase in mobility and hyper-connectivity, an education has become more than what is taught within the confines of a classroom or university. Studying abroad has become a significant component within the academic arena that allows students the privilege and opportunity to develop intercultural competence through first-hand experience

This study seeks to explore the articulation of experiences and encounters from the perspective of the study abroad student exposed to cultural settings different from their own. This dissertation will place particular emphasis on the articulation of the responses and approaches taken by individuals of their respective encounters and experiences, using the Circuit of Culture as a link drawing together the themes (Re)Construction of Self Identity; ‘Fitting In’ and Adaptation; Developing Intercultural Competence and Society as we now know it, to give a holistic, interpretive understanding into the meanings and outcomes produced by the relationship between the constructions and perceived ideologies of both the study abroad student and the hosts collective.

The study is amalgamation of responses from personal narrations given by eight participants, as well as a discussion with four individuals in a focus group from different countries. They reveal the importance of the self, from both the personal and social viewpoint to be able to comprehend the actions and reactions taken to construct, adapt, assimilate and learn from the experience. Discoveries uncover difference as a component that exists between the self and the other in a number of ways through how they classify and identify each other. As a result, slight but significant changes in perceptions can be noted.

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## **ACRONYMS**

CoC	Circuit of Culture
IHE	Internationalisation of Higher Education
HE	Higher Education
SA	Study Abroad



## PROLOGUE

As a student travelling frequently between places I feel as though, when I am in places where I do not belong, I am just another foreigner and am treated as such. This was a peculiar feeling I had in the immigration queue, ready to depart on my way back from India to my home country of Zimbabwe. After pondering my experience, I came to the realisation that I do not know where I fit in or belong.

When I am away, I miss being at home; when I am about to get home, I miss the place I have just left. I could not stop asking myself why I felt as if I did not belong anywhere, particularly at that moment in time. I remember feeling overwhelmed by different emotions: sadness, excitement and relief about my imminent departure, but also memories, both good and bad, about the place I was leaving came rushing into my head.

Even today, I do not understand what was happening at that moment. Perhaps I was just feeling nostalgic, or so I comforted myself. Most people, who travel constantly, probably feel the same, maybe, especially ‘in this day and age’, ‘at my age’.

I do not feel as if I belong anywhere, and that does not feel right. Is it because of the ‘stage of life’ in which I find myself?

I am still trying to figure out who I am, what I want to do and where I belong. This feeling was definitely not making it easier.

With the constant changes and moves that I have had to go through, I have noticed, with every place that I leave behind, I become a different individual with new uncertainties, insecurities, confusion and questions about who I really am and where I belong.

I want to be accepted. I want to belong. Maybe going home will answer some of these questions. I know that, at home, I am one with my family. And regardless of where I am in the world, my family will always be with me.

– Author’s Personal Journal (2014)

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

The twenty-first century has come with variations in inventions and innovations, both economically and culturally driven by globalisation. Globalisation was, and still is, often associated with the establishment, continuous expansion and transformation of economic global markets. These have been driven by neo-liberal capitalist motives of free trade, meaning an increase in the movement of resources, mainly people, capital and goods, borderless markets and nations, in addition to the intense reduction in time and space that exists across these places (Tehrani, 1999).

The advent and advancement in these movements have fuelled the constant need to advance. This has also been so widespread in institutions of Higher Education (HE), which have also followed suit under the premise of internationalising the curriculum to promote intercultural exchanges. These exchanges have been anticipated to result in an individual that is well-rounded, who is able to tackle and interact culturally on a 'global' level without much difficulty, creating and utilising opportunities that will further advance globalism.

The theoretical notion of the 'global citizen' is initially explored through the experiential encounters and personal developments made during a study abroad (SA) student's sojourns. But, there is need to be aware that the above theoretical notion and studying abroad is not afforded to all students. Globalisation, even in its neo-liberal form, is restrictive, and can be thought of as segregative. Thus, "mobile students can be considered a migratory elite [Musgrove, 1963], with individuals generally not originating from the lower strata of society, and affording to dispose of sufficient economical capital to finance a study period abroad" (Van Mol, 2012: 210).

However, under way is an exploration of the meanings that can be derived and denoted from the experiences of studying abroad and being immersed within the

internationalised educational system found in various socio-cultural locations, on what it means to the individuals in a SA programme. Issues of cultural engagement, as well as identity construction, are considered with regard to the individual's personal and social identity. The features revealed will help in the investigation of the effects that take place as a result of the interaction and relationships that can be associated with the collective identities that SA students encounter in the host countries, contrasted to their conception of their 'known' identities cultivated from their countries of origin.

## **Context**

This study seeks to explore how SA students articulate their experiences and encounters of studying outside their home country as a result of engaging with different cultural settings. Accordingly, exploration will be made of the different aspects that are likely to arise due to their mobility, hyper-connectivity and ability to learn and adapt within the cultures in which they are situated. This is made possible by investigating the students' responses with regard to the following: constructions of their SA experience; conception and connotation of what home means, as well as the relationships fostered between themselves and the host societies. Conclusions revealed will be linked to discussions on globalisation, internationalisation of higher education (IHE) and the understanding of the development of intercultural competence. This paper will place particular emphasis on the articulation of the responses and approaches taken by individuals of their respective encounters and experiences, using the Circuit of Culture (CoC) model as a link drawing together the themes ((Re)Construction of Self Identity; 'Fitting In' and Adaptation; Developing Intercultural Competence and Society as we now know it) to give a holistic, interpretive understanding into the meanings and outcomes produced by the relationship between the constructions and perceived idealisations of the SA student and the hosts collective.

This case study utilised multiple narrative methods to gather rich data from the participants. Eight (8) semi-structured face-to-face interviews took place, as well as a focus group with four (4) participants. Other qualitative methods included the author's journal entries and reflections on her personal experiential insights as a SA student in a

similar programme were also used, including continual reflection on participants' overall narrated experiences. Thus, these techniques allowed focus to be stressed on understanding the students' interpretations of their recent SA experiences during their Masters in Arts TAP\*<sup>1</sup> <sup>2</sup> semesters.

It explored the relationship between the lived experience of engaging and adapting to a different cultural setting through the concept of 'intercultural learning' (Gill, 2007). This concept encompasses understanding the experience of encountering two or more different cultures, while at the same time being aware of the learning that occurs through understanding such encounters (Alred, Byram & Flemming, 2003).

## **Background**

The opening excerpt (prologue) comes from a page in the author's electronic journal in which she wrote down her thoughts and experiences from the time she studied abroad. Upon recent reflection, she realized that most of her journal entries were particularly self-reflective, displaying a constant questioning of what a situation meant to her and how it would influence her behaviour within the 'bigger picture'. It is intriguing how she found herself behaving and reacting in certain ways within the societies she was in, which made her question 'whom she considered herself to be' and 'what it meant to be who she thought she was'. Simultaneously, curiosity led to the internally motivated need and desire to understand why she felt the way she did, and consequently why those around her responded and reacted the way they did. For the most part these thoughts were a result of her everyday experiences as a student in a completely different socio-cultural setting. Different in as many ways as the imagination can conceive, the cultural shock was indescribably unfathomable.

Nonetheless, the sentiments and beliefs she held at the time of the various encounters experienced went without saying. Having begun to make academic enquiries of some of these questions, she was determined to get a thorough understanding of

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<sup>1</sup> An asterisk (\*) indicates the use of pseudonyms for names and cities for participants' autonomy.

<sup>2</sup> TAP\* is the name of the programme that the participants are enrolled in.

society, how it interacts, and how it changes through an understanding of the self and culture by taking note of the experiences and encounters of SA students. The need to understand the changes and interaction finds its roots in the foundations of understanding the premise underlying the study of Sociology. As defined by du Gay, Evans and Redman (2000), Sociology is the study of those *social practices* that require *interpretative understanding*, which must be referred to in terms of *cultural understanding* in order to be *made sense of*. Hence, the basis of what the study set out to accomplish.

### **Rationale of the study**

The research focuses on the need to understand what place, space, identity and culture mean to different individuals, with regard to the exposure to, and contributions to processes of globalisation. The more one travels and interacts with various cultures and societies, the more one becomes familiar with, but at the same time different from, those within that particular culture and context – especially regarding the actions and reactions resulting from the cultural exchange between the student and host collective. Determining the processes of cultural exchange influences the way that individuals view themselves with cognisance to perceptions engrained from their societies of origin that are constantly at play. The need to understand and relate to previously held perceptions and stereotypes applies to how individuals choose to negotiate, translate and adapt to the ideologies and cultures that form and conceptualise the varying components that form and signify a culture, thus contributing to the experiences, learning and exposure that students get during academic sojourns.

For the researcher the examination and scrutiny to be administered in trying to understand these cultural exchanges and negotiations of experiences is an intriguing concept to explore. With a perspective ‘from the researcher’s experience, it was interesting to give some thought to the realisation that, though similarity could be located within the exchange between the student and the host culture, their differences were also magnified. The students’ conceptions of what home means and where they would locate their home, penetrated deeper the need to recognise and relate with something ‘familiar’. Thus, these confusing needs and desires led to the curiosity that guided the topic of

enquiry, having being directed by the anticipation that “identities function as a projection of future trajectories” (Yuval-Davis, 2011: 202). These expectations, accordingly, will support the resurgence and acknowledgment of the significance of intercultural learning through SA experiences that as a result enable the actualisation of a globally aware tolerant ‘citizen’. The question was what this would mean for the future of the travelling student, with prospects of future careers in which they are constantly on the move. What would these earlier exchanges mean years from now with regard to society as we now know it?

This study propels interest in the direction that globalisation is diverging towards, relating to the positive affirmations that society has taken a liking to in terms of the conveniences and technologies that it has adopted to itself. Mapping out these experiences is a task to figure out if identity is one of the many mechanisms that decipher the workings and effects that globalisation and the IHE, has on the socio-cultural front of human interaction. Some of the questions the researcher found herself asking were:

- What are the factors, which society needs to address, that are being highlighted by individuals’ experiences that might possibly have an effect on the way that society is advancing and could aid in it continuing to advance sustainably?
- What do experiences, like those undergone by SA students, mean to the individual that will never get to experience this side of globalisation and its perks?
- What are some of the implications of constructions and shifts within identity which society should be examining to start identifying some of the issues at hand? Is this a setback to society’s development?
- How has the world changed, and what are some of the features that make society as we now know it?

These among many are some of the questions queried within the study. However, to begin, a literature review on identity, mobility and the IHE could aid in the facilitation of the sought-after judgements and answers in this dissertation.

## **Structure of the dissertation**

Chapter Two provides a literature review on the understanding of globalisation and its influence on Higher Education (HE) by giving a background to the different schools of thought on the IHE. Also, taking a look into the changing paradigms and transitions that exist and take place within the knowledge society. As well as, assessing the influences of the IHE concept on individuals' construction of identity, so as to give an understanding of the interpretations of the 'cultural other' and its environment.

Chapter Three is solely dedicated to describing in great detail the methodological approaches and techniques used for research-material collection and analysis of the findings. It also contains brief biographies of the participants.

Chapter Four is divided into two parts. Part One identifies the relationship between the themes and its correlation to the CoC Model in examining and translating the early stages of the participants' interpretation of their construction of identity, and the identification of differences and similarities between the SA and the host collective. Part Two begins to unfold the findings and analysis of two out of four themes concentrating on understanding the perceptual articulations and their meanings of the experiences of SA student through the process of the (Re)Construction of Self Identity and 'Fitting In' and Adaptation.

Chapter Five demonstrates the findings and analysis of the last two of the four themes Developing Intercultural Competence and Society as we now know it identified in Chapter Four, focusing on the evaluation of experiential articulations with meaning – a stage at which the participant equates the need to adapt and learn from the cultural exchanges and experiences encountered.

Chapter Six is a discussion of the study. It gives a synopsis of the findings and discusses Chapter Four and Five as it relates to other studies and literature.

Chapter Seven concludes and summarises the findings and relevance of the discussion and study, also giving the strengths and limitations of the study, as well as the researcher's suggestions and recommendations for future studies.

# CHAPTER TWO

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### **Understanding Globalisation and Higher Education**

Globalisation is a volatile and turbulent phenomenon that has driven so many changes, creating and convoluting entities as well as re-fashioning processes that take place in almost anything and everything in everyday life. It is challenging vast forms of authorities, most notably the nation-state – where individuals' sense of being and rights are embedded. Consequently, this portent bores deeper into questioning the foundations and ideals of 'identity'. The impacts of globalisation's effects and its sphere of influence are realised within the global markets, economies, the state and individuals' choices and preferences. Yet a great likelihood of inherent but unpredictable effects on 'universities' and other institutions of Higher Education (HE) are under way (Scott, 2000).

According to Knight (2008), globalisation brings about new realities and opportunities for the exploration of lifelong learning and the knowledge economy as well as engagement and discussions around borderless exchanges. The Internationalisation of Higher Education (IHE) is taking place on two levels in order to prepare the student for a more globalised world. These are at home, through activities that aid in a student's understanding and development of intercultural skills and through more 'curriculum oriented' approaches, which involve the mobility of resources i.e., people, research etcetera.

The mission of the university continues to evolve within the twenty-first century and also challenges its boundaries in promoting innovation and increases its adaptability to cater for these novelties. However, to achieve this, institutions have embraced the enrolment of students from across borders, within their educational systems, and in turn allow them to be absorbed into the cultural fabric of the society in question.



## **The Emergence Of Transnational Mobility On Institutions**

The movement (mobility) of individuals for work, study or leisure has emancipated them from the set structures and limitations that come with how individuals have been identified and categorised within cultural, geographic and social contexts. The mobility of students has emerged as an important new group of international migrants, even though they still form a small part of total migration flows. Study abroad (SA) students mostly originate from Europe, America, Canada and Australia; these make up the majority of the students involved in the study programmes. This is as a result of the enforcement of the institutionalisation and promotion of policies driving organised student mobility on a regional level, for example through the European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students (ERASMUS)<sup>3</sup>, the National Association of Foreign Student Advisers (NAFSA)<sup>4</sup> and the World Education Program (WEP)<sup>5</sup> Australia, to name a few (Brooks & Waters, 2011). The notion of mobility brings into question the strategies individuals will take with regard to the changing structure of national societies (Kennedy, 2010). Consequently, nationality is being called into question, together with citizenship, as people are filtering through space and time without much difficulty (Albrow, 2004).

The changing forms of international relations characterised by time-space compression (Harvey, 1990), as well as the evaluation of the principles of the nation-state

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<sup>3</sup> ERASMUS is a European Union (EU) student-exchange programme established in 1987. Students who join the Erasmus Programme study at least 3 months or do an internship for a period of at least 2 months to an academic year in another European country. The Erasmus Programme guarantees that the period spent abroad is recognised by their university when they come back, as long as they abide by terms previously agreed.

<sup>4</sup> NAFSA is a non-profit professional organisation for professionals in all areas of international education including education abroad advising and administration, international student advising, campus internationalisation, admissions, outreach, overseas advising, and English as a Second Language (ESL) administration. As of 2010, it served approximately 10,000 educators worldwide, representing nearly 3,000 higher education institutions.

<sup>5</sup> WEP Australia offers study abroad opportunities in more than 25 countries. Their international student exchange programs offer a transformational learning experience hand-in-hand with unsurpassed quality of support and attention to every student and family.

linking a single nation, people and culture within a fixed territory (space), can be examined through the changes resulting from mobility in the way the world has been operating. Literature has been exploring these disjunctive flows of people, technology and ideologies (Appadurai, 1990), including the global connectivity that allows individuals to easily access distant locations (Tomlinson, 1999) and have a shared global reference against which cultural difference is accentuated (Robertson, 1992). Mobility in this sense has been used by the individual and society to aid in restructuring itself, with the central focus moving away from that of agency and structure sustained by class politics, to that concentrated on identity politics. This debate around identity politics pertaining to who people are and how they identify with the 'familiar' and the 'other' is being explored widely with the need to understand how individuals have started questioning their identity. This is especially the case with the exposure that movement across borders and interaction with the 'other' from different cultures affords them. Mobility as a theoretical concept has gone beyond the need to recognise specific locations, places and spaces as one's own, but has evolved and developed the individual into a multifaceted, flexible, tolerant and malleable person that is adaptable in most circumstances (Brewer, 1991).

However, views opposing (Hannerz, 2003; Burawoy, Blum, George, Gille, Gowan, Haney, Klawiter, Lopez, Riain & Thayer, 2000) this conceptualisation – that mobility detaches individuals from the local national context to a more global one – suggest looking at mobility in relation to rootedness and locality (Kennedy, 2010; Savage, Bagnall & Longhurst, 2005). This shows that with exposure to a range of social networks and spaces, individuals experience the need for a sense of belonging and negotiate their involvement within the given environment, indicating that their attachment is usually located from the place of origin, though, in most cases, initially, it is taken for granted (Andreotti, Le Galès & Moreno Fuentes, 2013). This is revealed by individuals' constant need to contact family and friends within these spaces through social media like Skype, Facebook and the like, or joining and embracing cultural groups that allow for the slight but significant connection to the familiar. As much as one chooses not acknowledge the ties that they have to national contexts, there are visible traits and/or worldviews that link individuals to specific places.

## **Exploring Internationalisation**

The terms ‘internationalisation’ and ‘globalisation’ are often used interchangeably to refer to one or the other. However, in the context of this study they are identified as separate concepts but with an interlinking characteristic that draws similarities. The difference is in the scale and intensity in which one or the other occurs, as well as the fact that they have opposing views. The distinction is that internationalisation “reflects on a world order dominated by nation states” (Scott, 2000:4), engages partnerships and exchanges with international agencies, and those with ex-colonial capitalist interests. Its emphasis is on strategic relationships in which HE is no exception, due to the fact that there seems to be a deliberate and significant conditioning that occurs during the process of engaging and accommodating students from a geopolitical standpoint with regard to who benefits and why the partnership exists. However, internationalisation has strong connections and ties to historical components, and to hierarchies and culture carried over throughout time and its dependence on already existing patterns and hegemonies, thus reinforcing its legitimacy on how and why the HE system came to exist. It cannot be separated from the process of imperialism and can be regarded as classic ‘Fordist’<sup>6</sup> in that “universities are locked into national contexts, with the majority of them still being state universities, are preoccupied with the large scale production of public service, professional and business elites, despite decades of massification” (Scott, 2000:5).

Comparatively, on the other end of the spectrum, globalisation and its capricious nature is evoking a more post-modern persona, exploring the world of information technology and global popular culture. It is a force that has set out to ‘reorder the status quo’ of how the world system stands and was initially expressed by Wallerstein (1974) three decades ago. “And in the present we are all irremediably the products of our background, our training, our personality and social role, and the structured pressures within which we operate” (Wallerstein, 1974: 233), hence the ideology that globalisation is set out to transform. In recent years new, strong markets and economies have been emerging and developing in the ‘semi-periphery and developing world’, rendering

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<sup>6</sup> Based on standardisation and mass production and consumption in a uniform manner that would guarantee sameness, efficiency and effectiveness of a certain criterion at all times.

obsolete national boundaries. Globalisation does not depend on the past and is very much at the forefront of addressing new agendas in the world, as we now know it (Scott, 1998).

Hence, with the recognition of these differences between globalisation and internationalisation, and the misconception that internationalisation can lead to the global citizen can be examined under the premise of globalisation endorsing this agenda. This, for the reason that within today's globalising world the speculation and dominance that identity and collective identities carries, propels a common understanding as those held through engagement with popular culture, particularly in the manner through which translations of the entertainment industry take place on a larger scale through e.g. Hollywood. Therefore, these differences highlight and strengthen the fact that globalisation is only a process that exists within a world that is battling with the need to advance, and is losing control as a result of the dominance that the human mind has on the need to belong, as well as its need to identity with others. Scott (2006) recognises and acknowledges that both globalisation and internationalisation are very complex phenomena and cannot be regarded as 'categorical'; rather, they overlap and are intertwined in many ways. As a result, "globalisation is changing the world of internationalisation, and internationalisation is changing the world of Higher Education" (Knight, 2008:1).

### **Internationalisation of Higher Education**

Student mobility on a global scale has been identified as a key strategy for IHE. To understand the effects and possible impact of globalisation on the universities, Altbach, Reisberg and Rumbley (2009: 7) have established that "internationalisation is defined as the variety of policies and programs that universities and government implement to respond to globalisation", which they describe as "the reality shaped by an increasingly integrated world economy, new information and communication technology, the emergence of international knowledge network, the role of the English language, and other forces beyond the control of academic institutions".

IHE, as defined by Knight (2008:19), is "the process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, function or delivery

(teaching, research and service function) of post-secondary education”, at the national, sectorial and institutional level. Internationalisation began to give way in the early 1980s, specifically with regard to the education sector. In practice it related to curriculum-based terms such as international studies, global studies etcetera, and in mobility-based terms such as the international student, SA and the rest (de Wit, 2002). The British Council Report ‘Vision 2020’ predicts current figures to triple, with these students making significant academic research contributions, bringing diversity to the campus scene and adding fee income to the institutions concerned (UKCOSA, 2004). The number of (international) students travelling outside their home countries to get an education has increased in the past few decades. Doerr (2009) estimates that over 3.7 million tertiary students were enrolled outside their country of origin, but it is difficult to point out the exact number for SA students in the various programmes administrated worldwide. With most universities enthusiastic about enrolling international and SA students, the motive behind it encompasses financial considerations. For example, Australia’s third largest export industry is via international education, with earnings of \$17.2 billion in 2008-2009 (Australian International Education, 2010).

However, for this reason there is a lack of consideration for mechanisms, programmes or facilities that can aid the transitional period of adapting into the education system, let alone easing into the culture of the country as a whole for international and SA students (Leonard, Pelletier & Morley, 2003).

However, the rationale of the IHE needs to be distinguished from the meaning of internationalisation, as explored above. De Wit (2000) identifies four categories of rationale for the IHE, defining it in terms of intended outcome:

- Political rationales so as to protect foreign policy, national security etcetera. To preserve and strengthen national as well as regional identity.
- Economic rationales contribute to the growth and competitiveness of institutions and financial incentives and cater to the labour market as well as national educational demands.

- Social and cultural rationale focused on the university's research and teaching, creating and understanding experiences that in turn develop intercultural competence and foster an 'international' environment for both internal and external students.
- Academic rationales encompass the development, quality and standard of education that can be ranked on an international scale.

These rationales apply differently to the different institutions and regions, and changes in importance with time. However, the last two (social-cultural and academic) seem to be governing the current decade's context, indiscreetly riding on the economic and political rationales. This is significantly interesting with regard to Brandenburg and De Wit's (2010) judgement of the debate between globalisation and internationalisation. The globalisation of HE in their opinion is a tradable commodity that is executed under the flag of internationalisation. The economic objective increases the geographic mobility of students' future careers, ensuring that competitiveness is built among the global economies. And the social objective lies on the same principle that students will be better able to interact and consolidate cordially with other individuals from different cultures and regions (Sigalas, 2010).

### **Rethinking Internationalisation**

Experiencing at first hand other cultures through studying abroad is considered a valuable opportunity to learn intercultural competence (Davies & Pike 2009; Skelly, 2009). This experience conversely emphasises the differences found between students' home and host cultures, while it gives the former a de-territorial disposition and the latter a territorial one as it 'normalises' both societies. Some of the intercultural competences that individuals acquire pertain to culture-specific knowledge, tolerance of the ambiguous, open mindedness, and acceptance and understanding of the host culture (Rizvi, 2000; Streitwieser, 2009). The effects of globalisation and the IHE have been branded as "preparing students for the globalising world, suggesting new pedagogies and institutional settings that nurture 'global consciousness'", including obtaining skills for future career opportunities and engagement with various individuals of different cultural

backgrounds having gained an understanding of global issues and the interconnectedness of the world (Mansilla & Gardner, 2007:56). Conversely, Zemach-Bersin (2009) critiques SA sojourns as a (re)creation of power relations between the SA student and the host societies. She argues that it commends consumerism with the experience expended as a commodity. Hence calls for the scrutiny of identifying the privilege that can be identified with such experiences and student classifications (SA student). Woolf (2010) agrees, expressing that the perceptible benefits spoken of studying abroad in the long run bringing about gain and support to a larger 'global society', are exaggerations from researchers and the programmes, to the development of a new privileged class. The question then becomes whether being 'global' is 'positive' in relation to the value that is given to the connections, linkages and circulation of barriers and associations' globalism has – considering how it conceptualises 'progress', or the conditions that hinder certain global movements (Tsing, 2000). However, Tsing (2000) strongly believes that globalism is a type of measure suggesting the culture and political economy as a unit through which sense can be made of social processes and events; this becomes a concept to be critically analysed, as globalisation masks the vertical segregation between the 'elite' and 'working class' within societies (Friedman, 2003)

However, taking the former viewpoint in the above discussion into account, as well as having realised the rationale that drives the IHE and the changing climate of societies and economies, the drive to create an inter-culturally competent individual has become the façade for the agenda of the 'international' becoming more interconnected. It is now deemed critical that the twenty-first century individual should be able to contribute to, and live harmoniously with, a cultural 'other', in understanding, accepting and adapting to difference.

This transformative (existential) internationalisation, coined by Sanderson (2004), highlights a view of internationalisation that aims to understand the actual experience of students within the system of internationalised HE. The process implies the understanding of experiential SA encounters, and ensures that institutional strategies of internationalisation are put in place. This view is pertinent in the assessments that will follow in this dissertation. An overall understanding on globalisation and

internationalisation around the issues of HE has opened up further considerations to keep in mind, as well as revealed concepts that will unfold the interpretations to develop.

The notion behind transformative internationalisation is for individuals to learn and know how to deal with the 'cultural other'. Individuals are naturally bound by historical constructions and reactions of fearing the unknown and unfamiliar, hence this should seize to exist with the introduction of transformative internationalisation and the development of intercultural competencies (Sanderson, 2004). The process of getting to know and understand the 'cultural other' helps an individual to "better understand oneself by deconstructing and reconstructing their national identity rather than retreating into stereotyped, chauvinistic populist nationalism" (Tian & Lowe, 2009: 663). However, to achieve this, Sanderson proposes that Appadurai's (2001) globalisation from below presents the opportunity for humanistic advancements of exploring the 'cultural other', possibly by adopting the principles of 'strong' internationalisation in which communities are genuinely willing to be open, engaging without prejudicing each other's knowledge and ideas.

### **'Impressions' on 'Identity'**

There has been a drive within the progression of globalisation for the need to homogenise, coordinate, unify and universalise society on a global level, concurrently highlighting and emphasising diversity, localisation and differentiation of the other. Henceforth, there is the recognition and acknowledgement that globalisation is not a rigid process, but is engaged differently within varying spatial and interpersonal contexts, in addition to the changing circumstances of engagement (Tehrani & Tehrani, 1997; Servaes, Lie & Teris, 2000). As it is, we see social processes of categorisation existing between certain groups globally through various national and supra-national organisational forms of identifying with those that are alike themselves. This shows that there is a need to identify the self through a congregation of factors, to something that can possibly give meaning to an individual, especially with the multitude of vicissitudes that exist in the twenty-first century.



Hence the resurgence and dominance of the identity discourse focusing on identity formation needs to be (re)conceptualised. In this case, concentrating on understanding the degree to which cultural exposure contests with or alters the existence of the individual self and its known 'culture'. Identity formation resonates with how an individual self-identifies, as well as considers whether a sense of belonging can be developed. This is necessary due to the negotiations SA students undergo as a result of adapting to the cultures exposed for the duration of the programme. In doing this, the discourses that emerge within the discussion of identity and globalisation are revealed to be complex and complicated, as they try and merge two very unstable and unpredictable concepts in trying to understand the 'self'.

Identity can be anything that you want it to be. It is a complicated concept to explore and explain, as it has different meanings to the different people that it is posed to. Nonetheless, it is a concept that matters to the understanding of who and what society is. Consequently, it provides individuals with the tools to understand the chemistry between their idiosyncratic (personal) experiences of the world and the cultural and historical setting in which that fragile subjectivity is formed (Woodward, 1997).

*Identity is the need to identify*

However, throughout time, identities have been socially constructed, meaning that no one is born with a particular identity, but is exposed to assume certain identities as a result of the circumstance, time and place surrounding their birth and existence. Thus, with time, people also realise that they do not have just one identity, but multiple ones, with regard to the different degrees to which they identify with different groups. An example of this by Bekker, Dodds and Khosa (2001) illustrates that we can familiarise and feel comfortable with a particular language group, but that does not mean that this community is not made up of, or does not identify with, other communities at the same time. They belong to different identities such as their religion, ethnicity or nationality and the like. This same language group can be looked at from different worldviews and viewpoints. Hence we recognise that identities are situational and that there is a hierarchy of importance with regard to the way individuals order their significance. Different

identities will be more important to an individual depending on the circumstance and the purpose of the need at that time.

In traditional societies of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, an individual's identity was fixed, solid and stable; it had a purpose predefined by social roles and traditional systems of myths which provided orientation and one's standing in the world while circumscribing the realm of thought and behaviour. However, in modern times identities have become more mobile, multiple, personal and self-reflexive, a subject of change and innovation: it is social and 'other' related (Buckingham, 2008).

Interestingly, though, identity is a topic that is relevant to the understanding of the self and society. There is little recent literature investigating this phenomenon amid other emerging subjects in twenty-first century literature considering the changes in formation, social structures and worldviews around topics concerning other forms of identity beyond the national, with the focus of the individual and intensification of global processes. The question then is: what could this mean a decade or two from now? considering that the generation that is currently emerging is one that knows nothing more than the digitalisation of almost all interactions whether economic, social or academic and so forth. Thus, enlightenment is given from the numerous citations in this review of studies from the 1990s which focused on the 'authentic' interaction of the self and society without the uses of 'advanced mechanisms and techniques'. This allows for the ability to filter through some of the meanings that are likely to exist of the self and society prior to these developments.

Identity has become characterised by the need for mutual recognition, with individuals thriving on recognition from others, as well as self-validation of this particular recognition. Still, identities are substantial and fixed with regard to social roles and norms, though the negotiation of new forms of boundaries and characters are being formed and are continuously expanding. It has now become more of a self-conscious process, as well as an engagement and reflection on available possibilities that one can change and cater to their needs of understanding and defining who they think they are. On the other hand, the 'other' acts on the basis of stereotypes that have been internalised

most often assign people identities accordingly (Ford & Tonander, 1998). These effects, being as a result of historical events that took place, usually define and stipulate who people are with reference to past classifications and categories. For this reason, ascribed identities are the hardest to change. Consequently, this is due to the fact that certain identities or categories of characteristics are dominant and possess the power that keeps these prejudices at bay (Bekker, Dodds & Khosa, 2001).

### **Changes Related to the Internationalisation of Higher Education and Globalisation through Experiential Encounters**

With consideration to globalisation's various paradoxes and incongruities, alterations and negotiations within personal identities have been taking place on both the micro and macro level and have an influence on each other. The rebirth and resurfacing of the (social) identity theory in the twenty-first century is one of the important factors which makes the examination of globalisation fascinating to explore – especially in a contemporary context – for the reason that the understanding of identity itself, and that which constitutes it, is hard to make sense of. The erratic fluctuating forms that make up identity take shape in varying spaces, places, times and contexts, given perspective by the engagement between the individual and society. Thus a reformulation is needed to understand what it means to numerous populaces. “There has been a veritable discursive explosion in recent years around the concept of ‘identity’” (Hall, 1996: 1). According to Bauman (2001: 140), “this ‘explosion’ has since 1996 triggered an avalanche”.

Identity has been associated with the identification of, or with, a particular social group that one is likely to belong to. It has also been thought of as that which one would define oneself as. “... to share an identity is to be bonded on the most fundamental level: national, racial, ethnic, religious, local” (Woodward, 1997: 301). These relate to an individual's source of meaning and experience, and aid in the process of the construction of meaning on the basis of culture (Castells, 1997). Nevertheless, identity is as much about sameness as it is about difference around this shared belonging. Identities are constructed and manipulated, not given; these are Castells's (1997) notions in the late twentieth century. However, they have changed and shifted in meaning with regard to the

time and context in which we are likely to refer to them (Held, McGrew & Perraton, 1999). Thus, they mark the divisions and sub-categories in individuals' social lives and help in defining the boundaries around the unevenness that exist in the attempts made of trying to make sense of the world.

It is in this context that the contemporary world presents, characterised by the changes that are taking place in the activities and trends at work, and in the way that individuals carry out their daily lives, including their approaches to these activities, as well as the perceptions that are cultivated by the various shifts that come with every experience and encounter. The conceptualisation and extended need to belong can be considered potentially less relevant to the processes and expressions of identity formations and manifestations if thought of so intricately. In this way, with the instantaneous exchanges and transactions that are taking place across borders through information nodes, networks and the culture of simulation and IHE, one can see how internationalism and trans-national exposure is starting to get a grip on internal variances of the self and influencing individual people's lives on a larger platform. There is a need to understand that within particular spaces, cultures and locations, an individual is likely to shift or adapt from his or her 'norm' – with regard to the ideology and/or context through which the space, culture or location is perceived and demonstrated. Thus, if individuals stretched their understanding beyond the limitations that are set by societal norms from earlier generations, there is a possibility that individuals could conceptualise identities that intermingle between cultures (Bourn, 2008).

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

This research took a qualitative approach, a method that “describes numerous approaches to exploring human experience, perceptions, motivations and behaviour. It is concerned with the collection and analysis of words, usually speech or writing”, (Clissett, 2008: 100), particularly important to the understanding of the findings and conclusions to follow. This research strategy aided in examining study abroad (SA) students’ experiences and encounters during their TAP Programme semesters abroad in various countries. This group of individuals is exclusively for the reason that they are a consortium of students from all over the world that come together to learn and deliberate about how to approach the world and globalisation from various regional perspectives by engaging in research within very different academic and cultural environments. The programme (TAP) encompasses an element of exposure to a multicultural experience and is enhanced by the multicultural composition of the group of students. This is the main reason for using them as a sample population, with the assumption that they are likely to give a diverse array of responses from their experiences. This would possibly connote, and perhaps convey, interesting areas to investigate, experiences that are comparable but also atypical between them.

An epistemological interpretivist (constructivist) paradigm was used as the underlining theoretical framework that aided in relating to understanding the meanings of the lived experiences and encounters to be explored and analysed (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000). It allowed for the attainment of knowledge through subjective meanings within the encounters presented, focusing on the details of the experiences as well as the realities behind these particulars. Interpretivists believe social actors and people’s perceptions construct reality through social interactions that are influenced by the varied background assumptions and experiences that exist in different social contexts. Due to the individual perspectives of experiences and their subjectivity, social reality tends to be

in flux as a result; therefore there is never a solid truth (Hennink, Hutter & Bailey, 2011). However, within this epistemological paradigm, the study set out to investigate the understanding of how each individual coped with and interpreted the different experiences and discourses that arose during their stays. The awareness of these experiences and their interpretations will give support to insights on how individuals understand and map out their identity within the world of 'internationalised higher education' as they experience it first-hand. As a result, the concept is to amass these social interactions and encounters concurrently with the individual's construction and understanding of 'their identity' from what it means on a personal level to what it could possibly mean after exposure to each experience encountered.

### **Collection of Research Material**

The investigation used a multi-method approach implementing a multiple case study using face-to-face interviews, a focus group, continual reflection on participants' overall narrated experiences, as well as the author's journal entries which included recollecting her own personal lived experience as a SA student in a similar programme. The interpretivist (emic) axiological paradigm was adopted, where the research studies the social reality from the perspective of the participants, of which part of what is being researched cannot be separated and so is subjective (Hennink, Hutter & Bailey, 2011). The case study approach was chosen as the most appropriate and fitting method of research collection for this particular study in order to delve deep into the phenomenon under investigation, getting a holistic representation and appreciation of the information gathered of rich data narrating detailed personal encounters and opinions (Jensen & Rodgers, 2001).

The research consisted of eight (8) participants who took part in the face-to-face interviews and four (4) participants who took part in the focus group. All twelve (12) participants took part in only one of the two methods. However, the prerequisite for all eligible participants was for them to have been SA students to at least two different countries during their current degree.

The research material was collected in the last two weeks of August 2014 during the semester spring break at the University of Cape Town. The reason for the limited time for data collection was that the anticipated sample was specific and had to be made up of exchange students who were registered for the semester at the University of Cape Town in a SA programme. The criteria then became even more specific and consequently used convenience sampling targeting TAP students, as they were the students that the researcher could guarantee as having had at least two extensive SA experiences within one year of having begun the programme. The cause for having such a short time for the research material collection and a very specific sample population was due to the fact that exchange students are only available in the second semester, the same time the research paper was compiled. There are a lot more students at this time of the year, as the most popular destination among the schools of choice is the University of Cape Town<sup>7</sup>.

## **Interviews**

The research sample using face-to-face interviews was made up of eight (8) individuals, three (3) males and five (5) females. The demographics featured six (6) Europeans consisting of three (3) Germans, two (2) Italians and one (1) Dutch person, and two (2) Africans, one (1) South African and one (1) Nigerian.

### ***Brief Profiles of Participants***

- ❖ Anita\* is a German, female, who joined TAP in 2014 and comes from Frankfurt\*<sup>8</sup> where the first cycle of four starts\*.<sup>9</sup> She has travelled a bit prior to the programme, so had some knowledge of living in other countries and being away from home.

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<sup>7</sup> Possibly because the University of Cape Town semester was in summer, and the only African University on the TAP list of universities to choose from, and to allow most of the students their first African experience.

<sup>8</sup> There are 2 TAP programmes in Germany, one in Frankfurt and the other in Dusseldorf, but both groups mix occasionally if individuals choose the same countries available to them on the list of options.

<sup>9</sup> The programme consists of 4 cycles, each cycle requiring the student to study in a different country and cultural context, and engaging with a curriculum that is socio-politically relevant to the host country. The cycles are 4 month to 8 months long.

- ❖ Michael\* is a German, male, who has been in Cape Town, South Africa for over 7 years and occasionally goes back home to Germany to visit during the long semester break. He started travelling as a result of a few school trips before attending university. A particular voluntary project got him to travel to South Africa where he decided to stay since 2008. He developed his passion for social development and joined TAP in 2013 with the Dusseldorf group.
- ❖ Jessica\* is also German and, like Anita, is also from Frankfurt. She joined in 2014 and is part of the Dusseldorf group. She had been to Kenya\* before for a year on a similar voluntary excursion like Michael's. The experience made her curious enough to want to understand and explore social issues and how societies are different, which triggered her passion to study and encounter what TAP had to offer.
- ❖ Mario\* is Italian and male. He has had a few school trips and his Erasmus experiences cultivated the desire to continue studying abroad and learning the different cultures and diversity that each place could bring. His was part of the Frankfurt group in 2013.
- ❖ Samantha\* is also Italian and female. She has been on numerous trips to a varying number of countries in Europe and Asia as a volunteer and had so much to relate about her experiences, as well as her own culture. Her reason for joining TAP was that she needed to challenge herself and wanted to have an African experience since it was the one continent she had not yet been to and was excited to explore.
- ❖ Kylie\* is female, from the Netherlands, and has studied Asian Studies in China\*. She is so immersed in her interest in Asia that she has developed a connection with the place; she also has an intimate partner who is from there. She joined TAP because she felt it would be an interesting programme, and it would be thought-provoking to get other perspectives about globalisation that are different from the view that she currently holds of Asian studies in her previous degree.



- ❖ Richard\* is Nigerian, male, and one of two Africans in the programme in 2014. He is a devout Muslim and most of his opinions are steered from that perspective; of how he understands and interprets the world. He heard about the programme from a friend who had done it before. And he is an advocate Pan-Africanism. He joined TAP in 2014 with the Frankfurt group.
- ❖ Likewise Irene\* is a South African female, who is also a Pan-Africanist and joined TAP in 2013 as a recommendation from a friend who had enjoyed the experience. She says that the SA experience itself has been changing in how she views the world and how it views her.

The brief descriptions will allow for the easy identification of the countries from where the participants come. This is in reference to the relevance that these credentials will have in the Findings and Discussion. Further and detailed descriptions develop as the findings and discussion unfolds in the following chapter.

### ***Sample and Access***

Purposive sampling was used to get access to the above SA students that were needed to match the sampling framework (Bloor & Wood, 2006). The sampling framework was set to get a sample of exchange students who were registered for the semester at the University of Cape Town in a SA programme. Of the programmes offered, only one had a guaranteed handful of participants that would fit the specifications and were likely to be interested in the study; thus the use of TAP students.

Purposive sampling “is a type of non-probability sampling technique in which the participants that make up the target population, are selected for the purpose of the study if they meet certain practical criteria, such as geographical proximity, availability at a certain time, easy accessibility, and their willingness to volunteer” (Farrokhi & Mahmoudi-Hamidabad, 2012: 785). The reason this technique was the most appropriate one to use was that this particular group of the proposed sample population needed was readily available and accessible, especially for the researcher, as they were in close contact with a gatekeeper that the researcher was familiar with, who was willing and helpful in terms of introductions and granting of later contact with the participants. The

researcher was privileged to get an opportunity to brief the complete group in one of their seminars when they were all available as a collective. The gatekeeper granted five (5) - minutes to explain and advertise the research, which gave the researcher access to the participants needed<sup>10</sup>. The actual population used was made up of exchange students that have had the opportunity to study and/or engage with a different culture in different countries for a period as long as a semester, which would count for four months or more at an academic institution besides those in their home country.

### ***Interview guide***

An interview schedule<sup>11</sup> was prepared prior to the interviews with five sections of focus directed to the individuals in the order that some of the issues came up naturally. These five sections focused on:

- Assessing opinions of participants' current destination, and what they thought about it thus far – *Focus on the current*
- A conception of what home is, and where they consider it to be – *Conception of home*
- Notions of society and the 'self' in terms of how they described their own identity, and how they identified with 'others' – people and cultures within the host countries they visited – *Society and self-identification*
- An investigation into some of the connotations and explanations of the stereotypes and prejudices that they had experienced or come across as a result of being a 'foreign student' – *Outsider perception (stereotypes and prejudices)*
- Participants' perspectives on globalisation as a result of their encounters and thoughts thus far – *Global perspective (outlook)*.

There is need to make known beforehand that not all the information gathered and sections covered in the four themes of the interview guide were included in the findings

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<sup>10</sup> Appendix B and C are research advert notice and flyer invitation to the study pg. 92 and 93-94 respectively.

<sup>11</sup> Interview schedule with interview questions, see Appendix G pg. 98-100.

and discussion. But they are mentioned and proposed at certain points within the dissertation without expanded scrutiny or further engagement. This is principally because of the layout used for the discussion that will consequently structure the dissertation, narrowing down and focusing on highlighting the responses and approaches taken by participants of their encounters and experiences, and relating them to how they affect the self. Also covered is how the individual self-adapts, negotiates and assimilates into the different cultures they encounter in host countries, and the effect that this process has had on the various identities and culture within the globalising world. Thus the analysis consequentially unfolds in a particular and restricted manner, which does not allow for the inclusion of further practicalities beyond the parameters of the approach taken.

### **Actual Interview**

The interviews were conducted face-to-face in an office reserved on campus for this purpose. The room was well ventilated and cosy enough to make the interviewee feel comfortable. Each participant was debriefed before and after the interview explaining the aim or the research, as well as highlighting the confidentiality, anonymity and voluntary nature of the study (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Each complete dialogue was recorded and saved with the consent<sup>12</sup> of the participant and ranged in length from forty (40) minutes to seventy-five (75) minutes per individual. Face-to-face interviews were used allowing the researcher the ability to engage each of the participants at a convenient and comfortable time at their disposal, in relation to when they were available and willing to answer and contribute significant information to the questions that the researcher had - synchronising both the participants' and researcher's communication of time and place (Opdenakker, 2006). It was also advantageous because participants were very engrossed in the subject of research themselves, which made it easier to probe and successively attain deep dialogues with each of them.

However, one of the drawbacks encountered as a result of meeting with some the participants in their desired locations,<sup>13</sup> was the fact that for a majority of the time, if the

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<sup>12</sup> Consent form for both interviews and focus group, see Appendix D and E pg. 95 and 96 respectively.

<sup>13</sup> A restaurant, café, or digs (apartment shared with other students).

interview was conducted outside campus, there was a third party in the background subtly disrupting the process now and again, which was not conducive to the recording component of the interview process. In all cases interview participants were briefed on the purpose and intentions of the researcher with regard to the information to be collected and the reason why they were a target group *per se*. However, they were notified of the significance and relevance of their SA experiences, thoughts and opinions. In spite of this there were no suggestions made as to the particularities and types of responses needed or expected by the researcher. Participants were allowed to direct the dialogue as desired, with occasional prompts if needed to redirect the discussion to fulfil the major issues addressed in the interview guide, which only the researcher had access to. All contact with the participants was on a face-to-face basis, with permission granted to record all interactions.

### **Focus Group**

A focus group was also used as a source of research material collected. It comprised four (4) participants in the discussion, one (1) South African female, two (2) German males and one (1) British male<sup>14</sup> who had also gone on exchange and lived in other countries. The researcher adopted somewhat similar questions to those contained in the interview guide used in the face-to-face interviews. This was to analyse whether a different array of responses could be derived from a group response on the same issues as those by individual responses – whether there were similarities or differences in perspective and sentiment.

An introduction<sup>15</sup> to the research aim and rationale was made in brief to echo and make sure that the researcher and participant were on the same wavelength. This process was concurrently done with the completion of administrative tasks i.e. consent forms. The group discussion was facilitated by the researcher since it was a small and relaxed group and there was no need to note other aspects, such as body language, as the major interest of the information to be gathered was in the richness of the actual engagement

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<sup>14</sup> Did not formally ask for their demographics and academic history, but made sure they were eligible for the study. However, this was also to make sure that anonymity and confidentiality could be observed.

<sup>15</sup> Appendix F pg. 97

and narrations that took place between the four (4) participants. Hence it was important for the researcher to be part of the discussion in order to prompt, as well as induct, the discussion if needed to aid in later reflection

The hour-long session was audio-recorded and started off with a 04:10 video clip of a TEDx talk that took place in Dubai in 2011 given by Yassin Alsalman, also known as ‘The Narcicyst’, titled ‘Who We Are, When We Were: Identity In Flux’.<sup>16</sup> It was an interesting excerpt to use for the reason that Yassin is an Iraqi-Canadian journalist and Hip Hop MC<sup>17</sup>. He currently resides in Montreal, Canada. His parents are originally from Basra, Iraq, but emigrated to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in the 1970s. Yassin was born in Dubai in 1982. At the age of five (5), in 1987 he and his family moved to Montreal, Canada. However, he spent much of his youth moving back and forth between Canada and the UAE; his high school years he spent in Dubai. In the year 2000 Yassin moved back to Canada and started working on his music production in a local recording studio.

Yassin’s story is a story narrated and lived by many individuals, especially in this globalising age. The reason for using his story was to figure out what thoughts individuals would have when they reflected on his particular experiences with regard to their own experiences as SA students along the lines of looking at the bigger picture of interpreting and identifying identity. The objective was to identify what thoughts this narrative induced in each of them in terms of what Yassin’s experiences meant from their perspectives. And if they shared the same threads of thought with the same significance as shared in the way Yassin expressed himself.

Four (4) questions were then posed to the group; these were followed by a discussion that lasted over fifty-one (51) minutes in total. Each question built onto the points made in previous discussions. The questions below were asked as recorded:

- What are your thoughts about the video? What comes to mind?

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<sup>16</sup> [www.youtube.com/watch?v=Libf3KYeCZ8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Libf3KYeCZ8)

<sup>17</sup> Also known as a rapper or music artist who creates and performs his or her own original written content.

- Why do you think some of these ways of identifying people came about? Why do we feel the need to identify that you are from a specific country, especially when you look at lineage as you outlined and the other options one has?
- Going back to the discussion of the nation state, do you think that it is still valid to define who a person is, considering we are in the twenty-first century where everything is in flux?
- What does this all say about how we interact with each other, considering we pointed to a few things that define your identity, and it is not always the nation-state? How are we engaging with each other if we take that away, or if we are reinforcing it? What does it mean to us as a society and how we interact?

Each question and discussion that followed interlinked spontaneously with an interesting revelation of the individual and group's sentiments of being a 'foreign SA student'. The whole process of carrying out the focus group was one of trying to identify some of the issues concerning the construction of identities and the negotiation on these identities in differing contexts. It was also about recognising how the individuals acknowledged these situations and learnt from them in turn as an attempt at understanding what this process could mean from their different perspectives, opinions and experiences.

One of the advantages of having the focus group, and especially the use of the video clip, was that it eased individuals into the session and stimulated their thoughts and curiosities behind the subject to be engaged with. It also gave a different lens through which to look at some of the points that were being raised as they were challenged and spurred on by the participants, leading to a fruitful discussion that progressed on its own without much interference from the researcher.

### **Author's Journal Entries and Personal Reflections**

Nonetheless there is also the inclusion of the author's journal entries and personal reflections of her experiences and encounters as a SA student. These two components take into consideration the researcher as a passive participant in the research process with regard to her connection with the programme and its participants due to her experiences

and quandary expressed in the Prologue and Appendix A.<sup>18</sup> Some of her motivations are insinuated and given mention in the purpose of study. Hence the reason for the inclusion of her journal entries and opinions as a result of foresight beforehand into cultivating the interest that seems to be culminating in the desire to investigate and study international students since the previous research she embarked on, which was titled 'Exploration of the perceptions Zimbabwean youth have of brain drain and future job opportunities: A case study of five individuals in different host countries on their perceptions relating to issues on job opportunities and reasons for migrating'. This particular insight can give a rational understanding of the choice of topic for enquiry to the methodology as well as the approach used to focusing on the 'individual' through understating their perceptions on certain experiences and encounters to comprehending their understanding of who they are to ideas and conceptions that others have of them.

## **Limitations of Research Collection Methods Used**

### **Sample and Access**

The researcher initially intended ten (10) personal face-to-face interviews and two (2) focus group sessions of about five (5) individuals each to take place. However, this did not suffice, as planned. This was for the reason that initially the researcher had advertised to all SA students and was seeking access through the university department that takes care of international student affairs. But the researcher encountered numerous gatekeepers and obstacles to procedural protocols that would allow the granting of the adequate permission needed to access the correct sample group. However the timing and length that this process took also prevented the fulfilment of the initial objective. However, for the TAP students, approximately twenty (20) students make up the programme and, with the voluntary aspect of the study, only those that had willingly volunteered were accommodated. Furthermore, since it was during semester break, some of the students had taken tours to different regions and neighbouring countries; hence accessibility in that way and timing were components to consider.

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<sup>18</sup> Appendix A: Researcher-Participant Relationship on p 90.

## **Interviews**

With regard to the interviews, the accessibility of other available participants was becoming an issue, considering that most of the research material collection took place during the mid-semester break.<sup>19</sup> Initially, before the study was narrowed down to the use of specifically TAP participants, the intended population group would have been candidates that qualify as SA students having studied at least in two (2) other countries, excluding their country of origin. However, the intended population was inaccessible for various reasons: one of these being that the researcher had to get clearance from the university's international programme office to get ethical access to the participants. Intranet flyers and notifications were sent out to invite individuals to participate voluntarily. But, as with every research method, there are almost always drawbacks and obstacles in the way of the research material collection. This turned out to be a timeous and tedious process that presented many gatekeeper obstacles which would delay the research material collection and in terms of the compilation of the dissertation.

## **Focus group**

For the first attempt made, four (4) participants were present; this was approved as a sizeable number to engage in the intended discussion. However, for the second session, only one participant turned up which automatically meant the meeting had to be cancelled. And due to time constraints, the researcher could not reschedule another session, resulting in the researcher working with the information provided by the eight (8) face-to-face interview participants and the four (4) focus group participants, making twelve (12) participants for the overall case study.

## **Research Material Analysis**

Having finalised and completed the collection of the research material for the interviews and focus group, the researcher used methodological triangulation to prepare the data. The research material was stored in its raw state in the form of voice recordings. Each of the recordings was then indexed into abstract narratives of what was mentioned

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<sup>19</sup> For the reasons stated under :Collection of Research Material.



within the actual interviews. This process then naturally became the initial step in the data analysis process as the preparation state sparks awareness of the subtle inferences, themes and patterns that are detectable earlier on (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

The research material was then segmented into the four (4) preconceived themes:

- (Re)Construction of Self Identity
- ‘Fitting In’ and Adaptation
- Developing Intercultural Competence, and
- Society as we now know it.

These are the anchors from which the relevant data will align, giving logical meanings to the findings (Boeije, 2010). Careful note was taken of documenting every recording and logging the major and relevant points appearing in each of these four main themes. Paying attention to the exact minutes and seconds when specific remarks and particular details were made. This was the most appropriate method to use considering the time constraints for the completion of the research.<sup>20</sup>

## **Indexing**

Indexing is a data preparation process of logging a recording by time and subject, which is a satisfactory alternative to transcribing. It allowed the researcher the opportunity of making notes during each of the interviews with regards to the relationships that were starting to emerge after completion of analysis of the first recording. It was also a very efficient technique to use as attention was given to the responses, possible themes and patterns that were emerging. However, indexing as a method accommodates quick and easy access to the retrieval of relevant content needed for analysis of the rich descriptions provided during mining the research material at a later stage – as opposed to being occupied in the tediousness of sifting, labelling and tagging that accompanies transcribing (Baylor University, 2014).

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<sup>20</sup> Faculty deadlines .

## **Content Analysis**

The qualitative analysis technique used to extract and interpret the meanings from the data was content analysis (Silverman, 2011). The (emic) insider view logic from the epistemological paradigm initially implemented earlier is coherent with the use of content analysis and the perspective it adopts. After having received all the research material, it was condensed into summaries through data reduction using thematic analysis (Given, 2008). A coding system was then used by way of using the highlighter function in Microsoft Word, demarcating all the sections with the same colours from the different participants visible as a form of data display of certain themes and patterns that then sanctioned the drawing of conclusions and verifications through the relationships that had been formed in the display stage earlier.

This was a manageable procedure of organising and compressing all the research material in order to draw upon relationships in a systematic and methodical manner (Boeije, 2002). The reason for this choice of method for analysis was to be able to discover meaning from the raw data through categorising and regrouping logical connections to make sense of what the narratives were revealing (Boeije, 2010). It also catered for the conscious awareness of the researcher's influence on the research material before and after the collection and analysis due to a possible preconception and ideas that are likely to be present within the implementation of the whole research design and analysis (Given, 2008).

Acknowledgement of probable biases made through this approach is to be present in research material collection, analysis and compilation of the report. However, content analysis was a useful method to use due to the systematic logic and repetition in process that occurs when categorising themes and patterns as the research progressed, making it a convenient process with regard to exploring and justifying the perceptions revealed. This meant steered guidance towards certain ideas that proved to be dominating the findings and the responses participants provided.

This chapter set out to show the methodological process established in order to later get an understanding of the responses given by first specifying how the participant

was selected by focusing on the process of gathering and mining through raw data that will be converted into logical inferences on individual experience and encounters.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **UNDERSTANDING THE EXPERIENCES OF THE STUDY ABROAD STUDENT: PERCEPTUAL ARTICULATIONS AND THEIR MEANINGS**

This chapter is designed in two parts. Part One sets out to display the relationship between the themes and its correlation to the Circuit of Culture Model (CoC) (du Gay, Hall, Janes, Madsen, Mackay & Negus, 1997) in showing the link and logic that will explain and interpret the connections to be made in the following findings and analysis. Part Two presents the findings and analysis of the first two themes: (Re)Construction of self-identity and 'Fitting In' and Adaptations. This depicts the early stages of the participants' interpretation of their construction of identity and recognition of differences and similarities between themselves and the host collective. Thus, it concentrated its focus on the initial understanding of the experiences had of students' study abroad (SA) sojourns.

#### **Part One**

Having analysed the opinions and responses of the participants and categorised them according to similar patterns and groupings, the narratives uncovered the four major themes ((Re)Construction of Self Identity; Fitting In and Adaptation; Developing Intercultural Competence; and Society as we now know it) that support the findings. These themes are a collective amalgamation of similar and/or dominant sentiments expressed by participants about experiences and/or encounters in their own words. The findings to follow will be demonstrated by the use of quotes to display a participant's responses, tying in meaning and interpretations that can be alluded through linking the relevant themes to the perspective of the quotes cited.

However, the order in which the themes have been presented is deliberate as each theme leads to the significance and understanding of the following theme, thereby creating a cycle that allows for explanations and analysis to follow within the confines of this research study. Thus, it outlines associations that can be drawn from study abroad (SA) experiences, and how in turn individuals articulate their understanding of themselves as a result of exposure to different cultural settings.

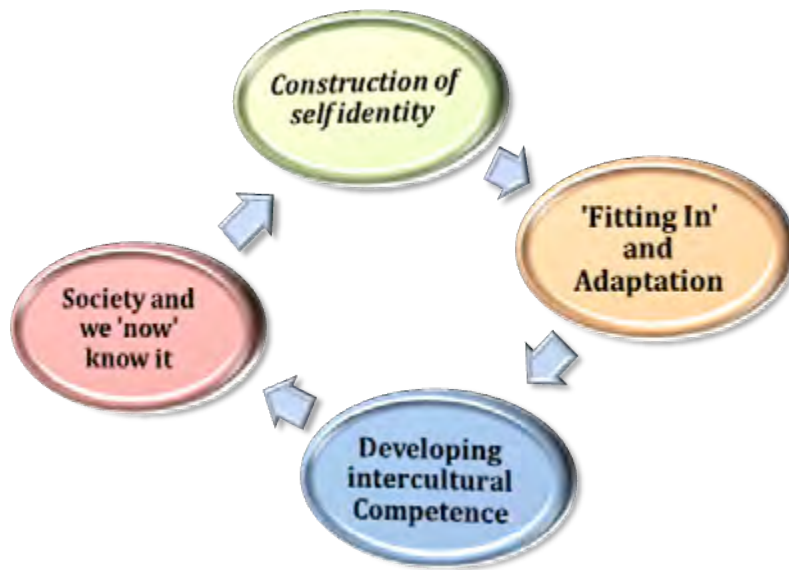


Figure 1. Cycle of the relationship between the four themes revealed in study

The use of the Circuit of Culture (CoC) model will supplement understanding by aiding in the conceptualisation and interpretations of the processes through which society and individuals can understand and make sense of who they are, in relation to each other and the elements around them. This will be achieved by corresponding the five interacting concepts of the CoC with the four themes revealed in Figure 1 by deciphering the nuances and connotations that these associates have, including the contributions certain meanings will hold regarding the articulation of students' experiences and encounters.

The categories of each stage of the CoC illustrate a simplification of the connections that they have to each other and briefly describes how Figure 1 and Figure 2 are related. This prototype combining the themes and COC model is being used to assist in exploring the meanings that have emerged through the theoretical understanding and interpretation of the Circuit of Culture (CoC) Model and inferences drawn from the themes.

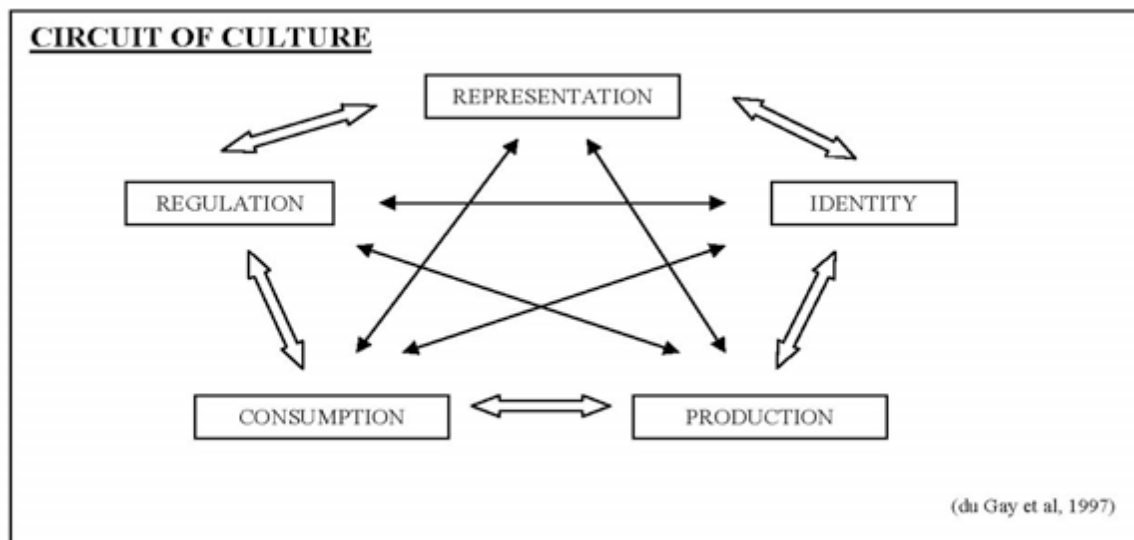


Figure 2. Circuit of Culture Model

- ❖ **IDENTITY + CONSUMPTION --(Re)Construction of Self Identity** – outlines how meaning is made and internalised by an individual. It gives individuals a position from which they can pin their belonging, presenting the link between ‘us’ and the rest of society. Consumption is the process through which messages are decoded by the societies in a place. It is also the fabric from which identities are constructed and find their being. Thus, it is that which is represented as being (Becoming what you consume).

- ❖ REPRESENTATION --**'Fitting In' and Adaptation** – refers to a description of someone or something in a particular way – an identification that leads to some form of appeal (classification) from the local individual's perspective. It can constitute various systems of representation that set individuals and different collectives apart, such as language, and various markers and/or signifiers that can be identified as normal and/or usual, constituting the characteristics of certain societies and cultures.
  
- ❖ PRODUCTION -- **Developing Intercultural Competence** – draws on the effort that individuals put into representing themselves to others. That is, the meanings that they put across from the representations that they carry and convey of themselves to themselves and what it means on a personal level. It is also the stage at which an individual self reflects and takes steps (respectful gesture) towards embracing and assimilating into the culture in question.
  
- ❖ REGULATION --**Society as we now know it** –consists of the formal and informal controls (institutional policies, discourses) that come with a culture concerning the meanings that are available about them, allowing an individual to relate. These meanings can be contested and are derived from a number of sources that characterise an individual and/or society, such as their nationality, social class, and ethnicity etcetera through media.

This structure presented above does not mean that the sequence in which it is presented is static. The concepts are interconnected in a dynamic network, but are also subject to change, while at the same time each position affects the others (du Gay, Hall, Janes, Madsen, Mackay & Negus, 1997).

## **Part Two**

### **(Re)Construction of Self Identity**

The operational meaning for the theme '(Re)Construction of Self Identity', examines the categories and classifications through which the participants recognise and

identify as. It relates to the conception, formation and comprehension of the students' understanding of how they describe and associate their 'self', vis-a-vis how the host recipients view and relate to them. Within this theme, the participants' responses will be examined for an understanding of the self, how meaning is made and internalised along with the various aspects that contribute to the construction of one's self-identity.

Below are aspects that feature and are acknowledged as significant subthemes that emphasise the overall comprehension of one's self-identity in both the individual interviews and the focus group discussion.

- *Who am I?*
- *What about Stereotypes?*
- *The Question of National Identity;* and
- *Ideals of Home and Belonging.*

### **Who Am I?**

The self is “a representation of a set of representations about oneself, parallel to the representations people have of other individuals” (Swann & Bosson, 2010: 591). What makes the self? Are the ideas and references that individuals have of what they feel or prioritise what makes them who they are? Within these references are historical philosophies that are attached to the experiences, feelings and thoughts that one is acclimatised to.

Who are you? was the first question asked to each of the students. From the brief accounts that they gave to this question, it is surprising to note that the statement above from Swann and Bosson (2010) does not fit as well with the way that the individuals defined themselves. The three responses below will illustrate this:

*Whenever I get asked that question ... people usually ... when they ask you that, you may start by saying.... That's what I do, **I'm a student** or you might tell them where you come from ... but I don't know... it's difficult to say ... maybe you need to think about that more often, **and it's not always the same.** How I would describe myself a year ago would not*



*be how I'd describe myself today. I don't know ... student would be a big one, like the category I would use to describe myself, I see myself as an open young person with a lot of different interests, curious about a lot of things. – Jessica*

*I'd start by saying I'm Kylie. I was born in the Netherlands, I'm now almost 24 years old. I'm a student of the Social Sciences and I have a great interest in Sociology and the anthropology of South Asia and I'm currently pursuing my Master's and hope to do a PhD afterwards. We will have to see. That's basically what my life is about at this point. – Kylie*

*Firstly, I am an African; secondly I'm South African and thirdly I am a black female Xhosa, in the legal profession. I come from a country that focuses on one's nationality, race, gender and tribal connections. Those are the things that have an impact on how I form my identity. – Irene*

Jessica brought out elements about herself being a student, young, curious and open-minded. Kylie states her nationality, age, current profession, her aspirations and interests, while Irene ranks herself through gender, race, ethnicity, nationality and profession. This is very common of all the participants and the responses given. When asked to identify oneself, individuals tend to gravitate towards one or more of these particular categories with a personal touch towards who they are. This gravitates away from how someone else would describe them, which would be a more basic generalisation of what they know at face value about the individuals. These responses lean towards an understanding and description of the self with the use of conventional social markers and references identified through a social categorisation of personal background. The individual best knows how to give a glimpse into the construct of who they are to the person asking, what they can easily relate to so as to form an impression of them.

Richard, Irene and Samantha show another example that relates closely to the above classification of the self as they describe how others can define and give partially 'informed' inferences of who they are by associating their outward appearance to religion and possibly assumptions of nationality/ regionality in this case:

*I always dress in my native wear, so **by my physical appearance** people will have a clue of where I come from. Wherever I am, when people see me in my **native Hausa dress**<sup>21</sup>, people call me **malam**.<sup>22</sup> When I was in Germany, people called me malam. **So people believe whoever dresses that way is Muslim**. But that isn't it, because it is my cultural dress. It has nothing to do with religion entirely. But people see it as Muslim; only Muslims dress this way. - Richard*

***Social markers would identify me**. I was in a land with people with **pale skin tones** and **I was dark, identified by my hair**... I wore scarves on my head in an African way. – Irene*

*I had a big problem in France, **because they would not take the time to ask something about me**, but how I eat spaghetti. The food thing and how we Italians are perceived abroad. It's really this image of the **Italian as a spaghetti eater**; it's really outdated. Maybe some of it is true, but right now, not at all. – Samantha*

It comes to show that the individual subconsciously is accustomed to labelling himself or herself in a certain way, and this is probably true of the 'other' towards them. This points to the (cognitive) process through which meaning is constructed, made and internalised by individuals when they are confronted with a different culture. In this case, an individual constantly needs to ascertain to the other who they are (du Gay et al., 1997).

Having established who they would 'describe' themselves as being from a social and personal perspective; it is interesting how more elements of whom and what they identify themselves with, directed us to the relationship between their current experience and correlation between the cities they come from and the city they were currently in. Accordingly, the findings of the research indicate that participants had very positive views of their current experiences in Cape Town. Mario, Samantha and Jessica's response references were how similar it is to Europe.

*Sometimes I feel like I'm in Africa, sometimes like I'm in Europe. Most often it feels **like***

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<sup>21</sup> Hausa people, usually from Kano in northern Nigeria, have a restricted dress code related to their religious beliefs. The men are easily recognizable because of their elaborate dress, which is a large flowing gown known as *Babban riga* and a robe called a *jalabia* and *juanni*.

<sup>22</sup> In northern Nigeria this is a title and form of address for a learned or educated man.

***both together.** It's one of the most fascinating things. I don't believe it of South Africa, but of Cape Town. – Mario*

*I love the nature and the diversity, the different nationalities. The culture and the music; the art. It's very nice; it's very lively. But again I'm very stressed about **how European it is. I'm very shocked.** I don't feel like I'm in Africa. – Samantha*

*I live in a student house. Though it's a private house, it's in a nice neighbourhood. I can walk up to the university or go out with friends or to the beach or a hike, but so far to me it **doesn't feel different as it would studying in another city.** – Jessica*

In these three responses there is a 'likeness' to Europe in their descriptions of Cape Town with regard to its actual development and urbanisation; as a result note is made of the 'already existing' perceptions generally held of 'Africa'. When it came to their expression of their current experiences in Cape Town, there was consensus that it was not any different to any other city they had been to, with most comparisons being made of the similarities that it shared with European cities and lifestyles. Already we examine that individuals travel with preconceived opinions about places they have never been to, and people they have never interacted with, and are differentiating actual lived experience and encounters to those infiltrating through the media playing a part in the development and construction of uninformed stereotypes and identities.

### **What About Stereotypes?**

Stereotypes are known as commonly held public beliefs about specific social groups or types of individuals based on race, religion, nationality and/or gender among various other classifications. They emphasise differences in how the 'other' refers to individuals not belonging to (fitting into) the in-groups of the host collective, which would be identified by the classifications identified above in the participants' responses. Richard gives a very practical and relevant example of some of the stereotypes that he has encountered. Due to the connotations broadcast through the media that then merge and portray 'all' Muslims:

*When it comes to terrorism, the most disturbing problem presently in Nigeria is this Boko*

*Haram crisis. So, as a Nigerian, I believe that once you present yourself as Muslim, people see you as an Islamist extremist, maybe belonging to Boko Haram. And, again some Nigerians travel abroad to commit crime. But that has to do with a certain section of Nigerian society ... so sometimes when you go to a region where such cases have been confirmed **they will look at you in that same way, without asking you who you are, or where you come from.** -Richard*

However, Kylie's experience and response, as she narrates it, is how most interactions between the host collective and a SA student's relationships begin with generalised blanket statements and references being made, until she showed some form of initiative to blend in.

***They had a stereotype, an idea of what a foreigner is like.** And it took me some time to tell them that I'm not like the idea that they had about me. **Not everyone fits in with that kind of stereotype.** Then when I was able to show them that I was **making an effort to learn** their language, that I would ask certain questions to know why certain things happen instead of judging why things happen, they started to become interested. -Kylie*

With regard to Anita's experience, there seemed to be a general perception that if you are European, then you must be well off.

*In terms of the city, it's more; you see people in the streets talk to you, but **they feel that you are European, you're rich** and that you should give them money. So that's something I'm still struggling with because **I don't know how to react and I don't want to ignore them**, but I don't want to give everything. I would rather not give money; I would rather give something else. – Anita*

The response below from Samantha was an interesting one to take note of as it is a stereotype that she has been made to believe and be aware of by those within the host collective about 'others' classified within their own in-group.

*If someone walks up to me in the street I would believe what they say. I would seriously consider what they are saying, even without all the knowledge. Or, if someone invites me somewhere, I will go. Why not? I like to be free, to go out and do whatever I want. But*

*not anymore. I am told I shouldn't trust people; my friend, who is South African, and also by the people I am getting to know. They constantly repeat how I shouldn't trust people on the streets, and be careful. Usually things that you do not think about. So I have to be scared a little bit. I've always believed there is a way to communicate, but apparently there is no way to. I guess there are practical things rather than cultural. - Samantha*

Stereotypes here are seen as constructed expectations of a particular response to something. However, above, they are noted as responses and reactions from the host collectives towards the SA students. Two different perspectives can also be noted as identified by the responses to follow on how they also relate to the in-out group relationship from the viewpoint of the student towards the host collective, and the students towards each other within the structure and group dynamics of TAP respectively.

The following response is from Mario with reference to the issues of safety that came up about South African stereotypes they had heard about before coming to the country. This is what he said:

*It is less safe than in Italy. When I go out in Italy, even if I have a lot of money with me, I need not think about safety. But if I go out here, carrying a lot of money, **you never know what could happen** ... or in the evening also. I feel more nervous if I walk in the evening, while in my hometown I don't have to think about it (it depends on which side of town). - Mario*

Within the TAP group dynamics, stereotypes were also identified among the SA students themselves on how difference could be noted in the classroom of what made them distinctively diverse, among individuals that would be classified as 'similar' when referring to TAP students. Jessica highlights this by showing how at a micro level, in a smaller, tight-knit context, cultures, beliefs and opinions may vary. When they are meant to supposedly be integrating and cooperating, they are converging and diverging simultaneously in the tussle to exist.

*I don't think that much that you become similar, maybe it's just using that knowledge that you have through global media about certain cultures maybe. Now that you are in this group, you are confusing it to get along. But it doesn't necessarily consist of ... it's not necessarily a part of your identity. -Jessica*

From the terminology that Richard uses within his response relating to the same TAP dynamic, there are strong feelings attached to how some of these differences are expressed and received by him.

*When I was in Germany, there is this girl; she had everything to say that was wrong with what I was doing and how the 'Germans' do things. She was my classmate, so there is no reason why I shouldn't tolerate her. You come from a culture which is different from my culture, so the understanding between us is when we interchange our cultural understanding. I show you my culture, you show me yours and that's how we understand each other and the society as a whole. She is a racist; she was always against the role of Germans helping refugees, and it was always a negative inference. It was her personal thing. It doesn't reflect the rest of the German society – Richard*

As shown in all the above responses from the participants, stereotypes can either create or tarnish interaction between in- and out-groups as a result of the perception that either has beforehand. Though some of the stereotypes might have been informed on a historical truth, and well-meaning in their own right, from those reflected, they are not always the most favoured of behaviours defining the collective. As a result, they play a role in the responses and reactions towards the 'other'.

### **The Question of National Identity**

Having established differences through the varying classifications cited above, following from the last response by Richard, *I show you my culture, you show me yours*, national identities are established as proxies of identifying oneself as well as each other, even within the group. They serve as the easiest label with which to tell each other apart. This also relates to the relationship and interaction between the students and those making up the host collective.

*I also think the further away you go from Germany, **the easier it is to just say German**, because to start explaining the differences within Germany, I mean you'd be there forever, just to say, especially if someone asks you where you are from. – Michael*

Again, the diversity of the group (TAP) insinuated that each individual intuitively takes the role of being a representative, more of an ambassador, for their respective countries when it came to discussing subject matter directed at the countries or regions from which either of them came. This was also the case in public spaces; the students represented more than themselves, symbolising complete nations.

*When you are with a very diverse group, you might think it's just going to be different identities and cultures and mentalities merging. But I have the feeling, like, actually your national identity is **strengthened through other people; how they perceive you, as a representative for you own nation**. You are seen as only Argentinian in that group, and you will be the representative of Argentina when people talk about Argentina. They come to you and ask, "So how is it in Argentina? How do you guys live or do that?" – Jessica*

Likewise, national identity seemed to be appreciated and recognised by the participants more when they left their countries of origin. And it seems the further they went, the more patriotic and critical they became. But there was also an appreciation of one's access to globality at a personal level that led to openness and tolerance exercised at a whole new level. Anita's response explores this:

*Nationality is in a way important. In the first years I was **travelling, it was not important to me**. I was always trying to not look German, to not speak German. I was trying to tell them that I'm Bolivian, but that never worked. **Being German has some connotations** that I don't want people to think about me, of being wealthy and coming from Europe. Maybe ... and on the other hand I like being able to adapt as much, showing in a way an appreciation for the culture. Because that's a different way of experiencing the things, by **trying to change the perspective of yourself to others**. – Anita*

With this in mind, Michael took it upon himself to change the perspective of himself to those around him, doing as those around him were, trying to blend in as much

as possible, to eliminate any sources that would continue to indicate the difference between himself and the host. However, it seems that difference persists regardless. In this response, difference is accounted for in his accents, having acculturated to the local tone and enunciations of the English language linked to the subtle traits that add up to constitute national identities.

*Sometimes I would get funny comments about the way I speak English, especially in the beginning. **I only really learnt English in the township.** It wasn't necessarily with a German accent. But sometimes I would use words that black people use. So once one person apologised, "I'm sorry to tell you, I don't mean it in a rude way, but you sound 'black'". To me it was more of a compliment. That meant that I kinda **managed to use the local connotation of things and I didn't stick to the German one. It was a compliment.** – Michael*

However, Irene in the following response gives yet another angle to assessing the reaction of what one's national identity could mean to the 'other', and the effect that it had on her. Even though nationality is not explicitly mentioned by stating a particular country as above, the reaction and emotion displayed hold meaning that goes without saying. She evaluates the social markers that define her as being viewed with associations qualifying her as a minority and foreigner due to the varying stereotypes that came with the intersectionality of those classifications.

*It's unique to me to have gone to all these places and been a minority, and looking at **all my identity markers, which were always qualifying me as a minority.** Not one place did I say that with a particular identity marker I'm a majority. In India, in almost all the social settings, women were a minority, and also... the gender intersectionality. You do not just see yourself as only a female. I was surprised, I am always a majority. In Germany I had panic attacks, if I may exaggerate, about the fact that **I am an alien. A foreigner. A minority.** – Irene*

Emphasis of this particular quote highlights the disparities correlating to the markers that she identified of herself as being 'thought of as', or reinforcing the label of minority, foreigner and alien. All three terms, 'foreigner', 'minority', and 'alien' denote a



sense of alienation and exclusion. A trait that is common and experienced by many individuals who travel a lot and have to adapt to the norms and various mannerism that come with the culture they find themselves in. National identity in this case relates to how the other views the participants, as their identity is secure in the fact that they are within a space they – the host – are familiar with and where they are a ‘majority’, so there is no need for use of nationality when it comes to the student using any kind of symbol of reference towards them (the host collective).

### **Ideals of Home and Belonging**

Eliminating the feelings of alienation and exclusion experienced and felt by Irene, there was need to explore what it was that defined her that could dissolve these feelings through comprehending ideals of home and belonging. Conceptualisation of what or where home was consisted of the existence of close-knit relationships with loved ones, wherever these connections can be located. These connections constitute the relevance of where someone grew up, their language, and the feelings that came up about the actual places, food and childhood memories. This encompasses the psychological construction of a comfort zone, comprising one’s personal space and freedom to be oneself. Having this physical and psychological space to relate to allows individuals to identify with elements of who they are beyond those socially constructed. Jessica, Samantha, Irene and Richard give us the gist of a range of understandings of what it means to them.

*Where I come from we don’t speak High German; **we speak a dialect**. And when I speak **dialect with my friends, my old friends and my family, it’s a very different feeling** from when I speak High German with other friends. **Then that may be a sense of belonging**, because you speak that language only with those people and you can only stress certain things in a different way from standard German. So **that plays a role for me**. – Jessica*

*For me, in the beginning I rejected my home, saying that I could live anywhere. Then I had to grapple with homesickness and the thought that **I am from a culture, a very specific one**. I realized how home for me now is a place where I see some cultural empathy, even personal empathy, and where I am able to be in satisfactory social networks, **where I am enabled to fulfil all the things that I want**. – Samantha*

*I cannot define any of the places I have been as home. Not because they were not homey, but because of what I describe as home. For me home is something that you have an inherent attachment to. With the kind of culture I was raised in, and the kind of person I am. Home is just more than a building; it's where your ancestry is. In my country, in my culture, we say 'you are a child of the soil'. So you have to have connections to the soil itself. They go back generations and generations. So I never saw any of those places as a home because of that ... **Belonging for me means being rooted,** your entire family going back generations and generations and being rooted in a certain geographical location. It was fine [Germany, the travelling and the experience]; just that sometimes **I missed the familiarity** of my own home country, my family, and my friends. **India was difficult; the culture, it was not what I'm used to.** – Irene*

*... where you **find comfort with your social interactions** with people and where you find comfort in terms of your religion, because I am a Muslim, and wherever I find myself, if I am not being impeded from practising my religion, I consider it as my home. – Richard*

These different versions of the conceptualisation of home and belonging show some of the important internal attributes that are necessary in defining and identifying who someone is. These internal properties likely have the most influence on how the individual constructs the self and others through stereotypes, as well as social and institutional definitions. The sentimental aspects of what makes the self and the connections to people and artefacts are the dominating roots of the classifications that are used regularly by society.

Overall, from the narrations and responses captured under the (Re)Construction of Self Identity, a variety of replies pertaining to nationality, personality traits, physical appearance and a vast array of other characteristics with regard to their importance of how and what an individual ranks as definitive in describing who they are. The prevalent attributes that were identified related to a concept of 'being', belonging to or referring to a specific native/federal/civic group of people that needed to be familiarised with for the sake of explaining and interpreting the participant's identity and deciphering who they were. Acknowledgment of backgrounds played a role in the categorisation process of

how views, opinions and perceptions are created and relayed before and after individuals meet the 'other' and vice versa.

### **'Fitting In' and Adjustment**

This is the second of the four themes. It concentrates on the fitting in and adaptation process gone through, and what it is that sets the host and the students apart culturally. These can constitute differences in behaviours, thoughts and sentiment of the student from what is deemed 'normal' or 'usual' by the host or vice versa. The responses will highlight some of the initiatives taken as a result.

Language barriers were critical in terms of getting integrated with the daily life of the host culture, especially in countries where the majority of the locals did not converse in English. This meant a lack of adequate information for the students to operate fully. Therefore, they had difficulties with basic tasks. Though from Michael's point of view, he takes a positive interpretation of this struggle:

*The language was a big barrier, but I liked it partly as a challenge. It sharpens your eyes. You become more observant, almost like a disabled person who has to complement what they lack in one area to get the meaning. -Michael*

There is a need to understand that within particular spaces and/or cultures the participants had to make a few changes to adapt, regarding perceptions and preferred behaviours within the cultural context of the location. In some instances it meant picking up habits that the locals often engaged in, which happened most likely unconsciously. Michael narrates his experience of adapting within one of South Africa's township communities:

*I started picking up habits which in the beginning I thought, 'Why would you do that; why would you sit at four o'clock in front of your house and start drinking?' And I found myself with a quart<sup>23</sup> there. And it just showed me; there is nothing inherently different.*

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<sup>23</sup> A quart contains 750ml of beer, as opposed to the normal 330ml bottle. That means 1 quart = almost 2 normal bottles of beer.

*We are the same. It's circumstances that shape us. And I think that was really another important development which helped me develop more empathy for people in this situation. -Michael*

This experience led to the recognition that all people are the same and that there is nothing inherently different about the host or the student with regard to the original blueprints that controls human activity. That it is different circumstances that governed and shaped activities as a result. Thus there is an inbuilt sensitivity and empathy that comes with getting used to a society, and how it views life, and how it carries out its routines. Relationships are built and determined under the consideration of the type of engagement that is exchanged.

Therefore, adapting accordingly shows to have led to participants like Kylie into truly assimilating into the culture in a manner that some of the habits turned into a lifestyle – even after having left for her home country and making provision for the future. And initially she had become accustomed to it in order to avoid clashes and/or insulting the locals.

*One thing which is really interesting to me is that once I went back to the Netherlands, I started dressing differently, which was **closer to the person I was in India**. It was for **practical reasons** – for example, because I see myself working in India after my Master's studies and if there are photos online of me in short skirts or in bikinis, that wouldn't help much. So **I have to deal with the different cultural contexts at the same time**, for example because of Internet and social media. – Kylie*

How people define you is how they react to you. Through observation and biased views on who a person is, those in the host society with regard to their values and opinions label and react to you as perceived. An example to make this explanation easier to decipher is relayed through one of Anita's encounters in Bolivia. Here she realised that the ideas about how society classifies you reflect on the reactions and treatment you get in return. In this way the experience allowed her to have different and diverse views about varying situations and their meanings, and as a result you (re)act accordingly.

*When I was in Bolivia it's in the way you dressed ... the guys loved to whistle after you, especially if you are white. You would stand out because you are taller, so they would whistle after you. And when you were dressed really pretty, so many guys would start talking to you. **So I started dressing more and more casually.** Something that was a bit annoying. In a way it changed (how) my dressing (was). -Anita*

As with the realisation that Anita had at the end of her response, Irene describes her view by reiterating the need to respect host cultures regardless of the participants' personal obligation to freedoms that they would normally have freely within their home countries. She emphasises the need to be considerate about the context, culture and social cues that come with a situation so as to adapt accordingly.

*Context is important to **be more sensitive to people.** One has to, whether you like it or not. It's just not cool to walk around in mini-skirts. It's culturally insensitive. Hence it makes you sensitive to other people's identities, their norms, and you have to now learn **how to respect that, knowing where you are,** will then make you more sensitive to the kind of social cues that are acceptable and unacceptable. **I don't think that necessarily changes your identity.** You learn to **adapt to your living arrangements.** – Irene*

However, with time, the students got to understand and see themselves through understanding the host individuals, through 'who they were' and 'who the students were not'. At certain points within the narratives there was reference to missing the familiar from almost every participant, though at times the familiar varied in terms of personal perspectives. The challenge and adaptation process was most significant when it pushed personal limits and tussled with existing comfort levels. Also, the exposure built in tolerance and acceptance of others' differences cultivating intercultural competence, is explored more in the following chapter.

***I thought I had some clear beliefs.** You come across so many people, get to hear so many stories and you realize that actually you are far from even **seeing the complexity of life.** And this attempt at really experiencing and approaching people in a humble way is also **shaped by the simple fact of seeing – seeing the number of people that are living every day in this world.** What really changed and is still on the way to change is that you*

*really believe you are the only one in the world, but then you see how you have very common problems that many people face. And you deconstruct your specialness. And you get more close to the real you. And you also see how your culture influences you a lot, especially when you go outside your country. – Samantha*

Fitting in and adapting meant the beginning of enjoying the ‘real’ experiences and encounters within their sojourns. After going through these stages of interaction with the host collectives in the different countries, they were able to identify with respect and encounter the cultures from a whole new spectrum of understanding. This also meant that the locals were more keen and willing to engage, show their culture openly, and in turn the students could learn as well as impart elements of their own cultures.

## CHAPTER FIVE

# UNDERSTANDING THE EXPERIENCES OF THE STUDY ABROAD STUDENT: EXPERIENTIAL ARTICULATION WITH MEANING

This chapter examines the findings of the last two themes, *Developing Intercultural Competence* and *Society as we now know it*. The former feeds off ‘Fitting In’ and Adaptation reviewed in the last chapter, which served as an introduction to the beginning of understanding intercultural learning and the development of intercultural competences. Consequently, the findings also link to the recognition of the advancements and changes taking place within twenty-first century society and how participants view it from the different perspectives held both before and after their intercultural experiences.

### **Developing Intercultural Competence**

Intercultural competence is defined here as the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately with tolerance for ambiguity to people of other cultures. It is the ability to be able to develop an understanding of culture-specific knowledge, perception, thinking, feeling, and acting. This concept encompasses the build-up of knowledge and responses from the preceding two themes, fusing them into further understanding participants’ experiences to developing intercultural competence (Katsantas, 2004). Having undergone the transition of fitting in and adapting to a culture and a people, the self-reflection that takes place reveals the personal growth having taken place within each of the individuals, of the qualities that were transferrable to one’s life even after the sojourn. As a result, intercultural competence development becomes innate within an individual on how they conduct themselves when faced with future intercultural encounters.

When it comes to how identity is affected, confronted and/or criticised, reflectivity of the self is done through the inward scrutiny of events going on around an individual. Thus, adapting accordingly as a result of various techniques adopted towards meaning and sense-making, around fitting in and integrating into the culture, then discovering what it is they can take away from it. Richard articulates the rationale of this process in his response:

*... you don't tell people what to do, if they are not willing to. **You allow people to grow in their own will.** Let me be myself, but I should be tolerant; that should be the core, the central thing that will govern us. **I should be tolerant.** I shouldn't see you as someone that is different from me. I should see you as a capable human being that can **do whatever he/she believes in and learn from it.** – Richard*

The narratives to follow by Samantha, Irene, Anita and Michael highlight that individuals were learning a lot more about themselves during each of their sojourns. The uniqueness of a study abroad (SA) experience is an inward, personal one that has more to do with participants self-examining themselves relative to the wider society within the given context and circumstances. The negotiations and contestation that they experienced when they were trying to adapt at certain points drew attention to self-awareness, about their personalities, their tolerance and strengths as well as weaknesses.

*I became much more insecure because **I thought I had some clear beliefs.** And you come across so many people; you get to hear so many stories and you realize that actually you are far from even **seeing the complexity of life.** And this attempt at really experiencing and approaching people in a humble way is also shaped by the simple fact of seeing – seeing the number of people that are living every day in this world. What really changed and is still on the way to change is that you really believe you are the only one in the world, **but then you see how you have very common problems that many people face.** And you **deconstruct your specialness.** And you get more close to the real you. And you also see how your culture influences you a lot. Especially when you go outside your country. – Samantha*

*The way I view the world has been changed. **The way I understand myself has been***



*changed. I am more assertive of my identity as an African. Not that I wasn't in the beginning. I have always been a Pan-Africanist. But I think now I understand the need for it and the joy of it. I think it also changed my views on and reinforced my previous Pan-African notion. It did change my personality. – Irene*

*The extent of cultures is a good thing if you are **open to learning from them** and you are not trying to oppose your views on them, but are open to the way that the others think, like adapting and taking the good things or what feels good to you. Context, time, space and place do play a role, **depending on where you are**, being away from the family and being in different cultural settings and contexts. But I think it has very **different impacts on you and on the identity you build**. I feel that you **adapt a certain identity at one place and then you go back; it's changed a bit, but it doesn't change who you are**. Sometimes you take back something with you. And sometimes I get back, **I get back to the way I have always been, even though I changed so much during the time I was away**. – Anita*

***I am a lot more socially conscious**. I got an idea of who I am. Before, I knew I was German, but there was no point in differentiating myself along those lines because everyone was German around me. **But now that started to harden more and more**. Finding out what being German might mean. **I don't think there is a 'German' identity**, but there definitely are some tendencies that people might be more prone to. And finding out about that, one thing was about being on time. I'm not saying all Germans are always on time. But there is a tendency to be at least less late, or call. You become more empathetic, trying to understand other people's point of view, **and I think those two things moulded me a lot in that sense**. – Michael*

The four accounts above seem to have been more of a developmental learning curve occurring simultaneously within the (academic and) cultural sphere. However, identity within the exchange experience seemed to be inconsistent and fluid, with so many factors influencing the self from varying angles, some being from passive thoughts. The self in this context is also riddled with feelings of insecurity around the realisation of the complexities of existence that are attributable to the cultural exposure lived through. As the intercultural experience deepens, many changes are taking place in terms of the

participants' ways of thinking and perceiving, values, attitudes and worldviews, because of encountering different social and cultural perspectives. By way of this heightened awareness, participants are able to understand, embrace and learn from the differences causing these changes, and to some extent, to integrate diverse perspectives into their own value systems.

From this acknowledgment of change, there was also an appreciation of one's access to the world's playground, again on a personal level, that led to openness and tolerance exercised at a whole new level. Kylie goes on to elaborate this through her changed idea of where home is, showing that she allowed her experiences to lead her into understanding and accepted certain places as home coupled with the introduction of an intimate romantic attachment being added to the context:

*Home is now for me **where I feel accepted, where I feel loved and where I have fun and where I have friends or family.** Home is more about being with people I love and that love me. For example ... I feel like Delhi is my second home. And being with **my boyfriend is a certain feeling of being home** because now we have spent almost two years apart and each time I go back to see him, I feel like literally I'm going home. I can see that now as home; I can basically create my home everywhere. – Kylie*

All the above responses within this theme highlight the difference between the participants and the extent of their open-mindedness, and lessons learnt about the societies existing around them. This depiction is also translated and detected in the way that individuals show interest in the 'other', accordingly, showing the magnitude of the extent to which they will alter and adjust to fit into the lifestyles and daily living of the locals. This indication sets the tone for how one then further develops the self and the lessons and reflections that come from specific encounters. Intercultural experience in this case enabled participants to acquire a greater knowledge and understanding of host societies in general. Thus, the understanding about the other was developed through constant interaction and exposure to different values and world views.

## **‘Society as we now know it’**

This theme is set out to examine the variations in views and opinions of the world as we all know it, from ‘today’s’ context and perspective on globalisation with reference to having being afforded the privilege and opportunity of experiencing different countries and cultures. The participants gave their responses relating to the power of belief systems, media influences, the move on globalisation and the advantage of privilege. It reveals their thoughts reflecting on the bigger picture of the world that they live in and takes a glimpse into their views and evaluates them in relation to their experiences thus far.

Belief systems have the most influence on individuals regarding how they think, and the actions they take as a result. Below are responses from all the participants on some of the factors they thought were critical in shaping their view on the world, now and in the future. Mario starts off by identifying political institutions and how they affect the development of stereotypes.

*The political institutions on a global level and the political parties: **they affect a lot of the stereotyping that takes place.** For example, in Italy there is always the discussion on immigration, because we have migrants from North Africa and from Eastern Europe. And the media and political parties, they always create a face of how the immigrants are creating xenophobia. – Mario*

Irene then goes on to identify the universities as a social institution participants singled out as critical moulders of thinking patterns, depending on the ideology that the institution lives on – in that universities are sure to pass on their beliefs and assertions to students with the assurance that their critical independent thinking, perception and options are formed in the years that they are starting to stand for, and run with certain causes and beliefs fuelling the current global processes. And the family institution was also picked out as an influence with regard to how individuals are socialised as a result.

*Universities form our identity to a great extent. The kind of work we are exposed to. The kind of **thinkers that we are taught to be.** If you are in an institution like JFK\*, they are*

*more Marxist; you form an identity that is towards socialism. If you are in an institution such as Francistown, you would form a more liberal Weber-kind-of thinking. And if you are in an institution such as UDH\* you ideally form a liberal identity where you are more expecting of others, but also depending on the kinds of lectures that you are socialised with. It varies. Like **the family institution, society**. For me a great deal of my identity has been informed by my family unit and my society, my upbringing. **Who were the people from whom I learnt who I am.** – Irene*

However, there is also the pressure that comes with being socialised in the system identified by Irene, granting the individuals the chance to have a fair opportunity to interact with other like minds. Jessica outlines some of the expectations that follow with such exposure and Samantha recalls getting similar remarks from her mother and grandmother of how fortunate she was to be able to have this opportunity.

*People nowadays, when you study, when you work, **it's expected of you to be very flexible**. Also, you have the chance to be [also privileged]; some people don't have that. You have the chance to travel; **you have the chance to experience different cultures and contexts**, so obviously **you want to because you are curious**. On the one hand you have that chance and you want to take it; that's what makes more of the idea that you can belong anywhere or to a group of nice people, or a subject, or an academic group. **But on the other hand it's very much expected of you.** – Jessica*

*I always think of how our grandmothers and mothers used to tell us, 'If I had the chances you have when I was younger, I would...' But actually I feel that this great choice we are supposed to have is sometimes, most of the times, more confusing than helping, because you are **also expected to be able to size all of those opportunities**, but they are so vast. – Samantha*

Interestingly, Anita points out a thought-provoking observation on the reality of life through her realisation and understanding of her lived experience in different educational systems:

*The whole education system, in the way you are brought up. Even with all this travelling, I have noticed how you take for granted things because you learnt it in school, and you assume that's the way it is. That's the way I learned it, and then you go **and find out that it's not the only truth that is out there.** – Anita*

The above can be attributed to the proliferation of media to different parts of the world. Regarding the exposure to the same TV shows, access to the same material over the Internet and the significance of English as a universal language being a factor to consider. Digital media, especially, has managed to channel and broadcast belief systems and seem to be successful at it.

Michael established that globalisation as a process and ideology caters to a privileged few; those being the individuals that are able to afford to take part in it, and experience the positive and progressive effect that it brings with it.

*People with access to TV, and people who can speak English, are more likely to watch US shows or English shows, so there is **a higher level of speculation of certain ideas.** But there are certain requirements, so the entry-level requirement would be the TV, smartphone, and money to buy data to follow people on Twitter or Facebook. **So that section of the world that fulfils these requirements has become more similar.** – Michael*

On the other hand Mario identifies that individuals are all the same, wanting and requiring the same needs and that it is a matter of the means used to arrive to an end.

*I think that **we share the same needs and the same aims.** There are not many differences: the Zulu father who wants to educate his children to the German father who wants to educate his children. **The aim, the need and the feeling are basically the same.** What is different is the way to do that. **Everyone does it in a different way, which I think is beautiful.** For me the pluralism is very important. Basically, because it gives you the idea that not everything is as you believe it to be. For you something that is natural, you discover that it is cultural for someone else. – Mario*

With this, globalisation tries to drive this understanding of sameness and bring it into the marketplace. Irene and Anita acknowledge the presence of this process and the

need to homogenise, but also are clear to differentiate the brands that they identify with regard to the influence that the cultural component adds.

*Everywhere I went there was MacDonald's, Coke and someone was listening to hip-hop music, but within every place they had a **unique culture specific to the country**, so I would say we are going towards a global identity per se, but I would say there are some commonalities. – Irene*

*I do not think that we are all becoming similar in a way. Things like MacDonald's and homogenisation; **there is a lot of adapting going on a global scale**. There is definitely change going on, but it's **always culturally informed** and the way we perceive things is always with your culture in the background. **So, even if we all would like to become similar we are all different.** – Anita*

It is also clear that most individuals did notice that there is some form of privilege that came with the experience, but also outlined are subtle but significant life lessons regarding material possessions. Irene was able to identify that they could do without a lot of the material belongings most people would think were important, considering that participants could only carry as much as the luggage limit the flight would allow them. Acknowledgment was made of the fact that there are so many other riches that exist in the simplicity of life and how other people live.

***I don't need seventy percent of the stuff that I have; I can live without them.** It also taught me that I spend way too much more than I really need. Germany **taught me solitude. I can live by myself in peace; and it also taught me independence.** – Irene*

Though Michael's perspective differs in how he expresses this same point, he notices the importance of privilege that comes with ties established within these experiences and exposure to some of the institutions and people found in them.

*You have the elite from Saudi Arabia\* coming to UDK\* and in many ways **students make connections you would not have been able to make**. And even people in Germany would not have been able to make such diverse connections, **with people coming from such different contexts, all shaping and having a relatively similar experience**. This is*

*exclusive to those that attend the institution. They are similar because they go to the same institution. That definitely shapes you. Also the prestige that is attached to certain institutions and/or universities. It carries with it privilege. – Michael*

This is a thought-provoking concept within the same composition that mandates the establishment of social institutions and the realisation of the global thought processes and their recipients. The idea of the ‘privilege’ recurred a number of times in line with the understanding and creation of difference on the global level, which contributes to the proliferation of inequalities identified and subtly insinuated within the response found in this theme.

This particular citation from Jessica below condenses the type of experience and exposure had by each of the students. She notes the different variations that have influenced the experience differently, and rightfully identifies some of the facets that allow worldviews and opinions to take prominence – in addition to displaying and underlining the series of findings that rationalised and aligned the logic used to support the position of globalisation and the other ‘-ations’ (internationalisation, westernisation etcetera.). She interestingly brings up the subject of the group’s dynamics. This is highlighted at a micro level, in a tight-knit context where there are varying cultures, beliefs and opinions in one setting; integrating and cooperating, converging and diverging simultaneously to subsist the different individuals from different countries, backgrounds and cultures within the programme – who are presented with the prerequisite to learn to tolerance and understanding each other (within TAP). Consequently, students are transferring these skills and are being able to do the same within the varying diverse socio-cultural contexts they will find themselves in later. She depicts differences, even among individuals that would be classified as ‘similar’ (in the context of them participating in the same programme).

*‘Cause I think if the first semester had been in China and there had been more Asian students than European ones, the atmosphere in the group would have been different, with us being in Frankfurt,\* and being a lot of Europeans and Americans, and maybe also people from Latin America and Africa or from Asia. We would also have had some*

*exposure to global pop culture or maybe less Western influence. I don't think that much that you become similar; maybe it's just using that knowledge that you have through global media about certain cultures maybe. Now that you are in this group, you are confusing it to get along. But it doesn't necessarily consist of ... It's not necessarily a part of your identity. – Jessica*

All these findings have provided a 'transactional' and a 'transitional' process undergone by each of the participants of their opinions and experiential encounters. In this they have shared stories and reflected on living and studying abroad, enabling participants to co-construct meanings within the explicit contexts of the narrated encounters. In addition they co-enquire and make sense of the world, as we know it today. Richard sums up this theme by concluding:

*The context at the global level is all about interest. Time comes and things are created. And as time goes on, it might be a different thing. Just as if you go by the concept of deviance. What is regarded as deviant today, tomorrow might seem like a lie. And in another time and context it might be condemned. So that is all about my understanding of the world. -Richard*



## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **DISCUSSION**

This chapter discusses and engages with the findings from Chapter Four and Five. It is a discussion and explanation of the sentiments displayed within the responses, accredited with the theoretical rationale supporting these explanations. Answering the how and why question to these sentiments will aid in further understanding the theoretical structures governing the logic that led to the specific reactions, and open up the discussion to relevant contributions from various theoretical concepts.

The four themes driving this discussion will be the same as discussed in the findings on (Re)Construction of Self Identity; 'Fitting 'in and Adaptation; Developing Intercultural Competence and Society as we now 'know' it. As shown in the findings within the four themes, the development of intercultural competence naturally unfolds as the participants narrate their experiences. From descriptions of who they are, how they negotiated ways to adapt, learn and personally develop from the experience, that then aided in an easier transition of tolerance to different cultures in future travel. The process and rationale behind this journey in self-development through experiences, weaves through the four themes that are interconnected throughout the discussion. Thus, as the discussion proceeds, associations will be made simultaneously without any particular linear order, as shown through the links seen in Figure 3 below.

As the discussion progresses, links, justification and reasoning of some of the topics brought up from the initial case that was built within the literature review will also be picked up and interrogated, with the support of the direction the logic of the responses addressed.

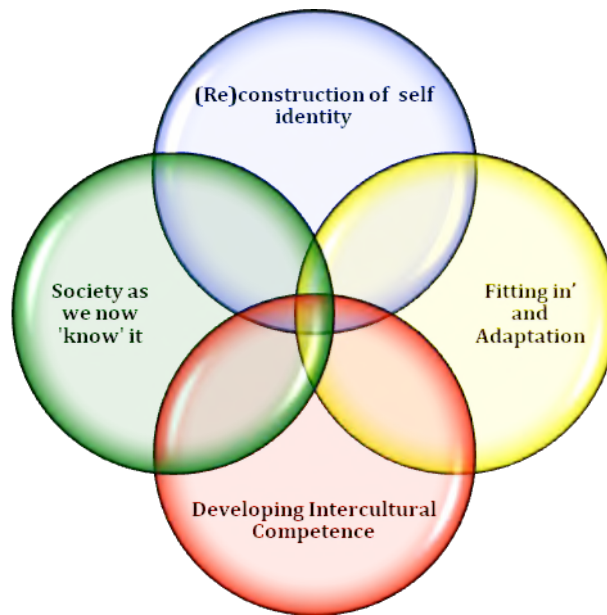


Figure 3. Understanding and Interpreting the Interconnectedness of Themes from Findings

### Understanding the Individual

The starting point is to focus on understanding the concept of the individual<sup>24</sup> with regard to understanding the participant before getting into trying to dissect their reasoning. According to Hall, Held, Hubert and Thompson (1995), the individual is an exclusively logical, conscious, integrated being, who has an identity established from birth as it unfolds with time while remaining ‘the same’ throughout his/her existence, although what changes there are are one’s perceptions towards opinions held at specific points in time. In the narratives within the four themes, connections to the self can be made in every theme, as these hold significant value to the understanding of the overall theorisation and framework of the issues that the dissertation addresses. The classification of the CoC Model (Figure 2) addresses an understanding of the self and the process of interpreting the identification of identity in cognisance to how it is constructed. Hence

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<sup>24</sup> ‘Self’ and ‘individual’ will be used interchangeably.

there is a need to understand the construction of the self in order to understand an individual's identity before any form of interpretation on experiences and encounters can be made regarding the importance that cultural interactions have, including the influences and effects that result on a micro and macro level.

However, regarding the observation of responses that were given in the interviews when participants were asked to describe who they thought they were, a variety of replies were recorded pertaining to the national and/or the regional, personality traits, profession, age, physical appearance, gender and a vast array of other characteristics in the order of their importance.<sup>25</sup> The prevalent attributes that they all identified with, in one way or another, related to the concept of belonging to a specific native/federal/civic group of people that they familiarise with, with regard to nationality and/or continental ties, as well as personal attributes reflecting their personality. The reason for gravitating towards particular categories that portray the individual in a particular way through the use of conventional social markers and references is a natural disposition of a preconceived reaction on the participants' part, of how they think themselves to be, with the classifications used ranking high in priority towards the construction of their identity.

### **Understanding the Individual through Use of the Concept of the Self and Identity**

The sense of personal identity is made up of "some distinguishing characteristic(s) that a person takes special pride in, or views as socially consequential but more-or-less unchangeable" (Fearon, 1999: 4). However, social identity refers to "a social category, a set of persons marked by a label and distinguished by rules deciding memberships and 'alleged' characteristic features or attributes" (Fearon, 1999: 4).

The way that the individual is identified is summed up by the use of a very few characteristics identified by the participants when asked 'Who are you?' What makes the self is experience, of the now, including one's feelings and thoughts. It also comprises the

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<sup>25</sup> Referring to quotes by Jessica, Kylie and Irene on page 47.

experiences of the world going on around them at various points in time.<sup>26</sup> According to James (1890-1950) “the entire set of beliefs, evaluations, perceptions, and thoughts that people have about themselves” – is the ‘me’, the self-as-object. However Fearon (1999) rightly establishes that societies socially construct the understanding and conceptualisation of what ‘identity’ is and the connotations that accompany it. And it has become a complicated notion to fully decipher, differentiating what truly is and what is constructed. Especially today, with the need to understand and incorporate the events and state of affairs taking place globally, and simultaneously taking note of concepts such as time-space compression (Harvey, 1990) and their effects. There definitely is a shift that has taken place in comprehending the self, and the effect that experiences will have on it, in addition to what this shift will mean to individuals in turn (Bourne, 2009).

### **Constructions Of Identity And Social Categorisation**

The construction of identity is achieved through meaning making, which is a cognitive process of internalising the various contributions made towards making sense of components that make an individual. Social categorisation theory (Turner & Oakes, 1986) and Erikson’s (1959) theory of psychosocial development, will unpack this cognitive process and show how correlations and certain constructions, beliefs and customs become a reality that define collectives identified as similar to the self or the ‘other’.

In all the participants responses there is at least mention of one’s country of origin, language, or significant geographic location, including stereotypes associated with these components, contributing as reference points to distinguishing between each other. These identities are constructed on the basis of various traits and experiences, many of which are open to different interpretations<sup>27</sup> dependent on the recipient and the transmitter. These stereotypes and markers serve a twofold purpose as a result of individuals self-labelling, and others assigning these same labels to them. Stereotypes and

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<sup>26</sup> Identified by Jessica ‘*How I would describe myself a year ago would not be how I’d describe myself today...*’

<sup>27</sup> Refer to *What about Stereotypes* pp. 43-48

labels are historically formed in connection to significant traits or events associated with something or someone's identity, and can last for generations, changing with shifts in the status quo. Examples of some of these overtones are shown in the following responses of an eight (8) minute excerpt, which was part of a dialogue had within the focus group session. The extracts highlight a lot of the various perceptions and ways in which identity is constructed.

*There are so many things that play a part in your identity. Like there is just so much, it's like what G1<sup>28</sup> was saying about... that's why you **emphasis different things in different contexts**. I don't think it's necessarily that your identity changes. I think it's more you **emphasise different identities** ... the ranking changes. Also, things do shape your identity. I think I've changed a lot about my identity since I've spent the past three years in university. A year and a half of that I have spent outside South Africa. And partly I think it's made me more South African, because I like people to know I'm South African and I'm proud of it. But it has also **changed the way I relate to other people from other countries**. And the way I relate to my perceptions of those countries as well. – South African*

*I also agree, maybe add that, you just find out **what you think is South African, and what other people think South African is different**. How that actually differs. In my case, German. There are things that I've heard attributed to Germans. **People don't behave like that, unfortunately they don't**. If they were that on point and that efficient ... Before I didn't see myself as German either; coming here to some extent, I've become more aware of it. I became more German. But I've also **became a lot more critical of some of the things, the behaviour of other Germans**. – German 1*

*But that's the point. **It's just stereotypes. Standard symbols for nations**. Like Spain, you've got certain ideas, but it's not an idea of the 'whole' nation. It's just like they are lazy, they are excessive, whatever. And the same applies for Germany or South Africa. – German 2*

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<sup>28</sup> G1 and G2 or German 1 and German 2 refer to German Speaker 1 and German Speaker 2 respectively.

*But also I think that you could say, to a lot of people, what is your idea of American? Almost everyone has an idea of an American regardless of how many Americans they have met, or if they have been to America. So it's interesting because your idea of Americans is shaped by your interaction with them as well. But there are a lot of German stereotypes. Like when someone asks me about Germans I just think of GI, because that's my frame of reference for Germans, because I don't know a lot of German people other than GI. Whereas British, I have a lot of reference because I've got friends who are British. So that is different ... of how nuanced my picture is. – South African*

*Being German is referenced probably with a car. But it's not like there are a lot of German movies out there especially in the English-speaking world. A German movie would be a World War 2 movie, and it wouldn't be produced in Germany most likely, or by Germans. It's about a certain unfortunate period in Germany, whereas if you ask about the US, you've got so many different angles. You've got Hollywood, Washington, New York, the South. Even within the polarised view you've got so many different angles and aspects of it. From entertainment to politics. Whereas, if you ask people about Somalia ... Pirates, and hunger or something. And back to the references, that is just... those are just the references that we get through our daily interactions. – German 1*

*You construct your own identities relying on the stories that you suppose the other know about the place where you come from. This more like this, like an interaction you need to consider if I'm from Somalia; people know of the country, for example. And then you say I'm from the capital of Somalia, because nobody knows the capital. – German 2*

*It's like when I explain where I'm from. I say it's where they make pork shank. That's it. Because otherwise there is no reference to the place. – German 1*

*It's funny when I was overseas with my parents. When we were in Turkey and the woman who was serving us couldn't understand English, pretty much at all, so she says 'Where you from?' and we say we're from South Africa. And she is obviously confused. She sees this table full of white people, and she doesn't know what we are talking about. So*

*my dad says, 'Africa, you know Africa, at the bottom.' And then we pulled out the usual, like, Nelson Mandela, because that's usually when people are like ohhhh, yeah. She didn't know that either. So she walks away, and then comes back to the table and she's like 'vuvuzela, vuvuzela'. Then we were like 'yes, that's it'. It was so funny, because we would never have thought to explain to her by saying vuvuzela. But she obviously went and thought about it and realised what it was. It was so interesting, because the Nelson Mandela thing always works. – South African*

This excerpt was an illustration of a common conversation had by a lot of people and reveals some of the examples of how individuals identify each other. The descriptions tend to be very specific and informed. Their relative importance and compatibility differing at various times and circumstances depending on the intent of the meaning or connotation wanting to be put across.

Simply said, identity can be described as 'who' individuals see themselves to be, and how they make and find meaning in their interactions with others, ideas and the world. Identity can be described as the label that classifies the individual through the identification of relational and contextual exchanges of experiences that construct him or her as being. The formation of one's identity is as a result of identification made by others, giving meaning to the individual. Usually with reference to the familiar and the known from the participants perspective. However, the reaction from the participant can be twofold; either the individual identifies with the group because he or she aspires to the host cultures characteristics or wishes to be dissociated from these same characteristics through a process of contra-identification (Weinreich & Saunderson, 2003).

Erikson's (1968) identifies the *ego identity* as the conscious sense of self that individuals develop and acquire through social interaction. According to Erikson, this part of the self, 'ego identity', is constantly changing with each new experience and assimilation of information that takes place through interactions with others (Schwartz, Luycjx & Vignoles, 2011). Therefore, having a strong sense of 'ego' (self) identity serves to safeguard individuals when there are these likely sudden changes from personal or situational factors. This means the individual is able to integrate multiple 'selves' into

one coherent self-identity throughout time, creating an inner coherence and sameness (Levesque, 2014). He outlines eight stages in his (1959) theory of psychosocial development, all of which are important and play a major role in the development of personality and hence one's identity in turn. The importance and significance of bringing in this theory, in particular, is that an individual goes through the first five stages (infancy: birth to 18 months; early childhood: 2-3 years; preschool: 3-5 years; school age: 6-11; and adolescence: 12-18 years) of development that naturally unfold and are vastly influenced by the environments around the individual at the time of growth. These influences are regarded as fixed and consistent, conveying a sense of stability and permanence, all dependent on the spaces and places in which one grew up. However, this is not the same for all individuals, but is true for most who have developed attachments within locations an individual can identify as one's own, in which he or she feels they fit or belong (Schwartz, Luycx & Vignoles, 2011).

This dissertation picks up and incorporates the ideas and concepts derived from the last three stages – young adulthood: 19-40 years; middle adulthood: 40-65 years and maturity: 65 years to death. At these points of an individual's existence one would have already developed a sense of trust, autonomy, initiative and industriousness to an understanding of who they are – as well as who the other is; these having been acquired during the first five phases. With the introduction of different cultural settings to SA students' lives, a slight but significant shift will take place with regard to their beliefs, attitudes and ways of thinking and perceiving. Through relationships and social interactions, people are influenced and manipulated by society and the institutions that form it, such as family, class, ideologies etcetera, that exist around the participants (McLeod, 2008). An example of what this means is shown below:

*Although I have spent most of my life living in South Africa, I've spent large periods of time overseas, during semesters abroad, exchanges, living in New York. I remember reading one of those silly mean quote things about **when you travel you never really feel home after that**, because it's something about meeting so many different people. **And a part** of you always ends up being left in places you've lived in, and with the people. I've thought about it ... you say you are coming home, **but it's never the same because you***



*have left all different parts of you all around, and I think that all contributes to how you see yourself and also changes your relationship with home, of what is perceived to be home. – South African*

Although Erikson (1968) theorises on identity from a psychoanalytic point of view as illustrated above. He also emphasises the role of the environment – particularly the social environment – in the development of identity, through one’s ability to be able to identify as a member of a family, a specific society and a variety of other social groups (Bornman, 2003). So, speculation is made of the individual being able to identify with the self already developed within the first five stages. Thus, one can relate and refer to specific, directed narratives and definitions of who they think they are with that background intact. Having used this theoretical framework, one is able to see the emphasis that exists in the formation and social nature of individuals, as well as identify the important influences that social relationships have on the self, facilitating an understanding of the negotiations individuals have to undergo when exposed to experiences and encounters that they have no reference point to any kind of ‘familiar’ (Jodl, Michael & Malanchuk, 1998).

The self interacts and is connected to the formation and reinforcement of its multiple identities. The emergence of multiple identities within the self is as a result of varying factors within the environment that take effect on a person. This is given reference to the various influences that contribute to one’s culture that assist in defining who an individual is, and forming his or her identity in turn. The concept of the influence from the environment illustrates the commotion and pandemonium of the complexities within the globalising world in which individuals have multidimensional lives that have to cater for the varying and increasing roles they need to take on within the different social institutions participated in. The different relationships and interactions that take place within a particular place, space and time depend on the context in which the interaction takes place. Those call on capricious responses and reactions from the individual on how they should abide with the standards and norms that are deemed to be acceptable within host environments. In the light of the views of the post-modern rationale, according to Wade (1999), in the post-modern world, you just don’t get to be a

single and consistent somebody. To a certain extent this is true and is demonstrated by Irene<sup>29</sup> and Anita.

There is a need to decipher, understand and interpret how people narrate and act in verifying their conceptions of who they are, following certain traits and creating specific patterns that are unique to the self and possibly connections with others that could be linked to the same groups of identity that the individual belongs to (Burke & Stets, 2000). Thus, there is a need to go further and understand how these traits, patterns and categories add up, emerge and merge with the deliberate but inevitable collaboration with society.

### **Self, Society and Adjustment**

Responses show that participants were comfortable within their current destination and found it much like Europe. It was far from their expectation of what an African city was meant to be like – having had certain perceptions of what the experience should be like, and having been informed by media searches done prior to arrival. Much to their surprise the reality was the complete opposite of what they had thought or heard. This was interesting as it is evident that individuals arrive at a new place with preconceived ideas about it, ready to act and behave in a certain manner only to realise nothing much is different.

But this is not always the case; individuals are not always fortunate enough to be located in a sociocultural system that is familiar or identical to what they are used to. Sometimes the transition is quite immense, from what would be believed to be basic everyday necessities in their ‘normal’ lives. The transition can be overwhelming; communicating with loved ones over social media was often what helped with part of the adjustment. The adjustment process is psychological, where one copes with the emotional stresses and sociocultural behaviours that come with being in a new culture, and trying to fit in.

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<sup>29</sup> *I don't think that necessarily changes your identity. You learn to adapt to your living arrangements I feel you that you adapt a certain identity at one place and then you go back; it's changed a bit, but it doesn't change who you are.*

As each stay and experience progresses, certain patterns and routines are developed by individuals that help them cope with their day-to-day lives. These routines, however, closely resemble what each of the individuals would normally do if they were in their own spaces and places within their ‘specific’ familiar cultures. The idea is to try and make their ‘normal’ routine and way of doing things, to fit into the practices of the place where they are, to make it much more comfortable and almost ‘home-like’. This consisted of simple things like setting up two clocks that showed the time for the place where one was and another for where they normally live or have close ties to (home). Otherwise they make sure that they use some form of social media (Facebook, WhatsApp, Skype, email and the like) to connect and communicate with friends and family on a regular basis to feel closer to, to relate and refer back to the familiar.<sup>30</sup> These served as strong reminders in the present of the nostalgia of the familiar – which brought about an unconscious reference to the present as certainly being different, though embracing it, and enjoying the diversity and the adventure of being in the unfamiliar. Kylie’s response expresses this point well and can be generalised as a common sentiment felt by all the participants during their sojourns.

*... I couldn’t do without Skype. I Skype with my boyfriend every day, and that used to be my way of dealing with not being with him, for example. My mum and I also Skype once a week ... I really have a strong connection with my mum, so if I don’t speak to her at least once a week on Skype and once a day on whatever other social media, then I really feel disconnected from home ... I often say ‘Thank God for Skype’. It’s one of my most favourite things on this earth right now. – Kylie*

However, as individuals get acquainted and used to a place, they loosen up and gradually learn the rules and norms of the sociocultural system, employing behavioural

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<sup>30</sup> A person from my close family died two days before my flight. You are ripped out of the situation because you have to fly and keep on studying. You don’t have the chance to say okay, now I’m going to take a break. If so, you might probably have to quit the Master’s course. So that is actually something that I am struggling with, **there is that distance between us now with the people back home**. When we Skype or write emails, I can’t console them or feel the pain they are feeling. **I can’t send the comfort from that distance to people**. That makes me feel a bit helpless to know people are still struggling with the situation and I’m here. I can call, **but it’s different when you are there**. **When you are very far you cannot share or transfer you emotions in the same way**. – Jessica

traits without necessarily fully understanding or accepting the new culture (Furnham & Bochner, 1986). This was true for the female participants when it came to the interpretation of one's dressing in certain cultures with regard to respecting the fact that it was culturally insensitive to ignore the norms pertaining to how women within the culture dressed. So the female participants had to indisputably abide to the cultural norms of dressing.<sup>31</sup> This process of adjustment and adapting was pertinent to intuitively steering inward reflection within the individuals that became a learning platform to encourage the emergence of personal growth through developing intercultural competences such as open-mindedness, tolerance, sensitivity, and acceptance etcetera. The establishment of these qualities within an individual are highly recommended on a global level as they teach and allow individuals to be culturally knowledgeable and tolerant of various cultures and each other, reducing the number of obstacles that could be present between inter-culturally different people, resulting in positive long-term consequences for intergroup relations (Cushner & Karim, 2004).

This active creation, shaping, expression, translation and negotiation of sociocultural norms and behaviours shown within the responses given of the process of adaptation, give meaning to the encounters and experiences that SA students on academic sojourns have. This has aided in the understanding and interpretation of the effect that experiences and encounters have on one's identity and culture through the explicit identifications that affirm difference in a positive as well as a negative manner. This results in embracing self-reflections that cater to one's flexibility and ability to adapt beyond just the current experience.<sup>32</sup>

### **(Re)Construction of the Self – Socialisation and Change**

As discovered above, the process of adaptation impacts the self, making the individual a more independent and increasingly confident individual than they initially

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<sup>31</sup> Refer to Kylie, Anita and Irene quote.

<sup>32</sup> An interesting note to be aware of about the students' sojourns is that they are over within four to eight months, with the adaptation process taking almost as long for the first experience. As they get used to moving from one culture to the next, the time to adjust dwindles with acknowledgment to past experience.

were prior to the experience. This was due to the socialisation process that takes place even for those that attribute their identity to multiple dimensions.

*The way I view the world has been changed. **The way I understand myself has been changed.** I am more assertive of my identity as an African. Not that I wasn't in the beginning. I have always been a Pan-Africanist. But I think now I understand the need for it and the joy of it. I think it also changed my views on and reinforced my previous Pan-African notion. It did change my personality in that India **taught me patience and that I don't need seventy percent of the stuff that I have, and I can live without them.** It also taught me that I spend way too much more than I really need. Germany **taught me solitude. I can live by myself in peace and it also taught me independence.** – Irene*

“It can be construed that during transition, sojourners are faced with the fundamental existential question about what constitutes the self” (Brown & Holloway, 2008: 243). Although this existential question is affected by culture and exposure to cultural differences, it is essentially transcultural, as all participants were confronted by this question at some stage during the fitting-in process. With the response almost being similar to Irene's above, revelations and lessons are the order of the day for most participants, which at a later stage contribute to the interactive approaches adopted when met with a similar situation as those presented during the SA experience. Appropriately, Kim (2008) notes plasticity, the ability to learn and change through new experiences, as one of the most profound characteristics of the human mind, which is the basis upon which individuals acquire an identity.

Hence, while there is an understanding that that plasticity is possible, as a recap, there is a need to understand that identity is complicated. With reference to Erikson's theory, there are portions of the self that can be considered stable and consistent and very difficult to change. Foundations would have been laid to build onto these beliefs and values that the individuals have, implying that certain elements of the self and being do not change, but the core of who they are (either they choose to believe it or not) continues to exist from that which was established before.

*I get back to the way I have always been, even though I changed so much during the time I was away. – Anita*

To better understand the concept conveyed here, an illustration of the construction of a house or a building will help. An individual starts off with a plan that is drawn by his or her architect, and when it comes to erecting the actual building there is a need to actually identify and buy the appropriate and/or desired material to start getting the house up. Throughout this process decisions are being made about which materials to use and/or buy with regard to quality, preference and availability, but also with reference to the master plan. The task of actually building the house would require that a foundation be built deep in the ground, depending on the size of the house and the material, to be able to keep it stable from possible external conditions and factors that could damage the house, such as natural disasters, for example earthquakes, floods, hurricanes etcetera, if they ever do occur. The idea is that the house should stay stable and grounded where it is, unless otherwise demolished. Unshakeable structures like that, when it comes to building a house that will last owners a lifetime, is a successful accomplishment. However, this does not mean the house or the foundation changes if the owner decides that they would like to extend a certain section of the house. He or she need not demolish the complete structure, but it is a matter of adding onto the existing structure.

With regard to the individual's negotiations around the various cultures that they found themselves in, this same illustration can be used, with the individual being the structure/house, the architect being the culture (as he can add onto the master plan if he is requested to draw an add on for the extension of the house), the foundation being one's identity (including the different facets that make it up) and possible natural disasters being the varying cultural interactions and intersections with the 'other' or host society and communities the participants encounter around them. (Various components within this illustration will be used to aid in some examples and explanations below.)

There is a need to look at the facets that make up and assist in the formation of one's identity, beyond the society, with society not being an 'ends to the mean'. Some of these come as a result of variations in worldviews (they can be said to have a elements of

personal identity as well a sense of community with those that share the same ideology) and through the influence of the social institutions that people find themselves within. Some if not most structuring the formation of one's identity from stage one to five of Erikson's model, which are the critical stages to building the foundation of one's identity.

At this point, self-identification has led to the need to collectively identify. But there needs to be an understanding of how and why individuals then identify with particular collectives. This is when social institutions start to make sense with regard to their significance in the whole equation. Social institutions in this case are made up of a variety of beliefs and worldviews that people hold to direct their thinking and reasoning of situations and circumstances around them. They are constructed and need to be reinforced to be able to influence individuals (at a micro scale) and collectives (at a macro scale). In this way identity of the self, society and institutions are involved in an interactive process of forming each other, contributing to how one or a group 'become', 'are' and 'belong' to a past, present and future within certain confines.

### **Difference, Society and Globalisation**

Throughout the research study, participants have shown the value and appreciation for the opportunity and experience to SA, articulating its relevance on their personal and future professional lives. Though they had some concerns regarding how the internationalisation higher education (IHE) is available to just a few, and that is fuelling and creating a specific individual that can further drive the process of globalisation having penetrated the cultural boundaries.

This was an interesting thought-provoking concept that most of the participants pointed out within the same composition that mandates the establishment of social institutions, and the realisation of the global thought processes and their recipients. This is the idea of the 'privileged few' that recurred a number of times in the lines of understanding and creation of difference on the global level which contributes to the proliferation of inequalities. This notion of the privileged few allows globalisation to differentiate between the rich and the poor in terms of its accessibility and affordability components. However, participants confirm that it is a process that addresses more of a

class culture than an issue of negotiation, adaptability and/or assimilation. It is only for those that can participate in it without being directly exploited by it. Thus, their experiences and choices can be regarded as directed, in a sense, in how they would likely be identified as being on the privileged side, considering that they were afforded these opportunities which are restrictive to one's ability to access and afford them.

Another issue that was brought up of concern about the society as it currently is was that of the mass media and other technological means of communication. How people around the world are increasingly exposed to the images and sounds of distant cultures, without having to leave their homes to experience acculturation. Having connectivity to these devices of communication over such distances again were discussed in relation to accessibility to a certain type of student, recognised within the system to be equipped in a such a manner that defies distance and no longer dictates the extent of intercultural communication as being a barrier.

However, all in all the opportunity and experience of studying abroad initially breaks personal barriers for each individual as an exploration of the self from encounters that force this awareness to take place in a manner that would have not otherwise have been possible. (Re)Construction of Self Identity, fitting in and adaptation, developing intercultural competence and seeing society as we know it now, have given a glimpse into the real life of a handful of the some of the experiences and opinions that SA students have of the different cultural settings that they have explored. It is interesting to note that Erikson's first five development stages contribute to the foundational, concrete and stable formation of ideas and conceptions of who someone is, and that plasticity allows for the human brain to absorb experiences altering and contributing to a new and diverse worldview, moulding more of an open-minded and tolerant individual that can salvage and maximise on the opportunities the world presents.



## CHAPTER SEVEN

### CONCLUSION

This study set out to explore and examine the articulation of experiences and encounters from the perspective of the study abroad (SA) student who came into contact with cultural settings different from their own. It was set to investigate the aspects that would likely arise as a result of their mobility, hyper-connectivity and ability to learn and adapt within certain cultural settings. The classification of the SA student used is distinguishable from the rest. The reason being, the programme enrolment meant a deliberate focus was given on ensuring that each student (within TAP) learnt to approach the world and globalisation from varying regional perspectives by engaging within very diverse (different) academic and cultural environments. As a result, this enquiry was motivated by the curiosity of the possible effects noted from the link that was derived through the discussion engaged in, on globalisation, IHE and the understanding of the development of intercultural competence. Having been a SA student herself within the same programme, the researcher grappled through a number of self-reflective questions during her own sojourns leading to this exploration. This paper placed particular emphasis on the articulation of the responses and approaches taken by individuals of their respective encounters and experiences. Using the Circuit of Culture (CoC) model as a link drawing together the themes<sup>33</sup> to give a holistic, interpretive understanding into the meanings and outcomes produced by the relationship between the constructions and perceived idealisations of the SA student and the hosts collective.

Through the use of a case study utilising multiple narrative methods to gather rich data from the participants, the study sought out the students' responses with emphasis on

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<sup>33</sup> (Re)Construction of Self Identity; 'Fitting In' and Adaptation; Developing Intercultural Competence and Society as we now know it.

four themes<sup>34</sup>. The first, regarding how participants constructed and communicated who they thought they were, with cognisance to their personal (self) and social identities. Secondly, the fitting in and the adaptation process were scrutinised. It explored the genesis of the interaction between participants and host collectives and their cultures. How both the society and the individual identified and classified each other, informed by preconceived ideas and concepts about the 'other'. This then lead to the third concept, the development of intercultural competence, an important component of the whole SA experience which brought about the emergence of a tolerant, open-minded individual who was ready to learn and voluntarily collaborate with the host collectives. Lastly, the study picked up some of the (re) constructions of perceptions and perspectives of society from this viewpoint, of how participants now understood the world around them after such encounters. As anticipated, somewhat, resulted in the creation of an individual that is 'well-rounded', who is able to tackle and interact culturally on a 'global' level without much difficulty, creating and utilising opportunities that will further advance globalism, when looked at from the wider perspective of the advancement of globalisation as a phenomenon on human interaction.

From the response revealed in the two findings sections<sup>35</sup> relating to the four above-mentioned themes, the narrations held similar truths told by each participant. Difference and the development of intercultural competence can be summed up as the two main inferences to be deducted from the entire study. These two were recognised and illustrated through the use of classifications and labels revealed by stereotypes; social markers and the initial realisation of having to change ones habits, behaviours and lifestyle for the duration spent within the host cultures. However, these inferences are significant to the construction and understanding of the various societal classifications held by individuals in a particular culture (country). This, through the way the classifications were reiterated within social practices across certain cultural settings.

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<sup>34</sup> Same themes as stated in footnote 33 above.

<sup>35</sup> Chapter Four pg. 35 and Five pg. 54

Though there is a desire and advocacy towards the need for universalisation and the merging of cultures through globalisation, the merging of diversity and differences displayed among them are what make the world unique. The differences are attributable to the variations in worldviews, which are what is bringing about innovation and advancement to the society, as we now know it. This form of globalisation has been able to show a different side of human interaction, through what it means to individuals within given societies, allowing mind-sets and opinions to broaden.

To reaffirm the above, the Galileo model sums up the discussion and concludes what the SA students' experience means. With reference to the Galileo Model,<sup>36</sup> the closer and more frequently one is to a culture is due to the similarities that they share with that culture, as opposed to that which is different from theirs. However, the more the individual gets closer to a different culture and gets used to it, due to the difference, the more they develop an open-mindedness when it comes to their perceptions and understanding of others (as noted above) (Cheong, Hwang, Elbirt, Chen, Evans & Woelfel, 2009).

Thus, the active construction, shaping, expression, translation and negotiations taken by participants shown through their responses of their experiences that have been outlined throughout the research have been able to give meaning to the encounters that SA students on academic sojourns have. This aids in the understanding and interpretation of identity and culture through its explicit identification and affirmation of multiple identities and influences on both the individuals and host collectives, and embraces self-reflections that catered to one's flexibility and ability to adapt and negotiate the behaviours within these 'foreign places'. This comes about by understanding each other

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<sup>36</sup> "In the Galileo model, objects are represented as points in a multidimensional space. Objects, which are similar to each other, are close to each other in the space (culture). The self as object is also represented as a point in the space (culture) and it is located close to the objects that best define it. Behaviours (negotiations and adaptation), which of course are objects, are also located as points in this space (culture), and behaviours closest to the self point are most performed, while those seldom or never performed are far from the self point; accordingly, media (identities) close to the self point would be expected to be utilized more and media (identities) further from the self point would be utilized less. In the Galileo model, ongoing behaviour (negotiations and adaptability) is represented by the trajectory of the self point through an evolving space (culture) of objects in more or less motion relative to each other" (Cheong, Hwang, Elbirt, Chen, Evans & Woelfel, 2009:4).

with an open mind and comprehending the differences that exist among people as a result.

Intercultural learning and the IHE have been the theoretical frameworks used in understanding the mobility of students, international or SA, adopted by a number of authors (Tian & Lowe, 2009; Brown & Holloway, 2008; Ippolito, 2007) who take a similar approach to that taken in this research. These articles are similar in that they explore the IHE but take different approaches to the concepts in that they focus on how to draw out the development of intercultural learning around issues of competence, communication and adjustment within foreign cultures. Thus, they differ in emphasis, as most focus more on language and classroom experiences from a 'long-term stay' of acquiring a complete degree as opposed to the short-term 'sojourns' explored here.

In this manner it would be interesting to further explore both approaches, combining the general exploration of the articulation of experiences and encounters with the overall academic experience of classroom interactions, language and the negotiations that would result from such exchanges. However, this study has investigated how individuals maintain and interpret their identities in the twenty-first century, particularly in response to globalisation through articulating narrations of their SA experiences.

### **In Summary**

- Globalisation equates sameness and difference, which embraces diversity among people.
- Difference is indicated through:
  - Makers, signifiers and variables that identify the 'other'.
  - The recognition and celebration of diversity and variety in 'difference' within people and cultures.

- Conscious involvement, deliberation and negotiation of the ‘others’ difference as a way of embracing and assimilating into culture and daily living within the ‘unfamiliar’ – developing intercultural competence.

## **Limitations**

*Research topic* – The approach taken in the research is limited in its scope in that it was too general, without being specific and in-depth with regard to certain experiences. There was more rich research material collected that could have been used to look at the differences within the structure of the global society itself. But this was also due to the limit of the word count. Thus, it focused on the self and society from the experiential perspective.

*Methodology* was affected due to the time constraint regarding the scheduling of the programme, navigating through travel, course-work and the research writing. This included limitations relating to having access to the supervisor and participants until a specific time of the year, in order to gain access to the required participants and resources.

*Sample population* – It would have been preferable to have more participants to work with especially from the different continents to see if there is a difference in opinion. But the availability of participants and the choice of sampling restricted this diversity. Also access to other exchange students was difficult due to a number of restrictions from gatekeeper and university protocol on the accessibility of SA students.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Also refer to page 22-23 on participants.

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# APPENDICES

## Appendix A

### Researcher- Participant Relationship

For full disclosure, there is the need to mention that there is a relationship that exists between the participants and the researcher in that I (as the researcher) am part of a similar programme of study abroad (SA) students, thus am sharing a similar background and am as opinionated about the issues under discussion as they are. This is indicated by the Prologue – this being another valid reason to the explanation of choice of participants, as well as purpose of study. However, I am aware that this can have either positive or negative implications on the whole research process from the conceptualisation to the analysis of the findings. As this can be a restrictive mechanism, when it comes to the use of information from both the researcher and participants stand point. For the participant in that they might not find it important to disclose certain important information that can be deemed to be obvious to the researcher under the capacity of being ‘one of them’, as well as the manner in which questions are asked which could lead to specific responses. And for the researcher, as they might take the fact that they know the individuals for granted and bypass a lot of relevant research material, by so doing meaning that I as the researcher, can be biased to a certain extent.

## Appendix B

### Advert Notice: Participation in Focus Group

DEAR ALL,

Global Studies Master's Student (\*\*\*\*\*002) request for participants in a focus group based on *the understanding of various identities and belonging*, of how individuals *negotiate* their way around cultures and worldviews emerging as a result of globalisation. The purpose of the group is to trying to discuss some of the issues that arise, as well as the meanings and significance that come about with regards to the various *intersections and discourses* that are presented within the formation of some of these worldviews.

The information learnt in the focus groups will be used in addition to other sources of data, to interpret the changing forms of identity and the conceptions of it within the twenty-first century. There are no right or wrong answers. I would like to hear many different viewpoints on the issue.

If you are interested, please RSVP to [\\*\\*\\*\\*\\*@gmail.com](mailto:*****@gmail.com) for logistic purposes by latest Wednesday 10 September for the Thursday 11 September session and

Thursday 11 September for the Friday 12 September session.

Proposed/ provisional schedules

Date: Thursday 11 and Friday 12 September 2014

Time: 2-3.30pm and 12-1.30pm respectively

Venue: Sociology Seminar Room

**Refreshments will be provided**

## **Appendix C**

### **Flyer for Interview Participants' via email**

I would be interested in getting 10 study abroad or exchange students to participate that have spent a semester away from their home campus and spent a semester at other university outside their continent of residence.

This research is based on the understanding of the sense of belonging or how individuals go about fitting into/adapting to specific cultural (foreign) setting for a specific period of time. Basically how an individual negotiates their way around this environment. Figuring out what it means to them with reference to who they are, within themselves (internally) and who those around them think they are (externally).

This would mean trying to understand or evaluate the meanings and significance that comes about with regards to the various intersections and discourses that arise (if they do) in understanding their various identities within the contemporary globalising world.

And how this globalising world receives them in turn, with reference to the different contexts, spaces and locations they encounter.

Each participant will have an interview on their perceptions about their home environment and that of their exchange/study abroad experience, social interactions and encounters, as well as their ideas and construction of what they think their identity is or means to them before and after this experience. Has the exposure meant anything with regards to who they are and has anything changed in anyway (particularly ideologies on stereotypes, prejudices and general biases and constructions that they possessed beforehand)?

Could you please send this to some of your study -abroad friends and if possible ask them to send it to their other friends.

Interviews can take place over a coffee and should take about an hour or less of your day. For those interested please send me an email and we can arrange a date and time to conduct the meeting (preferably between 28 August and 11 September).

Findings could reveal some of the slight patterns in perceptions that could be the markers that can bring about a different approach to how diversity, multiculturalism etcetera. should be approached and possibly how it should be looked at from a sociological perspective. Social change can be addressed or approached from the angle were individuals or policy looks at and understands how society thinks of themselves as well as each other. In this way those interested in exploring this topic with me could email me on \*\*\*\*\*@gmail.com and we could arrange a meeting.



## Appendix D

### Consent to Participate in Focus Group

DEAR PARTICIPANT,

You have been asked to participate in a focus group based on *the understanding of various identities and belonging*, of how individuals *negotiate* their way around cultures and worldviews emerging as a result of globalisation. The purpose of the group is trying to discuss some of the issues that arise, as well as the meanings and significance that come about with regards to the various *intersections and discourses* that are presented within the formation of some of these worldviews. The information learned in the focus groups will be used in addition to other sources of data, to interpret the changing forms of identity and the conceptions of it within the 21<sup>st</sup> century. You can choose whether or not to participate in the focus group and stop at any time. Although the focus group will be tape recorded, your responses will remain anonymous and no names will be mentioned in the report. There are no right or wrong answers to the focus group questions. We want to hear many different viewpoints and would like to hear from everyone. We hope you can be honest even when your responses may not be in agreement with the rest of the group. In respect for each other, we ask that only one individual speak at a time in the group and that responses made by all participants be kept confidential.

I understand this information and agree to participate fully under the conditions stated above:

**Signed:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

### **FOR ADMINISTRATIVE PURPOSES: OPTIONAL**

**Gender:**

**Age:**

**Year of study and/or programme**

## Appendix E

### Consent to Participate In A Research Study Interview

Dear Participant,

Invitation to participate in research that is based on *the understanding of various identities and belonging*, of how individuals *negotiate* their way around cultures and worldviews emerging as a result of globalisation. The purpose of the interview is to try and figure out what it means to an individual (study abroad or exchange student) with reference to whom they are within themselves (internally) and who those around them think they are (externally). This would mean trying to understand or evaluate the meanings and significance that comes about with regards to the various *intersections and discourses* that arise (if they do) in understanding or mapping out their identity within the contemporary globalising world. And in turn, how this globalising world receives them in the way that society is current organised.

You can choose whether or not to participate and/or stop at any time. The interview will be tape-recorded, your responses will remain anonymous and confidential, and no names will be mentioned in the report. There are no right or wrong answers to the questions asked.

If you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to answer a range of questions that will take more or less 45minutes to an hour

I understand this information and agree to participate fully under the conditions stated above:

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### **FOR ADMINISTRATIVE PURPOSES: OPTIONAL**

**Gender:**

**Age:**

**Year of study and/or programme:**

## **Appendix F**

### **Focus Group Introduction**

#### **WELCOME**

Thanks for agreeing to be part of the focus group. I appreciate your willingness to participate.

#### **INTRODUCTION**

##### **PURPOSE OF FOCUS GROUPS**

The reason we are having these focus groups is to find out how individuals *negotiate* their way around cultures and the worldviews that are emerging as a result of globalisation with regards to how we identify others and ourselves in turn.

I would appreciate your input and would like you to share your honest and open thoughts around the issues that will be under discussion.

#### **GROUND RULES**

##### **1. I WOULD LIKE YOU TO DO THE TALKING.**

I would appreciate for everyone to participate.

**I may call on you if I haven't heard from you in a while.**

##### **2. THERE ARE NO RIGHT OR WRONG ANSWERS**

Every person's experiences and opinions are important.

Speak up whether you agree or disagree.

I would like to hear a wide range of opinions.

##### **3. WHAT IS SAID IN THIS ROOM STAYS HERE**

I would like for everyone to feel comfortable sharing when sensitive issues come up.

##### **4. I WILL BE TAPE RECORDING THE GROUP**

I would like to capture everything you have to say.

I won't identify anyone by name in my report. You will remain anonymous.

## Appendix G

### Interview Schedule

Interpretations of changing forms of identity in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Identifying identity

#### Focus on the current

- Who are you (in general)? How would you describe yourself there could also be traits of identity found here, more traits could be found in this section
- How has it been so far in Cape Town? In what way/ how have you had to adapt to your current destination (there is a process that needs to be taken to do this with regards to methods of what is used to or familiarity)
- What do you like the most about the destination in terms of adapting (like relates to the adapting hence comparison exists between self and other)
- What are some of the things you are struggling with, with regard to the adaptation or fitting in process? Thus there is always the need to fit in

#### Conception of home

- ✓ How/what would you describe as 'home'/what is your understanding of home also here, definite synthesis here (ideas of home are derived from somewhere, thus differences between people. Maybe pick out those differences or similarities)
- (Where are you from)
- When reference is made to the idea of belonging, what does it mean to you? And here (also with reference to the ideas above about home)
- What are some of the things you have taken for granted before about home, or the people around you? (Same applies here, all the same point)
- How would you describe the current destination in comparison to your home city

#### Society and self (identification)

- ✓ How/who do people around you describe you as? Tendency of describing other as different

- What does the phrase ‘me, myself and I’ mean or imply to you. You can explain each of them
- What are some of the intersection that describe your identity there could be a relationship here with home also here
- Which between the two would you describe as accurate enough to describe the true version of who you are according to your own self-perception?
- What do you think the **meaning** of the description you get from who people think you are mean?
- What do you think makes them describe you/ define you that way.
- What are some of the various identities that you could identify with or are identified by?
- What do the various geographic locations including imagined spaces mean with regards to your understanding of “home” (do they co-relate/coexist)?
- Do you feel like you belong? Anywhere. Where in particular and why also here (conceptions and constructions learnt thus far)

✚ ***Outsider perception (stereotypes and prejudices)***

- ✓ What are some of the common stereotypes about you/ your identities have you come across? (Tendency to describe or define people by specific stereotypes e.g. jokes about nationalities)
- **What impacts do they have on you** in general and particularly in your current destination, **are they different from those you have encountered elsewhere** (How so)
- What are some of the stereotypes/ prejudices do **media emphasis/reinforce** about your various identities and what are these. How do they do this? And in your opinion, do you think they succeed in. what are some of the meanings they portray. Also same concept here
- How do you feel about some of the images put out by the media about certain cultures and identities
- What is your opinion with regards to the **exposure** that you have had thus far in relation to your identities. **Has it altered or shifted anything in the way you**

**think or perceive** certain cultures/ nationalities/ categories/ labels in general.

What are some of these, and why/what has changed.

- Do you think/feel that your various identities have altered/changed within the **different geographical locations/ spaces** that you find yourself in. how this is so. (I.e. chameleon- blending in). What are some of the features/aspects that you have adopted on the blending in process? (The actions taken). How have you blended in
- Do you feel like you and your culture are sometimes in conflict? If so how. If they are in sync, how. Results/effects of travelling

✚ ***Global perspective (outlook)***

- ✓ In what way would you say 'everyone' globally is becoming similar
- In what way would you say 'everyone' globally is becoming different
- What do you think about **globalisation on a humanistic level**? What is it doing to individuals on that level? How has it affected your personality.
- With consideration to the various identities that emerge. What importance do you think context, space, place and time have
- What impact do you feel social institutions have had on the construction of your identity? What are some of these institutions
- What are some of the messages that are put across by these institutions for you to believe in a certain way
- When and what makes your identity feel attacked
- What do you think is unique about your identity and your experience
- How do you think humanity is unique? What are some of the commonalities we share