From Ideal to Real: The Impact of Study Abroad on the Identity of Saudi Women in Australia

By

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A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at

Monash University in 2021

Linguistics and Applied Linguistics Program

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Abstract

Saudi women's voices often go muted, neglected, or misrepresented within their society and around the world. This, among other reasons, has resulted in their narratives being largely absent from study abroad literature.

This research study was undertaken in response to a paucity of research that explores the identity of Saudi women while studying abroad. At its heart is a consideration of the role of religion and culture in supporting or hindering Saudi women as they go by their lives before and during their time abroad. This study explores the participants' religious and cultural relationship that they had with English, and English-speaking countries before study abroad, the development of their identities, beliefs and practices during their time in Australia, and the role religious and cultural beliefs and positioning played in this development. This study also discusses how these women believed that this experience would shape their future goals, relationships, and their country.

Informed by Davies and Harré (1990) and Harré and van Langenhove's (1999) understandings of positioning, Norton's (2001) concept of imagined communities, Norton Peirce's (1995) concept of investment, SLA and language identity theories, and using a qualitative approach; case study, which was informed by a pilot questionnaire, this study investigate the SA experiences of Saudi women. approach It explore how four Saudi women, coming from different backgrounds, experienced studying and living abroad, and understood who they are and who they want to be. The central story behind the Saudi women's narrative accounts of being abroad and away from the constrains of their society and equipped with English language was a significant turning point in their lives, describing study abroad and learning English as opening doors to meaningful experiences as they negotiated their identities and creatively adapted to their new environment and positions. They reported more

confidence, independence and intercultural growth. The results suggested a strong new understanding of the national and religious identity of the participants. The study also highlighted how English language was a tool that helped them to understand religious texts differently and strengthen their religious identity in a different way. It also showed how Islam is being understood and differentiated from the cultural and social practices.

Most importantly the results revealed that though some participants who are still performing their traditional roles and holding on to their previous beliefs and values, nevertheless, experience a change in their views and perceptions. They started questioning these roles and acknowledging their limitations in the Saudi society.

It is important to note that the participants of this study negotiated their identity through their religion by reinterpreting Islamic teaching, i.e., Islamic feminism, and learning English language and using it to access different cultures and as a way to provoke change (within themselves, their family and the Saudi society).

The overall findings revealed that studying abroad was fundamental to Saudi women, to find their own voices and become active agents in re-writing their future narratives of faith, hope, independence, and agency.

Declaration

Declaration

This thesis is an original work of my research and contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at any university or equivalent institution and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

Luluh Alfurayh

3/11/2021

Dedication

When I was just a little girl, every time we visit my grandparents

and as we're about to leave,

My uncle would hold me between his arms so tight and whisper (in a squeaky sound):

I'm going to take you home with me.

Then and just then, I start kicking, screaming, and shouting:

Mezna, Mezna, I want to go with Mezna.

And here I am after all these years, all what I want is to go to Mezna.

To Mum

Acknowledgments

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious and the Most Merciful.

First and foremost, I offer my highest gratitude to God Almighty for blessing me with the opportunity to pursue this degree and giving me the strength to successfully complete it. Alhamdulillah, all thanks to Allah.

Writing this thesis was challenging and inspiring at the same time, and completing it was a reward by itself. This would not have been possible without the support I received from King Abdul-Aziz University, for that I am Truly grateful. Special thanks should also be given to the Saudi Cultural Mission in Canberra (SACM), especially the cultural attaché Dr. Hesham Khadawardi and my academic advisor Dr. Yassine Belkamel for their support and help.

My deepest gratitude goes to my dissertation supervisors, Louisa Willloughby and Nadine Normand. You have been a valuable source of support during the past five years, I have had a great opportunity to learn about the field from you. Louisa, you have a unique ability to see the big picture, and to explain how various findings can fit in with the field as a whole. Your knowledge of the field is inspiring and nearly limitless. Nadine, your ideas, and attention to small and specific details have shaped my dissertation and have made it a project about which I am particularly proud. You and Louisa have served as my role models; from you I have learned how to be creative, articulate, committed to ideas and research. I feel fortunate that during our countless meetings, you shared some of that knowledge with me. Your guidance has left an indelible imprint on my research strategies, goals, and my ways of thinking about research and the world. Thank you for all this and thank you for believing that this work was important.

I would also like to thank Susan Carland, for her inspiration and for fighting and encouraging

us to fight. Your book has imprinted on me and left some of your light in these pages.

A special thanks to Levi Durbidge, our few discussions over coffee were always so helpful and comforting. You took me by the hand and were so gracious with your time with me. For this mentorship and friendship, I am grateful.

I am also truly thankful to my fellow HDR peers for their ongoing encouragement and sharing of knowledge. In particular I would like to thank Tom and Dima for their friendship and emotional support over the years. I really struggled to adjust to writing without your whispers and giggles as a background during Covid-lockdown.

To my Australian friends, a heartfelt thank you for your invaluable friendship. Donna and family, thank you for always keeping in touch, and for all visits and presents. Russel and Selina, thank you for all the support and positive attitude to life, you helped make this experience an incredibly enriching one. Finally, a special thank you to Racheal and family, for being such dear friends, for all the picnics and long discussions.

To all my Saudi friends I have come to know throughout my time in Australia, Sumaya, Bothainah, Reem, Timah, Woodi, Sasa, Soso and Najwa. We have travelled different parts of this journey together and I am truly grateful for your friendship, company, and support. Special shout out to Mesho who has seen me through both thick and thin. Thank you for being there when no one else was. You are not just a friend, more like a sister.

Special thank you also goes to my friend back home, Molah, Aboora and Rasha. Abeer, I am truly blessed to have a friend like you in my life. Hessah, my good and dear friend over the years, thank you for always reaching out to me. Mona and Moodi, my sweet cousins, thank you for always remembering me in special occasions.

A sincere thank you for my brothers and sisters for their endless support. Khaled for being the first one to call every Eid. Osama for teaching me how to be a moderate Muslim, for answering all my questions and helping me understand. Thank you to Abdullah, for being

part of my journey, even for a short time. Abdulmohsen for all the endless discussions about women's issues.

Lastly, and most importantly, I wish to thank my family, ultimately it was the genuine and steadfast support, love and understanding that enabled me to complete this thesis. My husband Muath, for always believing that I can do this. Eleen, Ibrahim and Hamad, my children, my best friends, and my heroes. Thank you for your patience, your faith and for your understanding. Thank you also for all the cuddling breaks during the writing process. I love you beyond words.

And with fond memories of my father, who taught me how to be myself in a world that I do not belong to, by being himself in a world that he did not belong to, as he belonged to Heaven.

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Glossary

Abaya Saudi traditional dress or cloak to be worn in public.

Awrah The intimate parts of the human body which, according to Islam, must be covered.

Bid'a Innovated non-Islamic acts.

Fatwa A formal ruling on a point of Islamic law or matter given by a religious scholar (known as a mufti). Though considered authoritative, fatwas are not treated as binding judgments; if not convinced, a person is permitted to seek another opinion.

Hadith Records of sayings and life events of the Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him).

Haram Forbidden by Islamic law.

Hijab A scarf that covers the head.

Ired Sanctuary, it refers to a woman's chastity that is connected to the family's honour.

Ikhtilat Gender mixing.

Mahram A related male companion to women when they travel.

Najid Central Arabia.

Niqab A cover for the face but not the eyes.

Quran Islam's Holy book.

Sharia Islamic law which is derived principally from the Quran and the Hadith.

Sahwa A period of powerful religious change in Saudi Arabia between the 1960s and 1990s.

Sahwis People who carry the Sahwa ways of thinking.

Shura Council The Consultative Assembly of Saudi Arabia.

Tawhid The oneness of God.

Ulama Religious scholars.

Vision 2030 A transformative economic and social reform blueprint that is opening Saudi Arabia up to the world.

List of Acronyms

DMIS Development Model of Intercultural Sensitivity

EFL English as a foreign language

ESL English as a second language

L2 second language

SA study abroad

SLA second language acquisition

Chapter One: Introduction

When I first came to Australia to do my studies, I was taken by the large cohort of Saudi women abroad. These women were everything from housewives to PhD students, from mothers to daughters, married, divorced and single. They come from different parts of Saudi; from regions I have never been to.

As the first year passed, I watched how our lives, mine and others', unfolded with different stories and narratives about struggles, conflicts and changes. It was then that I realised that these stories must be documented. There were not enough studies about Saudi women abroad, and the extant ones seemed to be repeating the same old stories trying to maintain the polished image of Saudi women. All the extant literature touched on important issues but never expanded their discussion to areas such as gender segregation, male legal guardians, and avoided bringing up sensitive issues like hijab or other religious practises. These issues all contribute to the overall identity of Saudi women.

Saudi women abroad are living differently. They are looking at the world, their country, their society and themselves from a different angle. They are growing and evolving, struggling and fighting. Abroad, they are realising who they are and what they can do and how to do it.

In this study, I want to deliver the voice of Saudi women and let them speak for themselves without any social or cultural filters or barriers. They are speaking on their own terms without the narratives build around them by their societies, male legal guardians, or the media. I wanted these women to be the authors of their narratives and identity.

This thesis focuses on the experiences and voices of four Saudi women. It does not represent all the experiences of every Saudi woman or claim to cover every single issue faced by Saudi women abroad, but it explores untouched issues. It is a start – and an invitation to others to

claim and write their own identity.

In this thesis, there are stories about families, neighbours, friends, travels, studies, opportunities, expectations, disappointments, dreams and hopes. Stories about Allah, Islam, faith, and hijab. Stories about societies and individuals, racism and sexism. Stories about women.

In this thesis, I present the life stories of four Saudi women, and these stories are not finished. They are just the beginning.

1.1. Introduction

This study explores the social factors that have shaped the identities of a group of four international female Saudi students during their SA journey. It explores how these women with varying levels of English language proficiency, varying levels of religious commitment and varying cultural background (different parts of Saudi) portrayed themselves in their narratives in the past present and future and in relation to the Australian and the Saudi society. It also investigates the role of learning English as a second language in their identity formation.

Saudi women are breaking social barriers and becoming pioneers in fields previously dominated by men. The image of the Saudi woman as an 'ideal Muslim woman,' an image that has long been used as a national symbol, is also changing (Alsweel, 2013; Deo, 2006; Pharaon, 2004). The status of women in Saudi society is strongly connected to their identity and what they want to become. Redefining the role of Saudi women would force the country to redefine itself (Deo, 2006), as "the public invisibility of women has become a way to display one's faith" (Doumato, 1992, p. 45). For example, enforcing the wearing of the veil, banning women from driving cars, limiting the choice young women have in education, and guarding the strict gender segregation in all public spheres have long been used as symbolic

gestures of the country's conformity to the Islamic teachings (Yamani, 2005). Instead of emphasising the role of Saudi men as Muslims or addressing real issues of theological contention, such as bank interest charges, the public focus has been heavily placed on the behaviour of Saudi women.

Several scholars have noted the important role of the King Abdullah Scholarship Program (KASP) in the changes seen in Saudi society (Ahmed, 2016; Alamri, 2017; Alandejani, 2013; Alraddadi, 2015; Alrefaie, 2015; Alsweel, 2013). It started 15 years ago and has sponsored more than 200,000 students (25% of whom are women) in their study abroad (SA) programs and it is seen by many as having the goal to "create a critical mass of reform-minded Saudis who will indeed form a pressure group, sufficiently powerful to loosen the grip of the ultra-conservative Wahhabi religious establishment over Saudi society and the pace of change" (Ottaway, 2012, p. 5).

Thus, in this study I investigate the effects of the inter-cultural experience of study abroad on Saudi women's identity, and explores the changes on their perceptions, beliefs and cultural values while studying and living abroad. It investigates how Saudi women are becoming active members of their Saudi society and how they are understanding and changing their societal and cultural roles. A key area of interest is the role of learning English in their empowerment. An important aspect of this is that English holds a contested status in Saudi due to specific cultural and religious reasons, i.e., being seen as the language of the West.

This study also contests to the stereotyped image of Saudi and Muslim women as being oppressed, without agency or voice. In this study, I show that Saudi women are not interchangeable: their different life experiences and orientations can lead to profoundly different study abroad experiences. In doing so I explore their trajectory and the orientations that women are taking towards their Saudi and Muslim identity.

1.2. Importance of the study

Despite the increasing presence of international Saudi students in general, and Saudi women in particular, in Western countries, this group is underrepresented in the international student research literature (Alsweel, 2013). There are studies about the experiences of Saudi students on SA programs but this literature is largely focused on males (Alraddadi, 2015; Barnawi, 2009; Groves, 2015; T. R. Hall, 2013; Heyn, 2013; Shaw, 2010), done by outsiders (De Costa, 2011; Lefdahl-Davis & Perrone-McGovern, 2015; Sheridan, 2015), or did not consider identity as specific issue (Ahmed, 2016; Alamrani, 2014; Alamri, 2017; Alandejani, 2013; Alrefaie, 2015; Altamimi, 2014). The experiences of Saudi women must be studied separately from the experience of Saudi men because of the huge differential impact of culture and norms on female and male personalities and actions.

Saudi women are starting a very visible movement in Saudi Arabia, trying to overcome social and cultural barriers, so that they could be seen, heard and recognised as equals to men in building and developing their country. Thus, this study investigates the impact of the inter-cultural experiences on Saudi women's identity while studying in Australia. It explores how Saudi women are becoming active members and how they are understanding and changing their societal and cultural roles. It also highlights the influence of learning English language as a means of change and a tool of their empowerment. The lack of research studies that discusses this issue makes it a necessity to conduct this study which will hopefully add to the literature of Saudi women in cross cultural experience.

1.3. Research questions

Based on the gap in the literature and the lack of knowledge there is that looks into the narratives of Saudi women's identity in SA, I seek to answer three questions. The first question of the study is: 1. In what ways is the participants' overall experience of SA shaped

by their background? Understanding where these women come from are and how they lived their life before coming to Australia, is important to understand them as people, and to understand their behaviour and why they react to situations in different ways.

The second question I seek to investigate is: 2. How do the identities, beliefs and practices of Saudi women develop during studying and living in Australia? What role did religious and cultural beliefs and positioning play in this development?

This question is important to understand their sites of struggle and the ways these women negotiate challenges during their time abroad. While there is an abundance of literature regarding Saudi women challenges abroad, investigating the religious and cultural aspects of their journey and how they negotiated them are of the highest importance. Also by exploring the ways Saudi women abroad negotiate power relations, they are reclaiming agency.

The third question this thesis seeks to explore is: How do they believe this experience will shape their future goals, relationships, and their country? This question sheds light on their future and reimagined selves. I examine here what their imagined communities mean to these women and look into how it is perceived. The knowledge that is offered by answering this question helps to understand how their life in Australis was also shaped by how they imagined themselves to be in the future.

A qualitative approach was used to answer these questions. Four women were chosen as case studies from a wider set of 16 Saudi women Interviewed and over 100 questionnaires distributed online, which will be discussed in chapter 4.

1.4. Thesis organisation

Chapter 1 introduces the thesis and provides a brief background to this research project. It introduces King Abdullah's scholarship program, its aims, its importance, and its role in the study abroad experience. It also gives a glimpse on the background of the Saudi society, its

traditions and culture. The status of Saudi women in their society is also explored, and then the use of Islamic feminism is explained; as a lens, not theoretical framework, to understand the religious identity of the participants. Lastly, the importance and aims of the research are laid.

Chapter 2 discusses the main theories informing this study along with a review of some previous studies regarding the relationship between language, religion, culture, identity and study abroad. This will be discussed in three main sections; the first section provides an overview of the poststructuralist framework on identity which guided this study and the main theories that have informed that framework. The second section provides a review of the concept of cultural identity; as national and religious, in an intercultural context. The last section provides a review of the current relevant studies on study abroad starting of international students from Western and Asian countries. This is followed by studies of Muslim international students and ending with studies of Saudi students abroad.

Chapter 3 contextualises this research: it introduces the concepts of nation, nationalism, and what makes a nation. It also discusses the relationship between nationalism and religion in general and in the context of Saudi Arabia to understand where these women come from and how their identities were shaped before coming to Australia. It will also discuss the current situation in Saudi, the changes happening and the plans for the future. Lastly it will discuss the role of English in redefining the Saudi nation. This context of the study hopefully will help the reader to understand the closed society of Saudi Arabia, the uncommon relationship between religion and the state in Saudi Arabia, and how the scholarship program is so overtly nation-building.

Chapter 4 discusses the methodological choices made throughout this project; the research design, participant recruitment, where and how data was collected and the position of the researcher. This chapter also includes a brief description of quantitative data collected

through a pilot study which was intended to be used as a guide for major trends, to inform the interview questions and find participants for the interviews.

Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8 present the narratives of my four case studies Arwa, Deema, Belle and Leen respectively. Out of the 12 participants, these four were chosen as they represented different parts of Saudi which brought about different perspectives of the Saudi society and different religious beliefs. They also provided detailed answers to the interview questions and were happy to keep in contact in the future for any questions or explanations.

Each chapter is divided into three main sections; the first one explores the participant's background, her experiences with learning the English language as a child and young adult, her attitudes toward English and the social factors that influenced these attitudes, and her reasons to study abroad. Understanding their previous experiences will help us understand their experience in Australia and its impact on their lives and identities. The second section explores the participant's experience of study in Australia and the role of language in her life inside and outside home. It also explores the personal, social and cultural change each one is witnessing in Australia; how their views of Australia and its people have changed and how their life in Australia has developed their personality and empowered them, and the effects on their religious and national identities. The third section explores their future views on their lives after returning to Saudi and how they are willing to make a change in the society and the family.

Chapter 9 is the conclusion chapter. It discusses the four case studies and shows similarities and differences between them and highlights major findings. It also discusses the implications and limitations of the research including suggested areas of further exploration.

In the next chapter, I go over some theories and studies which are reviewed in this work to better understand the experiences of this group of Saudi students and the effects on their identities.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

In this section I discuss the poststructuralist approach to identity construction and language learning, which is the approach I take in this study. I also explore Bourdieu's theory, which considers language as a form of capital, and a source of power that determines who is construed as a legitimate speaker, by using this theory I explore the positions language learners take within different social contexts. I also use Norton's notion of 'investment' to investigate the complex relationship between power, identity, and language learning, and how such investment is influenced by the unequal power relations which in turn affect people's positions in social settings. I also explain the way language learners imagine their positions in the host/home society or in their desired community and how that imagination might affect the way they position themselves and others in the L2 speaking community, as imagination is their first step to start new experiences which would change the way they position themselves with the real world. I discuss how different subject positions contribute to the overall identity of the participants. So in the present study, I try to bring together the ongoing conversation of identity formation and positioning in study abroad research.

I then explain the use of an Islamic feminist lens to understand the religious identity of the Saudi women to explain their reasons and justifications of the changes they encounter while studying abroad.

The last section provides a review of the current relevant studies on study abroad starting of international students from various countries. This is followed by studies of Muslim international students and ending with studies of Saudi students abroad.

2.2. Identity

Identity is not a simple term. It was introduced into the social sciences in the 1950s and is still difficult to define. This is due to the fact that identity, which is centred within the self, is believed to be socially constructed and dynamic (Peirce, 1995; Tajfel, 1974). Identity is also believed to be constructed, maintained, and negotiated through language (Norton, 1997; Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004). Identity is, when defined very broadly, the set of beliefs, assumptions and meanings attached to the roles that an individual embodies. Identities are not static or immutable, but are situationally dependent (Stets & Burke, 2003). Identities are constructed and performed in response to various social and temporal conditions. These identities are constructed and performed at an individual level, and there are multiple further layers of identity (Block, 2009). An individual holds a gender identity, a racial identity, an ethnic or national identity, a cultural identity, an identity connected to their age, their job and their social class etc., and each of these identities is bound to one another. The way that the individual makes meaning of and performs the role of mother, for example, is inextricable from their cultural identity, which is itself often inextricable from class, national and ethnic identity (Block, 2009). Identity within this understanding is a not static as promoted by early twentieth century anthropological theories of identity. Instead, it is mutable, multiple and defined by constantly changing contexts (Norton, 2013). Identity is inherently expressed and understood as a social concept.

There are two theoretical lenses through which the SLA researcher can view social identity. The structural approach assumes that "society" is essentially a stable and unchanging and made up of social structures (Block, 2007). These structures are commonly made up of binary oppositions such as male/female, rich/poor, black/white which assume that identity is fixed within certain categories (Stets & Burke, 2003). The second approach is the post-structural, which critiques the structural approach by interrogating the oppositions that make up social

structures, and problematising the ways that individuals continually negotiate and renegotiate their identities in changing social and temporal contexts. Identity in this approach is fragmented and constantly contested (Block, 2007).

Moreover, post-structuralism offers a lens through which to explore the ways in which power is negotiated, reinforced and challenged through the performance and construction of personal identities, particularly within socio-historical contexts (Norton, 2013). In particular, understanding the role of power in identity construction and performance allows researchers to understand the ways in which identities are limited within specific contexts (McKinney & Norton, 2011). It is for this reason that post-structural theories have been prominent in SLA research concerning identity. As learners are exposed to and learn a second language, they are forced to renegotiate their identities in relation to both the first and second language. When that language is English, there are particular socio-historical power relationships that must also be negotiated, which are often connected to ethnic and national identity and experiences of colonialism and cultural colonialism (Higgins, 2009). Post-structuralist approaches therefore offer a useful lens through which to understand the relationship between SLA and identity, and the ways in which SLA mediates identity construction and negotiation (Mckinney & Norton, 2011). Therefore, post-structuralist theories will underpin this literature review.

This covers the definition of identity for the needs and understandings of this research. Focusing on its multifaceted nature, identity will be explored by looking at the social identity theory, as well as the influences of language, power and agency, and finally concluding by discussing imagined communities and investment.

2.3. Social identity theory

It is important to talk about social identity theory as it provides a useful psychological model

of the overall relevance of identity to the way people live their lives. It also helps understand the complex and changing nature of identity belonging and affiliation, and how they affect people's behaviour. The current study is drawing on a poststructuralist perspective, which considers the social identity theory as a foundational concept in understanding identity, to show how social identities evolve, change and intersect.

Identity is mutable, multifaceted and not just simply self-constructed, as an individual is never away of the influence of their surroundings. It is how an individual interacts with others and then understands the self within the larger social influences. Therefore, how an individual identifies themselves is highly dependent on the surrounding social contexts (Howard, 2000). Thus, to answer the questions "who I am?" and "what is my relationship to the world?", social identity theory (Tajfel, 1974; Tajfel & Turner, 1992) provides a useful model for understanding the identity development through interactions and the creation of ties with several social groups. Those social groups that the individual belong to will deeply impact their life experiences and the way they behave in different social contexts. The social identity theory then shows identity as a social process (Tajfel & Turner, 1992), something that constantly develops as one grows and interacts, and not something one has per se.

Social identity theory focuses on a person's sense of who they are in terms of their group membership(s), which means that a person can belong to one or more groups at the same time (Tajfel & Turner, 1992). Therefore, an individual may develop several selves that relate to different group memberships triggered by several social settings. Thus, the relationship between the self and group membership(s) can also answer the question of "Who I am?".

The different groups (e.g., social class, family, nationality etc.) which individuals belong to are a central source of their pride and self-esteem. As these groups give their members a sense of belonging to the social world, a sense of social identity.

Within the social identity theory, individuals define their identities in two main aspects:

personal, which is defined by the characteristic traits and idiosyncratic attributes that distinguish an individual from the others (the "I"), and social, which is defined by membership in various social groups along with the values attached to those memberships (the "we") (Tajfel, 1974).

Social identity theory posits that identity develops through the continuing interaction and participation in society. This process starts from a very young age through adaptation of culture, awareness of the different statuses and relationships within a society, and adherence to the different roles prescribed by that society. It is formed through engaging in a way of being and trying to find a place in the society. Identity is described as dynamic because it is socially constructed and because the social values and attitudes of a community may change over time, and people can join different communities throughout their lives. Identity as Norton (1997) puts it, is the way individuals understand themselves across time and space; hence, it is changing and growing, and it allows people to continue to create new relationships with the world.

The current study is using a poststructuralist approach, which considers the social identity theory as a foundational concept in understanding identity. Also another important basis to this poststructuralist lens of identity is the work of Bourdieu.

2.4. Bourdieu's approach of power

Bourdieu's theory gives us a way of understanding the positions the Saudi women take as language learners within different social contexts. By considering language as a form of capital, which is defined as a source of power, that determines who is construed as a legitimate speaker. This theory informs later post-structuralist work on language and identity, in the way that it considers the role of unequal power relations among the social agents,

which is important to the framework of this study.

. In his theory Bourdieu introduced different concepts that contribute to the study of language, power and social relations. Some of these concepts which are related to this study will be discussed below: field, habitus and capital.

One of the important concepts in Bourdieu's sociology is the idea of 'fields', which are the various social arenas in which people as 'social agents' express their dispositions, and where they manoeuvre in pursuit of different kinds of capital (Jackson, 2008). A field is a network, a set of social relationships which, for example, can be intellectual, religious, educational or cultural (Navarro, 2006). In these fields, people often assume different social positions where they experience power differently depending on the values and worldviews which determine the importance of 'the social agents' at a given moment (Jackson, 2008, p. 23). This means that the field, i.e. context, can influence one's habitus. Moncrieffe (2006) believed that Bourdieu's theory can help to understand "the tensions and contradictions that arise when people encounter and are challenged by different contexts. His theory can be used to explain how people can resist power and domination in one [context] and express complicity in another" (p. 37). She used his theory in her study of Ugandan women, where she showed how fields can help explain power differentials that women experience in public and private spheres. Moncrieffe showed how her participant has authority in public but is submissive to her husband when at home (Moncrieffe, 2006, p. 37). This shows how the distribution of power is different between men and women in different social fields, and how they are socialised to behave differently in different fields.

Power for Bourdieu is culturally, socially and symbolically created, and continuously re-legitimised through an interplay of agency and structure. For this to happen, Bourdieu has thoroughly re-interpreted habitus as the concept referring to the socialised norms, values, skills, habits, styles, tastes, beliefs and customs which are shared by specific groups,

societies, or nations. This 'set of dispositions' in turn controls the behaviour and ways of thinking of the individuals 'social agents' in 'social exchanges' (Bourdieu, 1991). Habitus, hence, is created in a social context through a social, rather than an individual, process. This process leads to patterns that are continuable and transformable between social contexts. Which means that habitus "is not fixed or permanent and can be changed under unexpected situations or over a long historical period" (Navarro, 2006, p. 16). Habitus is the creation of the interplay between social agents and structures. It is shaped by past events that shape the current practices which form individuals' perceptions (Bourdieu, 1984). This means that habitus is created and recreated unconsciously, without any conscious concentration (Bourdieu, 1984). The Saudi students, for example, were socialised into particular ways of living their life in Saudi, i.e., ways of dressing, thinking, building attitudes and beliefs (their Saudi culture), so according to Bourdieu, when they change their field, come to Australia, their habitus unconsciously change as they change their lifestyle and develop new ways of thinking, i.e., their culture changes. The new field however is temporary, and these students are going back to their old field with newly gained habitus which might shape their life after returning.

Bourdieu also developed the concept of 'social capital', arguing that it forms the basis of social life and determines people's positions within the social hierarchy. For Bourdieu, the more capital one has, the more powerful position one occupies in social life. He extended the idea of capital beyond the concept of materialistic assets, i.e., economic capital, to one that might be social, cultural or symbolic (Bourdieu, 1986). These different forms of capital can be equally important and can be transferred from one field to another (Navarro, 2006, p. 17). For Bourdieu, social capital refers to resources based on group membership, relationship, network of influence and support (e.g., contacts that are important for social and career advancement) (Jackson, 2008, p. 26).

His concept of cultural capital refers to the collection of symbolic elements such as tastes, clothing, manners, academic qualifications that an individual obtains through being a part of a particular social group. Sharing similar forms of cultural capital with others—for example, a degree from a certain university—creates a sense of a shared identity and a group position. Bourdieu also shows how the "social order is progressively inscribed in people's minds" through "cultural products" which include systems of education, language, judgements, values, methods of classification and activities of everyday life (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 471). which can cause an unconscious acceptance of social differences, hierarchies and inequalities, which in turn lead to "a sense of one's place" and behaviours of self-exclusion (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 141).

In Bourdieu's sociology, he argued that language can be a significant source of power, as the language someone uses is linked to their positioning in a social context (Bourdieu, 1991). So, the concept of capital can be used to analyse the inequalities in social contexts, as in linguistic exchanges where different varieties of a language are used, which in turn tend to reinforce speakers' positions in different contexts. This led Bourdieu to formulate the concept of "legitimate language" to explain how language practises and discourse (e.g., standardised forms of speech used by the dominant group) are legitimatised in specific social condition which reinforce their authority (Bourdieu, 1991). For example, Saudi students with high level of English proficiency (linguistic capital) which bring about prestige (symbolic capital) in a Saudi context; however, when abroad these students realise that they are not equally placed with native speakers and that they hold a subordinate position and lose their symbolic capital, i.e., the right to be listened to. In other words, members of a certain society possess a kind of cultural, linguistic and symbolic capital, but the capital that some members of society possess is not always seen as the correct capital or the capital that is most valued (Bourdieu, 1991). Thus, a person's role and position in the society gives them the right to speak or make certain

utterances in particular contexts. This means that someone's symbolic capital is, in fact, an indicator of their social identity in a given context.

Through Bourdieu's theory, which considers language as a form of capital, and a source of power that determines who is construed as a legitimate speaker, we can explore language learners' identity and positions within a social context.

2.5. Language and identity

Poststructuralist models of identity were not routinely incorporated into SLA research until the 1990s, but they have been enthusiastically embraced since Bonny Norton Peirce's seminal (1995) paper on social identity, investment and language learning. Here she argued that contemporary models of SLA saw language learners and language learning contexts as being separate variables and failed to consider the interactions between learners and contexts. Thus, SLA research until that point had failed to understand the significance of social identity to L2 learning or the role that power relations have to play in social contexts of language learning (Norton, 2012; Peirce, 1995). Norton went on to pioneer the application of post-structural theories of identity and linguistics to SLA.

Poststructuralist approaches see language use as a site of identity construction because word choices, phrasing, grammar and phonology all act to create and communicate meaning about who or what an individual is, their class, gender, ethnicity, sexuality and so on (Pavlenko, 2002). Language use is, therefore, an act of constant struggle, fragmentation and movement. For speakers of a second language, use of their L2 is a continuous struggle between their self-chosen identities in L1 and others' attempts to position them differently (Pavlenko, 2002). When learners use their L2, they are positioned as 'learners' and given new identities that may conflict with their own self-perception (Altamimi, 2014).

The use of language, either L1 or L2, is therefore not an objective act, but a subjective one

that requires the negotiation of identity, the negotiation of power structures and struggles to form and engage with meanings within multifarious discourse communities. Learning a L2 is therefore not simply a matter of learning vocabulary and grammar, but of engaging with power struggles and the construction of new identities (Block, 2009). To address this, and to build more holistic and useful models of SLA, researchers have undermined the traditional theories of language learning motivation that tended to be applied to explain why language learners failed and have developed "investment" as a construct that is more suited to post-structuralist theories of SLA (Norton, 2013). Investment was developed by Bonny Norton Peirce, who aimed to address the fact that in empirical research plenty of learners who appeared to be highly motivated to learn a L2 were still failing, and many highlighted a perceived power imbalance between themselves as L2 learners and L2 speakers (Peirce, 1995).

2.6. Investment

Some theoretical concepts such as investment and imagined communities (next section) have become influential concepts that have furthered our understanding of language learners' identity. Norton's notion of 'investment' is used in this study to investigate the complex relationship between power, identity, and language learning, and how it is influenced by the unequal power relations which in turn affect Saudi women's positions in social settings. It is also used to explore how investment can relate to the ways of one view their identity.

Drawing on Bourdieu's (1991) notion of cultural capital, Norton explained that investment stresses the efforts learners put into learning a language with the expectation of acquiring a wider range of tangible (e.g., real estate, money, capital goods) and intangible (e.g., language, education, friendship) resources which will increase the value of their cultural capital and social power (Norton, 2000). Investment, according to Norton, can capture the complex

relationship between power, identity and language learning. She argues that investment is influenced by the unequal power relations experienced by language learners, as it can signal "the socially and historically constructed relationship of the women [language learners] to the target language and their sometimes-ambivalent desire to learn and practice it" (Peirce, 1995, p. 17).

In other words, investment in language learning can explain how relations of power can limit the opportunities for language learners to speak and use the target language. It, as Darvin and Norton (2015) put it, "lay[s] bare what is becoming increasingly invisible" (p. 41). This illustrates how learners are often positioned in unequal ways due to the invisible forces of power inherent in different sites (p. 37). For example, research has demonstrated that English language learners in multilingual classrooms are sometimes afraid of being corrected, criticised or laughed at if they try to use English as an L2, and so they remain silent, as is seen in research concerning Saudi women studying abroad (Ahmed, 2016; Altamimi, 2014). This is not a lack of motivation, but a fear that is related to a power dynamic between learners and L2 speakers. They are therefore not invested in practicing English in what they perceive to be a hostile classroom context, surrounded by speakers who have a higher cultural capital than themselves (Altamimi, 2014).

Investment, therefore, understands the learner as having a social identity that is being constructed in their learning and use of their L2, a social identity that is tied to their personal and cultural history, their existing identities, their multiple and shifting desires around, and perceptions of the L2 (Norton, 2013).

Norton Peirce (1995) believes that the complexity, multiplicity, discontinuity and social nature of the identity of a language learner led to a struggle in learning, and changing over time. This means that a language learner's investment in learning L2 is changeable because their view of capital resources of learning that language is also changing. In other words,

since identity is multiple, complex and a site of struggle, investment is also complex, contradictory, and fluid.

Investment also helps learners reorganise and negotiate a sense of who they are. In this regard Norton Peirce (1995) states that:

> When language learners speak, they are not only exchanging information with the target language speakers, but they are constantly organising and reorganising a sense of who they are and how they relate to the social world. Thus, an investment in the target language is also an investment in a learner's own identity (p. 17-18).

Investment also can be considered as both the source and outcome of learners' identity. It means that learners' ways of viewing their identity relate to the ways they invest, their investment in response changes their existing identities and self-perceptions, which enables future investments. For example, when a shy female international student successfully invests in a discussion with L2 speakers, her experience can lead to a renegotiation of her sense of self. Her investment in return can bring more confidence and legitimacy to her negotiated self and hence facilitate future investments.

The concept of investment brings about discussions of the role of future possibilities in the students' identity formation. In this regard Kanno and Norton (2003) draw the attention to the role of the learner's imagined community and imagined identity in facilitating investment. A language learner's affiliation with different imagined communities is driven by their aspiration for their future selves. It is important to note that imagination here does not mean unachievable fantasies or impossible wishes, but they are hopeful imaginations that inform the anticipation for a better future (Simon, 1992 as cited in Kanno & Norton, 2003). Kanno and Norton (2003) draw a distinction between 'wishes' and 'hopeful imagination', where the former represents imagination without possible actions, and the latter represents possible struggles in the future. The learner's imagined communities transcend time and space and go beyond the realm of their immediate communities. Kanno and Norton (2003) claim that a

learner's investment in language learning grows stronger in imagined communities than in their current wider community. Hence, attempting to understand a learner's identity requires understanding their imagined community, not only the current existing one (Kanno & Norton, 2003). This will be discussed in detail in the coming section.

2.7. Imagined communities

'Imagined communities' (B. Anderson, 2006; Norton, 2001) is one of the concepts used in this study to explore the social factors that have shaped the imagined identities of a group of Saudi women, and how these women with varying levels of English language proficiency, varying levels of religious commitment and different cultural background (i.e. different parts of Saudi) imagined themselves in their narratives and in relation to the Australian and the Saudi society. It also explores how their imagined identities impact their language learning, self-representations, their engagement with the host society.

The relationship between identity, imagination, and language learning has become a point of interest in the field of SLA as it allows to deepen our understandings of language learners' experiences (Kim, 2013; Kinginger, 2004; Norton, 2001; Norton & Pavlenko, 2004; Pavlenko & Norton, 2007). In the context of the wider 'social turn' in SLA (Block, 2003), the two theoretical constructs of 'imagined identities' and 'imagined communities' have reached a centre stage in SLA.

The notion of "imagined communities" was introduced by Anderson (1983) to describe the conceptualization of nationhood as being imagined (more detailed information will be provided in section 3.4.). The concept was later adopted by Norton (2001) as her theoretical foundation in which she developed her theory in the context of L2 learning. She proposed that learning should not be restricted to the engagement in immediately accessible communities such as classrooms, but to a greater extent, should involve distant communities

that learners construct through their imagination which would work as a great source for the advancement of the learning process. In this regard, imagination could give the learners the chance to place themselves as members of a desired community. Kim (2013) in her qualitative case study of a Korean graduate student in the U.S. shows how the hopes of gaining membership to an imagined Korean elitist community that may afford high social status and financial success, have helped the student in learning English. For Saudi students abroad, learning English language also plays a role here as it can be the core stone that bring this imagined community together. With the language they can engage with the host society and place themselves in a better position with a better future as language can bring them new possibilities; in Saudi, certain level of English proficiency is a job requirement in many sectors (Alsubaie, 2016). So learning the language can bring them better job opportunities. Language can also show them new perspectives where they can belong; and through language they can culturally open up to the world, share their experiences and build connection with different people in the host society and around the world. Language can also add new meanings to their lives, as through language they can understand themselves and the world differently.

Drawing on the work of Anderson, the concepts of imagination, identity construction and learning were combined by Wenger (1999). Imagination is considered to be a crucial part of the identity that helps people to learn and get involved in a certain community (Wenger, 1999). For him imagination is "a process of expanding our self by transcending our time and space and creating new images of the world and ourselves. Imagination in this sense is looking at an apple seed and seeing a tree" (p. 176). People can use imagination to place themselves in the world and in history, they can imagine their identities to include "other meanings, other possibilities, other perspectives" which lead to create a sense of belonging (Wenger 1999, p. 187). Recently the concept of imagined community, which includes the

imaginary existing communities and people in the present, has been expanded to include imaginary communities that might exist in the future (Seilhamer, 2013).

So once people build an attachment to an imagined community, they "engage in active attempts to reshape the surrounding contexts" (Pavlenko, 2003, p. 266), to reach that community. This imagined community involves their extended identity, which is their future image that directs their present actions to certain commitments and investments, like learning L2 or participation in a certain society. Thus, they develop a sense of belonging to their imagined community which might exist in a school, language club, workplace, certain society or any social form that desire the same cultural product even if it was not exited yet. The hopes and dreams of the future impact the actions and perceptions of people while they are still grounded in the present (Seilhamer, 2013). Here an imagined community is no less than a real one (Kanno & Norton, 2003). For example, in the mind of every Saudi, home or abroad, there is this unique imagined community that they relate to, with imagined members of that community who share the same qualification, second language and their experience of study abroad. With the current changes in the country, their imagination can take them to different places where they have a fruitful future.

To explore the imagined communities of language learners, we need to investigate their identities, as they are no longer viewed as fixed constructs, instead identities are recognised to be multiple, fluid, subject to change and a site of struggle (Norton, 2000), and are believed to emerge through interactions (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005).

Much research has stressed the influential guiding power of imagination in identity negotiations and language learning (Norton, 2001; Kinginger, 2004; Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004; Pavlenko & Norton, 2007). It has been contended that new identities are born when people reimagine their positions and hence new ways of representing themselves.

This process of identity co-construction is formed through identity negotiation in interactions

(Bucholtz & Hall, 2005), in which learners not only bring their histories and their socialised ways of doing and being (habitus), but their future desires are also linguistically utilised in the present (Block, 2015). This process is not only about how learners imagine themselves, but also how they relate, using language, to social communities, how they are positioned and repositioned by self and others, and how, through interactions, they develop, or not, a sense of legitimacy in the various social, cultural, and linguistic contexts (Block, 2015). The construction of new identities then is an essential process for immigrants and students abroad as they experience the new and changing relationships which is related to their new life in a new country. Once these new identities are constructed individuals can switch between multiple identities to interact effectively in their multiple worlds (Norton, 2014).

In this globalised world and through mobility, people have more opportunities to interact with others from different cultures which lead them to develop a more conscious sense of who they are and where they belong. This means that the relationship between place and identity is becoming increasingly complicated because of cultural globalisation (Hashimoto, 2003). Globalisation can have the effect of contesting and dislocating the centered and 'closed' identities of a national culture. This can have a pluralizing impact on identities, producing a variety of possibilities and new positions of identification, and making identities more positional, more political, more plural and diverse; less fixed, unified or trans-historical (Hall, 1990).

With these multiple identities L2 learners bring together contradictory ways of life through their imagination and redefine who they are within the global community. In other words, they repeatedly transform their cultural norms (Atkinson, 1999) and develop cultural hybridity which "gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognizable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation" (Bhaba, 1990). So their hybrid identity is not necessarily a blend of two or more fixed identities, but rather a new one (Hashimoto,

2003).

However, culture is often viewed as shared between the various individuals of one nation (Atkinson, 1999) and language learners are often assigned a cultural identity which ignores the different constructs and diversity among individual learners (Blackledge & Pavlenko, 2005; Norton, 2000). This results in viewing the learners as typical products of their nations which assign to them certain norms, characteristics, and expectations. Issues like race, ethnicity and religion impact the way images of non-English speakers are constructed, as their identities are being attached to how their race, ethnicity and religion are being presented within the larger contexts and how they are being stereotyped in the media. For example, contrary to the images of Saudi women in Western media as passive, conservative and held back by their religion, Saudi women abroad developed a new gender identity that is supported by their own interpretation of their religion (Song, 2019). This new identity is powerful and active, one that allowed them to participate freely in the host society. Religion here is seen as an assistant to their cultural hybridity and not an obstacle. As religion is a source of power for these Muslim women, they believe that it is suitable for all times and places and there is always room for multiple and more contemporary interpretations of their faith. Most importantly they believe that their religion is there to help them improve and not to hold them back.

Through imagination learners can negotiate stereotyped identities via new practices of self-representations, new ways to build relationships and new means to access the English-speaking society. However, the ways that learners are imagined within a community could expand or limit their chances to get involve in the English-speaking society (Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004). When language learners' cultural traits are presumed to be incompatible with the aspirations of the host community, this would limit their access to the English-speaking community and vice versa, learners might isolate themselves to preserve a desired

imagined identity.

The degree of the participation of language learners in social interactions depends on the function of their imagined identities (Norton, 2001). Investigating the imagined identities of language learners within classrooms, Norton highlights that "extreme acts of non-participation were acts of alignment to preserve the integrity of their imagined identities" (p. 165). That means learners may withdraw from a certain learning context, if they were not allowed to participate in their imagined communities. For example, Kanno and Norton's (2003) study showed the case of the non-participation of Katerina, a Polish immigrant in Canada, who imagined being a member of a community of professionals, similar to her previous community back in Poland. When her ESL teacher discouraged her from taking a computer course, Katerina felt that she was positioned as a mere immigrant and deprived of opportunities to access her imagined community of professionals. She subsequently withdrew from the ESL course. Katerina's withdrawal from the class was a result of the clash between her projected imagined community, the community she wished to join in the future and the perceived identity expectations imposed by her teacher (p. 243). Her nonparticipation then can be interpreted as a form of negotiating and resisting her marginalised status in that cultural sitting. On the other hand, learners can persist in learning the language if they believe that it is a necessity for participation in their imagined communities. Kanno and Norton give the example of Rui, a Japanese student who maintained his Japanese language fluency while living in English speaking countries for most of his life. His persistence was a result of his strong identification with a Japanese imagined community, which gave him motivation and an important sense of direction (p. 243). But on visiting Japan he was disappointed to discover that the "real" Japan was nothing like what he has imagined, which led him to assert that he did not want to be Japanese anymore. These experiences provide a brief illustration of Norton's (2001) general point that language learners' imagined identities control how, when,

where and with whom they interact.

The learners' self-image could empower or disempower them, and expand or limit their participation with the host society. Language learners might invest in certain identities to draw social approval, recognition and affiliation with certain social groups (Norton, 2001). Through the power of imagination, they develop new identities and ways of communicating and representing themselves in an imagined world. So, their investment in learning the language is influenced by their hopes for the person they desire to become in the future rather than their present social contexts. For example, a Saudi student who truly believes that change can happen through language, would likely put more effort in learning the language and socializing with locals while abroad. In this case the belief that doing so will help them in improving their country and contributing to making change, motivates them to push themselves to achieve that imagined position.

The relationship between language learning and imagination is suitable to the theoretical framework of this study as the way language learners imagine their position in the host society or in their desired community would affect the strategies they employ to participate, or not, in L2 speaking community. Imagination gives language learners a basis for starting new experiences which alter the way they position themselves with the real social world.

2.8. Positioning theory

The present study builds on previous SLA positioning studies by examining the links between social positioning and language learning in social and academic interactions outside the classroom, and their role in identity formation, for SA Saudi female students completing a degree abroad. It seeks to examine how positioning mediates learners' access to social interactions and it explains the process of how students' positional identities are constructed and reconstructed across contexts and interactions.

Positioning theory was originally outlined by Davies and Harré (1990), with the aim to examine and explore the system of rights and responsibilities to speak and behave in certain ways when participating in an interaction. This system sets the base for the discursive formation of social positions and positioning (Davies & Harré, 1990; Harré & Van Langenhove, 1999). It was then developed by Harré and Langenhove (1991; 1999) as a framework to investigate discursive identity construction and interpersonal relations. At its core, Positioning theory investigates how individuals discursively position themselves (reflexive) and others (interactive) and respond to this positioning in conversation. A fundamental tenet of positioning theory is that multiple subject positions exist in every social setting and that through interaction "people can adopt, strive to locate themselves in, be pushed into, be displaced from or be refused access" to these positions (Harré & Moghaddam, 2003, p. 6). Therefore, positioning may affect micro and macro levels of communication and social practices.

This theory is useful in dealing with the complexities of identity in interaction in different social contexts. It comprises positions and story lines. These positions that individuals take and story lines that they construct work together and shape their actions and meanings. It also distributes "rights, duties, and responsibilities relative to shared cultural repertoires, which in turn shape who we are. In other words, we have choices of what to say, where, and when (Rex & Schiller, 2009); however, we are not always completely free to make these choices" (Kayı-Aydar, 2019, p. 22). These choices depend on who we are and where we come from and the people we are interacting with. Positioning, hence, is shaped by power relations and different social factors. It helps to understand the dynamic construction of personal identities through social interaction. Therefore, analysing positions and story lines can be a way of exploring individuals' identities.

Positioning is dynamic, fluid and contextually changing "across interactions or scales of

activity" (Anderson, 2009, p. 292). The way individuals position themselves and others in a particular context depends on the moment of interaction and on their relationship with each other. And since positions continue to be constructed and reconstructed in and through conversation, they are always in flux. Positions are also negotiable, as before a position is determined there is always the possibility to question it and resist it. However, when the positioned individual does not protest or reject a position, they are submitting and confirming to it. Positions, therefore, can explain behaviour that is deviant from expectations and norms (Warren & Moghaddam, 2018, p. 7).

An individual can reveal their identity or be ascribed a new identity in the form of a position in different contexts. When subject positions are assigned to an individual, with time, some of these positions become more salient in someone's way of presenting themselves (Adams, 2011) and they begin to see the world from that position. Davies & Harré (1990, p. 46) explain this point in more detail:

> Once having taken up a particular position as one's own, a person inevitably sees the world from the vantage point of that position and in terms of the particular images, metaphors, storylines and concepts which are made relevant within the particular discursive practice in which they are positioned. At least a possibility of notional choice is inevitably involved because there are many and contradictory discursive practices that each person could engage in.

To illustrate this concept let us consider the example of international students studying in Australia. If they are positioned as 'outsiders' (i.e., non-Australian, temporary-residents, non-native speakers, among others) in the host community, then over time they might start to see the community through this subject position. The community in which they live might become a strange place in which these students feel they may never belong, because the community will not allow them to belong. This in turn may then affect their behaviour, e.g., they would not feel confidant to speak, start conversations or build relationships, which in turn can further reinforce their sense of exclusion.

Positioning theory has been modified by Blackledge and Pavlenko (2004) who provided a conceptual framework for identity negotiation in multilingual settings. They distinguished three types of identities: assumed, imposed and negotiated (Blackledge & Pavlenko, 2004, p. 21). Assumed identity is one accepted by the individual and never challenged, imposed identity is one assigned to the individual that is non-negotiable, negotiable identity is one that the individual can contest and resist. Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004) stated that this negotiation of identities is grounded in Davies and Harré (1990) and Harré and van Langenhove (1999) and must be "understood as an interplay between reflective positioning, i.e., self-presentation and interactive positioning, whereby others attempt to position or reposition particular individuals or groups" (p. 20). These three types of positioned identities can help us understand why some Saudi female students' subject positions are more salient than others in their SA experience, and why some aspects of their identities are more vulnerable and changeable than others.

Positioning hence thoroughly relates to who we are, thus influencing the way we behave and communicate. Members of any social setting, for example a student in a classroom, may shift their identity positions to become a recognised member of and be accepted by particular social groups (Miller, 2000). Therefore, the student's different subject positions (i.e., SA student, neighbour, friend, wife, volunteer etc.) which they may take on during the day might mediate their access to linguistic resources in L2 community, contributing therefore to their overall language learning (Lantolf, 2000); i.e., if they are recognised as members of a given community, they are given access to learning affordances. However, if they are denied access or fail to "be heard representing themselves and enacting social roles in ways that other students can recognise, a degree of exclusion from social interaction seems inevitable" (Miller, 2000, p. 73) like the women in Norton Peirce (1995).

Positioning was first used in SLA research by McKay & Wong (1996) who analysed

students' discursive positionings and the impact of these positionings on the students' language learning outcomes. McKay and Wong urged other researchers to investigate how learners are "both positioned by relations of power and resistant to that positioning" (p. 579). This has led SLA scholars to examine, drawing on Davies and Harré's (1990) positioning theory, how students position themselves (reflexive positioning) and others (interactive positioning) in ways that eventually might impact their learning (Anderson, 2009; Blackledge & Pavlenko, 2004; De Costa, 2011; Kayi-Aydar, 2014; Miller, 2004; Norton, 2000).

Duff (2002) provides a clear example of how positioning theory can be fruitfully deployed in SLA in her classroom-based study in a multilingual secondary school in Canada. Duff stated that the teacher's different attempts to provide speaking rights and opportunities for the non-local students in the classroom had ambiguous results. This was because many of those students were afraid to be criticised or laughed at because of their limited command of English by English-speaking students in the classroom. They thus avoided oral interaction and remained silent as "silence protected them from humiliation" (p. 312). On the other hand, the non-local students' silence was perceived by the local students as "a lack of initiative, agency, or desire to improve one's English or to offer interesting material for the sake of the class" (p. 312). It was clear that the teacher's efforts to give the non-local students chances to speak contributed to position them in an "awkward" way. And though some students verbally resisted their subordinate positioning, others accepted that position and remained silent. Those silent students were not invested in the language practices of the classroom. They were resisting the teacher's practices which was affected by the unequal power relations and positioned them less than the local English-speaking students.

The use of positioning theory in applied linguistics research is quite recent and still limited. The theory's strong focus on social context, interaction and identities, helps in understanding the nature of SLA multilingual contexts. This is important because "second language learning

goes beyond acquiring the grammar rules, lexicon, and phonology of the target language. It is a social phenomenon embedded in the social context and cultural knowledge required for appropriate language use" (Kayı-Aydar, 2019, p. 44). Pennycook (1990) supports this by arguing that SLA must be evaluated in "its social, cultural, [and] political contexts, taking into account gender, race, and other relations of power as well as the notion of the subject as multiple and formed within different discourses" (p. 26). Indeed, individuals bring along several, sometimes contradicted, discourses which position themselves in story lines and narratives that involve race, class, and gender (Kayı-Aydar, 2019).

Positioning theory is compatible with the post-structural understanding of SLA. Its focus on participation, social contexts and identities can help to allow a better understanding of how L2 learning happens in different social contexts (Kayı-Aydar, 2019). However, despite the growing number of studies that apply the positioning theory in SLA research, the theory has been mainly applied in the language-learning classroom settings. For example, De Costa (2011) used positioning theory to investigate the impact of positions and language beliefs on the learning outcomes of an immigrant ESL student from China in a Singaporean secondary school. She employed positioning theory in the language classroom. She stated that learners' positioning can either facilitate or restrict their access to meaningful language experiences and opportunities.

Studies applying positioning theory to SLA outside the classroom – as I do in this thesis – remain relatively rare. This includes one of the best-known works in the field: Norton's (2000) study of identity development of immigrant women in Canada.

We see a taste of Norton's approach and findings in her case study of Martina, an English language learner who had immigrated to Canada to find a better life for her children. Martina struggled to find work in her desired profession and was employed in a restaurant, where she struggled in social interaction with her co-workers. Her struggle stemmed from her position

as a dehumanised “broom” which she resisted. She reframed her professional relationship with her co-workers into a domestic one and claimed a different position as “mother” which allowed her to speak (p. 99).

This demonstrates how L2 learners can, even if not always, appropriate more desirable identities with respect to the L2 community. The distribution of power in the social world affected Martina’s access to the L2 community, and her opportunities to speak. However, Martina claimed the right to speak by changing her subject positions which can be encountered as communicative competence (Norton 2000).

Martina was highly motivated; however, she was not invested in the language practices of her workplace. Her hopes for the future are integral to her identity. So for her, the L2 community is not only a reconstruction of past communities, but a desired imagined community that offers possibilities for an enhanced range of identity options in the future. An imagined community assumes an imagined identity, and a learner’s investment in that identity can encourage them to take on different subject positions that take them closer to that imagined identity.

Eva, contrary to Martina, accepted and absorbed the subject position of an immigrant in the workplace, which is why nobody acknowledged her presence. Eva considered herself as somebody who is not fluent in English. She referred to herself as “not Canadian” and “stupid,” and someone who had “the worst type of work” (p. 24) among the others in the workplace. She could not speak under such conditions. She accepted that she was not a legitimate speaker of English, hence, could not make her interlocutors listen to her. She put herself in that position the moment she arrived in Canada, as she assumed that if she was treated with disrespect, it is all on her and her own limitations. So whatever happened to her, and however she was treated, was considered as normal and accepted by Eva. However, the moment Eva’s sense of who she was, and how she related to the social world started to

change, she started to resist her subject position in her workplace and see herself as a legitimate speaker of English (Norton, 2000, p. 24).

So, some of the factors that might impact the positioning of an individual in a social context is their racial, ethnical and cultural backgrounds, social status and gender. It is also influenced by their shared histories or differences (Davies & Harré, 1990). Miller (2004) conducted a qualitative study in Australia on the assimilation of two groups of high school students of different backgrounds. Miller compared the integration of Chinese and Bosnian students within the school setting by looking at their 'visibility' and 'audibility'. Her study showed that, even though they arrived at the same time, the blond, white Bosnian girls were easily accepted by the teachers and peers and positioned as eligible speakers of English. On the other hand, the Chinese students were mostly excluded from the school social interactions and positioned as inaudible, which prevent them from the chance to develop independent voices. Due to their lack of linguistic skills, the Chinese students could not resist this interactive positioning, and when they could not reposition themselves, they were not empowered to speak. These race-based positionings make a major impact on the way language learners access the English-speaking society, get the chance to practise L2, and develop an audible voice within the host society (Miller, 2004). This is supported by Blackledge & Pavlenko (2004) who argued that "if students are to negotiate their identities in school settings, they need access to spoken interactions with English speakers in which their voices are heard, and their identities seen as usable capital in the first place" (p. 312).

Another study in South Africa has provided a different set of insights into issues of race with respect to language learning and speaking. McKinney (2007) investigated the language practices of black South African students in a high school that used to only enrol white students. The study showed how black students had sophisticated understandings of themselves and others in relation to different "brands" of English as well as to the use of local

African languages. Despite eleven languages being official in South Africa, it was English that is considered the language of power. And although black students who were acquiring a prestigious variety of English were positioned as 'becoming white', they resisted that positioning and showed awareness of the cultural capital they can gain by acquiring different varieties of English and local languages. They have demonstrated that they were learning English for their own uses rather than identifying with white people who spoke that variety of English.

When telling a story, people take on certain interactional positions and when acting like a person in that position, they become more like that kind of a person (p. 9). As people engage in the act of narrating their life experiences, they become interpreters of these experiences which position them as agents who are responsible for shaping their own experiences (Cortazzi, 1994). This narrating then shows the ways learners present or negotiate multiple identities. And when analysing their narratives, we can understand how they perceive themselves in relation to the language, social environment and other people. Do they position themselves as legitimate members of the language community? Do they consider themselves as eligible English users? The way they position themselves will affect their social interactions.

Through telling stories, individuals reshape themselves, situate themselves in stories, and respond to various characters and individuals in the past, present, or future (Frank, 2012). Frank (2012) states that "stories provide an imaginative space in which people can claim identities, reject identities, and experiment with identities" (p. 45).

In this project, the focus will be on the Saudi female students abroad and how previous assumptions of their culture can attribute to their positioning and in what way would they accept or resist those positions with no regards to who is the one placing them in that position, e.g., Saudis or Australians.

2.8.1. Positioning theory in the current project

As positioning theory enables us to examine the process of students' identity formation, and to investigate how cultural and linguistic resources shaped their positioning acts and how different aspects of their positions are adjusted across multiple, interrelated contexts and social boundaries (Anderson, 2009). Through the lens of positioning theory, the life experiences of the women of this study and the meanings attached to their cultural, social and religious positions will be analysed and represented in a way that respects the complexity of their contexts, experiences, and attitudes. This will be done through tracing the multiple identity positions they revealed within the different events of their lives.

Though positioning research often looks at recordings of naturally occurring conversations, in my study, it will be applied to semi-structured interviews which were conducted in a natural setting and were not scripted or edited. While less common, such an approach has precedent in the work of Norton (e.g., 2000) as well as more recently (Alsufyan, 2020; Miller, 2004; Plews, 2015). The theory is mainly applied at two levels of positioning: the narratives and reports that participants shared with the researcher, about how they have been positioned in interactions, and the positioning work that the participants and the researcher do in the interviews themselves.

In the present study, the positioning of Saudi the women was explored. In Saudi, women positioning was affected mainly, among other factors, by their home society and culture. The situation of Saudi women and their position abroad was affected by their previous position in which they are to maintain an ideal image of Saudi womanhood. That image entails different positions: a traditional woman, segregated and restricted from public participation, dependent on men, shy, modest, and quiet in the presence of men. There was no space for debating this imposed position in Saudi and women were not able to resist the authority of the society, which makes shyness and fear of judgment aspects of their imposed gender identity position

(Song, 2019). This imposed position has been based on traditional cultural practices that are mistakenly linked to religion in Saudi and have been wrongfully reinforced as a religious base for being a good Muslim woman. However, though some Saudi women resist this imposed position and celebrate becoming more independent and socially active during their study abroad, they also worry about criticism they may receive for breaking gender rules, which make them look less Saudi or even less Muslim (Alhazmi & Nyland, 2013). Moreover, the presence of Saudi males abroad increases this worry and puts extra pressure on Saudi women to accept this imposed position which, even abroad, limit their participation and force them to be silent (Song, 2019).

Drawing on positioning theory (Blackledge & Pavlenko, 2004; Davies & Harré, 1990; Harré & Langenhove, 1991; Harré & Van Langenhove, 1999; J. Miller, 2004; Norton, 2000), this study investigates how, through conversations with the researcher, Saudi female students position themselves and others, resist being positioned by others, and reposition themselves.

In this section we discussed the poststructuralist approach to identity construction and language learning, the approach taken in this study. Then, links between poststructuralism and subject positioning have been made as follows:

- Through Bourdieu's theory, which considers language as a form of capital, and a source of power that determines who is construed as a legitimate speaker, we can explore language learners' positions within a social context.
- Norton's notion of 'investment' can be used to investigate the complex relationship between power, identity, and language learning, and is influenced by the unequal power relations which in turn affect people's positions in social settings.
- The way language learners imagine their position in the host/home society or in their desired community would affect the way they position themselves and others in the L2 speaking community, as imagination is their first step to start new experiences

which would change the way they position themselves with the real world.

- Different subject positions contribute to the overall identity of the participants.
- Positioning is relevant to my participants' experiences as narrated in their interviews with the researcher and to their self-presentations in different social settings.
- Identities are created in and by narratives. It is through these narratives that we position people or position ourselves.

So in the present study, I investigate the construction of identity Saudi women and their positioning in study abroad.

2.9. Identity and intercultural development in study abroad

In this study, the focus is on the experiences of international students who moved from their home culture (Saudi Arabia), where they are considered as the ethnic majority, to the host culture (Australia), where they are an ethnic minority. Hence it is important to explore the current understandings of the constructs of culture, cultural identity and their intersections. It is also important to explore the development of the learners' intercultural identity as they cross cultures and the role of English as a second language in their intercultural development. In this section I discuss the different approaches to culture, i.e., post-modern in contrast with positivist approach.

the positivist approach to culture which can explain the norms, laws, customs and beliefs that can control people's behavior and ways they position themselves in the world. while the post-modern approach to culture which state that every individual has their own unique culture which is changing and evolving through time and place. I see Culture as a post-modern construct. However, some of my participants take a positive stance – at least at times, so I look at both.

In this my participants are similar to those in Amadasi and Holliday (2017) study on

postgraduate students newly arrived to study abroad from a particular national origin about their intercultural experiences during the first weeks abroad. Amadasi and Holliday looked at how stories about culture and cultural identity can be multiple and competing depending on how people position themselves in interaction, sometimes creating essentialist blocks and at other times drawing non-essentialist threads.

In the present study, I try to bring together a conversation between these two approaches to explain how international students, in this study Saudi women, construct their identity between the large culture of Saudi/ Australia and their own imagined small culture that they believe is unique to them and the way they position themselves.

2.9.1. Culture and identity

Defining culture is difficult. Some might use it to refer to something fixed and permanent, something that explains people's behaviour. Others consider culture as something emerging and evolving, something that people create, adapt to and make their own. According to Holliday (2000) there are two major perspectives on culture: essentialist (positivist) and non-essentialist (interpretive). From an essentialist perspective, culture is defined as "a concrete social phenomenon which represents the essential character of a particular nation" (Holliday, 2000, p. 38). On the other hand, the non-essentialist views culture as "a movable concept used by different people at different times to suit purposes of identity, politics, and science" (Holliday, 2000, p. 38). Holiday and many other recent scholars reject essentialism and cultural overgeneralization, and acknowledge cultural diversity within a nation (Holliday, 2000). I share a non-essentialist view, but essentialist views are quite common in Saudi, so part of the thesis is about engaging with some of that discourse.

For a long time, people equated cultures with larger notions of nationality, ethnicity and race (Holliday, 1999). Many people still believe that the large culture which equates nationality is the correct one and that small culture, i.e., social groups such as the academic community, is

just metaphorical (Holliday, 1999, p. 238). Tylor (1871) talks about culture as the "complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man [sic] as a member of society" (p. 1). This acquisition of beliefs results from the surroundings and is a process of learning from their group. Hence, people's behaviour results from this learning of and passing down of beliefs and values of their group. Therefore, culture becomes a causative agent that controls behaviour. Tylor here holds a positivistic view to culture as he reduced the notion of culture to a predetermined set of values that people take in from their society without considering people's choice, experience, and agency. So culture, as defined here is a way of life that involve structures of power, can be an alternative to Bourdieu's notion of field, and habitus bridges the agency of individuals and the structure of culture (Cargile, 2011).

The positivist approach to culture as equal to nationality assumes that people who belong to a particular nation share the same past and have shared experiences. As a result, they must share similar worldviews, values, and beliefs. In such a framework it is assumed that all Saudis, for example, are similar. In this thesis, however, culture will be discussed as a phenomenon which is fluid, dynamic and ever evolving. It will be discussed as something that is determined by what people do with it and can be applied to today's globalized world (Street, 1993). In this thesis I argue that not all Saudis are similar.

Culture according to Holliday (2018) can be constructed on a daily basis. As a small culture then could be made and negotiated when people come together, by accepting, rejecting, remaking, breaking, passing by etc. (Holliday, 2018, p. 3). So every member of a society has their own culture which has been obtained from their own cultural group. And even if two people live the same culture, this does not necessarily mean that they have the same cultural identity as cultural identities are extremely complex and it is impossible to assign cultural identities to a specific culture (Holliday, 2010). Every individual cultural identity has its own

habitus which consists of different components such as religion, language, class, dress, political attitudes, education, ancestry, profession, activities, skin colour, family, food, skills, friends, community, region and discourses (Holliday, 2010). And this in turn controls individual behaviour and ways of thinking.

Similar to habitus, which is changing in different situations or over time (Navarro, 2006), cultural identity is also developed through the many intersections a person faces throughout the different stages of socialisation in their lives, which include home, school, friends, colleagues, technology, life experiences, etc. When these intersections meet within a certain individual, they create a unique culture which is continuously changing depending on the different social situations a person finds themselves in. In this regard (Geertz, 1973) states:

> Culture provides the link between what people are intrinsically capable of becoming and what they actually, one by one, in fact become. Becoming human is becoming individual, and we become individual under guidance of cultural patterns, historically created systems of meaning in terms of which we give form, order, point, and direction to our lives. (p. 52)

Culture then is a changing reality that has roots in many aspects of human experiences. Every society has its own culture which involves knowledge of how to operate in a manner accepted by its members (Goodenough, 1957, cited in Ennaji, 2011, p. 318). However, it is important to note that these acceptable manners are changing through time, which means that what is accepted in a certain time might not be accepted at others. In reality, culture is symbolic and manmade (Geertz, 1973). It is created through the individual and their interactions and relationships with others in certain social contexts, where social values, symbolic tools and information are created and exchanged. Culture cannot exist without individuals, and they are the bearers of their culture. They are also active social agents within it as they create, transmit, transform, and sometimes discard certain cultural qualities. They are the ones holding the cultural system together, as culture is located within the minds of the individuals (Gergen, 1990).

So, individuals are an essential aspect of the culture, their interaction within that culture is even more important. Since individuals can interact with and belong to multiple social groups at the same time, each of these social groups offer different cultural contributions which individuals can choose to adapt to or discard (Gergen, 1990). In these different social groups, there are core cultural values which are reflected at a collective level. These cultural values have an effect on the groups' customs, norms, practices and institutions (Cooper & Denner, 1998), which in turn are manifested in the individuals' behaviours and social actions (Geertz, 1973).

Culture is a system of meanings that is historically transferred between generations, which help individuals to understand their context and learn the appropriate way of how to "communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and their attitudes toward life" (Geertz, 1973, p. 89). Individuals learn about a culture through relationships, language, and symbols. Culture here can be considered as tool of people's adjustment to their environment, as it allows individuals to understand their own behaviour, and guides their expectations and actions (Ogbu, 1990). Culture "can be learned or constructed from what members of a population say (their 'talk') as well as from what they actually do (their 'behaviour' or 'action')" (Ogbu, 1990, p. 523). This means that "a great deal of what people do is culturally shaped in the sense that both the goals and the means to the goals are part of a learned and shared system of understandings about the appropriate things to do" (D'andrade, 1990, p. 65-66).

Hence, to become a recognised member in a society, one must understand the socio-cultural environment of that society, and with increased participation in that society, the individual's identity is also developed by learning to speak and act appropriately. This means that "culture" here is the way people negotiate their multiple identities by participating in everyday activities and relationships as members of a group; it is people's way of making

sense of their lives (Pennycook, 2017). Culture here is more than just being, it is how we engage, learn and do. It is the construction, reconstruction and negotiation of the surrounding contexts which is based on relationships and learning from a collective environment and history (Alsagoff, 2010). This aspect of cultural identity is particularly crucial in personal trajectories of individuals immersed in an unfamiliar cultural environment, like the participants of this study during their study abroad experience.

It is fair to say now that culture and identity are strongly connected. Cultural beliefs are powerful as they are the basis for the sense of self and play a main role in the identity formation. Culture shapes the mind and life of people, and provides the raw material to construct their world and self-conception (Bruner, 1990). Mazrui (2002) explains how the two concepts overlap:

> Culture has several functions: it influences people and how they perceive themselves and the world and it allocates women and men in different roles. Culture also has a communicative function in the sense that it is largely transmitted by language (mother tongue or foreign language). Finally, culture is a basis of identity, as it distinguishes between the "us" and the "other" and limits the borders of national solidarity. (Mazrui, 2002, as cited in (Ennaji, 2005).

So during times of globalisation, an individual can no longer see the national identity as defining their cultural identity (Appadurai, 1996), and culture becomes "particularly at issue in the lives of people" as they find themselves in a "dynamic, complex situations, especially when their identity is at stake" (Holliday, 1994, p. 27). In other words, in this globalized world, it is important to consider the concept of culture in an interpretative way and not to limit it to a positivist view. However, it is important to keep in mind that people, at different points in time, might belong to several different cultures.

These two approaches to culture then can facilitated our understanding of the positions the Saudi women take between their home/ host culture, and the culture of their own making.

2.9.2. Cultural identity

Cultural identity, broadly defined, is developed through the relationship that an individual has with a group that shares their history, language and ways of perceiving the world (Norton, 2013). An aspect of cultural identity is what it means to "be American", or to be a part of any other culture, to be British or Japanese or Saudi (Pavlenko, 2001). So national identification is one of the most basic forms of identity; when individuals describe themselves as American, British, Indian or Saudi, they are laying claim to a national and cultural identity. Cultural identity is a wider concept than national identity, which is tied to a nation and a national history (which will be discussed in detail in chapter 3).

Cultural identity is not static or single faceted and can be formed as part of and in response to cross-cultural communication (Kim, 2015). Migrants, refugees and short-term 'sojourners' such as students studying abroad experience new cultural elements that pose oppositions or risks to their existing cultural identities and research suggests that national identity, in particular, becomes more important and stronger when it appears to be threatened, for example by individuals living in countries other than those they call their own (Patron, 2007; Jackson, 2008; Kinginger, 2008; Plews, 2015).

Kramsch (1993) proposes the concept of third culture which is formed when people travel between and experience two large cultures (usually nationalities). This third culture results from the interaction between those two cultures. This can be noticed in the case of immigrants who "attempt to create a third culture, made of a common memory beyond time and place among people with similar experiences" (Kramsch, 1993, p. 235).

When individuals are part of two or more cultures, they are developing new identities as it is the case of biracial children, migrants, international students and sojourners as they negotiate being members of multiple cultures in different ways. However, contact with culturally different people and places can be disturbing which can trigger a series of complex emotions

and reactions. “Culture shock” is the term frequently used to describe this reaction of people to novel situations. Culture shock can cause different feelings to arise such as anxiety, uncertainty, confusion, and isolation (Oberg, 1960). These in turn can develop a host of related symptoms like homesickness, loneliness, disengagement from social activities, as well as stereotyping and feelings of hostility toward the hosts (Oberg, 1960). However, “culture shock” is not inevitable. As some people might immediately admire and accept the characteristics of the host culture and might even temporarily reject their own culture.

In line with the positivist approach of culture, Bennett (1993) suggested a Development Model of Intercultural Sensitivity DMIS which is widely used as theoretical framework in intercultural studies to explain how people experience and engage in cultural differences. In his model there are three ethnocentric stages in which people’s own culture is central to their perception of the world. In the denial stage, people do not recognise the existence of cultural differences and perceive their own as the only real one and avoid cultural contact with others. In the defence stage, people recognise other cultures but not their validity. They feel threatened by other cultures and thus belittle them to assert their culture superiority. In the minimization stage, they start to recognise some surface differences between their culture and the others; however, they try to minimise differences by telling themselves that cultures are more similar than dissimilar and view their own culture as universal. In short, people in the ethnocentric stages avoid cultural difference in one of three ways: ignoring its existence, rejecting it or denigrating its importance (Bennett, 1993).

There are three ethno-relative stages where people assume the validity of all groups and do not judge others by the standards of their own culture. In the acceptance stage, people become “culture-neutral” and see cultural differences as neither good nor bad, but simply different. In the adaptation stage, people begin to see cultural differences as positive and a valuable resource. In the integration stage, people expand their identity and effortlessly and

unconsciously shift between different cultural worldviews. Though maintaining their own cultural identity, they naturally integrate aspects of different cultures into it. In sum, people in the ethno-relative stages work towards cultural difference in three ways: accept it and its basic values, understand it from both their own worldview and the others, or integrate the two aspects in their identity (Bennett, 1993).

His proposed model shows how people's sensitivity to cultural difference gradually increases. The more complex their experience of cultural difference becomes, the more interculturally competent they are. Bennett did not talk about cases when people regress to a previous stage or skip one, however, there is such possibility in his model (Bennett, 1993).

With reference to Bennett's developmental model of intercultural sensitivity, shifting from an ethnocentric view of the world into a more ethno-relative configuration of cultural difference is the process of becoming bicultural. This usually happens through "culture learning" (Furnham & Bochner, 1986). The idea is that the struggle and anxiety caused by intercultural contact are largely attributed to people's lacking the social skills of the host society. So, getting general knowledge about the host culture and being competent in intercultural communication are two important facets of "culture learning" (Furnham & Bochner, 1986).

Acquiring cultural knowledge is to obtain educational foundation about different cultural groups (Furnham & Bochner, 1986). And to be interculturally competent requires acquiring knowledge of both the host and one's own cultural communication rules that regulate interpersonal communication. It also involves how people send and receive information, express their emotion, and influence each other by verbal and non-verbal communication (Furnham & Bochner, 1986). So "culture learning" demands a cultural knowledge and social skills of the host society which are usually acquired through socialisation in the new sociocultural context.

Language socialisation is the process by which L2 learners become familiar with cultural

norms of the L2 community through interaction with the target community (Pavlenko, 2002). Language socialisation, as a post-structuralist concept, acknowledges that SLA is more than simply rote learning of grammar and vocabulary, but also involves acculturation through interaction. Acculturation is a broader process that derives from sociology rather than applied linguistics, and which includes the development of linguistic competence in L2 as part of the adoption of the norms, values and behaviours of the target culture (Gans, 1997). This adaptation involves the negotiation of new identities, where, in SLA research, the L2 is the site of that negotiation.

The process of negotiating new identities have been highlighted in research that focused on women returning to Saudi Arabia after time abroad, with Alamri (2017) calling this the 'bicultural' identity, a unique combination of the two cultures in which her participants had lived. It is also a 'universalised' identity that offers a broader understanding of their home and host culture. Alamri (2017) argued that her participants had developed this new 'bicultural' identity and had found a space both between and beyond the two single cultures with which they interacted. Costa's (n.d.) research with Saudi and Vietnamese women studying in the USA explicitly connected this new multicultural identity to the acquisition of a L2. These studies and many others conclude that L2 learners, migrants and sojourners are only aware of their cultural and national identity when they are in active moments of struggle as a result of social and cultural oppositions or comparisons. These struggles emerge more strongly when they are sited in linguistic practices, such as difficulty expressing oneself or understanding.

Patron argued that increased L2 proficiency led to reduced cultural stress concerning social identity among her participants. However, it is necessary to consider the warnings of Pavlenko (2002), whose brief literature review on language socialisation found clear intersections between gender, age, race and social status and access to language socialisation

opportunities.

In this study, the concepts of culture shock, culture learning and Bennet's DMIS will be used to explain and highlight some of the phases that the participants have gone through.

2.9.3. Religious identity

As discussed, cultural identity is a wide concept which includes religion, ethnicity, nationality and race. In this section, cultural identity is discussed in relation to religious identity as religious identification is one of the basic forms of identity formation. When an individual identifies with a certain religion, they are claiming a religious and cultural identity. Religion is a significant influence in today's world, and religious beliefs have a strong influence on the culture of a society. It is difficult to define religion from one perspective; however, it is often defined as a system of faith and worship of god. For Geertz (1973), it is defined as:

> A system which acts to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic. (p. 90)

Religion and culture are connected, as religious beliefs and practices are uniquely cultural. Certain religious practises may unite believers in a certain religion and separate nonbelievers, as these practises can form the basis of their own culture. Even the commitment of believers in certain religions may vary between them, creating a separation between practisers and non-practisers, which create two different cultures. So religious and cultural beliefs develop from one another, and religiosity is an essential element to understand when examining religion (Simmel, 1950), as the level of religiosity can be the scale to weight and separate cultures.

This means that both culture and religion are socially constructed and religion influences culture and vice versa. The status of Islam in Saudi, for example, makes it particularly interesting as there is a real tension between the boundaries of religion and culture. Although

sharing the same core Islamic principles, the Islamic practices of Muslims in the Middle East in general, and Saudi in particular, are different than those in Eastern Asia. The extreme gender segregation and fully covering of women in Saudi are considered religious practises though not practised in any other Islamic countries, which make them arguably Ancient Arabian cultural practises rather that religious ones.

Religion[1] clearly and with no dispute reveals what is forbidden, such as gambling, consuming wine and pork, while religious culture creates hundreds of forbidden and presumptive fatwas that are compatible with customs and traditions and that people might disagree about (Alahmadi, 2016). These constants of religion do not change over time and doctrines do not dispute these tenets, for example, no Islamic doctrine would permit wine or pork.

Islam is considered as a Saudi cultural identity marker. It acts as the basis and the custodian of the culture. Every aspect of the culture must be filtered and approved through religion as interpreted by the religious committee. With time the borders between culture and religion become blurred, and cultural traditions, e.g., gender segregation, were believed to be religious practises. Even religious practises, like hijab, have been given more weight, exaggerated as Carland (2017) puts it, and they become more of a tradition than a religious practise and have been forced on women, religious or not.

This created a conflict in Saudi, since most people do not differentiate between religion and religious culture. In his article in *al-Watan*, Alahmadi (2016) explained how difficult it is for Saudis to separate religion, with its fixed texts and its clear pillars, and religious culture, which varies according to different interpretations, understandings, cultures and countries. Islam as a religion is what God purely revealed to his prophet. Islamic religious culture is the local interpretation and the special understanding of the texts of the religion, which may be extremist, permissive, or even wrong. Religion obliges you to the text, legislation and

[1] By religion here I mean clear and direct Islamic teachings and orders in the Quran while religious culture is people's interpretation of the unclear or indirect orders in the Quran.

worship, while religious culture obliges you to its own interpretation of the text, legislation and worship (Alahmadi, 2016).

Religious cultures vary among generations, countries, and societies. Evidence for this is the multiplicity of religious cultures among the Islamic countries and the fact that the prevailing culture in Saudi Arabia, for example, does not resemble the prevailing culture in Egypt, Indonesia, or Pakistan. Further evidence is the change in the concept of what is forbidden within a single society. There was a time when Saudi Arabia banned radio, television, and girls' education, and a time when we prevented mobile cameras, satellite dishes and travel abroad, and we still live in a time when cinema and women driving, though recently allowed by the law, are still not completely welcomed.

Nevertheless, it is difficult to separate, within the same society, between religion on the one hand and religious culture on the other. The two share elements bearing the same names such as values, behaviour, morals and social taboos, and this intermingling makes most people unable to differentiate between what is religious prohibited and cultural forbidden (Alahmadi, 2016).

Religion may form the basis of a new culture, as what happened in Medina's society, which changed rapidly after the Prophet's migration from Makkah. The Quranic texts, upon their appearance, turned into common concepts as the citizens of Medina and immigrants poured away jars of wine as soon as they heard that it was forbidden. Its legislation quickly transformed into new norms and traditions, such as honour crimes which are based on the prohibition of adultery (Alahmadi, 2016).

However, as centuries passed the religious culture regressed from the Quranic texts and came to be interpreted according to new variables, returned as sacred rituals, devoid of spirit, to conform with their old traditions or emerged interests (Alahmadi, 2016). Religion, for example, commands women to be modest and men to look away, but the patriarchal societies

ignore men's actions and put women in a state of complete isolation, not only in clothing, but also in ways of interaction, quality of jobs, separation of buildings and transportation. And when the religious culture turns into mere rituals and formal practices, the colour and appearance of the veil (not modesty itself) becomes the primary concern of the society. So it is important to differentiate between abstract religion, with its clear texts and its white argument, and religious culture, which varies among diverse societies, changing eras and different concepts.

When investigating religious identity, we look into different aspects of identity formation: the sense of group membership to a certain religion, or religious culture, and its effects on one's self-concept (King & Boyatzis, 2004), religious practices and beliefs. The religious culture is different for religious groups as religion and religious context, similar to ethnicity and race, can generally affect one's perspective and view of the world. It can also provide them with opportunities to socialise with people from different generations and contexts and set the basic principles of life (King & Boyatzis, 2004). The religious practices refer to the degree of devotion and following religious duties and, finally, religious beliefs are what one holds regardless of his religious culture (Edwards, 2018). People might hold different beliefs than their religious culture, yet they feel obliged to follow the norms of their society's religious culture just to be a member of it (Edwards, 2018). For example, people in Saudi might hold different religious beliefs and vary in their devotion and commitment to their religious practises. There are many religious groups that can be divided along the religious and cultural spectrum, in regard to their adherence to religion and traditions such as conservatives, traditional religious, moderate religious, traditionalists and liberals.

Identity and religion are socially constructed, and religion is considered an aspect of the culture and one's worldview. This means that one's religious identity would embrace the religious culture in which they socialise in, and which stays largely solid even if they decide

to question or reject related religious beliefs (Edwards, 2018). In other words, the previous hidden social, cultural and religious messages which one receives throughout their whole lives about who they are cannot be erased. Hence, when an individual starts to hold new beliefs different than the ones they were taught to believe in, or if they start to hold different beliefs than their family or society, these new acts do not automatically wipe out the religious socialisation that has rooted their religious and cultural beliefs (Tatum, 2010 as cited in Edwards, 2018, p. 205). The familial, social and cultural influences often remain as a part of people's worldview and their identity (Clack & Clack, 2019).

However, Religious identity, as any other aspect of identity, is dynamic, fluid and a site of struggle (Peirce, 1995). This becomes clear when crossing borders, cultures and religions. People convert to different religions all the time, change religious positions, i.e., become more liberal or conservative within one religion and get absorbed into new ideas and beliefs. This makes religious identity more fluid and dynamic than, for instance, racial identity (Edwards, 2018). However, this does not happen suddenly or overnight, it often requires time of devoted practice, research, and society influence. Brimhall-Vargas (2011) states that "even when the external features of the religion are in alignment with a person's new internal beliefs, as the old identity is still present as a nagging point of reference" (p. 76). It is important to note that one might hold a belief that is not reflected by their religious culture, so when the religious culture change, this would strengthen their beliefs and puts them into actions (Edwards, 2018). For example, study abroad exposes students to diversity, improves their critical thinking skills and increases their autonomy which makes them more open for religious questioning and doubt.

This study investigates the development of the identity of Saudi women when studying abroad, and since religious identity is one of the dominant aspect of Saudis (discussed in chapter 2), this study looks deeply at how their religious identities have changed and

developed throughout their time in Australia. Some studies discussed how study abroad affected the identity of Saudi women (discussed in section 2.11.2.), however, they have ignored the effects on the religious side of their identity. Some have mentioned that their religion was affected but without any further details. This is no surprise as the talk of religion in Saudi is sensitive and subject to different interpretations.

By doing so, this study is a response to Han's (2018) call for a subfield of applied linguistics that focuses on the connection between language and religion. She strongly calls for giving more attention to the role of religion in the experiences of people learning, teaching, or engaging with certain languages. In her article she discusses Chinese immigrants to Canada who converted to evangelical Christianity and offers important background on how the study of religion has developed throughout the years in the field of applied linguistics. Sarroub (2018) also discussed the connection between scholarship and religion in her study of Muslim youth and their literacy. Sarroub agrees with Han in her call for more work that addresses globalization and migration. The call for this subfield in Applied linguistics is important to understand people's different ways of navigating their shifting and fluid social, religious, cultural, linguistic and national boundaries (Sarroub, 2018).

2.10. Islamic feminism

In this study I employed an Islamic feminism perspective to empower Saudi women as it will give them a voice and help in their development and movement in Saudi Arabia. Most Saudi women are unaware of their rights and believe that their rights are against Islam (Wagner, 2011). Islamic cultural traditions and narrow Quranic interpretations have clouded women's issues in Saudi Arabia. For example, women were led to believe that having a male guardian and the ban on women driving are rooted in Islamic law and thinking or acting otherwise is against the verses of Sharia. This has caused a number of Saudi feminists to seek "their sense

of power, their sense of identity, their freedom, and their equality with men" (Yamani, 1996, p. 263) by using Islamic feminism. Islam informs and regulates Muslim women's lives and is central to their self-perception, even those who consider themselves liberal modernists (Yamani, 2000). Therefore, any changes in the cultural norms and social practices must be legitimatised by Islamic texts, which means that female empowerment in Saudi Arabia must come through Islam (Al Fassi, 2016). Moreover, using an Islamic feminism perspective will encourage both genders in the Saudi audience to accept and recognise this study.

In this thesis Islamic feminism is not used as a rigid or technical theoretical perspective, but as a looser term that describes the rereading and reinterpretation of the Islamic texts by using different lenses and voices to find answers to Muslim women's problems, and to validate their actions and reactions. Leading Islamic feminists, including Margot Badran, Amina Wadud, Lila Abu-Lughod and others, see Islamic texts as a justification for their arguments against patriarchy. The Quran supports women's rights and freedom and advocates for gender equality (Sheridan, 2015). It declares equality in labour. It also states that the quality that positions one person above another is the religious ideal of righteousness, which disregards gender and race: "If any do deeds of righteousness, be they male or female, and have faith, they will enter heaven, and not the least injustice will be done to them" (Quran, 4:124). Indeed, Islamic feminism is religiously, culturally and theoretically relevant to Saudi women (Sheridan, 2015).

Islam guarantees women their rights, the misconceptions about Islam are "partly due to the stereotypes of Muslim women as being ignorant and submissive" (Syed, 2008, p. 247). Clearly not all Muslim women throughout history were able or interested to fight sexism, which is also true in the West. This does not give the right to argue that all Muslim women have been "passive victims or, worse, active compliances in their own oppression" (Carland, 2017, p. 21).

Although the term Islamic feminism is recent and can be interpreted in different ways, the act of fighting sexism in the Muslim world is indigenous, and "is an endeavour that sprang from the soil of Mecca and Medina at the time of the prophet Muhammad" (Carland, 2017, p. 18), and has grown and spread ever since. However, many of the Muslim women's attempts were not recorded, until the nineteenth century, when they started to write journals, form organisations, and record their own histories, "that a tangible and cohesive Islamic feminism emerged at a national level in places like Egypt" (Carland, 2017, p. 18). This proves that the West is not the original home of feminism, and that feminism was indigenous in the Arab world, especially in Egypt (Carland, 2017).

In the Arab world, the word 'feminism' is usually rejected; it is considered a synonym for the West (Alsweel, 2013; Carland, 2017). However, feminism is not one unified movement (Sibai, 2015), but it is "a plant that only grows in its own soil" (Badran, 2002, p. 243). That is why the term 'feminism' is used in an Islamic context to address the needs of Saudi women who have often been misunderstood by Western feminists who criticise Islam and consider it a stumbling block to women's freedom. This is an inadequate way to fight sexism and disrupts their solidarity with Muslim women (Sheridan, 2015). Abdel-Raheem (2013) states:

> The continuous attempts from the West to impose its values elsewhere are pointless. Western feminism is not only unlikely to take hold in countries like Saudi Arabia, it is not what many women in the kingdom want... the West's definition of equality cannot work in our Arab world…the West should first ask Saudi women if they really want this or not, and Western countries should accept the result, even if it's not to their liking (p. 4).

Islamic and Western feminism share core beliefs about independence and autonomy for women. The difference is in the notion of complete equality, which is the basis of Western feminist ideals. Muslim feminists seek gender equity, a basic Islamic tenet, in which men and women are expected to fulfil different, yet complementary social roles. Moreover, similar to the debates on Western feminism, Islamic feminism does not have only one approach. What

is suitable for women in one Islamic country, or even one region within a country, might not be of interest to Muslim women in others.

Islamic feminism gives Muslim women a safe, secure path toward change and equality. It is "culturally relevant and less threatening to core Islamic values" (Wagner, 2011, para. 10). Islamic feminism enables Muslim women to work within the (Islamic) system to accomplish change, rather than changing or fighting the system, which is what many Western feminist are attempting. Thus, the nature of Islamic feminism in contrast with its Western sister is more fundamentalist and reforming than revolutionary in nature. Islamic feminism has the goal of restoring the teachings of the Prophet himself to the practice of modern Islam, not the overthrow of the existing system.

It presents Saudi women with a feminist movement on their terms, which includes Islam as a major component because many of them see the Prophet Muhammed's wives as role models (Sheridan, 2015); this is expressed in statements like "If I was looking for role models, I would want women who looked and talked like me, covered with the hijab, and addressing me as a Saudi woman. Not some Western ideal of what a Saudi woman should be" (Wagner, 2011, para. 12). Therefore, I believe that using the Islamic feminism perspective will best assist in the explanation of the development of Saudi female identities in the SA experience. It will also be used to identify how encountering the new culture and learning the English language impacts them. It is important to note that Islamic feminism here will not be used as a theoretical framework when analysing the data, but as a lens to understand the religious identity of the Saudi women to explain their reasons and justifications of the changes they encounter while studying abroad. It should also be noted that the Islamic feminism perspective is used here in the specific Saudi context, which might hold different perspectives of Islamic feminism than in other Islamic countries.

2.11. Current research on study abroad and identity

Students participating in SA programs have been the focus of a great deal of research concerning identity and SLA. However, research to date has tended to explore the experiences of North American, Asian and European students and has neglected, so far, the experiences of students from the Middle East, particularly Saudi Arabia (Block, 2009; Kinginger, 2013). However, as a result of the King Abdullah Scholarship Program, thousands of Saudi students have received funding to study in Western countries (Saudi Cultural Bureau, 2014). This section will offer a brief overview of current research concerning SA programs and identity, and then will discuss some studies of students from Islamic countries and Saudi Arabia in Western contexts.

Research has investigated how SA shapes learners' identity and perceptions (Benson et al., 2012; Block, 2009; Coleman, 2007; Jackson, 2008; Kinginger, 2004; Patron, 2007; Takahashi, 2013). A number of studies have shown how SA affects students' personal identity and how it alters people in terms of their general outlook on life and cultural openness (Block, 2006; Jackson, 2008; Murphy-Lejeune, 2003). For example, Murphy-Lejeune's (2003) monograph explores the experiences of European students studying abroad as part of the ERASMUS programme. All of her participants stated that their ERASMUS experiences increased their intercultural sensitivity, and many stated that they felt that they had developed new cultural identities as a result, stating that they had "changed" (Murphy-Lejeune, 2003, p. 142).

Other studies offer insights on how SA experience shape the students' gender identities, for instance, how Japanese women often find SA to be empowering (Block, 2006; Kobayashi, 2002; Takahashi, 2013). Block (2006) explored how the SA experience in Western countries, UK, US and Australia had an effect on his Japanese students. For them, the experience of Western femininity was empowering and gave them access to new discourses of gender that

allowed them to resist their cultural identity as Japanese women. Through interaction with male students, they felt able to resist cultural pressure to act "like a female" and were able to access behaviours that they considered to be masculine, such as expressing their opinion and negative emotions (Block, 2006). These findings mirror those of Kobayashi (2002), who noted that English is a language of gendered empowerment for Japanese ESL students.

However, Takahashi (2013) found a limitation of this empowerment. She investigated the beliefs and experiences of Japanese women studying English in Australia. SA experience is marketed to these women as a "glamorous means of reinventing and empowering womanhood and kick-starting a new lifestyle" (Takahashi, 2013, p. 45), and many Japanese women choose to study abroad when they face personal struggles in their home culture (Takahashi, 2013). Many of Takahashi's participants wanted to take on a new different identity by learning a new language and living in a new culture. They believed that "socialisation with Australian/native speakers of English was the key to learning English in the ryūgaku context" (Takahashi, 2013, p. 63). However, they weren't always successful in having these new identities respected. They have struggled to get into contact with Australians, even worse, they were exposed to racial and linguistic discrimination. Even those who managed to befriend the 'Aussies' were disappointed as their boyfriends were attracted to them only because they saw them as "passive, obedient and convenient" (p. 82) and wanted them to act like 'typical' Japanese women. These women started their journey eager to become "empowered English-speaking women with promising international careers" however, they became powerless "in the face of the authoritarian nature of Japanese companies, which openly discriminated against women on the basis of age and gender" (p. 121). As a consequence, most of them did not wish to return to Japan.

Gender and national identity have been highlighted in the identity and SA literature as being key facets of an overall identity that are challenged during SA programs. Research on

gendered experiences in SA shows some disadvantages which were reported by American students in their attempts to gain access to local social networks (Block, 2009; Isabelli-García, 2006; Kinginger, 2008; Trentman, 2015). For example, Trentman (2015) explored the gendered experiences of American women in Egypt and noted that they found the SA experiences offered transformative opportunities to confront and resist gender discourses. For American women in Egypt, these opportunities arose from their struggles negotiating the limits of the Egyptian "good girl", who is passive, modest and restricted, and the perceptions of the sex-obsessed white foreigner that were forced upon them (Trentman, 2015). These students often had very negative gendered experiences until they learnt how to resist Egyptian narratives of correct femininity versus American femininity.

Kinginger (2008), which is a review of available literature on identity and SA programs, highlights research exploring the experiences of American students in France and their difficulty in negotiating French gender norms. A female student, Deidre, considered French femininity to be superficial and immodest, leading her to avoid French culture and thus the French language. Instead, she found comfort in her American-ness, which was tied to her cultural discourses of femininity and gendered interactions with men (Kinginger, 2008). In contrast, Bill, a male American student in France embraced French-ness and French femininity, to the point of rejecting the American femininity that Deirdre clung to as passive and vapid. Bill too clung to his American-ness in the face of French men, however. Both these responses to the new culture were mediated by their home culture and by their gender; in terms of their own gender, both saw their own cultural identities as being superior to the foreign practise (Kinginger, 2008). Thus, their gender and national identities were strengthened. Kinginger's overall conclusion is that the SA experience often strengthens narrowly defined national identities, rather than promoting the development of inter-cultural identities (Kinginger, 2008). She bases this conclusion on the lack of willingness to engage

with native speakers among the participants of his studies, but it is important to note that the participants are almost exclusively American entering European contexts, and that their adherence to their American national identity may well be a unique characteristic of a particular culture.

This review of literature draws a distinction between research on Japanese, European, and American students. Most of the Japanese students developed an empowered and liberated personal and gendered identity through learning English. In contrast, the American students had identity conflicts that were as difficult in terms of gender or national identity and recoiled into "a discourse of American superiority" (Block, 2009, p. 185), instead of engaging with the others. Whereas the European students developed an intercultural awareness and pan-European identities. Thus, the significance of national and cultural identity is highlighted for SA students, who enter their experiences with full expectation of returning home.

The French students studying in Australia in Patron's (2007) study, found a third way between the American and European studies. Her participants experienced a strengthened sense of French-ness as a national identity but felt that they had developed a more complex cultural identity as French people who had lived in Australia. It is possible that the distance between the home culture and the target culture affects the degree to which students experience a strengthening of their national identity. There is a much larger cultural gap between Australia and France, or France and America, than there is between France and Italy for example.

Race also has been highlighted in SA literature. African American students, for example, have always experienced language learning in communities where they felt isolated, minoritized, and marginalised (Flores & Rosa, 2019; Talburt & Stewart, 1999). Anya (2016) investigated the experiences of four African American college students on a SA program in Brazil. However, she focused on how they took their journey in a black Brazilian city where

they were surrounded by people who looked like them and with whom they felt a connection and affinity. Hence, learning to speak Portuguese entailed learning to speak blackness in a new "linguacultural context" (Anya, 2016). The study showed how identification fueled by historic, social, and cultural similarities between African Americans and Afro-Brazilians contributed to learners' investment in learning Portuguese, and, at the same time, how their understanding of blackness clashed with Brazilian notions of race, nationality, gender roles and performance, sexuality, and social class. There was no suffocating impact of racial trauma which is usually the central focus that shape the learners' immersion experience. The African American students developed strong linguistic knowledge and made clear, communicative gains while interacting in target language communities where they felt connected, comfortable, relaxed, and respected (Anya, 2016).

These studies highlight the diversity of experiences with regards to the ways that SA programs impact the identities of L2 learners. The processes by which their identities are confronted, negotiated, resisted and transformed are complex and bound to the norms of the students' home and host culture.

2.11.1 Muslim students in the West

The experiences of Muslim international students in English speaking countries are being explored as the role of religion in SA is essential to this study. The role of religion in SA and the experiences of Muslim students in western coutries, how they adjust to living in the host countries, or how this experience impacts on their cultural and religious identities are generally overlooked in SA literature.. Most of the research on Muslim international students is embedded in data on international students which usually lacks depth. This subgroup of international students who have spent most of their lives in their home countries and were relocated to the host countries are likely to have unique experiences that are different from those of non-Muslim international students. Especially when considering both the religious

and cultural differences between home/ Islamic and host/ western cultures.

Muslim international students come from a number of different countries with different cultural traditions, however, they share a common religious tradition (Islam) and mainstream perceptions as racially different especially in the context of Western countries such as the United States (Fine & Sirin, 2008). Moreover, the Islamic culture is generally characterised by hierarchical and collectivistic interrelations, whereas Western culture is generally less hierarchical and mainly individualistic (Asvat & Malcarne, 2008). The Islamic practices include ritual prayer at five specific times throughout the day, conducted in single gender spaces for men and women. Before praying, Muslims have to perform ablution to create a state of purity (McDermott-Levy, 2011). In addition to the difficulty of performing these practices for Muslim students, due to conflicting class schedules and difficulty to find an appropriate place to pray at the specified prayer time, Muslim students may encounter a lack of knowledge, familiarity with and disrespect for their religious practices on university campuses (Cole & Ahmadi, 2003; McDermott-Levy, 2011). Speck (1997) explored the experiences of Muslim university students in an American university. He reported that cultural differences and prejudice based on religious practises have negatively impacted on their educational experiences of the Muslim students.

The degree of harassment is likely to vary depending on the race, ethnicity, and culture of origin. It is believed that, in the United States and other countries, prejudice and discrimination of Muslim students is related to the events of September 11 (Abu-Ras & Abu-Bader, 2008). Immigrants from Islamic countries for example, face higher rates of discrimination compared to other racial, ethnic and religious groups in the United States (Awad, 2010). For example, Sirin and Fine (2008) reported that 88% of young Muslim participants in the United States reported at least one incidence of harassment and discrimination in relation to their religious affiliation. Due to this hostility, some Muslim

students try to change the visible markers of their Islamic identity. They try to hide their religious and cultural practices to avoid discrimination and blend in the new society. This is mostly clear in the case of Muslim women as they might be the most visible population on campus as wearing the hijab can be their identity marker. To avoid conflict and misconceptions, some Muslim women choose to take off the hijab (Cole & Ahmadi, 2003). One of Speck's (1997) participants, a female wearing hijab, reported negative misconceptions held by students and faculty about veiled women. She reported being perceived as docile, oppressed and having limited English abilities because of her veil. Speck goes further to explain how these exaggerated perceptions persist and are magnified especially in situations when these students have limited English abilities and are unable to defend their cultural and religious practises or correct misconceptions. Ahmadi and Cole (2003) investigated veiled Muslim women in US campuses and explored why some women remove their hijab while others do not. They explained how those who continue to wear the hijab are benefitting from it and are not pressured to wear it. On the other hand, those who choose not to wear it came to believe that modesty can be achieved without veiling. It is that they still believe in modesty, yet they are questioning the means (hijab) to it.

Shaheem's (2014) study, which explored the experiences of Emirati international students in American universities, reported similar issues. His participants reported transformation in their identity which was "guided and bounded by their original cultural identity, sense of heritage, religious values and consistent reinforcement of such principles through regular contact with family" (p. 240). Many of his participants expressed being concerned about discrimination which caused them to be more discrete in public with, for example, greeting, religious practices and customs, so that they won't be perceived negatively or as "aliens". Most of his participants spoke about their pride and devotion to religion, however, they reported that they would privately explore "forbidden worlds" (p. 181), i.e. bars. It is

important to note that this was true for men, as women in his study were less curious to explore such places. Two of his participants clearly rejected some aspects of their cultural identity and adopted and accepted the host system of social interaction, i.e., they rejected carrying the family honour and adopted the individuality of the host culture. They felt that they could never, publicly, "be themselves" (Shaheem, 2014).

The Malaysian students in Kim's (2003) study talked about how they learned to switch identities in a very complex way in a multicultural society. They reported that speaking English distanced them from their friends as speaking English is considered a non-Islamic act. One of her participants reported that some people resent her because language is associated with religion, and using English means not being a good Muslim "from their point of view, English equals to "Other" than Islam" (p. 145).

The Omani students in McDermott-Levy's (2001) study talked about the discrimination they faced while studying abroad. They explained how such negative Muslim sentiment encouraged them to maintain their religious identity as religious practices helped them "to manage stress and discrimination" (p. 276) and facilitated their adaptation in the host country. On the other hand, as with other international students, studying and living abroad gave these women the chance to experience personal freedom and independence, something they have never experienced in Oman under the watch of their families and society. However, they reported being in constant contact with their families, i.e., fathers and husbands, for consultation and personal support. These experiences enabled these students to mature and grow personally, religiously and professionally. They described it as transformative experience with the sense of increased responsibility and awareness of their capabilities.

In short, Muslim women abroad might experience discrimination and prejudice, especially since they are easily marked by wearing the hijab. However, these difficulties did not prevent them from benefiting from their experience abroad. They have experienced personal and

social changes.

To date there is a paucity of research examining the experience of female Muslim international students in Australia. I am unaware of any qualitative study of such. In the present study, I was interested in the experiences of female Muslim graduate international students from Saudi Arabia and specifically their perspectives concerning cultural and religious experiences in Australia, and how these experiences impact on their identities. In the next section the focus will be on the research concerning this population of students in different Western countries and how the experience of study abroad affected them.

2.11.2. Saudi students abroad

It is surprising, given the originality of the Saudi culture and the increased number of Saudi students studying abroad in the past decade that SLA and identity in the Saudi context has not yet been a focus for research. However, there has been a recent surge in research concerning the experiences of Saudi women who study abroad, as their situation is recognised as being quite different.

Saudi culture is strictly gender segregated and this segregation is connected to religious beliefs. However, when Saudi female students study in the West they are forced to engage with mixed gender environments, and this can be a challenge. As such, research has begun to explore the effects of the transition from Saudi Arabia to the West and back again, and has, sometimes, engaged with the concept of identity (Ahmed, 2016; Alamri, 2017; Alrefaie, 2015; Alandejani, 2013). Much of this research has been carried out by Saudi female recipients of the King Abdullah Scholarship. For example, a 2016 master's thesis by Saudi student Noor Ahmed in Canada explored her peers' experiences while studying for master's degrees in Canada. Her findings highlight the impact that the SA experience had on her five participants, with all expressing a great deal of pride in their new identities as women who had advanced degrees, who were educated and independent. All her participants stated that

they felt much more confident in themselves and their abilities as a result of their experiences and their struggles in Canada, with one stating “I love who I’ve become” (Ahmed, 2016, p. 48).

Another North American MA thesis explored the specific experiences of mixed gender education for male and female Saudi students by highlighting her own experiences (Alrefaie, 2015). She found that participants experienced a high level of discomfort and embarrassment to begin with, which eventually faded in relation to students of the opposite sex of non-Saudi origin. However, her four participants continued to find interactions with Saudi students of the opposite sex extremely difficult. She concluded that Saudi students developed an identity that prioritised their national identity as Saudis in both themselves and the opposite sex, which allowed them to interact comfortably with non-Saudis but maintain culturally appropriate Saudi distance from Saudis (Alrefaie, 2015).

Research exploring the experiences of Saudi female students returning to Saudi Arabia have found similar issues regarding identity changes. Alamri (2017) interviewed 12 Saudi women who had studied abroad and found that they struggled to reintegrate into Saudi culture as a result of their experiences. Her participants expressed the sense that they had “blossomed” during their studies and found the return to the segregated and collective Saudi culture to be difficult and restrictive (Alamri, 2017). Her results support those of Alandejani (2013) who interviewed six returning female students and also found that participants developed new personal identities while studying and found it difficult to negotiate their new identities as individual women and Saudi cultural norms concerning gender. As with Ahmed’s (2016) participants, and those interviewed by Lefdahl-Davis and Perrone-McGovern (2015), these women highlighted their new-found skills as researchers and independent individuals capable of caring for themselves.

The only current study to specifically explore SLA and identity among Saudi women is also

the one to explicitly engage with both the theoretical lens of feminism and the importance of Islam in Saudi Arabia through her discussion of Islamic feminism (Alsweel, 2013). Islamic feminism embraces Islam at the same time as it embraces the notion of gender equity and rejects Western conceptualisations of oppression. Alsweel is therefore able to offer deeper consideration of Saudi women's experiences as English language learners and as educated women eager for change within Saudi Arabia as part of their renegotiation of their new identities within Saudi Arabia and Wahhabi Islam (Alsweel, 2013). Alsweel (2013) found that English offered Saudi women a bridge between the traditional and the modern worlds and gave them confidence in themselves as women in a global world. At the same time, gendered expectations of appropriate behaviour limit women's access to and participation in language education, and these expectations are often culturally bound (Norton & Pavlenko, 2004). Therefore, learners have gendered responses to learning languages and to engaging with L2s that can affect their investment and outcomes (Costa, n.d.). Their responses in terms of identity construction will also be gendered and multiple (Alsweel, 2013; Shi, 2006).

One interesting point of gendered contrast here is that research with male Saudi students abroad tends to highlight their feelings of responsibility as ambassadors for Saudi Arabia and for Islam, which controls their behaviour and often restricts their interactions with the target culture (Barnawi, 2009; Groves, 2015; Hall, 2013; Heyn, 2013; Alraddadi, 2015; Shaw, 2010). Male students as a result tend to experience fewer identity crises or problems reintegrating into Saudi culture upon their return. It is notable that female students do not seem to experience these feelings of enhanced responsibility connected to their national or cultural identity; this might be because of the position of women in Saudi, as women are not considered leaders in society or in religion. Another notable characteristic of the current body of research concerning student experiences abroad is that it is almost entirely focused on students in North America, leaving a significant gap where students in European and

Australian contexts are concerned.

After reviewing all these studies which focused on study abroad and identity and explained how people develop and thrive during their time abroad and how learning another language open different widows for them. What most studies have been missing so far is the impact of study abroad on the students' religious identity and faith.

Norton (1995), for example, who is a pioneer in this field, focused on different aspects of her participants' identities but at no point in her study did she consider her participants' religion and faith. Her participants Eva and Katarina from Poland, and Felicia from Peru came from very Catholic communities (according to Statista, in 2018 Poland was 92% Roman Catholic, and Peru 70%). Coming from these communities, they could have been Catholic and embedded in the Catholic church, which can potentially have a big influence on their identity, and any change on that part of their identity can impact their overall identity and journey.

Faith matters. Faith can shape someone's life, socialisation, attitudes, beliefs, and values. It can ground someone's world view. When faith is impacted, strengthened, or weakened, it affects how people go by their lives and hence the way they define themselves. This raises the question of why religion has been ignored in the field of study abroad research all this time. Alsufyan's (2020) study was the only study that touched on the topic of religion and religious identity of Saudi students in SA. She explored the religious identity of a young Saudi girl, Norah, in her six months experience of SA in Ireland. However, Alsufyan's (2020) focus was on the effect of Norah's religion and religious identity on her experience of study abroad. And though she explored how her religious identity was strengthened, it was explained as a static aspect of her identity, as something that cannot be questioned or negotiated. And though Alsweel's (2013) study implemented Islamic feminism in her study of Saudi women abroad, it still lacks deep details of how it was used to empower Saudi women. Both these studies draw a nice superficial picture of Saudi women abroad. My study

threw more detailed case studies showing that there are more complexity and struggle going on within themselves. This deep investigation of their religious identity has never been considered or thought about in a more sophisticated way.

While I am interested in the concept of identity as a constructed entity, it sets in some degree in an opposition with the way identities are conceived in Saudi, in which chapter three explain by contextualising Saudi between Islam and nationality. In my case study chapters also I will explore the different understandings that my participants have of their national and religious identities.

Chapter Three: context of the Study

3.1. Background

In this chapter, I set the context of the study. I take the reader into some of major characteristics of Saudi Arabia as a country and a society. I reveal some of the related issues to the study. The concepts have been reviewed with a "Saudi" lens. The history of Saudi is narrated through defining the terminology of the nation. It is defined from a perspective that I believe best fit the needs to understand the history of Saudi and its accompanying cultures.

3.2. In highlighting the unique situation of Saudi as state, society or nation I do not try to take agency from the Saudi women, I just try explaining where they come from and why the study of Saudi women is worth it. Saudi society

Saudi Arabia is a young nation that has undergone major transformation as a rich oil nation and is now implementing a strategy of rapid change with the aim of becoming a westernized, neo-liberal information economy (Alharbi & Own, 2016; Vision 2030, n.d). Saudi 'traditional' identity is tied intimately to both the Arabic language and to Islam, which are equally inextricably tied to one another. Saudi Arabia is a country governed by the tenets of Wahhabi Islam, which strongly promotes gender segregation, modesty and chastity (Alhazmi & Nyland, 2010).

Saudi society, in general, is deeply religious, traditional and family oriented. It is a collective society and individuality is not encouraged (Alraddadi, 2015). In Saudi context, tendencies are towards conflict avoidance, and socially approved behaviour is self-moderated through regimes of shame. Everyone is responsible for the other members of the close or extended family, and loyalty is highly valued. Traditional Saudi identity is viewed as family oriented, and family ties and relationships are considered the basis of the social structures; thus "its

nucleus is not just father, mother and children, but all the brothers of one generation, their wives and children, grandparents, possibly some elderly aunts and uncles, and occasionally some cousins… the family unit is the source of identity for each individual in it" (Al-Sweel, 1993, p. 19).

Saudi traditions and dress-code have largely been derived from pre-Islamic Arabian culture. Saudi culture and traditions dictate distinct social and cultural roles for men and women, where men are given a superior position in the family and are considered legal guardians and decision makers, whereas women occupy a subordinate position and are considered legal minors who are required to perform household tasks. These roles, although based on cultural norms rather than Islamic teachings, are enforced through traditional, legal and familial structures (Yamani, 2000; Hamdan, 2005; Hunter & Ali Sallam, 2013; Pharaon, 2004). Hamdan (2005) clearly confirms that: "women's issues in Saudi society are often mistakenly connected to Islamic teachings" (p. 45). Saudi women have been a symbol of continuity and change throughout Saudi history, held up by the government and media as a particular representation of the traditional and religious continuity of Saudi culture, while highlighting any changes to the position of women within the country, such as their increased access to higher education and employment (Sakr, 2008). Thus, women's roles in the society and their rights to independence from their male counterparts are limited. Behaviour and dress are highly gendered, and gender segregation as a religious ordinance and as a cultural marker is central to Saudi identity. The limitation on women's roles in the society is clear, considering the fact that even though almost 9.1 million (out of 13.5) of women in Saudi are of working age, only 20.2% of them participated in the workforce in 2015, compared with 77.8% of men (Naseem & Dhruva, 2017, p. 23).

However, Saudi society has started to change in recent years. The cause of this shift is widely attributed to Saudi youth and those who studied abroad; as they are pushing for more freedom

(Alraddadi, 2015; Alsweel, 2013). This is exactly what Yamani (2000) expected: "the new generation is aware of its capabilities, and this inevitably leads to the questioning of some norms and social rules" (p. 69). For example, Saudi women have started to gain employment in almost all industries. They work in professions like architecture and engineering, and do not just study law but practice as lawyers. Their increased participation has coincided with a change in Saudi Arabia's attitude towards women, and women in the country are slowly beginning to occupy more powerful roles in society. This is clearly seen in the monumental change which has happened for Saudi women over only one-week, early 2017, as the country witnessed three key female executive appointments in the male-dominated financial sector. These appointments mark an unforgettable moment for both the industry and Saudi society as they come in line with a goal outlined in the Saudi Vision 2030 reform plan, which seeks to raise the proportion of women employees from 22% to 30%, in order to stimulate the economy and improve the presence of women in paid work (Shalhoub, 2017). Since most of the women who have been appointed to top positions in Saudi Arabia were former scholarship students in Western countries, this study argues that the experience of residing temporarily in a Western country and learning English has a profound impact on the identity of Saudi women and is spearheading movements towards social change.

3.3. Saudi women's status

Why the focus on Saudi women studying abroad? With the increasing socioeconomic changes happening in Saudi Arabia and with the increasing participation of Saudi women in more public roles, it is appropriate to investigate the narratives of Saudi women abroad to understand how their experience might have facilitated such increased participation. Saudi Arabia is currently experiencing the beginning of a new era where more focus on them. Therefore, more studies need to explore the challenges, and opportunities in ways that highlight women's voices, agency, and subjectivity. In this section, I explore the first steps

taken toward empowering Saudi women.

The departed King Abdullah introduced several changes to allow women to play a larger role in society. He had a deep and thorough vision for social change. While global and local debate was confined to the topic of women driving, he appointed the first female member of the council of ministers as deputy education minister in 2009. In 2013, he granted women the right to vote and run for office in municipal elections in 2015. He also appointed 30 women to the Shura Council, a consultative body that produces recommendations for the cabinet. Through their efforts domestic violence has been criminalised. He declared his support for women in an interview with Barbara Walters on American ABC in October 2005, where he stated: "I believe strongly in the rights of women. My mother is a woman. My sister is a woman. My daughter is a woman. My wife is a woman" (Al-Mukhtar, 2012).

However, the desire to reform required a careful balance between what the country needs for modernisation and the weight of tradition. King Abdullah had ambitious goals, but he moved slowly, to appease the Saudi conservatives. King Salman is following in the previous king's footsteps by prioritising women's development. His support is clear in his recent decree to allow women to drive in June 2018, which is considered a remarkable signal of change in the history of Saudi Arabia. His daughter, Princess Hussa, appreciated what her late uncle (King Abdullah) achieved and described him as "a champion of women's rights". She continued "my uncle, the humane leader, has enabled women to claim their rights as mothers, sisters, daughters and wives" ("King Abdullah Championed Women's Rights", 2015). She is reflecting on King Abdullah's great efforts in pushing through limited women's rights, but what is missing here is their rights as women, as independent human beings. What is important for a woman is to be considered and accepted as an independent person, to have her own existence without being drawn from the identity of the men in her family; and to be given the honourable status that Islam has guaranteed for her, as there are huge differences

between Muslims' practices and normative Islam. Islamic teachings emphasised the equality of all people, men and women, as a basic tenet of the Quran (Badran, 2013): "Their Lord responded to them: I never fail to reward any worker among you for any work you do, be you male or female – you are equal to one another" (Quran, 3:195).

Despite the above-mentioned moves, the pace in which women in Saudi Arabia are claiming their rights and gaining better representation in public life is slow when compared to that of other countries. In other words, considering the ideological elements in all these pushes for women's rights, many of the efforts (education, access to paid work) are basic human rights and not particularly revolutionary in themselves. It seems that the Saudi government and society are torn between coming into line with the rest of the world and preserving the old Arabian traditions. The initiatives implemented to date appear to be progressing women's rights without making any real change. Women themselves need to be educated concerning their rights and demand them without mixing religion with culture. Most Saudi women submit to cultural demands thinking that their rights conflict with their religion, as will be discussed in the next section.

In conclusion, after reviewing some of the characteristics of the Saudi society, and the status of women in Saudi Arabia, we can see that the Saudi female identity is strongly tied up with a number of overlapping issues of nationality, religion, language and ethnicity. A Saudi woman is a woman, a Muslim, an Arabic speaker, an Arab, and a Saudi, and different aspects of this identity will be emphasised and present at different points, each having its own interconnected discourse as "individuals are both the site and subjects of discursive struggle for their identity…the individual is constantly subjected to discourse. In thought, speech or writing individuals of necessity commit themselves to specific subject positions and embrace quite contradictory modes of subjectivity at different moments" (Weedon, 1996, p. 93-94).

However, each of them will be simultaneously and dynamically present during the process of

SLA. Learning a L2, most commonly English, means that the common discourses of Saudi femininity will become sites of conflict, identity negotiation and struggle that is potentially more challenging for Saudi women than it is for women of other cultures. Studying overseas might give Saudi women not only practical tools for advancement, i.e., education, English skills, etc. it might also give them personal advancement in the sense of gaining exposure to different cultures and ways of thinking about and understanding the world, learning how to respect and appreciate different cultures, how to handle change and transitions, how to balance their social, cultural, religious, and national identities when living in a different culture. Learning English language might provide a medium through which students can access new ways of thinking and gain better education, and living in a Western country, a new culture, and being able to socialise with local people gives them a new perspective which prompt change. This research will explore Saudi women's identity, and it is therefore necessary to examine the intersections between nationality, culture, ethnicity, religion, and language that are quite unique to a Saudi context and to Saudi identity construction. To be fully able to understand these intersections, and to understand where these women came from and how their identities were shaped before coming to Australia, I need to explore the history of Saudi Arabia with the reader.

3.4. Saudi Arabia's past and future: Between nationalism and religion

In this section, I give a historical account of the establishment of Saudi Arabia. It is important to explain the history of Saudi Arabia to better understand the context of the research. With that being said, I would like to point that my narration of the Saudi history does not represent an absolute truth or facts. Contrary, history is continuously reimagined and retold depending on the various traces historians decide to follow. These representations of history create different ideas that can be retold in different ways. So my narration and interpretation of the Saudi history can be understood differently by the reader. Having said that, I claim that the

historical events retold are my own interpretations of the Saudi history with no disregard the various other ways in which such events can be interpreted and understood. In order to understand the position of Saudi women, it is important to understand the socio-political context and its history. This will give the reader the chance to understand the discourses that continue to appear in the narratives of the Saudi women.

This section contextualises this research; it introduces the concepts of nation, nationalism and what makes a nation. It also discusses the relationship between nationalism and religion in general and in the context of Saudi Arabia to understand the past present and future of Saudi women. It discusses the current situation in Saudi, the changes happening and the plans for the future. Lastly it discusses the role of English in redefining the Saudi nation. This context of the study hopefully will help the reader to understand the closed society of Saudi Arabia, the uncommon relationship between religion and the state in Saudi Arabia, and how this scholarship program is so overtly nation-building.

3.4.1. Defining the nation

A nation is "a daily plebiscite" as defined by Renan (1882). It is "the product of the subjective collective memory of communities rather than the results of objectives "facts" such as kinship, geography, history, language, or economic interests" (Jankowski & Gershoni, 1997, p. x). Renan here is suggesting that the fundamental criterion of national existence is of "large scale solidarity" or shared "moral consciousness" (Jankowski & Gershoni, 1997, p. x).

Almost a century later, the notion of "imagined communities" was introduced by Anderson (1983) to describe the conceptualization of nationhood as being imagined (as mentioned in section 2.2.5). A nation is viewed as the product of its members' imagination because "the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them or even hear them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion"

(Anderson, 1983, p. 49). Like Renan, he used the cognitive context of nations to discuss how a large group of people with no direct contact could nonetheless think of themselves as a meaningful group. Anderson addressed some sociological matters that are related to belonging and cultural communities. He defined a nation as a community because "regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship" (Anderson, 1983, p. 7). Therefore, the use of the concept 'imagined community' suggests that a nation, national identity, and nationalism are socially constructed. The term 'imagined' here does not mean fake, false or fictionalised, but rather refers to the socio-cognitive aspect of the construction of a nation (Hubbard & Kitchin, 2010, p. 19; McGuire, 2008, p. 205; Jones, 2007, p. ii) .

The identity of a nation could be regarded as both a factor of its coherence and unity, and as a factor of "differentiation from others" (Guibernau, 2007, p. 1923). However, it is impossible to create a single, homogenous identity in a certain society. Despite the common features of human beings, their identities can never be expected to be coherent, since they have varying genders, ages, health, abilities, dreams, hopes and so on which means that no individual will be the same as others. When adding cultural characteristics to these features, a coherent nation identity becomes even more elusive. However, individuals or groups identify themselves by certain values, norms, roles, and so on in relation to their community which create "a feeling and recognition of 'we' and 'they'" (Lee, 2012, p. 29), i.e. national identity, which also comprises of history and narratives which are passed through several generations. That is why an "imagined community" is the main part of cultural identity (Anderson, 2006). Based on this background, we can say that every imagined community is different for each individual regardless of the similarities of their experiences (Anderson, 1983), as every individual construct their own belonging to a certain social group through imagination.

A point of debate in research on nationalism is the degree to which culture can affect the

formation of a nation. Gellner (1983) argues that culture can be used as a definition of a nation, and for two people to be considered as members of the same nation, they must share a common culture, i.e., a system of concepts, signs, relations and ways of behaving and living. Most importantly, they must recognise each other as members who belong to the same nation (Gellner, 1983). A shared culture here can include a shared language and a shared education, which Dieckhoff (2004) and Rieffer (2003) claim are the most important components in a nation cultural identity. Here language gains its importance because it is the main way to communicate and share ideas and the most efficient means to build relations with the others and gather people. Education is also important for nation-building as the more developed the education system is the more literate population who can assist in the economic growth of their society. It also promotes the development of a common language which in turns accounts a collective culture (Gellner, 1983 as cited in Rieffer, 2003, p. 18-19). For example, in some European countries the industrialised economy led to the development of nationalism which occurred when people shared a common language and culture. Their nation state rose because economics, culture and politics were more intertwined than ever before (Rieffer, 2003).

Anderson, on the other hand, took a further step when he defined a nation as an imagined community. He believed that nationalism has the same origins discussed here, however, it is more about the invention and creation of a nation where it did not exist previously rather than the awakening of a historical self-consciousness. The combination of the spread of print capitalism in a shared language and the growth of the bureaucratic state aided in the development of an imagined community and set the stage for the birth of the nation state (Anderson, 1983, p. 46). Since literacy increased, people were able to read about their nation in books and newspapers which made it easier to gather public support and unite people.

In addition to language and education, Rieffer (2003) believes that religion is a neglected and

essential aspect of the nation and one of its most important cultural components. Its importance lies in the true believer's life as it offers an identity, a direction and guidance to religious people, and it gives individuals a range of choices to frame and revise their life plan (Kymlicka, 1995 as cited in Rieffer, 2003, p. 8-9). Religion often provides options, answers and meanings to some individuals' lives, in the same way nationalism offers people a worldview and offers a structure to their everyday life (Rieffer, 2003). It offers its members a sense of identity that can be as important as religion. So, when religion and nationalism are united into a religious nationalism, as in contemporary Saudi Arabia, one can expect a powerful force that can bring people together. Religion can also create tension because religion is not necessarily bound to one territory and creates a separate loyalty in people's lives. Different religious interpretations and practises can sometimes cause conflict, as discussed in the next section.

In religious nationalism, the impact of religious beliefs, ideas, symbols and leaders is crucial to its development and success in a certain territory. This means that religion is so important that religious nationalism "adopts religious language and modes of religious communication, builds on the religious identity of a community, cloaks itself in the religion and relies on the assistance of religious leaders and institutions to promote its cause" (Rieffer, 2003, p. 225). Moreover, religious nationalism usually obtains some form of political sovereignty, as the religious beliefs are often institutionalised in the law or the procedures of governing the region (Rieffer, 2003).

3.4.2. Nationalism in the history of Saudi Arabia

The above-mentioned background about the religious nationalism can best describe the formation of the Saudi nation, as religion has been the basis of the Saudi national identity. In Saudi Arabia, religion and nationalism are tightly linked. Everyone is expected to be Muslim, and there are penalties for converting to another religion. However, Islamic teachings can be

interpreted in different ways, and ways of practicing Islam have diversified as Islam has spread around the globe. Also, in Arab countries, especially Saudi Arabia, the boundaries between religion and pre-Islamic Arabic traditions are blurred (as described in section 1.2.1 and 2.3.3). This can create a paradox, i.e., although religion strengthens nationalism, it can also provide tension, especially if people view the state as veering from their particular view of how Islam should be practiced. Since Arabian traditions and religion are mixed up, sticking to both of them is demanded by the common people, and deviating from them can create conflict.

The story of the Saudi nation begun in 1740 when the House of Saud represented by the bond between Muhammad bin Saud (known as Ibn Saud) and a Muslim scholar, Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, the founder of the Wahhabi school. Of this Nevo (1998) writes:

> The House of Saud achieved substantial power owing to a bond with a religious harbinger. The supreme position the dynasty has enjoyed in the Arabian Peninsula for two and a half centuries arises from the facility and acumen with which members of the Al Saud family utilise religion as a unifying instrument and as a source of political legitimacy for their rule. (p. 36)

Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab called for the reinstatement of the same religious, social and political customs that had been practised by the prophet Muhammad and his followers, namely adherence to the Quran and the Sunna[2] as the only sources for religious conduct, and the rejection of any new element or concept introduced into Islam thereafter; those were branded as bid'a, innovated non-Islamic acts (Wynbrandt, 2010). The most important Wahhabi tenet was *tawhid*, the oneness of God. Not only is God omnipotent, but he is also the one and only who is such. No person or object possesses divine traits, so no one and nothing can or should mediate between a human being and God. The use of such an intermediary was considered shirk, i.e. polytheism (Nevo, 1998).

[2] The traditional portion of Muslim law based on Prophet Muhammad's words or acts, accepted (together with the Quran) as authoritative by Muslims and followed particularly by Sunni Muslims.

Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's called for the destruction of the holy places (i.e., objects mediating between human and God) as they were very common and widespread among people in central Arabia. This call had a huge impact on the daily life of people and shook the dominant religious and social system in central Arabia. This caused the local leaders of the Najid tribes to consider him as a threat to peace, stability and to their own authority. They banished him from several places and threatened his life (Wynbrandt, 2010). It was Ibn Saud who supported him and took him under his patronage. The union between the two led to the establishment of ruling of Al Saud family on most of the Arabian Peninsula and at the same time, the spread of Wahhabism as the main Islamic school in the same regions (Nevo, 1998, p. 37).

This cooperation between the book (Quran) and the sword means that the state will use its forces to protect religion, and on the other hand, the Islamic law will help the state become a fair organization. This alliance with Ibn Abd al-Wahhab gave Ibn Saud an advantage over the leaders of other tribes in the small towns in central Arabia. As all these leaders, including Ibn Saud, depended on their tribes for loyalty as a source of support, however, Ibn Saud had an additional support religious support, from Ibn Al-Wahhab, which facilitated his continuous victories, settlements of the tribes and the creation of the new Najid region (Nevo, 1998). So, with religion and force, the Saudi-Wahhabi rule helped to unify the area and to transform the region from being ruled by a dozens of local leaders into "a comprehensive supra-local and supra-tribal structure" (Nevo, 1998, p. 37). The Saudi-Wahhabi alliance also appeared in the second Saudi state of the nineteenth century and in the third Saudi state, i.e. the contemporary kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Religion has still been the basis for the alliance between the Najid people and the house of Saud and for King Abdul-Aziz movement to unify the country and the formation of the third and present Saudi state, during the first half of the twentieth century.

Wahhabism has become widespread throughout the Arabian Peninsula and contributed to the notable victories of King Abdul-Aziz. However, the king's efforts for forming a modernised country, i.e., introducing technical innovations, such as motor vehicles and communications caused some conflicts between state and religion, as his attempts were considered by the religious committee as *bid'a*. The king then, around 1920, met with the Islamic leaders and explained to them the need for such reforms and changes for the development for the country and they in their turn had to justify and explained the to the people (Nevo, 1998). This has led to a gap between the state on the one hand and the Muslim fundamentalists on the other, which has on occasions turned violent. The first occasion was conflict around 1920 between the state and the Ikhwan, Bedouin who were encouraged by the king to settle and engage in agriculture. They were persuaded to change their lifestyle by religious advocates, for example, to enrol their children in school and use some of that time inventions e.g., radio, however, they considered such acts as against their religion, especially that they are introduced by the West (Nevo, 1998). So, they soon turned into extreme fundamentalists, and went up against King Abdul-Aziz's plan to improve relations with the Arab countries on the boarders as they considered their inhabitants as infidels. They also did not approve his modernization campaign and was considered against the true Islamic principles (Nevo, 1998). Their opposition was rising in the time the king needed to support to modernise and develop the country which drove him to confront them militarily and end their opposition. A second example of violence was seen in 1965, when the newly established television studio in Riyadh was attacked by a group of fundamentalists. And most notable of all was the seizure of the Holy Mosque in Makkah in 1979 by a large group of religious fundamentalists led by Juhayman al-Utaybi. In these latest attacks, accusations were made against the state and ulama (religious scholars) for deviation from the true path of Islam (Nevo, 1998; Wynbrandt, 2010).

King Abdul-Aziz built Saudi Arabia on a religious basis, unified the tribes under the umbrella of Islam, however, when the religion was used by the extremist against modernisation and the good well of the country and its people, he had to stop them by force. The same can be applied at the current time, with King Salman and the crown price calling for a moderate Islam.

3.4.3. Nationalism in the current Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

As we have seen, Saudi Arabia is a vast country. It is the home to various tribes, and different ethnic and regional groups. It is a young nation established 86 years ago. Religion has been sought to unite the identities of this diverge population, as religion is considered important to the Saudi people, in spite of the different levels of commitments and different interpretations of the religious texts and teachings, which exist along the regional lines. So, Islam is the identity of the Saudi populations, which has been strengthened by the country being the birthplace of Islam and the host of the two Holy Mosques. Since the foundation of the current kingdom under the rule of King Abdul-Aziz, the teaching of the Quran and Islamic studies have taken place in the mosques of what is used to be known as Alkatateeb, small groups of children gathering around a teacher to learn and memorise the Quran. With the country's development, schools have been established and more subjects have been introduced, yet the main weight was still on the Islamic subjects, as the religious education was the main education (Nevo, 1998). The oil boom has led to more schools being established which helped to reinforce a more coherent religious identity, which in turn led to the enforcement of the Sahwa (Islamic awakening) movement in the seventies and the eighties (Nevo, 1998). Religion then moulded as a predominant identity, it was the core of the culture and the society's ethical framework.

3.4.3.1. Sahwa, the Awakening

Al-Sahwa al-Islamiyya (the Islamic Awakening), or Sahwa, was a period of powerful change in Saudi Arabia between the 1960s and 1990s. Sahwa developed as a result of the bond between the Muslim Brotherhood's ideology and the Saudi state's Salafi-Wahhabi tradition. Sahwa in its core is an Islamic revival that arose from among the masses as an expression of faith in Islam as a comprehensive lifestyle.

Sahwa has a political and social nature, and for the purpose of this study I will focus on the social aspects and how it still has an influence on the Saudi society. The powerful and quick rise of Sahwa in the 1980s can be tracked to three critical events: the Iranian Revolution, the Soviet-Afghan War, and the Holy Mosque's seizure in Mecca in 1979. The former two had a political nature, however the latter is believed to be the main cause for the rise of the social influence of Sahwa in Saudi.

The story of Sahwa is dated back to the 1950s, with the arrival of thousands of Muslim Brotherhood members who had fled persecution in their countries (Syria, Egypt and Jordan). The well-educated refugees rapidly spread their ideology as they took high governmental positions, media sectors and educational roles at universities and schools. They became a model for a larger number of Saudis longing to spread the extent of Sharia within the country. Sahwa in this line is not a movement, but a phenomenon. It grew naturally within the roots of the Saudi society.

In 1979, when Saudi Arabia was trying to introduce some plans for social reforms, Juhayman al-Utaybi, a former army corporal, seized the Holy Mosque in Mecca with demands to go back to the real Islam and accusing the state of deviating from the right path. This incident shook the Saudi society and state and made them rethink their plans on westernizing projects in an attempt to soothe Saudi fundamentalists.

In that regard, the state allowed the growth of Sahwa in the 1980s and enabled it. Sahwis

preachers were encouraged to speak publicly about their beliefs and their perceptions dominated the education and media sectors of the state, providing them with the platform to gain more influence and popularity (T. C. Jones, 2005).

The position of women was used in this context of the political project of the state and of its historical transformations. In a number of Muslim countries, women have tended to be a symbol of the state political discourse. They have been ascribed a uniform identity. They were expected to signify the virtuous implementation of Islam through the obligation of wearing the veil, like in Iran for example. While in other countries like Tunisia, the ban on veiling symbolises a discourse of modernity, as enforced by the state. Women's place in the society reflects the state national identity.

Moreover, in the context of the oil boom, Saudi women did not have to work which has been considered as a sign of both richness and moral distinction and a privilege to protect them from the outside dangers. All the previous mentioned facts promoted a picture of the Saudi woman as "pious and virtuous, modest, educated, financially comfortable, and devoted to her family" (Le Renard, 2008, p. 611).

The position of women was less affected by the Islamic awakening. It was not until the 1980s, women then became 'Stowaways' of the Sahwa (Le Renard, 2008). The black abaya for example was "an invented tradition". Previously women used to wear long wide coloured dresses – similar to older Western ways of dressing – with hijab thrown on their hair, and face covering was not mandatory. The spread of the black abaya was considered as the simple conservation of the traditional dress. It is a relatively recent practice that symbolises the national identity based on a specific interpretation of Islamic teachings, thus linked to the expansion and development of the Saudi state. This implemented dress code is not restricted to only women, as men's dress code has also been transformed, but without such strict 'religious connotation' (Le Renard, 2008). The black abaya and the face covering then were

attempts to erase the presence of women in public.

Sahwa also helped in enforcing gender segregation in every sector in Saudi which reinforced this dominant masculine society where the authority and domination are still vested in men (Kabasakal & Bodur, 2002). The appearance of women in gender mixed places was promoted as strange and unusual with bad connotations and portrayals of women as 'temptations' for men. Sahwis also emphasised the idea of "sanctuary", ired, which refers to woman's chastity that is connected to the family's honour which is in turn connected to the tribe and the extended family members. Alhazmi and Nyland (2010) believed that it is the idea of ired that is mostly responsible for the practice of gender segregation. The notion of ired is vague. It is derived from the pre-Islamic ancient Arabian civilization and has not been mentioned in the Quran, though it appears in some of the Prophet's sayings, i.e., Hadith (Patai, 1983).

The notion of ired seems to be more sensitive to Saudi than anything else (Baki, 2004). And it is all on women. A woman will lose her ired if she commits adultery or attempts to do so and if the ired is lost, it cannot be recovered again. As a result, gender segregation has come about as a means of preventing people from committing adultery (Alhazmi & Nyland, 2010). However, what is important to mention here is a loss of ired is only associated with women but not men's chastity. This perception of ired in the Saudi culture has led to considering women as being an "erotic creation" (Jawhari, 2007 as cited in Alhazmi & Nyland, 2010, p. 3), and sends a sexualised picture of women who exist in mixed gender environments (Alhazmi & Nyland, 2010). Moreover, as some pointed out, the increased importance of ikhtilat (gender mixing) is new and it was not emphasised before the conservative reformist Sahwa movement considered it immoral in Saudi Arabia in the 1970s and 1980s (Roel Meijer, 2010). It is now possible to understand the situation of women in Saudi Arabia considering the history of the formation of the state and the rise of Sahwa.

Sahwa came to a clash with the state in 1990 at the time of the Gulf War. Sahwis officially

confronted the state with their opposition to the state approval of the US troops on Muslim soil. Hence, their aim was to transform the political system along Islamic lines, combined with a stricter imposition of the Salafi system of values (Royt, 2020). By the mid-1990s, Sahwa started to collapse and there was a clear emergence of Sahwa dissent within the Saudi society. Despite this dissent since the 1990s, Sahwa has maintained an influence over the years.

Recently the rise of crown prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS) to power has weakened Sahwis especially since he has announced that he is determined to "destroy extremists now and immediately" (Althaydi, 2017). In March 2018, he explained to Nora O'Donnell in a 60 Minute interview that "We [Saudis] were living a very normal life like the rest of the Gulf countries. Women were driving cars. There were movie theaters in Saudi Arabia. Women worked everywhere. We were just normal people developing like any other country in the world until the events of 1979." (CBSnews, 2018). In line with this, during an interview done in 2019 Aid al-Qarni, a Salafi cleric who was a former Sahwi, made a public apology on behalf of Sahwa on Saudi television "for the mistakes that were not related to Islam". He apologised to the "Saudi society for the mistakes that have contradicted the Quran and the Sunnah, and contradicted the tolerance of Islam" (Arab News, 2019, para. 3).

And though Sahwa has ceased to exist, its ideas among the Saudi society have remained influential until today. That is why the state has granted people more freedom, speech, and media access since Sahwis have accepted a "schism between secular state and religious public space" and stopped accusing the state of deserting Islam (Beranek, 2009, p. 3, as cited in Royt, 2020).

In recent decades, the power of religion has become increasingly challenging to maintain as there has been a growing diversity of religious and secular views within Saudi society. A balance needed to be reached between conservatives and liberals forces and their continuous

calls for social reforms. This balance is sought to be achieved through a move from the Islamic identity and Arabic unity to Saudiness and Saudi Nationalism. This new rising sense of nationalism in the country sprang during the time of the previous king Abdullah (2005-2015) who provided the basics of the today's flourishing ideology. He established some new policies which are being strengthened by the current king Salman, some examples of this are making the national day a public holiday, starting the governmental scholarship program, which he announced as a major step towards the country's development, and increasing the presence of women in public, which shows this population that they are needed in building their country. However, these actions were perceived by the religious figures to be against the Islamic teachings and means to ruin the Islamic identity of the society.

These actions were an early indication of today's changes and the starting points in constructing the image of the new Saudi. In 2015, King Salman ruled the kingdom, and the crown prince revealed his cornerstone strategy for the Saudi economic diversification, Vision 2030. This vision is a symbol of the crown prince domestic ambitions. Although based on economic changes within the country, declining oil dependency and developing certain sectors, it points to the importance of young people and identifies them as the real vehicles for change, stating "real wealth lies in the ambition of our people and the potential of our young generation" (Vision 2030, n.d). The crown prince directs the young population (who make up 60% of the Saudi population), to examine their potential and capabilities and to promote a sense of pride, loyalty and enthusiasm about change.

The vision here works as an inspiration for the youth, it shows them how their country is being imagined in the future. It also assigned them the task to take up the mission of accomplishing and bringing it to life, as they could be a real driving force as in some other Islamic countries. Stressing the fact that this era is beyond oil, generate a sense of continuity with the past, one that takes the country back to the future.

3.4.4. The role of English in the Saudi nationalist project

Many studies have discussed the importance of English language with the new imagined vision of Saudi Arabia, as language among other traits have helped other nations to lead the economy of the world (Alzahrani, 2017; Fatani, 2016; Yusuf, 2017; Yusuf & Atassi, 2016). The Saudi move from the oil economy into knowledge-based economy requires its people to have enough language abilities to participate in the competitive international economy (Wedell, 2008), as language plays a role in such economy. Especially since the goal of Vision 2030 is "to attract and retain the finest Saudi and foreign minds and provide them with all they need. Their presence in the Kingdom will contribute to economic development and attract additional foreign investment" (Vision 2030, n.d, p. 37). For these minds to meet, and for foreigners to invest in the country, a common language of communication is viewed as imperative. Successful communication between people from different nations across the world is the foundation stone for cultural exchange, understanding and wellbeing. Today, English is the predominant lingua franca around the globe and the de facto language of technology, business, medicine, academia and the media among many other fields (Crystal, 2012 as cited in Alzahrani, 2017). Membership to the world of advanced technology requires English skills, which give people access to globalization, foreign innovation resources, technology information, high-quality education, improved navigation of the internet, and openness to the world markets (Alzahrani, 2017, p. 3).

In order to compete in the global economy Saudi Arabia needs to build an educated and skilled workforce. The country's economic development is associated with the improvement and advancement in the education system which in turn is associated with the development of teaching English language (Alzahrani, 2017). Thus Vision 2030's second major theme is establishing a new educational system that is able to prepare the new generation for the market needs ("Vision 2030," n.d.). One of the key strategies in achieving this is the

country's decision to improve English language learning and teaching with the intention to help Saudis accept the West at a young age (Azuri, 2006) and provide them with the means, i.e. language, to reach the world, be creative and independent thinkers (Mahboob & Elyas, 2014). This has started during the time of the late king Abdullah, as in 2013 English was introduced in primary schools' year 4 (age 10). The same year heralded the release of the new English Language Curriculum for Elementary, Intermediate and Secondary Schools in Saudi Arabia 2014 – 2020 (B. Mitchell & Alfuraih, 2017). Also, the English language teaching textbooks and the supplementary material were modified and supplied by three contracted international publishing partners. The new teaching materials were standardised to a comprehensive national curriculum and hold on to the culture and principles of Saudi Arabia (B. Mitchell & Alfuraih, 2017). Additionally, more weight is being placed on English for undergraduates as many subjects are being taught in English at the university level (Alrashidi & Phan, 2015). For example, the schools of medicine, engineering and computer sciences use English language as the main language for communication and teaching and curriculum books are all in English.

Yet despite the importance of English language to fulfil the objectives of Vision 2030, and regardless of the efforts done by the government during the past few years, the teaching of English has been resisted by a large sector of the Saudi society (Elyas & Picard 2010). From its inception, English teaching in Saudi Arabia has been critiqued by fundamentalists who see English as inextricably linked to Western ideologies and behaviours, such as drinking and adultery, which are against the core teachings of Islam and will have a deleterious influence on the young Muslim people (Alzahrani, 2017). This mindset pervades curriculum resources, which for years focused on enforcing Islamic ideologies and detaching English form its native Western cultures with the fear that "more English" would lead to "less Islam" (Elyas & Picard 2010, p. 141). It also affects students' willingness to learn the language and accept

the culture as it was always socially pictured as the language of the infidels (Elyas & Picard 2010). Even with the recent emphasis on the importance of learning English within the education system and despite many ambitious projects and changes mentioned above, there has not been any significant improvement (Al-Essa, 2009). Rahman and Alhaisoni (2013) described the level of achievement in learning English as a foreign language as "still far below the acceptable one" (p. 64). Teachers have reported that students graduate secondary school without the ability to carry out a short conversation (Al-Shumaimeri, 2003) and they have a poor overall performance in English (Alzahrani, 2017). This means that the current practices of English language teaching and learning in the country might not be enough to meet the Vision 2030 objectives. Under these conditions, in 2017, the crown prince renewed the commitment to reform the education which was started during the time of King Abdullah. The prince has affirmed to create an educational system that supports the market needs (McDowall, 2016).

The crown prince has presented himself as the face of Saudi youth, true Muslim in a completely different way from the older generation of clerics. He called for a new era where the young Saudis are more open to the outside world and more accepting to its cultural influences (McDowall, 2016). He believed that this openness and acceptance can be accomplished by improving the level of English language skills among Saudi students and developing a more positive attitudes towards English and its culture. A key vehicle for achieving these goals has been the King Abdullah scholarship program, which was established around fifteen years ago and continues to this day. Its primary objective is to qualify Saudi youth so that they can effectively contribute to the national development of the country across all fields (SACM, n.d.), thus working towards the Vision 2030 goals. The scholarship program serves a further role "as one of the many plans to improve the outcome of the Saudi educational system" (Education Minister Khalid Al-Angar quoted in Rodolfo &

Estimo, 2019, Para, 1).

The scholarship program provides Saudi students with a window to the outside world. As the king himself has declared, the purpose of this program is for the Saudis "to know the world and for the world to know them" (quoted in Weinzetl, 2012, as cited in Alharbi, 2019, p. 3). For them to know the world means to understand and accept other cultures and religions, and to learn how to relate to their adherents. At the same time, the world will recognise and acknowledge Saudi students' accomplishments as thinkers, innovators and researchers. Students are expected to be ambassadors for their country, who will help to change negative stereotypes of Saudi people and Saudi Arabia in the West and bring more investors to the country, thus supporting the achievement of the goals of Vision 2030. The scholarship program not only give the students the chance to study the language and get degrees, which will help in the development of the country, but also their families; partners and children get the chance to study the language, understand and accept other cultures.

The scholarship program has sponsored more than 200,000 Saudi students so far. However, not everyone gets the chance to study abroad and see other cultures, which is why more weight has been placed inside the country to open up Saudi society to the outside world. The assumption here is that the more that Saudis accept the Western culture the better their English learning experiences will be, which in turn will lead to better English skills and eventually better job and more opportunities to help develop their country. This has been done through different initiatives and organizations. For example, the MiSK foundation, a non-profit organization established by the crown prince in 2012 is dedicated to encouraging entrepreneurial culture, expanding Saudi's economy and transferring its system from oil-based economy to a knowledge-based economy ("MiSK Foundation," n.d.). The Foundation invests in enabling the youth to learn, develop and progress in education, media, culture and technology which in turn are believed to support and develop the country. To pursue these

goals, MiSK has established educational programs, events, initiatives, workshops and talks, and partnered with local and global organizations in different fields to develop the intellectual capital and release the artistic, academic and leadership potential of Saudi youth ("MiSK Foundation," n.d.). Some of the prominent achievements of MiSK are the foundation of MiSK schools and the art institute. It is worth mentioning that a key requirement to benefit from the programs offered by MiSK is the ability to understand and speak English as most of the events, initiatives, workshops and talks, held in Saudi or abroad, run in English; and to apply for the perpetration or fellowship program, a minimum of 6.5 is required in IELTS ("MiSK Foundation," n.d.). Moreover, the General Entertainment Authority (GEA) has been organizing events of international performers, sponsoring Western music concerts and many more, which are considered as a catalyst for the social and cultural transformation in the country. The county has also opened its doors to international visitors as part of its efforts to boost tourism by launching a new visa regime for 49 countries. This will enable the Saudi people, especially the ones living in big cities or town which are tourists' destinations, to meet people from other cultures and interact with them.

The above mentioned polices have proven to be effective as change is happening in the country. For example, many Saudi study abroad student returnees have shown open-mindedness, more acceptance of differences and other cultures, especially the Western ones and improved English language skills and increased willingness to study English and other languages (Alamrani, 2014; Alamri, 2017; Alandejani, 2013; Aldossari, 2015; Alsabatin, 2015) (discussed in the literature review). This means that the outcomes of these policies will affect the cultural imagination and national identity of the Saudi people.

In this chapter, the history of Saudi was explored. Within this history, the connectedness between religion and nationalism has been explored to understand when my participants come from and how English language played a role in their imagined new nation of Saudi.

Chapter Four: Methodology

4.1. Overview

In recent years, the question of identity has become a major focus of inquiry in applied linguistics research. The experiences of international students living and studying in different countries and their impact on students' identity have been widely explored, yet there are still some aspects of their identity that need to be investigated and more research is needed to study the different changes they go through.

In this study, I was eager to hear the stories of the Saudi women in Australia, how their experience had impacted on different aspects of their identity. To do that a qualitative research design was employed which allowed for a more in-depth account of lived experiences (Yilmaz, 2013). This design is useful in understanding the subjective experiences of individuals, as it focuses on careful listening and respect for people's unique voices and their interpretations of life experiences (Yilmaz, 2013).

This chapter outlines the ways in which I approached this study. While the main study is qualitative in orientation, I began with a pilot questionnaire to gauge the opinions of Saudi women living in Australia on a range of issues and to identify likely candidates for the main qualitative study (Creswell, 2007). I conducted an online survey to elicit the participants' responses on a number of overlapping issues of gender, culture, religion, ethnicity, nationality and language, and 101 responses were collected. The analysis of the survey provided data which was considered the initial basis to address the research questions and provide an impetus for designing and informing the interview questions.

The qualitative data collection, which is the dominant source of data, complemented the quantitative results by providing anin-depth investigation. Qualitative methods are

particularly appropriate for studying a phenomenon that needs "complex, detailed understanding" (Creswell, 2007, p. 41). Qualitative research is also suitable when "we cannot separate what people say from the context in which they say it" (Creswell, 2007, p. 40) It involved semi-structured interviews with four participants. The goal of the interviews and discussions was to be exploratory in nature to discover what issues the participants believed have impacted their identity development in SA. Twelve participants were interviewed, and four of them were chosen for detailed case study analysis which will be discussed later in section 4.3.1.

This project has ethics clearance from Monash university under project number 1599.

In this chapter, I describe the methods used in this study. Firstly, the initial quantitative study's tools, participants and results are presented, followed by the qualitative study, and finally the researcher's position in this study.

4.2. Initial quantitative study

The aim of using an initial online survey was to obtain general insights on the Saudi women's perspectives and get a wide overview of major issues that impact on their identity while residing temporarily in Australia. This initial survey was intended to provide insights into different aspects of identity formation, such as gender, ethnicity, religion, culture, and language. It aimed at answering the following questions:

- What are the general attitudes and perspectives of Saudi women in Australia on Saudi traditional gender roles, cultural values, social relationships and learning English language?
- What factors shape these perspectives and views?

To collect data, I used a detailed online survey distributed via social media networks among Saudi women in Australia. The survey was available in both English and Arabic. The questionnaire items were not designed to be particularly objective in phrasing. Rather they

were meant to respond to a number of Saudi stereotypes and were created to capture such discourses. They were also designed not to be threatening or westernised to encourage people to participate, as the participants themselves needed to be comfortable and engaged. Different kinds of question formats were included. In the first four sections of the questionnaire, the items were statements that participants had to respond to by indicating whether they agreed or disagreed and to what degree. These four sections included questions related to gender roles, cultural values, social aspects and general attitudes, to take an overview of the general beliefs and values of the Saudi women in Australia. This was followed by two sections focused on English language proficiency, both prior to SA and at present. The participants were asked to rate their English language proficiency across each of the four skills, from none to very good. The survey then asked participants about their use of English and the importance they assigned to it, they were asked to rate the degree to which a range of statements applied to them from never or almost never true, to always or almost always true. This section was formed to investigate the role of English language in forming beliefs and attitudes. The last section contained demographic questions and included space for the participants to write open-ended comments, which was the only source of the qualitative data.

101 Saudi women in Australia participated in this survey. They were students and graduates. Data was collected via the Surveymonkey platform and exported to Excel. The questionnaire data were then computed and analysed using SPSS and general trends were revealed from this quantitative study.

4.2.1 Quantitative results and discussion

The purpose of this questionnaire is to function as a pilot study to elicit general opinions and see the different orientations that would emerge. The analysis of the data was meant to serve a particular purpose of recruiting participants and forming interview questions. As a number of clear trends emerged from this data they are reported here to give the reader a taste of the

spectrum of views elicited and the relative popularity of different opinions (while not making claims to representative sampling).

The first section of the survey sought to elicit participants' general views on traditional gender roles and gender inequality in Saudi. Table 1 presents a summary of the proportion of respondents who agreed or strongly agreed with each statement:

Section 1: Gender roles	**Percentage of agreement (agree + strongly agree)**
1. The roles of men and women in the Saudi society have been changing over the last 15 years.	89 %
2. There are different barriers for men and women at work.	88 %
3. In Saudi Arabia, the roles of men and women differ in the family.	87 %
4. In my home, I do the cooking, cleaning and household chores.	81 %
5. Generally, there are too few women in top positions.	78 %
6. Boys and girls are brought up differently.	75 %
7. The educational system in Saudi Arabia tries to push (or unconsciously pushes) people into traditionally "female" and "male" roles and jobs.	73 %
8. In Saudi Arabia the responsibilities of a mother should be same as the responsibilities of a father to their families.	71 %
9. There are different expectations for sons and daughters in Saudi Arabia.	70 %
10. In Saudi Arabia, boys have life easier than girls.	70 %
11. Certain behaviours are seen as appropriate for men but inappropriate for women.	63 %
12. Women work harder than men.	61 %
13. Men and women are equal in their ability and intelligence.	59 %
14. I believe it is ok for men to stay home to look after the children while the woman goes to work.	54 %
15. Men and women are treated equally - and paid equally - at work.	46 %
16. It is good that there are different laws in Saudi Arabia depending on one's gender.	46 %
17. Saudi fathers are capable of carrying out the duties of a mother.	34 %
18. I think men should make all decisions in the family.	30 %
19. Having a male legal guardian is important to me and all the other Saudi girls.	21 %

Table 1: Participants' overall agreement on gender roles questions

These results show that there is a strong agreement that gender roles in Saudi have changed lately, which is logical given that this generation is more open to the world via internet, social media, travel and certainly scholarships as were discussed by Saudi scholars (Alsweel, 2013; Alraddadi, 2015). However, there are still many differences acknowledged. For example, there is still some controversy around issues of men taking on women's work (e.g., only 34% support the statement "Saudi fathers are capable of carrying out the duties of a mother", 54% support men staying at home while women work). And across a number of questions a minority of women continue to support quite strong patriarchalism: for example, 30% agree

with men making all decisions in the family and 21% support women having male legal guardians. So, though the country is changing, and legally giving women more freedom, some women can hold themselves back by giving authority to men. It seems that there is clearly a bit of dispute and uncertainty about what a more feminist version of Saudi might look like which might be linked to what Wagner (2011) argues as women's lack of knowledge about their rights.

The second section of the survey focused on cultural aspects, including religion, traditions, and practices:

Section 2: Cultural Aspects	**Percentage of agreement**
1. **My religious or Islamic beliefs are important to the way I live my life.**	93%
2. Saudi women should have the choice to drive a car or not.	79%
3. I have some cultural concerns about Saudi Arabia.	76%
4. I believe it's permissible for a woman to show her face to strangers.	63%
5. Wearing the black abaya is not important to me as a Muslim woman.	63%
6. Gender segregation in Saudi Arabia has an influence on the way I socialise in Australia.	62%
7. I believe gender segregation is not an important tradition to preserve Saudi females' chastity and honour.	61%
8. Saudi women in general have not been given their rights.	57%
9. **It is important to me to carry on my Saudi traditions and customs such as food, clothing, art, etc.**	47%
10. A man and a woman cannot be just friends.	43%
11. I see myself as a typical Saudi woman.	28%

Table 2: Participants' overall agreement on cultural questions

As can be seen in Table 2, 93% participants put great value to their religious identity as Muslims. This is not surprising since Islam is the religion of 100% of Saudi citizens and plays a prominent role in their daily life, and being a Muslim configures greatly into the identity of Saudi people. There is also a high support (79%) for women driving, while a narrower majority reject niqab, abaya and gender segregation and feel Saudi women have not been given their rights. But still almost half agree that a man and a women cannot be friends. Women driving, dress codes and gender segregation have long been seen as a way of

protecting Saudi women's chastity and honour (Baki, 2004), and are thus areas where prohibitions continue to be enforced.

While views are changing there is clearly controversy regarding women's status and roles and the case studies will show and explain more about why and how participants come to different views on these topics.

Section 3: Social interaction and attitudes	Percentage of agreement
1. The time I have spent here has changed the way I act; I am more independent and confidant now.	91%
2. I think it is good for my children to be educated in Australia.	88%
3. The time I have spent here has changed the way I think, I am more open to different ideas.	86%
4. The time I have spent here has changed the way I live; my daily routine is different and I have more freedom.	86%
5. I made new friends with native English speakers in Australia.	80%
6. I like to extend my stay in Australia.	75%
7. I spend free time in the homes of Saudi friends or go out with other Saudis	74%
8. In general, most of my friends in Australia are Arabic speakers.	73%
9. I don't think my hijab is causing me any trouble here.	70%
10. I feel comfortable dealing with males in general.	67%
11. I get homesick in the sense of missing Saudi Arabia.	64%
12. I feel comfortable in performing my worship duties in public in Australia.	61%
13. I don't feel uncomfortable or different because of my cultural background, race, language or religion.	61%
14. I spend time with English speaking friends at university.	58%
15. I have tried not to change my values because I'm going back to Saudi Arabia.	48%
16. I had to change my behaviour, the way I look to fit in the new society.	47%
17. I have tried not to let my children be too influenced by Australia because we are going back.	41%
18. I often assist at events or activities related to the Saudi community in Australia.	33%
19. As a Muslim, I worry about the fact that my children are getting exposed to everything in Australia.	32%
20. I feel comfortable dealing with Saudi men.	20%

The third section of the questionnaire explored social interactions and attitudes, including the impact of their time here on their personal self, their relationship with locals.

Table 3: Participants' overall agreement on social questions

Table 3 shows that the participants overwhelmingly agreed that their time in Australia had been transformative and viewed in a positive light: for example, 91% reported more

independence and confidence, and 86% reported more openness to different ideas and having more freedom. This supports the findings of other Saudi studies (Ahmed, 2016; Alamri, 2017; Alrefaie, 2015; Lefdahl-Davis & Perrone-McGovern, 2015) as participants reported increased independence, confidence, freedom and intellectual growth during their international program of study. The data also show that despite their status as a minority in Australia, a majority of participants did not see their religious or cultural identity as problematic in Australia – e.g., 61% did not have any problems in showing their cultural identity; as they did not feel culturally different, 61% felt comfortable in performing worship duties in public, and 70% felt their hijab is not an issue. The participants here gained recognition without amending their cultural and Islamic identity to the dominant culture. More research must be done in this area as this contradicts other studies done in other Western countries where Saudi female students, as Muslims, have been harassed and abused (Alamrani, 2014; Aldossari, 2015; Rich & Troudi, 2006; Sheridan, 2015). It seems that Australia, which has a long history of multiculturalism and acceptance of diverse cultures and ethnicities, is different than other societies. So, the changes they have encountered regarding their religious or cultural identity were the result of self-awareness and development rather than fear of harm. This is a point of some nuance that will again be explored in more detail in the case studies.

Though many of the participants reported making new friends with Australians, most of them spent their free time with their Saudi friends. It seems that they started relationships with Australians but still they are not intimate in the way that they are with fellow Saudis, which could be due to cultural differences. This relationship and friendship issue with Australians were one of the major issues discussed in the case studies. Along with this is the issue of dealing with the opposite sex. While 73% of the participants were comfortable dealing with men in general, 80% of them find interactions with Saudi men of the opposite sex to be

extremely difficult. This difficulty and discomfort in dealing with the opposite sex was attributed to the extreme gender segregation in Saudi (Alhazmi & Nyland, 2010). This complication of their relationship was also discussed in detail in the case studies.

The fourth section investigates the participants views regarding the importance of learning and speaking English language and its effects on them:

Section 4: The importance of English Language	Percentage of Truthiness (always + usually true)
1. I consider it important that me, my family and other Saudis can speak and understand English	92 %
2. I believe that with practice, my English language has greatly improved after coming to Australia	86 %
3. I use more English since I came to Australia.	79 %
4. I prefer watching English television programmes and movies	71 %
5. I spent a lot of my time using the internet for researching and studying	70 %
6. I use English when I read or watch content in the internet	66 %
7. I feel comfortable using English in conversation.	62 %
8. I speak English daily	60 %
9. I spent a lot of my time using the internet for pleasure	56 %
10. I prefer listening to English songs	54 %
11. I use English inside my house.	45 %
12. I read / watch Australian news	42 %

Table 4: The importance of learning English language

Many participants recognised the importance of English for themselves and for their family and believed their language has improved as they used it more after coming to Australia. This is logical given the fact that most of them are on scholarships in Australia. In Saudi, Arabic is the dominant language and English is not used outside the classrooms (Elyas & Picard, 2010). However, some of them still feel difficulty in speaking English comfortably and on a daily basis. This was supported by the fact that English is not used inside their houses and their lack of interest in the Australian news. It was clear that English played a role in these women's lives, however, it seems to still be a tool rather than integrative motivation. The role of English and its impact on the identity of Saudi women will be discussed in the case

studies.

4.3. Qualitative study

The results of the questionnaire helped me to identify general trends of the participants' beliefs, views and attitudes about their culture, religion and social life in Saudi and Australia. By using a qualitative method, I wanted to give the participants the opportunity to describe their feelings, thoughts, and experiences with their own words (Patton, 2002), in order to deepen my understanding of the effects of the experience of study abroad on the identity of Saudi women. By using a qualitative method which is emergent, inductive, interpretive and naturalistic approach it gave me the flexibility and openness to deeply explore "people, cases, phenomena, social situations and processes in their natural settings in order to reveal in descriptive terms the meanings that people attach to their experiences of the world" (Yilmaz, 2013, p. 312).

The use of a qualitative method facilitated the understating and the description of the social phenomenon "by capturing and communicating participants' experiences in their own words" (Yilmaz, 2013, p. 313). The participants are given a voice to "elucidate how they make sense of the world around them and their experiences through interviews with open-ended questions" (Yilmaz, 2013, p. 313). The open-ended questions allowed the participants to give long and detailed answers which allowed me to "present the world as it is seen and experienced by the participants without predetermining those standpoints" (Yilmaz, 2013, p. 313). And by using the participants' direct quotes I was able to deliver their "depth of feelings, experiences, thoughts about what is happening, and meaning at a personal level" (Yilmaz, 2013, p. 313).

4.3.1. Women of the study

I was privileged to be contacted by many Saudi women who completed the survey and

wanted to take part in the future interviews. I have decided, after analysing the quantitative data, to recruit the participants who meet the following criteria: Ph.D. candidates, who spent more than two years in Australia, as I have noticed that most of the rich qualitative data (open ended questions) has been provided by this group. While selecting the participants, care was taken to ensure representation of different parts of Saudi Arabia.

I adopted several strategies for participants recruitment in order to collect a sample of Saudi female students from different backgrounds, who have different beliefs and adopt different lifestyles in Saudi and in Australia. This was done to have a broad representative picture of the Saudi experience in Australia.

Initially participants were recruited simply through contacting those who provided their contact details in the survey and met the criteria of (PhD candidates and spent more than 2 years in Australia). While 101 students participated in the survey, only 20 of them provided their contact details. Six of them did not match the criteria as they spent less than two years in Australia, eight of them left the country as they have finished their studies, and two were doing their bachelor. That left only 4 eligible participants who were contacted and agreed to participate.

I also approached the students in different WhatsApp groups and invited them to participate and encouraged them to spread the message to their friends and neighbours. In the message, I invited Saudi female students to participate and explained the purpose of the study. I included a few instructions in the message such as the time and place of the interview to be arranged at the convenience of the participants and each interview might take between 60-90 minutes. Also, they were given the freedom to contact me directly. The message was written in English as well as in Arabic. I also approached some of my friends who I know might be willing to take part in the study. I then asked those who agreed to participate if they could encourage some of their friends and see if they would be interested to participate in this

study.

By doing so, I reached students from various parts of Saudi, who are undertaking different studies in different universities and live in different parts of Melbourne. I ended up having 32 volunteers, but only 14 of them met the criteria. Two of them were used as pilot studies to make sure the questions were understandable, and more questions were added, and some were modified. From the cohort of the remained 12, I have selected 4 four cases. The chosen women for this study stood out from the beginning of the interview process as they were eager to tell their stories. The length and richness of their stories made them unique cases from whom I could gain more understanding about their identity development and their personal, social and spiritual experiences in Australia. In addition to being "information-rich cases" (Patton, 2002, p. 230), they show different trajectories and the stories that they told capture different experiences and orientations. They also represent different parts of Saudi, different maternal status, and different disciplines. They are all PhD students, who spent somehow a long time in Australia, studying English language or doing their masters.

The main aim of purposeful sampling in qualitative research is "to select and study a small number of people or unique cases whose study produces a wealth of detailed information and an in-depth understanding of the people, programmes, cases, and situations studied" (Yilmaz, 2013, p. 314). The emphasis in this study was on quality rather than quantity as according to Slavin and Smith (2009) the sample size is determined by how well the selected sample generates data to learn in depth about the group. Participants ranged in age from 30 years old to early 40s (Table 6). They were all working on their doctorate degrees. Among these participants, one was divorced, three were married, and all had one to four children. Their areas of study included 4 different disciplines at four different universities in Melbourne:

Participant	**Maternal status**	**Age**	**Degree**	**Discipline**	**Years abroad**
Arwa	Married with children	38	PhD	IT	8

Deema	Divorced	42	PhD	Linguistics	5
Belle	Married with a child	31	PhD	Physiotherapy	5
Leen	Married with a child	30	PhD	Arabic language/linguistics	5

Table 6: Participants' demographic information

The women of this study are the heart of this thesis. They are remarkable Saudi women, who have had a significant impact on me throughout the time of the interview and during the multiple times I have listened to the interview audio recordings and while transcribing and analysing. They have connected with me during these various stages, and we ended up having this interesting bond.

4.3.2. Case study design

In this study I used a qualitative case study design that is "an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 37). It was chosen to understand the complex real-life experiences and the identity development of four Saudi women in Australia during their SA journey.

Case study research seeks meaning and understanding of a case and gathers rich description of their real-life events (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). It aims at "the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances" (Stake, 1995, p. xi). It is one of its strengths to demonstrate the experiences of the case under investigation in a more illuminating, personalised and concrete manner, which offers insightful understanding (P. Duff, 2012).

Case study research can focus on a single or multiple cases. In this study I chose to have four cases to help with the transferability of the findings (Creswell & Poth, 2016). They can also flesh out the bounded system being studied by offering more light on the topic under investigation (Creswell & Poth, 2016). They can also allow for comparisons to be made across cases, and in this case, each case should have the same research procedures (Creswell

& Poth, 2016).

By using multiple cases in my study, I wanted to shed light on the uniqueness of each woman's experience and their identity development. People have different perceptions of themselves and interpretations of their lives and the world they live in. The multiple cases allowed for those distinctive voices to come through and be acknowledged. While there were differences between the four cases, there were themes that cut across these cases during data analysis. Using four case studies gave me the opportunity to show the shared life experiences but with personal nuances (S. Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). It also helped me to get a deeper and more detailed understanding of the impact of SA on the identity of Saudi women in Australia, as identity and SA are both complex topics and using four cases enabled me to have a more general view and understanding of the women's interpretations of themselves and the world, they live in.

I believe that the four case studies may shed some light on the development of the identity of Saudi women in SA experience. Though the findings of these case studies cannot be generalised in the traditional sense, they can be used by policymakers and administrators in the field of SA to deepen their understanding of the situations of students abroad.

4.3.3. Data collection

The purpose of this study is to explore the effects of study abroad on the identity of Saudi women in Australia. Therefore, interviewing was used as the main strategy to elaborate and explore the initial results of the survey. I used semi-structured open-ended questions to give the participants the ability to best voice their experiences and to describe them in rich details (Creswell, 2007). Since the interviewer is mainly responsible for the quality of data produced during an interview (Patton, 2002), I chose the best interview strategy that served my study's goals. I used the general interview guide approach which is structured but provides quite a bit flexibility in its composition (Gall et al., 2003). One of the strengths of this approach is that it

ensures that the same topics are covered with each participant. It also provides focus and at the same time allows for a degree of freedom and flexibility in probing and getting more information from the participants, asking more questions, and exploring in more depth new areas of investigation (Patton, 2002). Though they were semi-structured interviews, after each question, I asked the participants to elaborate by telling stories or experiences they have lived. Though self-reported has been doubted in linguistic research regarding its validity, the data from participants is useful for identity research even if it isn't necessarily 'correct' or a single truth, in this regard Willoughby (2017) says:

> What is of interest is not so much the objective truth or accuracy of how speakers describe their language practices, but how they make sense of these practices in over-arching narratives of what kind of person they are and the attitudes that they hold (p.7).

The interview questions (listed in full in appendix 3) were created based on the literature on study abroad, identity, and the experiences of international students in general, and the Saudi female students studying abroad in particular. The focus has been on some of the social, cultural and religious issues. For example, the topic of Islamic feminism has been discussed lately in a few Saudi studies (e.g., Alsaweel, 2013), so a section of a few questions regarding it and other related areas have been created. They were also informed by the results of the initial quantitative study.

The participants were given the choice to conduct the interviews in Arabic or English to ensure a comfortable setting and ease in responses. Any Arabic quotes presented in the results section have been translated into English by me and were double-checked by a Saudi Arabian colleague who was not involved in the study.

All the interviews were held separately in a natural setting of the preference of each participant (e.g., university library or cafés), and they were all informed about the aim of the research and were provided with the explanatory statement and consent form. The

transcriptions of the interviews were sent to each participant to confirm information and to allow the participant to clarify some answers or provide more details. I also asked for their permission to contact them if I needed any further information via phone calls and text messages. Which I did, as participants were contacted continuously to elaborate on some of their statements. Others were happy, rather excited to read what I have wrote about them. Belle in particular, had read most of her chapter and read it to her mother as well.

During the interviews, interaction with the participants was relaxed and informal. Participants were open and shared a lot, and I had the opportunity to learn more about their in-depth experiences through semi-structured questions. Our informal setting gave me the chance to develop a relationship with each participant which allowed me to ask follow-up questions based on their answers to the interview questions. This approach was quite useful in my interviews as I was able to ask, skip or change questions based on participant responses to former questions. Although the questions were semi-structured, I managed to adapt them which gave me the chance to explore a more personal approach to every interview.

All the interviews carried out in this study were audio recorded and data were transcribed directly. Notes were taken during the interview, which helped me formulate questions for unexpected topics of inquiry and assisted me in locating important quotes within the audio recording.

4.3.4. Data analysis

Analysing the data started immediately after the first interview. The processes of collecting, transcribing, analysing the data and writing the results became increasingly interconnected, and overlapping as the research progresses (Creswell, 2007). Right after the first interview, I started transcribing, writing memos and highlighting major issues in each interview for each participant.

I tried to manage the data as soon as data collection was completed with all participants

(Creswell, 2007), so the interviews transcriptions were organised into different files according to each participant. I then listened to the audio recordings of the interviews, read and reread the data files to get familiar with the data and identify initial main ideas. To analyse the data, I needed to make sense out of it and "making sense out of data involves consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what people have said and what the researcher has seen and read – it is the process of making meaning" (Merriam, 1998, p. 178).

I tried to hear what the participants wanted to say and disregarded the predetermined interview questions, as some questions touched different aspects of the participants' lives which encouraged them to provide different answers and support them with different examples and stories.

The analysis was focused on the women's identity, their investment (Peirce, 1995), imagined communities (Norton, 2001) and most importantly their positioning (Davies & Harré, 1990; Harré & van Langenhove, 1999) within their community and the host one. Analyses are presented in the form of case studies, so as to highlight the significance of the participants' different paths (De Costa, 2011). Pseudonyms were assigned for the participants. In each case study, the data was arranged chronologically under three major categories as the main themes to code the data. These three main themes became the main headings of each case study: before study abroad, during study abroad and after study abroad. Under the first main heading I discussed each participant's background, childhood memories and major characteristics of their identity. Their relationship with English as a language and a culture and their decisions to study abroad. In the second main heading, I discussed their time abroad; cultural shock and the development of their different aspects of their identity, let that be linguistic, social, religious and national. In the last main heading, I discussed their future dreams and the impact of the Saudi vision 2030 and the recent changes on their identity. The reason for displaying the data this way is to show their experiences in a sequential way from the past,

present and an indicate of the future. It was aimed to show their life experiences continuously without any pauses as they lived it and how their previous experiences led to their present and future ones. Displaying their experiences this way will allow readers to connect the dots and make sense of their identity development.

This was done manually by highlighting different concepts with different colours. I partly used the Microsoft Excel program to assist me in analysing and organizing the data. The initial and developed themes were continuously revised by the research supervisors.

4.3.5. Researcher positionality

To understand my position in this study, it is important to know where I come from, as "researchers cannot have "empty heads"", therefore, I am obliged to acknowledge my intellectual, physical and personal presence in my research (Letherby et al., 2012, p. 134). As a researcher who shares much with the women I am researching I want to be clearer and more aware about my biases, personal positions and selves, perspectives, beliefs and value orientations, instead of believing that I would be neutral. Here I offer some information about my own positionality in this study, as well as steps I have taken to encourage participants to share a diverse range of perspectives with me.

The main motivation for my research topic was my own personal experience as a female Saudi student in Australia. I came to Australia seven years ago, completed my master's degree and currently I am a doctoral student and a recipient of a Saudi governmental sponsorship. I was born in the U.S. and spent a few years there as my father was an international student finishing his postgraduate degree. I grew up in Saudi Arabia, under an open-minded father and a religious, rather than conservative, mother. This gave me, I believe, a moderate perspective of life and religion. However, the Saudi conservatives, or even common people, would consider me as liberal.

Although I don't remember most of my life in the U.S., I grew up attracted to the West,

mostly through movies, music, magazines and books. I loved learning English at a young age and kept on developing my language throughout the years which was the reason behind my choice of majoring in English language at university. I used to make friends with people from different countries especially those who speak English. Although I have travelled abroad a few times before coming to Australia, what has surprised me is that after arriving in Australia, I faced some social and cultural challenges, not only in dealing with the Australian society but also with the Saudi community here. This was my first indication that there was a need to study the experience of Saudi women in Australia.

Over my few years here, I have been able to adapt to the new culture and maintain my old one. Being able to speak two languages (Arabic and English) allowed me to take on multiple roles in different environments I find myself in. My identity has developed, and I have created multiple identities which have allowed me to take on different roles. The exposure to the two different (and sometimes conflicting) cultures helped me become who I am today. This has increased my interest to learn more about the Saudi women identity development and how they define themselves as they are immersing into two different worlds, especially that the gender role identities prescribed to women in these two cultures are completely different.

One of the advantages of being an insider in my research is that I was 'less threatening' to my participants since I knew the rules and was as bound by them as my interviewees were, "trust increases as people see that you share a common background with them" (Rubin and Rubin, 2005, p. 92). I was able to build a relationship with my participants as they considered me one of them. I was not a researcher with them, I was considered a friend. I gained an immediate access as some of them opened up from the first question, they wanted to share everything, for them I was means for their voices to be heard. Although I was already friends with some of them, friendship was immediately built with the others, something that was

bound to happen through the shared stories and experiences which created trust and understanding that allowed me to know and interact with them in a meaningful way.

However, I was aware that being an insider comes with some difficulties especially with participants from a collective society like Saudi Arabia. For example, my dress and physical appearance can influence the participants' attitudes and reactions (De Andrade, 2000), as it can create a bond or a barrier to the interview, especially that my participants come from different backgrounds and hold different cultural and religious beliefs and completely varied in their physical appearance, from fully covered to not covered at all. For me, I wear modest clothes, but not abaya, and a hair cover which can be consider as a sign of moderation. In the research I took a number of steps to try not to let my identity become central in the interview discussions. I did this by introducing myself in the beginning as a researcher interesting in this certain topic and assuring my participants that they won't be judged for having different or opposing opinions than mine – on the contrary, I was eager to know how different their experiences were.

I also want to acknowledge here that research cannot be separated from the researcher (Wickens et al.,2017) therefore, I acknowledge my subjective implicatedness as a researcher and an interactant in this research (Clifford & Marcus, 1986; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). The interviews were sites where we all, my participants and me, co-constructed meaning and made sense of the world around us (Miller, 2011). So the stories were co-created and therefore, I consider my own position, as a researcher and writer of the stories, an important aspect of this work. Also by being reflexive, I do not only serve to increase transparency but also help in interpreting the narrative of other Saudi women by understanding the socio-cultural context of where we come from.

A researcher cannot employ participant, investigate and write stories about them without reflecting on their 'own histories, social and cultural locations as well as subjectivities and

values' (Merrill & West, 2009, p. 5). Being reflexive researcher is to intentionally reflect on your background, basic assumptions, and research decisions (Wickens et al, 2017). Being reflexive "challenges us as researchers/writers to revisit what we thought we understood about our research participants, our own language, and ultimately ourselves" (Wickens et al., 2017, p. 863). Therefore, to be reflexive is to become "self-aware" (Begoray & Banister, 2010, p. 788) of your position and your influence in your research. Not only does the researcher's own knowledge influence the way they handle their research, but also, the generated data affects the researcher as well. So any attempt of the researcher to stay analytically unbiased "strips individuals of their history" (Bamberg, 2004, p. 369). This requires the researcher to share their own subjectivities and assumptions, which are common facets of all qualitative and narrative research.

In short, my goal here is not to get an objective truth, but to showcase the different experiences and views the Saudi women report and better understand the role study abroad has played in shaping their views on language, culture and religion.

4.3.6. Summary

In this study, I adopted a qualitative research design to investigate the experiences of Saudi women in their SA journey. I started with an initial quantitative data which provided a general understanding of the problem and helped recruit participants for the main qualitative study. Then semi-structured interviews were used to get rich details of their experiences. The next chapter will provide the findings for the study represented in the form of case study of four Saudi women.

Chapter Five: Burdened with English

Arwa's Journey

I haven't changed.

5.1 Before studying abroad

Among all the participants, Arwa had the strongest bond to her family. She came from a moderate religious family and had strong ties with her parents and siblings. Talking about them brought joy to the conversation at times and tears at others, especially when mentioning her mother. In this section, I discuss the different factors which had an impact on Arwa. Here I discuss her life before going to Australia; her family background, factors that shaped her identity, her history with English and her expectations and reasons to study abroad.

5.1.1 Profile and family background

Arwa was a gentle and reserved 38-year-old mother of four children. At the time of the interview, she was in the second year of her PhD candidature studying IT, having spent eight years in Australia. Arwa considered herself a religious person and very committed to religious practices. She covers up and wears abaya and niqab. She described herself as a quiet and shy person who minds her own business as she does not like to argue or get into deep discussions with people.

Arwa comes from a big family; seven brothers and two sisters who as she described have stronger personalities than her and are more confident. Her father worked for the military and her mother was a housewife. Both of her parents had limited education (finished secondary school) and they encouraged her and her siblings to study and achieve high degrees. They were easy going and understanding parents. Arwa described them as very religious but not traditional, as they travelled abroad to nearby countries on few occasions, and never forced

their children to do any religious practices: “they used to talk to us and convince us to do stuff”. After her mother passed away, her father remarried which was very difficult for Arwa as she was so fond of her family.

Arwa grew up in Jeddah and her family lived there but they originally come from the south of Saudi and their extended family live there (grandparents, uncles and aunts). They regularly go to the south for visits, and she is still in contact with most of her extended family members. They also have some relatives (an uncle and an aunt) in Jeddah, and they are also in regular contact.

After getting married Arwa moved to the south as her husband and his family live there. She got a job as a teaching assistant in a university there and had two of her children before coming to Australia. When talking about her husband and his family, Arwa referred to them as strictly traditional. About them she said: “my family’s environment is completely different than my husband’s. You know gender roles and the way they raise their kids, my dad used to help my mum, take care of us, but they are very different, very traditional”. Getting married was an important milestone in her life, a new era that carried conflicts and struggles.

5.1.2 Identity

Arwa’s beliefs about the construction and dynamics of a family were strong, her feelings and perceptions of what a family should be were so closely linked to the construction of her own family when she was a child and while growing up.

> I see many families who never see each other, like everyone is living their own life. We were a big family, but we were so close. We used to gather around the table for all the meals. We watch TV together; you know in the evening with snacks and tea. My father, though busy, always found a time to spend with us. He used to drive us to school, although there was a bus, but he wanted to drive us and to talk to us on the way. They taught us never to leave the house without kissing them and asking them to pray for us. Something I try to do with my kids. I taught them that, now they never leave the house without saying that to me, but not their dad... ha-ha. Don’t get me wrong I don’t like that they are ignoring him but I’m the one who remind them about

> that every day. I want them to live the life that I lived to feel the cosiness that I felt with my family.

Her mother had a huge impact on how Arwa sees herself as she compares herself to her mother all the time. She was a role model for her. Arwa described her mother as a peaceful, religious and wise person, and she believes that she got these traits from her.

> I'm a quiet and shy person, just like my mum. And I like that there is something in me that connects me to her. She was so religious, and she taught me a lot about Islam and how to do good and only expect the reward from Allah and not people. She never imposed herself on anyone even on us, never shouts or give orders or force us to do anything, she used to show us by her actions not her words. Her memories really touch me, I keep thinking about how she used to act, I remember many incidents with her and realise how great and peaceful she was with us. She influenced me in a way I did not realise till I grew up. She was a giving person, she used to give at the expense of herself, and I try my best to be like her, but the truth is I cannot do this, it is so exhausting. And you know, this peaceful trait I took from my mum, I don't like it, because sometimes I feel it is more like weakness than peacefulness, and sometimes people do not appreciate that, yeah, they see you minding your own business and not defending yourself, because sometimes I don't want to get low! I just ignore them. They look at you as a weak person, but I don't want to change this about me.

Arwa recognised that she is becoming a version of her mother, she is admiring her traits as they remind her of her mother. At the same time, she is acknowledging that copying her mother is somehow tiresome, but she is continually trying. She also displayed dissatisfaction at some of these traits and how people would interpret them and position her as weak but even that did not stop her from embracing them and did not want to change. This gives us a hint of who Arwa is and how she deals with situations that she does not like or approve of. She took the position of a mother, and that position is connected to her mother. So, to her knowledge being a mother is to impersonate her mother even if she does not like that position. The position of mother was nonnegotiable for her, however, she had choices on how to be one and she chose to be a copy of her mother.

Arwa's older sister also had an influence on her, she was ten-years older, and a religious mentor to Arwa. She used to gather Arwa and her siblings around and listen to some religious

tapes about Islam; something that Arwa kept on doing as a grown up.

At a young age, Arwa recognised the importance of education. She explained how her parents pushed them towards learning. Even her extended family, especially her mother's side, encouraged them and emphasised the importance of education. Their achievements and high positions set them as role models for her. She talked about how knowledgeable and educated they were; her grandfather was a well-known religious clerk and a teacher of the Quran and Islamic studies at the Holy Mosque. Her aunt was also one of the first female teachers of Islamic studies there. Even her grandmother, though illiterate, was very knowledgeable of the Quran and Islamic matters. Going to school and learning was, then, essential in Arwa's family, as religiously education was greatly valued. Her extended family also supported girls' education since its beginning in Saudi in the sixties, something she was really proud of. She continued to describe how school contributed to her identity:

> School played an important role and contributed to my identity in the same way my mother did. In particular, the Islamic studies teacher played a huge role on who I am today. To this teacher goes the credit of the after-school Quranic classes in my compound. She also used to preach about good manners and respect at school on our free time. The physics teacher also used to reinforce the value of good Islamic manners on us. They contributed to who I am today.

Arwa's religious aspect of her identity was the dominant one. All her stories centred around how religion and religious people around her contributed to that aspect of her identity. Even when asked about other effects of school on her, she talked about the unacceptable behaviour of young girls in her secondary school and how they used to tell stories of their adventures in dating boys. She displayed awareness of the society's acceptable behaviours at a young age, which is why the girls started to avoid telling such stories around her, as they came to understand her religious background and her stance of such behaviour. She took a religious position with her friends and distanced herself from them and was determined to correct their wrong doings. Even when she tried to do something adventurous one day, she could not find

herself there:

> I decided to escape one of the classes like the other girls and I did it, and I saw my sister outside, told her "Hey Sara, I ran away from my class" my sister was surprised and asked me how! I said I asked the teacher for permission to go out, ha-ha! It is not me! The adventures and all this, I don't feel anything! I don't like it and I don't understand why the girls do it!

Arwa was a disciplined girl and found herself with the regulations and laws. In general, whatever she saw or heard in school from her friends or teacher usually would be filtered at home by her mother or her older sister. Her society also played a role in her life.

> Lulu: How did you become the woman you are today?
>
> Arwa: the credit goes to my parents supported me all along, emotionally, financially, they were there for anything I needed. The society played a role too, but it was different, you know, the way they look at you and when they tell you can't do this or that, and I was like I will show you, I will go abroad and study and raise my kids in an Islamic framework even if we are in a Western country. I was like I'll show you. From that moment I considered myself a warrior. I mean I'll fight for what I want, and I'll prove them wrong, not that I'll make trouble, no no, I'm a peaceful person as I told you.
>
> Lulu: What do you mean by society?
>
> Arwa: Everyone, people around me; my in-laws, some of my friends, my extended family. They give you this look that you can't do it, and they are waiting for you to fail; so they can say 'we told you'.

Their attitude towards her scholarship was confusing to Arwa. Education was supported all the way as she was growing up. It seems that the conflict rises from the fact that she was going abroad and not against education itself. The Saudi society, and her community members in particular, had difficulty in accepting teaching English language (Mahboob and Elyas, 2014), let alone travelling abroad to study. The belief that the ideologies of the West, through studying English and living abroad, might influence her and her children might be the main reason of their attitude (Alzahrani, 2017). Arwa recognised that and was assuring herself that she was going to study and raise her children in an Islamic way even if she was in a Western country.

During the first part of the interview, Arwa kept on describing herself as a peaceful person, and for the first time here she described herself as a warrior. She believed in education and was determined to get the degree even if she had to travel abroad and go against the advice of her society.

At this stage of her life, Arwa was pretty much contented with her religious identity. Religion gave her satisfaction, and it was the main drive in her life. Its importance was emphasised by her parents, especially her mother, her older sister, her extended family, grandparents, uncles and aunts, school and society in general who were keen to guide and teach her all religion - related matters. Religion, for her, became the measure for what is right and wrong, the drive for learning and good manners. It gave her the feeling of being complete and in place. It was the essence of her identity.

5.1.3 Languages: English attitude, ability and use

Arwa's journey with English started early at the age of six. Unlike other primary school children at that time, Arwa studied English in grade one. This is because she used to live in a military compound and studied in their public school that hired the most qualified teachers and was taught English by a British teacher. Arwa's father was also keen to give her the best opportunities to develop and prepare her for the future, so he used to enroll Arwa and her brothers in English language and computer classes after school when she was in high school.

However, Arwa did not develop any interest and had "no passion at all about the English language". Arwa's attitude reflects that of people around her (extended family members and southern community), she also explained how until now she stands out as being able to understand and use English language.

Despite her parents' encouragements for education in general, and her father's support to learn English, Arwa was not interested as she was receiving negative messages about the West, English language as the official language of Westerners, the "language of the Kufar

(non-Muslims)" (Elyas & Picard 2010). As a child, she was driven by the society. Her preference of her own culture over that of the target culture affected her willingness to learn L2 (Schumann, 1975). Her society was a source of external pressure in which cultural and linguistic differences were considered in a negative light (Fillmore, 2000). As a child, she received two contradictory signals which affected her motivation to learn English and influenced her learning progress.

Though it has been noted that parents do not need to speak L2 to provide support for their children's L2 learning (Prescott & Orton, 2012), it seems that Arwa's parents' limited education and lack of English abilities might have played a role in this. That is if Arwa's father were able to speak the English language along with his encouragement for her, it would have motivated her.

Arwa graduated from secondary school with limited English ability, like most of the Saudi students at that age. She was able to understand a very simple conversation in English which is what teachers have reported in (Al-Shumaimeri, 2003; Alzahrani, 2017). For her undergraduate major, she chose to study IT (information Technology), and she didn't need to learn English for her studies as Arabic was the medium of instruction at that time. So at that stage, her attitudes towards English didn't change and the idea that she did not need English for her studies was enforced. After graduation, Arwa's English ability remained very limited. However, getting the job as a TA (teaching assistant) in a university was Arwa's wake up call. She knew that she has to study abroad as it was a job requirement since some of the Saudi universities list getting a scholarship as one of the contract conditions.

Before her trip to Australia, Arwa appeared to be satisfied with her English level and did not think that English would be a problem.

Arwa had many chances to learn English, but she was not invested to learn it. English was not popular among common Saudis at that time and barely used in contexts other than

classrooms. So, it did not have any power or add to her cultural capital.

When talking about languages, Arwa described Arabic as "the language of Quran". She connected it to her mother tongue, and to her religion, the only language used to read the Quran. Thus she considered it the language of value, contrary to English, which was associated with the West, the language of the non-Muslims. As a consequence, her negative views of Westerners and their influence on one's religion distanced her from English (Mahboob and Elyas, 2014). Also, her desire to connect with her own society, culture and religion affected her views of English. Arwa reflected how on how her beliefs about the English language had been influenced by her cultural background, and in doing so, detached her from the language and disclosed negative feeling of it. She showed high cultural affiliation which is closely connected to her religious identity. English, which was not their language, was not appreciated compared to religious knowledge.

5.1.4 Pre-departure expectations

Studying abroad and getting a master and PhD degrees was a job requirement for Arwa. From the moment she got the job, her husband started preparing for the scholarship and was in charge of all the arrangements. He was excited about living abroad as it was a great chance for him to study as well, as Arwa's companion and guardian. He chose Australia and contacted an agency to finish all the paperwork as his English was limited and he needed someone to finalise the process for him. At that time, they had two toddlers, and who were keeping Arwa busy. She came to Australia without any perception or expectations about the country or the people, she just wanted to finish her studies anywhere:

> Lulu: What were your perceptions of Australia before you came to Australia?
>
> Arwa: look, you might laugh at me when I tell you this, when I first came here, I was a newcomer, I didn't search or learn anything about Australia or it's people. My husband did everything, it was actually his choice. I just wanted to go somewhere and get over with it.

Lulu: So, you didn't have any image about how Australia would be like?

Arwa: I was just worried about the fact that I'm wearing hijab and abaya.

Lulu: What about the language, did you prepare yourself, took any English classes before coming?

Arwa: Well, no, I didn't think it would be a big deal, we knew were going to study here, so why bother.

Anticipating a negative reaction, Arwa started her answer by saying "you might laugh at me when I tell this". She wanted me to know that from the very beginning, before leaving for Australia, she was not excited or interested in the life or the people, she was travelling to study; that was the ultimate goal. She was completely dependent on her husband to deal with all the matters related to the scholarship. She appeared to be more accepting and content about her English skills. The only thing that was concerning her was her hijab as she did not want to change the way she covers up.

5.2 While studying abroad

Arwa's journey in Australia started by taking English classes. She was enrolled in an English school and studied English for a year and a half. Instead of the IELTS test, Arwa took a bridging course to start her master's degree. In her first few days in Australia, they lived in a hotel in the city near her school, after three weeks they moved to a town house in the suburbs where most of the Saudi community reside. Finishing her master's in two years, Arwa then took another master by research for one year, a requirement to start her PhD. She started her PhD in IT and as we will see Arwa faced several struggles in her studies. At the time of the interview, her candidature was not going well, and she was debating whether to continue her studies or withdraw. Her husband also faced some trouble in his studies. He couldn't finish his PhD and quit in his second year which was a cause of trouble for Arwa as he kept pushing her to quit and go back.

5.2.1 Cultural shock: Men can help

Arwa poured her heart out about how difficult her early days were. She started her English classes after few days of arriving. Her husband stayed at home with her two toddlers as his studies started three months after their arrival. It was stressful for both, as his family, back home, used to push him "to be a man" and start studying and not to let her finish before him:

> His family used to pressure us from day one. Every time he called them, the first question they asked was: did you start studying! They don't want me to finish before him, to be a doctor before him. They told him, be a man and start studying before she finishes. In the first few days in Australia, my first day in school, I went, and he stayed in the hotel with the babies; my daughter was only two years and my son was less than a year, they had dirty nappies and he didn't do anything he called me and he was very upset and asked to come and deal with them. I came home to find them in the bath as he didn't know how to deal with them.

From day one, her husband wanted to deliver a message that he does not want to do anything with the kids or the house chores. He was under pressure to study and staying home with the children while she is studying was unbearable for him. He was supportive to the idea of studying abroad, so Arwa expected more from him especially since she was the one with a scholarship:

> I don't understand how helping with the kids and the house can conflict with the role of a father! When I first came here, it got my attention how fathers here go out with their babies all the time. I lived with a dad who used to take care of us when my mum was busy and stay with us when she is visiting friends or neighbours, he used to clean and help mum with the house chores, but it is rare to see that in Saudi. Men in Saudi believe that the father has to be controlling and superior, and the mother is the one supposed to do everything. I got married and had kids and everything is on me, I'm the one responsible; I can't go out alone as I have to take them with me, we go together or stay home together. My husband is not like my dad, he can't do this, it is his environment that he grew up in, it is their culture, it is different. This is not even against their role in Islam, I mean being a father or a husband, it is something that we should work on together. Islam is a religion of ease, but in Saudi they assign too much on women, things that we're not obliged to do in Islam. Prophet Muhammed used to work in his house and help his household.

A short time after their arrival, Arwa started comparing between her husband and other men

in Australia. The parenting example in her life included her father helping, unlike her husband and many Saudi men; her father gave her an example of Islamic based gender roles, where men are more involved with domestic chores and taking care of children. In Australia, she started questioning the traditional gender roles in her house by comparing her husband to other Australian (non-Muslim) men. That time was the perfect time for her husband to step up and help, as they were away from the Saudi society, away from its norms, traditions and narrow gender roles. She was not expecting her husband to be like the Australian men but at least close to what her father was in terms of helping. In other words, she was not intending for her husband to perform as Australian non-Muslim men, but nevertheless be more engaged in domestic tasks and respect Islamic based gender roles as her father did. This is one of the basic demands of Muslim feminists such as Margot Badran (1994), Amina Wadud (1992), Lila Abu-Lughod (2013) and others who use the Islamic texts and Prophet Muhamad's acts as justifications for their rights. In Saudi she had the help from her parents and her maid, but in Australia there was no one to help but her husband. Being away from Saudi, without domestic help is one of the transformational factors in Arwa's life. If Arwa had been able to get a maid in Australia, her life might not have been changed that much.

Disappointed with her husband's attitude, Arwa started to feel stressed and unable to cope with her new life. Her education is important but so is her family. She took on different positions, a mother, a wife, and a student. She had more responsibilities than ever, if she does not do it, nobody will. All this got her into a cultural shock. She was feeling confused, uncertain, and helpless. Her personality type and her unfamiliarity with the host culture, lack of support and lack of English skills all slowed her from overcoming this stage quickly.

Arwa was trying to make her life easy and accept these traditional gender roles, but her husband's control did not end here as he tried to raise the children in a traditional way, the way he was raised:

> Lulu: How about your children, do you treat them the same and teach them about gender roles?
>
> Arwa: for me, I assign the same chores for both boys and girls and I won't accept that he would control his sister or disrespect her in any way, I was raised this way with brothers and sisters. But my husband isn't helping me with this, he has this idea that my son would not step a foot in the kitchen, and he says that in front of them, I say no and try to but as I told you two different cultures. Look, I sometimes go easy with my son, I tell myself no, this will affect him and his personality. He is going to be a man and men need to have strong personality, this will give him wisdom on how to act and also prestige. So yes, I go easy on him.
>
> Lulu: have you ever talked to them about gender roles or equality?
>
> Arwa: To be honest no, I try to change this, but I don't completely accept it myself.

Arwa was taking full responsibilities when it comes to her children or the household. That is why she did not accept her husband's interference with her way of upbringing the children. Interestingly, she is somehow supporting his ideas by treating them differently and never talking to them about gender roles or equality. This might be caused by her husband's influence on her way of thinking or may be the fear to teach them something against their culture and traditions.

Her husband controlled her actions outside the house as well, as he did not approve her mixing with other men:

> Arwa: My husband is making a big deal out of it. He doesn't want me to meet with men or be around them, even my supervisor. Till today, since day one, he is refusing the whole idea and we always fight about that. He always tells me to be careful in the future not to take any high positions in Saudi, as with these positions come the possibilities of dealing and talking with men.
>
> Lulu: How do you react to that?
>
> Arwa: I don't agree with him. I don't talk with men in dirty way, you know! I'm a respectful woman. I don't know why he thinks this way! He used to work in a gender mixed company in Saudi! I can't do anything, but Allah will ask him about all this.

While Arwa believes that gender mixing is not appropriate from a religious point of view, she couldn't understand her husband's attitude towards it. She knows that he is not religious, and

he doesn't take matters from a religious point of view especially since he used to work in a mixed-gender workplace. Again, Arwa shows another level of questioning traditional gender roles, she could explain her husband's attitude neither from a religious point of view, nor from a traditional way. If he were a religious man, she would accept this attitude and maybe respect it (as she values religious teaching), but the fact that he used to engage in gender mixing himself in Saudi, this was confusing for her and a site for more questioning.

5.2.2 Linguistic and cultural gains

At the time of the interview, Arwa has been in Australia for almost eight years. She was in the second year of her PhD. As we were about to start the interview, she asked me to keep the interview merely in Arabic. She told me that her English-speaking skills are not good, and she cannot express herself well in English. This is a point that she returned to at many points during the interview. She is attributing her lack of English knowledge to her lack of use of the language but at the same time she is not putting in effort to practice the language, even with her children.

Growing up, Arwa did not have the passion to learn English as we mentioned before and her attitude towards the language did not change:

> When I came here, I knew everything is going to be in English, so I'm forced to learn the language to understand people and survive.

She had a typical instrumental motivation for learning English. She does believe that learning and speaking L2 is important, but this importance is somehow restricted to the academic level:

> Lulu: Do you think it is important to learn a second language! Let's say English?
>
> Arwa: sure, it is important, how are you going to learn! If you want to read books and understand other cultures, not everything is translated to Arabic, so if you want to learn you have to know another language!

Lulu: Do you embrace the English language and or keep it out of your life?

Arwa: Look I don't embrace it, but I try to keep what I've got. I try not to lose it as I have already lost most of my language while doing my PhD.

Lulu: So, do you use English daily?

Arwa: Sometimes with my kids to explain the meaning of an Arabic word… you know I'm not that good! so we speak Arabic most of the time thank Allah, because we're Arab and Arabic is our language.

Lulu: How about the feeling of speaking another language! You speak English right! How does it feel for you?

Arwa: Nothing! It's just ok! Let me tell you something I'm not that good in English and not that bad.

Lulu: So how do you feel about the fact that you can speak and understand a second language!

Arwa: Ok nothing, I don't feel so much about it!

Lulu: Are you comfortable in speaking the language?

Arwa: Currently no, it is a little hard for me, I was better when I was doing my master.

Lulu: Why?

Arwa: Maybe because I used to do assignments all the time! I used to have group assignments and used to work with other students on them, so I used to practise the language. Now I rarely use it, just when speaking with my supervisor and as I told you I don't socialise, so just my supervisor and my readings and most of the language is academic.

Arwa did not use the language inside the house unless it was necessary, and she did not use it outside because she did not like to socialise. She positioned herself as an Arabic speaker and attached herself to Arabic and wanted her children to speak it as it is their mother tongue. Her position as an Arabic speaker was connected to her position as a religious person as Arabic was part of her religion as "the language of the Quran". So Arwa as a parent was motivated and committed to teach them Arabic to access the Quran and to be part of their Islamic identity (Bahhari, 2014). She believed that her English skills are good enough for her studies and speaking English fluently doesn't mean much for her. This feeling is stemming from her

lack of English skills in the first place, something she repeated many times to make it clear to me. Claiming the position of an Arabic speaker and rejecting the English speaker one is important to Arwa, as the former gave her the legitimacy to speak. Her English skills were not good enough to put her in a favourable position, a strong one, as she does not like to appear weak. This could also be the reason for not practicing the language with her children and keep it merely Arabic, as a parent she might want to be in a higher position and speaking weak English could jeopardise that position, while speaking a very good Arabic can reassure her and make her a good example for her children. Norton (2000) touched on the idea that children will show sign of disrespect to their parents with limited English skills. Her participant Mai talked about the way her nephews disrespected their mother (Tan) for her limited knowledge of English. Contrary to Tan, Arwa kept Arabic as the main language at home, to gain her children's respect.

This made me wonder if her English was better and she could speak the language fluently would she appreciate the language more or she would hold the same view, which encouraged me to ask her the following question:

> Lulu: How do you feel about people who can speak English in Saudi Arabia? And those who don't?
>
> Arwa: Look, there are people who speak English very well and I do really envy them because Mashallah Tabarak Allah it is great to be able to get yourself out of certain situations. You can explain yourself better, you can speak up and be understood. Sometimes people ask me about stuff, but I can't answer them in English, and I get embarrassed. It hurts me. But again, I say it's a gift. And honestly, I'm ok with my level of English. I learned it to pass my studies and that's it.

After sharing her profound admiration for those who fluently speak English and wishing to be as fluent as them, Arwa expressed her satisfaction with her English level as it gives her what it takes to finish her studies. She described English fluency as a gift that has nothing to do with hard work, as she has been working hard since day one. This can also contribute to her

rejection of using English, stemming from her deep feeling that she can never be good. She wanted to feel better about it, and that is why she kept saying that she is happy with her English level, and she does not need it. It can also be traced back to her society's attitudes as we saw in the previous section.

> Lulu: so you are satisfied with this level of English and you manage your studies which are in English! How does that feel? To be able to speak two languages.
>
> Arwa: I thank Allah, I wish I can be fluent, but it is not necessary (whoever learns a people's language, will be safe from their plot) I wish to understand everything they say. Here in Australia they appreciate the fact that you are doing your studies in another language, they don't judge or criticise my speech or my homework, but there in Saudi, they live to criticise, they criticise my language, yes I learned it but it doesn't mean I have to be perfect! It is not my mother tongue, so people please back off.

Arwa here revealed another factor for her resistance to learning the language; criticism from Saudi society and the expectation of high fluency after studying abroad, as they cast study abroad as a "magical formula for the development of language ability" or "easy learning" (Kinginger, 2011, p. 58) where students will master the language just by being abroad. Such criticism can form pressure on L2 learners, and instead of learning, students start to defend themselves.

Arwa believed that the Saudi culture influenced her identity, and affected the way she interacts, writes and talks in the classroom or with her supervisors. She discussed her struggles with writing and rewriting which usually ends up with a meeting to discuss and deliver the meaning and express herself in a better way. She also talked about how her supervisor asked her to change her way of writing and addressing them in her emails and how she started to observe and learn how to do that. At the same time Arwa denied any connection between language and culture:

> Lulu: Do you think understanding the culture would help you learn the language?

Arwa: No

Lulu: I'll give you an example, would you understand that the expression "No worries" means "no problem" and that it can be an answer to thank you, if you didn't come here?

Arwa: REALLY! I didn't know that!

Lulu: haven't you ever heard it from anyone after saying thank you?

Arwa: So it means you are welcome! Oh, I don't socialise that is why I don't get it. So yes, studying and socializing abroad might improve someone's language.

Arwa recognised the role of socialising. She was content for what she had and for the first time during the interview she changed her beliefs. She acknowledged missing something, and she was surprised that after all these years she did not recognise that. Arwa is clearly demonstrating limitations of the 'immersive' experience. Automatically gaining linguistic and cultural skills while studying abroad is often described as a myth, and Arwa is clearly an example of someone for whom immersion is counterbalanced by her own beliefs and her family environment.

5.2.3 Social isolation

From the beginning of her journey, Arwa was focused on her studies, as this was her main goal of travelling abroad. She was not interested in building relationships with native speakers or even internationals. During the interview she stressed that she did not socialise much and limited her contact with others. She did not initiate conversations and kept them short when someone else did:

Lulu: Do you socialise with Australians and make friends with them? do activities with them?

Arwa: NO!

Lulu: What about your kids' friends! Did you meet their mothers?

Arwa: Only the Saudi ones, not the Australians.

Arwa's response to my question was affirmative in a surprising way, it was like 'why would I do that'. She was happy with her relationships with the Saudi community and was not interested in expanding her social circle. She positioned herself as a Saudi and was clear about her ingroup being only Saudis. She was looking for sameness and avoided difference. Even at university where students usually get the chance to socialise with Australian and international students Arwa did not consider other students to be related to her in an academic way:

> Lulu: What about in the office! Do you talk with anyone there?
>
> Arwa: There is this international student from Pakistan, and we talk occasionally if something happened to her or if she has something useful to say.
>
> Lulu: What about in the kitchen when you are having lunch or making coffee! Don't you chitchat with any one there?
>
> Arwa: Maybe with the secretaries in our school, they know me, and I know them, but I just say hi and how are you, that's it! There isn't any kind of any relationship. I mean I never sat down with them or chat.
>
> Lulu: What about your school activities, seminars and workshops, do you meet with people there and talk?
>
> Arwa: No, I never ever go there and socialise with anyone.

Arwa's had a negative attitude towards building social relationships with English speakers, she made it clear when she says, "if something happened to her or if she has something useful to say", other than that talking is a waste of her time. This might be because she has limited time in school and does not want to waste it, especially if she is struggling to talk. This was her attitude with everyone, even those who are interested in making a conversation with her:

> Lulu: What about them! Did anyone try to start a conversation with you?
>
> Arwa: No one no! there was this guy who is interested in Saudi Arabia, and he loved to talk whenever he sees me, but I'm not interested so I cut it short, I don't give him any chance to go on.
>
> Lulu: Why don't you!

> Arwa: As I told you, I just don't like it, he is a man and I'm a shy person, it's in my nature.

Arwa got few chances to practice English, but she showed no interest. A colleague showed an interest in her culture which gives her a chance and legitimacy to speak and explain everything culture related and improve her language, yet she chose to be silent. Arwa's reaction to him and others is triggered by different factors. First, her attitude towards socialising: "I just don't like it". Also, her position as a religious person who is against gender mixing: "he is a man". Also the pressure of her husband to avoid talking to men. And lastly, her nature and personality: "I'm shy". However, she also avoided having conversations with women around her, which might be caused by her lack of time or confidence with English. In short, Arwa's lack of interest in socialising was due to a mix of different reasons; her limited time, studies, religion, shyness, husband pressure, or language difficulties as she kept all her conversations short even with women. She also might be using some of these reasons as excuses for others. She was silenced by her culture and language ability and like Duff's (2002) students Arwa used silence to protect herself from humiliation.

Talking about socialisation and interaction with Australians brought us to the issue of gender mixing which was a huge issue for Arwa:

> Lulu: What are your thoughts on gender mixing or separation? In general?
>
> Arwa: Look, I don't approve gender mixing. Here in Australia, it is something that I can't change or do anything about it. But I don't accept it that's why I don't put myself in a mixed-gender situation. Sometimes I have to be in one, as in meetings or seminars. I just discuss what's there to be discussed, and finish what I'm there for, and then leave.
>
> Lulu: Is this what you do in your meeting with your supervisor! As you said he is a man?
>
> Arwa: Exactly. I have to be there for my study.
>
> Lulu: So is it you or your husband?

> Arwa: Listen to me, I can never imagine myself sitting in a desk with a man next to me! I'm shy! In my English classes I used to sit far away. I isolate myself from people.
>
> Lulu: Do you think this is because we have limited interaction with men in Saudi?
>
> Arwa: I don't know but I'm shy.

It is not only that she couldn't interact with men in general, but she could not also imagine herself sitting near a man or contacting men, and she is attributing that to her nature of being a shy person. The recourse to "shy" here might have different interpretations; it might be as she said, "her nature", her lack of experience on how to act in a gender mixed environment, her religious belief that this is how a good Muslim woman should be, or simply to avoid a theological debate. When she said, "listen to me", she wanted to end that discussion, to confirm to me that it was her choice and belief, and when I asked one more question, she just went with "I don't know" and gave me the "I'm shy" excuse. It is important to note that throughout the interview, Arwa made it clear that she is against gender mixing at any level and believe that life would be easier for Muslim women in Australia if there was strict gender segregation. So, the strategy of "I show up when I'm needed, do my work and leave" was morally suitable for Arwa, but academically it was not, as she was struggling with her work, and she was lacking networks to seek support. With these struggles, it seems that not only did she lose interest in learning English but also in her PhD studies and became instrumental about the whole SA experience. This might be another reason for her isolation and not being engaged academically or worried about passing up networking opportunities.

Arwa, as a student distanced herself from the new community and showed disinterest in what it offered (Bennett, 2011). The wide cultural gap between Saudi and Australia, e.g, in terms of women's independence, and gender mixing, could be the reason for Arwa's distance and opt to reject the host culture. The differences of the host society were seen as threats to maintaining her home values (Bennett, 2011). In this defensive stage, she preferred to

surround herself with members of her own culture and avoid contact with members from other cultures. Arwa here is taking a moral stance as she does not approve of gender mixing even if this stance affected her academic career, she has priorities and she was happy with her choices.

In short, Arwa believed that the reason for her isolation and struggle in her second-culture interaction lies in her personality as being shy. It would be much easier for Arwa to learn new skills and increase her competency than to change her personality especially since "culture contact was manifestly an interpersonal, interactive event. Intrapersonal characteristics and traits certainly played a role, but that was really only one part of the story, and a minor one" (Bochner, 2003, p. 8). Socialising exclusively with members of her own culture did not help her to develop (Bochner, 2003). This act was triggered by few factors; speaking a weak English put her in a weak position and caused her to withdraw. Also, her religious education and upbringing can have an influence on her as she considered gender segregation a religious act. Her husband is also an essential factor, knowing that he does not approve of her interaction with men might have impacted her overall interaction in Australia. Finally, not holding a passion about her area of study might be another important reason for withdrawing from the academic zone.

5.2.4 Personal growth

Many of Arwa's answers revealed a firm character and rejection to change. She was determined to show me proudness of her never-changing self:

> I haven't changed. I'm the same Arwa who came here 8 years ago. Even when I go home on holidays, people tell me that though they expected me to be different, but I remained the same.

As discussed in section 5.1.2, the idea of SA was confronted by her extended family and friends, so change for her was off the table, and she had to fight it to prove how strong and

devoted a Muslim she was. In fact, she was criticising how people in Saudi have changed in the last few years:

> Look, in general I see how people in the Saudi society have changed I mean religiously. The new generation, in high and secondary school are the worst! They don't feel the religion, not in the way that "I am religious" and I have to be strict! No! they don't sense the spirituality of it! they are not like me! They are busy watching TV and going out with friends! I was not like that, we used to visit friends and neighbours, but our interests were different than girls these days.

As the interview went on, she opened up and talked about how some aspects of her identity have changed. She believes that her priorities have changed, she became more mature, and became more critical to the shallowness of people:

> Lulu: Did your perceptions of home change after being in Australia?
>
> I don't criticise my country itself, I look at people and criticise much. My priorities have changed, here I grew to believe certain things are not that important, I compare myself to the people in Saudi and I see how shallow they are. They care about looks, stuff that I don't see their importance! I mean now I believe that education and educational activities are more important than traveling, going out to restaurants or cafes! For them they spent most of their money on such stuff.

Being in Australia, and away from Saudi society, has enforced her beliefs about the importance of education and how she wants her children to get the best educational opportunities available for them.

Her experience of gender roles in Australia has changed her views about gender roles too and the issue became so sensitive to her in a way that made her speak up her mind with her father-in-law, something she had never though she would do:

> Lulu: Do you think that you accept the traditional gender roles?
>
> Arwa: No, I don't. Look, honestly, I believe that working together is an essential thing in any relationship, it is a nice thing as I told you before. You just don't throw all the responsibilities on one member of the family. All the responsibilities are on the wife; you do it or no one will do it. It is not our responsibilities, and we are not obliged to do it (in Islam).
>
> Lulu: Do you speak up about this? When you encounter such things?

> Arwa: Yes, I recently blew up, especially with my in-laws as they drove me crazy. I had an intense conversation with my father-in-law about this; I told him you burden women with stuff which are not their duties, you ignore their rights. I talked and argued until he couldn't answer any more.
>
> Lulu: What about your husband? What did he say?
>
> Arwa: ha-ha-ha, he wasn't there, I couldn't say a word if he was there.

Again, Arwa is showing confused opinions about traditional gender roles. Though stated before that she doesn't accept the idea of equality between boys and girls, she opened up here about her rejection of the traditional Saudi gender roles, which again shows a level of basic questioning which might be triggered by being in a conservative and traditional atmosphere (her in-laws). She does not identify with them, she wanted to distance from them and their actions. She wanted to be in a different position than them. Even in her strongest moments the fear of her husband is controlling her opinions. However, she managed to overcome this fear once and faced him and threatened to leave him:

> Lulu: Would you sacrifice getting married and having kids with having a good job or a high position in the society?
>
> Arwa: Look, I said it to my husband once. I told him that it is really ok for me to end my marriage, it ok to be divorced if he stands on my way to reach my goals. But to be honest with you, I don't know, I can't. I just said it to him to warn him.
>
> Lulu: Are you scared to do it?
>
> Arwa: YES
>
> Lulu: Because of people gossip!
>
> Arwa: No not that at all.
>
> Lulu: Why then?
>
> Arwa: Because of my kids. Because of family life and its effect on my kids. If I don't get this high position in my society, someone else will do, man or woman, but why should I sacrifice my family life and endanger my kids. I want them to grow up the same way I grew, or even better.

Arwa's biggest fear is raising her children in a home that is not warm and cosy. They are her

number one responsibility. Her position as a wife or an academic in high position does not compare to her position as a mother, which is always present and strong. However, these two incidents show how Arwa's peaceful and quiet personality can be evoked at times and how she managed to overcome what she considered once as a weakness (section 5.1.2).

5.2.5 Understanding of religion and religious identity: Religion is always the drive

Arwa's experience and perception of Australia were shaped by her religion. Everything was measured on a religious scale. Her hijab, a religious practise, was the first and only thing she thought about before coming to Australia, as we mentioned before. She expected to be harassed because of her hijab, which might also be why she was defensive all the time (Bennett, 2011). This might also be the reason for her limited time outside the house and limited contact with Australians. Arwa carried negative stereotypes about Australians and their thinking before SA. Being in this defence stage, she felt threatened by the non-Muslim culture and the differences between them and her culture (Bennett, 2011). However, all her worries faded away with time as she explained how everyone treats her with respect because of her hijab, and it was clear that she did not hold any negative attitudes towards the Australian society:

> Lulu: How do you think others perceive you as a Muslim/ Saudi Arabian/Middle Eastern female?
>
> Arwa: I don't know! I don't interact or talk with them, I don't know what they think, but usually they treat me with respect, they open doors for me, move a side to let me go first if I want to make coffee in the kitchen. It is nice that they respect my hijab.
>
> Lulu: How do you think they perceive Saudi Arabia?
>
> Arwa: I don't know. I don't mix up with them or talk about anything. I'm not social, I barely talk with the girls in the office. So, I don't know.

Arwa was still avoiding them and seeing them as different, and not knowing what they think of her and her culture. She measured their nice treatment on her religious scale and connected people's polite attitude to her hijab: "it is nice that they respect my hijab". It was her only reasonable explanation to their respect. Arwa saw her own culture as the only real culture (Bennett, 2011); religion is the scale and hijab is the reason. Arwa is a good example to Cole and Ahmadi's (2003) call to investigate the experience of veiled women and how their veil affects their experience abroad in a non-Islamic country. Here Arwa's veil was the lens of her experience.

Arwa believed that her religious identity has developed in Australia and changed "not in a bad way to the contrary I have become religiously mature while abroad". She explained how being away from the familial social life gave her more time to search and look for religious material online. She also believed that studying in Australia has changed the way she experienced life and more importantly the religious matters as they are very important to her. She talked about how she searches and analyses and tries to understand beyond the religious text. However, when we discussed this more, she said:

> When people talk to me about religious matters and start questioning them, I don't do that! I take these religious matters for granted and I don't question, I don't rethink them I don't go deep. I believe it without thinking. They are like 1+1=2.

Arwa explained that religious matters, like hijab, gender mixing, male guardians etc., are non-questionable to her if there is an issued fatwa about them. What she meant by searching and analysing is looking for the spirituality and spiritual meaning behind religious texts. She would search more and read about how she could be a better Muslim. But once the fatwa is issued there is no place for her to question. She also talked about the effect of the social life in Australia on her religious identity:

> Look, being here in a gender mixed environment has affected me in a bad way! I'm less shy and modest here and you know (modesty is a branch of

> faith) and I'm really sad about that. Also, I live in a constant struggle! I feel that I practise less here in Australia.

Being in a mixed-gender environment has caused a shift in her religious identity; she feels less shy and hence, less Muslim. This feeling confirms to her earlier thoughts that fatwas against gender mixing are absolutely in the right place. The social life in Saudi distracted Arwa from spirituality, and the social life in Australia affected her modesty and they both affected her religious identity. This shows how prominent, and present is her religious position.

In her ways of looking at fatwas, Arwa would look for ways to justify them and never to question them:

> Lulu: Ok did English open new windows to you? religiously?
>
> Arwa: Look, learning English didn't add much to my life other than academically. For example, I can't read religious text or watch religious episode in English! I just don't accept it, so I stopped, and never tried again.
>
> Here everything is meaningless, we are not in an Islamic frame, you know, when I open the TV you can't find anything to relate to, you feel like everything is out of context. Even reading Quran in Arabic is different, honestly, I feel tired and sad.

Arwa learned English for one reason; to study. This is the only way that she relates to English and cannot see any other benefits. It was clear as she expressed elsewhere that she was forced to learn the language to start her studies here. For her Arabic is the language of Islam and reading religious texts in English is meaningless and she cannot feel its spirituality the same way in Arabic. It might also be regarding her English skills, reading the text in English might be difficult for her and that is why it is meaningless.

Arwa was seeking out some connections to her cultural background, she tried to enjoy the things she used to do; reading the Quran, Islamic texts or even watching TV, but everything was tasteless. Even after spending eight years in Australia, she felt her own culture is the only good culture (Bennett, 2011) which is a position of 'cultural superiority'. She was in the

defence stage and carried negative stereotyping about the host culture and considered them the "other". Arwa felt threatened by the host cultures and tried to maintain a strong hold of her home culture values and avoided anything related to the host culture, even enjoying the simple religious practices in a Western frame. She was very critical of the other culture and on what is appropriate and correct (Bennett, 2011). There are many aspects of Arwa's experience that Bochner (2003) would say heighten the chance of culture shock; the cultural distance between Saudi and Australia was huge which clearly affected the smoothness of her experience in Australia. Also, though Arwa was living among the Saudi community, she was keen to find someone who shares her values, beliefs and practices which could provide confirmation that her opinions, actions and decisions are righteous and correct, which could have eased her experience in Australia (Bochner, 2003). The Saudis around her were from different parts of Saudi and were raised differently and Arwa was criticising some of their acts in Australia, something which added more difficulties to her experience and undermined her security (Bochner, 2003).

Feeling sad and tired in her new nonspiritual context, stressed by her husband's attitude in this stage of their life, I asked her about her views and attitude towards Islamic feminism as it can be reinforced in situations like these and provide women with answers to their problems:

> Lulu: Have you heard of the term Islamic feminism?
>
> Arwa: Is it the islamophobia?
>
> Lulu: No, it is a movement demanding rights for women
>
> Arwa: I heard about those who are asking about women rights and removing the male legal guardian!!
>
> Lulu: Yes, it is a movement where women ask for their rights which includes the removing of the legal guardian in Saudi.
>
> Arwa: I heard about such stuff, they also say that women in Saudi are oppressed, and we suffer a lot. But sorry they make a big deal out of it and they want attention. They don't appreciate what we have! If one of them is oppressed in one aspect of her life, she doesn't see what other good sides she

> has. For me I believe that I have everything I need, I don't pay attention to the shallow and silly stuff they are asking for. They are ruining the picture of Saudi women.
>
> Lulu: So, you are against it?
>
> Arwa: Sure. But if they are going to follow the basic tents of Islam, I might go for it.

The fact that Arwa went directly to Islamophobia shows that she is not familiar with it. After explaining what Islamic feminism is, she automatically connected it to the rebellious women demanding rights like the removal of the male guardianship, a law that Arwa does support and believes is a basic Islamic teaching. She deeply believes that women are weak in nature and in need of a male to take care of them, and in addition, she does not question any issued fatwa. She made an exception that:

> If the guardian is bad or abusive, then may Allah send a good judge her way and may he be a good guardian. It is an essential Islamic teaching; they must have one.

It is worth mentioning that the male guardian in Islam, according to the Islamic texts, is only required in a woman's first marriage. However, the law in Saudi, until recently, required the agreement of the male guardian on most of women's matters. Arwa knew about that Islamic text but insists on going along with the need of the male guardianship in every life matter as issued in fatwas. Arwa's insistence on the importance of the male guardian supports Wagner's (2011) claim about Saudi women and how they are unaware of their rights and think their rights are against Islam. This misunderstanding (as discussed in section 1.2.3) is a result of the Arabian cultural traditions and narrow Quranic interpretations which have clouded women's issues in Saudi Arabia.

Arwa is framing these women's demands as shallow and silly. She does not see the importance of or the need for these demands, even if they are oppressed; instead she is urging them to look around and find other aspects of their life to appreciate. Arwa is trying to

reinforce her views, nothing of what these women ask is a priority and she has "everything I want" or this is what she tells herself when looking around to other aspects of her life. She rather keeps the whole bag of traditions, than try to cut and paste or mix and match.

Another important issue here is the weight Arwa is putting on the image of Saudi women. Arwa described these women as attention seekers and by doing so they are ruining the picture of Saudi women. As a member of a collective society, Arwa believes that even if what they say is true, it shouldn't be put out for the world to see, as it is a private matter, dirty laundry that should be kept within Saudi society. Though Muslim feminists, e.g., Carland (2017), chose to speak up to change the image of Muslim women as oppressed and passive, it seems that Arwa prefers another way: to keep it quiet.

Islamic feminism, for Arwa, is taking what Islam has given women even if it was filtered by the society and its traditions. She believes that the society and traditions should be respected as they have given Saudi women privileges. She argued about the status of women in Saudi and how they are well treated, and all the laws and the regulations are for their own good, and nothing is missing from them. She then compared them to women in Australia and the West in general and how they are disrespected and treated like men. She talked proudly about how her husband pays for everything, for example when they go out for dinner and how it is different in Australia, and everyone pays for themselves. It was clear that him being in charge made her feel more feminine. She also compared between women's jobs in Saudi and here and how working on construction sites is not a place for women.

The experience of women like Arwa, as a veiled Muslim woman with strong religious affiliation, in Australia and the probable influence of that on her academic and social development is under researched as stated by Cole and Ahmadi (2003). Arwa's views on her hijab, gender mixing, Saudi women's rights and Islamic feminism show us that everything for her has to be measured on a religious scale. It also shows that she is mixing religion with

traditions and, though religious, she seems to be, at times, in favour of traditions over religion. This is understandable since Arwa was a product of Saudi society, especially the southern region, where traditions, dress-code, gender roles have largely been derived from the ancient pre-Islamic Arabian civilization and are based on cultural norms rather than Islamic teachings and are enforced through familial structures (Yamani, 2000; Hamdan, 2005; Pharaon, 2004; Sallam & Hunter, 2013).

5.2.6 Meaning to the Saudi identity

Speaking about Saudi and Saudi identity was emotional for Arwa. While most international students adapt to life abroad after few years, she felt a continuous homesickness:

> Lulu: Do you think your national identity has changed?
>
> Arwa: Oh God, I really miss my country. It has strengthened; I became more Saudi here. I understood what it means to be Saudi. I compare myself to other national and think thank God I'm Saudi. Before coming here, I used to be racist like we are the best, but now the feeling is different I feel gratitude and appreciation. And this grew after I came here, when people know that I'm from Saudi they go WOW so I feel proud.
>
> Lulu: Why do you think they react like this?
>
> Arwa: They look at it from a financial way. They are interested in my scholarship and how much the government pay me. They know all the details.

As time progressed, Arwa was still in the defence stage (Bennett, 2011). Her value of the home culture has strengthened, and she has developed a new meaning and understanding of what it meant to be Saudi. A new way to appreciate and value home culture. Being away from Saudi and among other nationals in a multicultural environment made her rethink her national identity. By comparing herself to others she developed a new sense of gratitude and proudness of being Saudi. The reaction she gets from people enforced the growing value of her home culture, as before she used to take everything for granted. In Australia, Arwa was never an international student, she was always Saudi. Becoming more nationalistic whilst studying abroad is something that has been widely discussed in many studies (Ellwood, 2011;

Jackson, 2008; Kinginger, 2008; K. Mitchell, 2015; Patron, 2007; Plews, 2015). In these studies, it is frequently noted that students who spend 6 months to one year abroad do become more nationalistic, in that respect Arwa's case is not unusual. However, the fact that she is still feeling this way after 8 years does seem quite uncommon, as you would expect someone who spend that many years to pass the nationalistic phase, or the defence stage, as coined by Bennett (2011).

Being a Saudi in Australia also enforced her religious identity. As a Saudi, she was positioned as a representative of Islam and Muslim women before anything else. Religion, hence, was strongly associated with being Saudi:

> Lulu: Do you think that your Saudi identity is related to your religious identity?
>
> Arwa: I have never thought about that, honestly, but I feel that the society there make me feel this connection, even here, when people know that I'm from Saudi, especially the Muslim ones, they make you feel that you are religious and expect you to know everything about religion.

The connection between her Saudi identity and religious identity was enforced in Australia, which added more weight and value to her national identity. Religion is very important to her, and now her Saudi identity has a sense of religion, which is why Arwa did not reject this imposed religious position, to the contrary it added more value to her. Also, Arwa was concerned about the image of Saudi Muslim women, and this connection could add more value to their image. This shows Arwa's tendency to please Muslim societies, in Australia and Saudi and about the Saudi society she said:

> The Saudi culture is based on traditions and habits, some people are more open and take them easy, others are so conservative and strict that they control everything women related. This is what makes Saudi, this is our society, and it should be respected.

Arwa understood how the Saudi society are controlled by traditions. She is also acknowledging the existence of people with different ideas, different culture and habitus, who

are open-minded and easy going. However, she is insisting that traditions, even if controlling women's rights, should be followed and respected. This attitude was pointed out by Hamdan (2005) who explained that it is culture, not religion, that restricts women's rights. She is advocating for this large culture and rejecting the contribution of its individuals.

It seems at odds that Arwa did not consider religion to be an aspect of what makes the Saudi culture. She might be trying to avoid a theological debate about Muslim women's rights by enforcing that it is traditions, and we must accept them as good Saudi citizens. This attitude of Arwa, to prioritise tradition over religion, is something many scholars have discussed (Al Fassi, 2016; Wagner, 2011; Yamani, 1996; 2000).

Arwa's sense of Saudiness was highly connected to her cultural, traditional, and Islamic identity. They are related in a way that acquiring one identity will lead to the others. This interconnectedness means that to be less religious, e.g., by gender mixing or revealing her face, does not only go against Arwa's core Islamic values, but also confronts her Saudi position as the ideal Saudi woman, which consequently affects her sense of Saudiness. Indeed, her Saudiness and religiousness mutually construct and reinforce one another. This sense of Saudiness was highlighted while being away from Saudi, through her feelings of proudness and gratitude. Feelings that were enforced on her by the Saudi and Muslim society in Australia.

5.3 After studying abroad

5.3.1 Future dreams and making change

Arwa has many hopes and dreams for the future. She talked about these dreams with enthusiasm, but she keeps them to herself as her husband seems to be an obstacle for achieving them. The fact that her husband was holding her back was expressed clearly by Arwa:

> Lulu: How do you imagine yourself in the future? Do you think that image affects how you go about your life/ studies now?
>
> Arwa: I have many dreams; I see myself prof attending many conferences and holding many meetings. I want women to hold high positions and be creative, but I can't express any of these dreams because of my husband, as he likes to repress me and put me down.

It was good to see Arwa's academic passion coming through, even if with difficulties. Her husband controls her life, to him holding such positions might lead her to contact with men, something he does not approve of. He also knows that with such positions come responsibilities and obligations which will take much of her time. So, all these are just "wishes" with no possibility of action. Simon (1992) distinguished between "wishes" and "hopeful imagination" that leads to working on struggles and obstacles for a better future. Arwa is not imagining and acting to achieve her plans and fighting for what she wants. Her imagined identity did not have a powerful impact on her educational goals as she has a more important moral obligation. All these dreams are impossible because of her husband and her deep belief that women's basic role in life is to raise their children:

> Lulu: What do you think Saudi women's biggest achievement?
>
> Arwa: It is raising these generations I mean this is a huge achievement look at our generation they love to learn, and we are perfect.
>
> Lulu: Is there anything else that you can see in the country, and you feel proud that this is the Saudi women's doing?
>
> Arwa: It is our raising, look at us this is the achievement of our mothers. it is a huge achievement. Yeah right, women held high positions and I see some became deans in some universities and organised some conferences and became examiners I feel happy for them really, they are making a change.

She is appreciating the change but referring to the role of mothers who raised this generation to make a change. This is clearly what Arwa thinks of herself as she is raising her children to make the change she could not make and hold the position she could not hold. She feels that she is done but the hopes are for her daughter to build something of herself. Also, it seems that Arwa's value of education is at odds with her genuine belief that women's place is at

home to raise the next generation. She is admiring the efforts of these women but does not see herself among them. She recognizes the importance of education but does not see a future where she can really use that education. She is epitomising the tension in the Vision 2030 of becoming educated critical thinkers without changing a scrap of Saudi traditional society.

Arwa came to Australia with weak English and very strong instrumental reasons, and she had trouble trying to get to where she imagined herself to be. It seems that she has not really thought it through; she had this idea that being an academic, a researcher or someone important would be great for her, but she had not really followed through. She did not have a concrete plan or followed practical steps to get where she wants to be. Her religious and familial commitments were at odds with her academic ambitions, and she felt that she had to choose. Also, the fact that she is fully taking care of her children and she is doing well at it gave her the feeling of satisfaction, something that she did not feel in her academic zone.

5.3.2 Worries about the change in Saudi

Arwa is not comfortable with change. She likes the life the way it was. She is keen to go back to Saudi to life as she once knew it, and the changes currently happening are a source of discomfort for her. These views can be related to religion or to the nature of her husband and his views. So the fact that the country is moving toward more gender mixing in work places and public places in general can be distressing to Arwa as it means more restrictions on her movements and relationships and it might also jeopardise her work in general. She has spent almost eight years in Australia, yet it seems that her life here has not impacted her beliefs or thoughts at all; to the contrary it made her more conservative:

> Lulu: After living in Australia, is there anything you would want to see done differently in Saudi Arabia?
>
> Arwa: yeas I would love to have libraries for women. I mean for women only. Gender segregated libraries and next to it parks for women.

The exposure to another culture reinforced Arwa's ethnocentrism. Life in Australia did not suit her at all, it complicated her life. Her limited interaction, her language abilities, her religious beliefs, and her husband, together contributed to that. The change she wanted to see in Saudi is not something she saw in Australia, but something that resulted by her experience in Australia. She is longing to go back to her life in Saudi as she loved the way everything was done there, she showed that in the way she was defending the education system in Saudi:

> Lulu: Compare your educational experience (in general) in Australia and in KSA?
>
> Arwa: The education in Saudi has developed a lot in the past few years, I can't compare my experience here now with my experience there then. It's not fair.
>
> Lulu: What about your experience with the teachers in particular, here and there?
>
> Arwa: Yeah, interacting with teachers it's different, here they are more friendly, the teacher doesn't treat the student in an arrogant way like back there. It is simple here you know, there, there is a gap in the relationship.
>
> Lulu: How about your views of learning the English language, have they changed after coming here?
>
> Arwa: I told you I had to learn the language.
>
> Lulu: I mean the way of teaching English here! Do you think it is better than there?
>
> Arwa: I can't compare, teaching methods have changed in Saudi.

Arwa was reluctant in talking about some of the flaws of the Saudi educational system. Knowing my familiarity with the system, she still tried to defend it. To some extent, she criticised her teachers, but not the governmental sectors, educational system. She might see the teachers' attitudes as personal traits that can be criticised, but she could not say a bad word about her country which could be out of gratitude and proudness (discussed in section 5.2.6). This was also clear by emphasising her negative attitude towards learning English in a way of excluding it from the Saudi educational system. In other words, she does not see English as an important aspect of the Saudi educational system, and she is showing this by

emphasising the fact that she was forced to learn it to study here; other than that, there is nothing to compare between the two systems.

5.4 Arwa in review

Arwa was raised in a religious, less traditional family, yet she was exposed to the Saudi traditions and cultural gender roles through extended family and in-laws. As a child, Arwa held negative attitudes towards English. Later, in her early adulthood, the idea that she does not need English in her life grew with her. Before coming to Australia, Arwa was content and satisfied with her social life, status as a Saudi woman and her language abilities.

She came to Australia with poor English skills and very strong instrumental reasons. She had difficulties reaching her imagined identity, as negotiating that identity was always tied up with English proficiency, cultural knowledge, social and academic networks and openness.

Though she came to hold somewhat positive attitudes about Western society in Australia, she isolated herself from it. Her life in Australia was merely academic without any effort to socialise.

Some of the main factors that influenced her experience in Australia were her religious beliefs, language skills, personality, and her husband. She felt that she could not have it all; English language, academic success, motherhood and being a "good Saudi women". Her imagined identity as a successful academic who attends conferences and makes a change, and her idea of a more equal society, were merely 'wishes' (Kanno & Norton, 2003; Simon, 1992). She knew that to join that imagined community, she had to put on an effort and fight. She had to learn and speak the language, to socialise, build networks and relationships, and make changes inside and outside her house. But Arwa was not invested in all that, as they represent possible struggles in the future.

Arwa does not see her attitude as a failure, or that her way is the only right way. It is more of

a moral or theological position that could not be changed even after eight years. She couldn't find a proper way to reach her goals as the available ways, through socialising and networking, were against her values.

Arwa's case is evidence of the idea that people who come into contact with other cultures, ideas, and ways of thinking are not always invested in benefitting from them, especially if it is going to be difficult, i.e., when they believe their community is likely to oppose such changes. Interestingly, while holding her core Islamic values, life in Australia raised some tensions in Arwa about what is right and proper. Study abroad may not be causing her to change, but she is certainly questioning things and navigating tensions.

Chapter Six: Longing to Belong

Deema's Journey

> In Saudi I am Deema the daughter, the mother, the friend, the neighbour, but here I am Deema the student, that is it. No other identity I can express.

6.1 Before studying abroad

Living in a big multicultural city in Saudi and being from a large family gave Deema the chance to grow and evolve as a child. In this section, I explore her family background and her life before coming to Australia to understand how her identity has evolved.

6.1.1 Profile and family background

Bold, outspoken, and affirmative, Deema was a forty-year-old woman, and a single mother of one girl. When the interview took place, she was in the third year of her PhD, studying applied linguistics, and had spent five years in Australia. Deema wears hijab with modest pants, and shirts. Her education was her passion and achieving a higher degree was her goal. She was very proud of who she is and how she became the person she is today. She described herself as "independent, strong, very focused. I know what I wanted I go for it." She was very confidant, and clearly and loudly expressed her mind and opinions.

Deema grew up in what she described as a traditional religious family who would strictly adhere to traditions and do the basic religious practices (section 2.3.3). It was a big family: eight girls and one boy, and she was one of the youngest. Deema's mother was a housewife who, although illiterate, spoke four languages. She described herself as traditionally religious; while she had a great deal of knowledge about religion she would adhere to culture and traditions even if they went against the religious teachings, e.g. putting more restrictions on women and giving them lower status than men in the society. Her father had limited

education (finished high school) and was the breadwinner.

Deema grew up in Madinah; one of the two Holy Cities in Saudi Arabia and a multicultural one. Her family have never travelled outside Saudi Arabia and rarely travelled within it. They do not go out much, just occasionally visiting relatives as they were a big family. They used to spend time together, especially after her older sisters got married and had kids.

Deema majored in English language at university, and after graduating from her BA, she got a job at a university as a TA. After her father's death and her divorce, her brother became her male legal guardian[3]. Though divorced with a child, Deema used to live in her own house, which she bought with the help and support of her family[4].

6.1.2 Identity

Through her family's practices and guidance, Deema developed her own perception of religion and traditions. Her family members were not 'strict' in religion, i.e., devout in their spiritual beliefs. They enforced basic religious practices and placed great emphasis on traditions. She summarised their attitude:

> You have to pray on time, you have to do all the cultural things, you know hijab, the basics yeah and in my family, we do not listen to music, it really contributed to my identity.

As a young girl this became a point of conflict, and Deema rebelled against the gender expectations thrust on women and girls in Saudi society, as she recounts:

> A girl should be well behaved, you keep your voice down, you do not sit with your legs open, my mum hated it, I did it all the time. She would shout (don't sit like boys, sit properly) [in Arabic]) you know!

In a sarcastic way, she explained how the society kept on guiding her on how to behave. She was positioned as 'the ideal Muslim girl', the default Muslim girl, who is expected to be modest, shy and polite (Alsweel, 2013; Deo, 2006; Pharaon, 2004): to lower her voice, sit

[3] Until recently, Saudi women used to have male legal guardians, fathers then husband. In the case of the death of a father then brother

[4] In Saudi, usually when a woman gets divorced, she moves back to her family house.

properly and dress modestly in long skirts and dresses. Her mother was a reminder of such expectations, however, Deema resisted that position and was determined to defy them by doing the opposite whenever she got a chance. However, due to parental pressure she went along with all these cultural practices and pretended to do them as acting on her own beliefs and morals was not an option.

Deema's mother was a strong woman with great influence on her children. Though uneducated, she and her sisters were so strong and independent and got that from Deema's grandmother:

> My grandmother used to work, she was a tailor, working from home, she also used to cook and sell, you know…. So, the thing that I could see in my grandmother, my mother and myself is that we are very strong. My grandmother had five daughters and, at the time when the boy is the holy grail! When you need to have a boy in order to be a person. She had five girls and got divorced for that. She worked very hard until she bought a house for her daughters. She said: 'when I die, this is their house, no one share it with them, for the sake of their stability'. My mum, she had the same mentality. She worked really hard to get what she wants; she did not depend 100% on my father. She always had this mentality 'do not depend or rely on a man'. She does not work! But she has that kind of mentality …. She is feminist in that way, but she does not know it.

Her mother knew from a young age that independence is the key to survival. She pushed her children towards education and employment as they are the keys to be independent and able to support themselves.

Like Arwa, Deema saw her mother as a role model who had a great impact on who she is:

> My mum is very independent, very strong. You know I mirror her in a way; but in an advanced way; you do not crack her easily; but she is so traditional, maybe I am more outgoing, but in the core, we are the same.

However, unlike Arwa, Deema saw herself differently. She admired her mother but did not embrace everything she was. She emphasised that by saying: "we are similar in different ways" positioning herself as similar in being strong but different as being anything but traditional. Overall, having a woman like her mother with whom she shared ideas about

independence, gave her strength. Her father also had a great impact on her beliefs and perception of herself as a woman. He was "pro-women" and managed to establish a sense of equality between his children (boy and girls). Because of her father's parenting approach, at a young age she positioned herself as equal to men and started comparing the dynamics of her family with other families:

> [My father] gave me a sense of self-worth, you feel you are worth on something regardless of your gender, you know like men and women are not so much different from each other, I saw my father, he carried himself around the house, because even though, my mum did not work, she was a housewife, but still when my father comes in, you know, he would take out the trash, he would tidy the place, he was ok with it. Seeing my father like this made me feel, men and women can coexist without being one above the other. It really gave me that feeling of content…I was not looking for equality; I was just thinking that I do not need to look for equality, because it is there.

Deema experienced gender equality within her household when most women in her community did not. This has built up her self-esteem and made her feel complete regardless of the country's law. So, with her mother's encouragement for independence and her father's support for equality, she was able to face the society's norms and injustice regarding women (Doumato, 1992; Pharaon, 2004):

> If I would submit to the society I would have been broken honestly. I do not see the society of Saudi Arabia as bad… but the culture is very not women friendly. They do not have kindness in their hearts…., when setting what is decent and what is ok. If a woman is over-worked it is ok, if a woman is mistreated, it is ok. They do not do it, but it is ok, they accept it. What if a man slaps his wife? In Some societies it is ok, they try to justify (he loves you) or make you feel guilty by destroying your family. It makes you feel more responsible for keeping things going and takes all the responsibilities away from the man. Your action will destroy the family; but the man hitting you will not destroy the family. I think this is unfair, so for myself I feel like, I did defy the rules as much as I could and I love to be fair, I did not have to defy a lot from the beginning. I did not have that in my family. But I did see it around… and I know what I do not want, I know my rights, as a human regardless of what the society say it is my right and I ask and go for it. I do not care if they would say:(you are not ashamed! Not like that! He is a man) I am not talking about only marriage; I am talking about general life.

Deema was aware of the nature of Saudi society, the dynamics of gender roles, yet she did

not submit. Instead, she defied them and frankly expressed her ideas. When she decided to get divorced, she went through with it without asking for her family's help or approval, and nobody dared to interfere. Deema did what she thought is fair and just, even if it was against the norms of her society. However, Deema here is not only referring to her marriage but talking in general about the norms of Saudis including her mother and sisters. So, though her home environment did not encourage her attitude, she made sure that she was entitled to her own opinions and actions. This strong and assertive personality might be the result of her father's support. Like Arwa, Deema had a great example of a father. The difference is Arwa positioned her father as different and the society as the norm, whereas Deema, positioned her father as the norm and society as different. She tried her best not to submit or accept what they offer.

> I feel like, my life there (in Saudi) was at an end point that I worked so hard to go through. There were some life events that gave me detours here and there, but the ultimate goal never changed, you know. The thing that I always notice in my life, at the end of the day I do not rely on a man's permission to do what I do. but at the same time, I know back in my mind that if they want to say "no!" they can stop me. I was lucky in sense that my father was so much pro-woman's education. My husband was so into education, his father was a professor. After my father died, my brother was my guardian, so he could have stopped my scholarship if he wanted, but he did not because he is a good person; he wanted me to be better. But he had the choice. I feel it is painful, that other people can stop you. But I was lucky enough that they did not. These things in life, I always keep in my mind, I really hate having a male guardian. But I was luckier than other people, I did not have to fight that fight or to go through that challenge to get what is right for me.

Finding her way in Saudi was difficult, but she considered it easy compared to other women. Here, Deema is reflecting on women's position in Saudi as legal minors. Fortunately, the male members in her family, her legal guardians, supported her socially and academically. Have they been less supportive, she would have fought to get her rights. Like Arwa, Deema's close environment were academically supportive which added to her appreciation of education.

Education was essential for Deema. Growing up, she did not have many choices of entertainment; limited TV channels and no internet, reading was her escape. She read most of her father's books even though "they were boring as hell. But I was reading them, because there is no other form of entrainment". She would also watch anything on TV even documentaries. With time knowledge became her addiction:

> Education has been the biggest influence on my life choices. Everything I learned always… the thing is; when I was young, I would read anything that comes under my hand and these things gave me a sneak peek to what is going on and what I want to do…. Education for me was always the basic thing. I would challenge families, friends and everything but I would never challenge education.

Reading and learning was not only means of entertainment, but also a way of exploring the world. It also helped her to decide what she wanted to be in the future. This positive attitude towards learning was one of the factors that encouraged her to learn a L2.

6.1.3 English ability, use and attitudes

Deema started learning English formally in high school at the age of 12. At year 7, children are introduced to the alphabet, simple words and basic English grammar. However, Deema was ahead of her classmates and stood out from the first day, as she had another source of English. When she was ten, Deema witnessed the first airing of Channel 2 (the Saudi English Channel). It was her window to explore and understand the outside world. Led by curiosity, she started to consume language through media:

> I started watching sesame streets and started watching this TV channel where you can see men and women are actually talking together. It was ground-breaking 'oh my god!' you know and the kind of songs they play and the kind of romantic comedies that we had.

She used to pay attention to all the small details of the language and the Western lifestyle. However, her attitude towards this channel was not appreciated or even accepted by her mother:

> My mother did not like Channel 2 much, because it was Kafer (non-Muslim) incarnated. Honestly that was it. She used to say, 'if you like them, you will go to hell with them'. but I perceived it differently, I really liked it so much, so for myself I feel it really contributed to my identity later, it formed my thinking. You know, it was the sneak peek to the outer world. There is something out there that different then us. Not only about how people look, how they behave, act, how they dress. They really affected me.

Coming from a religious traditional family, TV in general was not very much appreciated. It was believed to have bad influence on young people, especially Channel 2 which brought different language, religion, customs and ideas to the closed society of Saudi. Deema's mother was against that channel mainly because it was English, "the language of the non-Muslims", and it was delivering a different content than the other Arabic channels. Since her mother did not know English, she also did not understand the content and was thus suspicious of it. Such attitudes – to television in general and Channel 2 and in particular – were commonly held at the time. In fact the first television studio in Riyadh was attacked by a group of conservatives in the late Sixties (Nevo, 1998) as they considered TV introduction in Saudi to be a deviation of the true Islamic path.

Deema's mother noticed her daughter's attachment to Channel 2 and sensed her admiration for the content and kept on warning her against it. However, regardless of her mother's attitude, Deema positioned herself as a language and culture learner. She was seeing more through that channel and experiencing something different than her ordinary life. She was attracted to the details, the actors' different ways of looking, acting, behaviour and dresses. She considered this channel to be more than a form of entertainment, but a window to the outer world, a way to learn about others, especially since she appreciates knowledge and education. TV gave her a chance to understand the culture and observe not only the everyday material culture, such as housing, food, and different patterns of behaviour, but also their values, norms, and historical heritage.

Deema has shown a great interest in the language, and channel 2 was her main source of

English knowledge in her formative years. Television increased her motivation to learn L2 (Bada & Okan, 2000), and gave her the opportunity for linguistic growth as an EFL learner (Jylhä-Laide, 1994). Deema's case is similar to the exceptional case of an eight-year-old Finnish girl who learned English to a high level of oral fluency only by watching cartoons repeatedly, without any formal language teaching or other contact with the language (Jylhä-Laide, 1994, p. 93). Jylhä-Laide stressed that this girl's case "proves that even a beginning language learner may benefit from viewing 'ordinary' television programmes" (p. 107). The power of media on intercultural awareness has been recognized by scholars in applied linguistics. Deema's experience echoed that of Chao's (2013) participants who were majoring in English and were highly motivated to participate in his study which was based on using media to promote intercultural understanding. He concluded that the use of media, as films, to teach culture is recommended as it motivates the language learning process in the EFL classroom. By understanding the content of a film, language learners can draw the social situation for gaining cultural knowledge and language practice (Chao, 2013).

So, from a young age Deema developed confidence when speaking in English. Her father, contrary to her mother, motivated her and praised her English ability several times. He asked for her help on different occasions which put her in a position of power and gave the legitimacy to speak. She was proud of her English fluency and used to impress people with it:

> When I was younger, very few people spoke English. For me it was a distinctive feature. A lot of people were like 'oh my god, you speak English very fluently.' It helped me a lot to stand out. They were like 'where did you learn that! did you go to the West!' No, I did not! 'Oh my god you are so smart'.

English gave Deema a voice and made people listen. Their admiration of her fluency gave her the confidence to speak and show off her language. She believed that English could make her different and smart. This was clear also when she requested the interview with me be carried out in English, her strongest voice, and in having no difficulties in talking about a wide range

of topics in English.

Deema was invested to learn the language at a young age (Norton, 2000). With English came the hope of becoming and belonging. She wanted to be identified with English speakers and imagined to be a member of the English language community. Her English skills were her cultural capital as, unlike Arwa, English has power and value in her society, and she was recognized for it, something she admired very much. The more she learns the language the more she loves it, which has led to this relationship and connection with the language and its culture. She developed a desire to learn and connect more, which is a feedback loop about being a high achiever. English for her was an investment, and so she chose to major in English language and undertook her undergraduate studies mainly in English. English brought new ideas, new lifestyle, new ways of thinking and living. English provided her a way to transform and become different and special; a way to stand out.

Though her formal learning in school did not add much to her, she found support in other platforms of mass media. Books for example, played a significant role in her cultural and linguistic development. She was obsessed with the language and didn't want to miss anything when it came to English. She also held a strong belief about the importance of education and since English was her major, she was determined to master it and believed that it had been one of the biggest influences on your life choices:

> When I was in my first year in college, one of the teachers was talking about Applied Linguistic and I didn't know what that was. It was my first year and we were studying grammar and stuff like that, and I thought 'this is what I want! I want to study applied linguistics' the funny thing that I had this in my mind and the more I learn, the more I like it.

Deema's admiration of English and education continued and her curious nature to know more about the language and its people was her reason to study abroad. For her, TV, books and the internet were not enough, she wanted to travel and live among native speakers.

6.1.4 Pre-departure expectations

Deema decided to study abroad for a host of complex social, economic, cultural and familial factors that were at play. Similar to Arwa, it was a job requirement. However, employment and getting a degree were not the main reasons. Rather it was an opportunity to grow personally and culturally, to fulfill her childhood dream by living in a Western country and practising English every day. And most of all, there was her appreciation for knowledge and education.

Unlike Arwa, Deema searched and tried to look for the best place for her and her family:

> when I was young… there was this TV series called 'The Man from Snowy River'. First, I didn't know it was Australian, but I really loved it. I saw all the places in Australia, part of it was filmed in Sydney and part of it was in Melbourne. It was beautiful, it was like the 19th century. Women were in big dresses and they had horses, oh my god! I really loved the place just like that, it was really a beautiful place even for one day visit. So, I made a promise to myself, I was not planning for master and PhD at that time, one day I will visit this place. Years later, when I had the chance to choose a country to go to for my studies! The Man from Snowy River came back to my mind. When I first applied, I was planning to take my daughters with me. I was searching all the countries available, I thought about USA, no! too much... guns, islamophobia. It was like after 2003. So, no! crossed that out. Canada was possible, but I did not have enough information about it, and a lot of people say it is too boring and stuff like that. So, I was trying to find a place, that is suitable for my daughters, and always I come back to Australia and Melbourne. In my heart, I wished this is the best place for it. After my research, it was safe, family oriented, there is no Islamophobia and education was really good. So, all these factors combined with my own desire, I chose it.

Deema's first encounter with Australia was through a TV series in her teenager days, for which she developed a connection with the country, which was later translated into a desire to choose Australia. This desire was built on other reasons too. Similar to Takahashi's (2012) participants, Australia emerged as an attractive choice because of its English-speaking Western identity and its relative safety compared to the US. Add to that her image of Australians as friendly, and the good education she is going to get. This idealized view of what Australia and her life can be like strongly connects to Takehashi's (2012) participants

and their 'desire for English'. Similar to them, Deema had a positive image of Australia and Australians as friendly and warm. She imagined a new lifestyle surrounded by friendly Australians and expected immersion in their community just like what she used to see in TV. She considered the act of studying abroad "as a means of finding a new self and/or lifestyle" (p. 150). Study abroad for Deema served as a means of rejecting her position as the ideal Muslim woman, and of restarting her life by reinventing a new position as an international woman with a cross-cultural experience. It was as a site of liberation. She was going to live according to her own morals, without family pressure. Her views of this experience as "a powerful way of reinventing identity and finding a brighter future" (p. 156) was consistent with Takahashi's participants. Like Yoko, Chizuko and Yuka (Takahashi, 2013), study abroad gave Deema a chance to leave her society which positioned her negatively. This indicates that she, just like the Japanese women, did not come to Australia only to study, but with a great desire for 'identity transformation'. The difference here is that Deema is going there to do her master's and PhD, with high English proficiency. She did her IELTS test in Saudi and reported scoring an overall score of 8, which is the highest score among my participants.

In sum, this journey was not only concerned with getting a degree, acquiring linguistic and cross-cultural knowledge, but also linked with the traditional position of women in Saudi. It was Deema's first trip out of Saudi and she ended up going to Australia without her daughter, but with her nephew, as her mahram, a relative male member who is forced by the Saudi law to be with female students on scholarships.

6.2 While studying abroad

Deema's journey in Australia started in her imagination before her actual arrival in the country. As we have seen, her perception of the West in general, and Australia in particular,

were shaped through her TV consumption. Shortly after her arrival, she started her master studies and with great dedication to her studies, she completed her degree and moved across states to start her PhD.

6.2.1 Cultural shock: Realization of social existence

From day one in Australia, Deema was in charge. Her male companion was her 18-year-old nephew who had no English skills, thus she arranged everything from house hunting to finalising school enrolments for both. However, she did not expect legal responsibilities. One incident in her early days made her aware of her "previous social non-existence". It was when an agent asked her to sign the lease of the apartment they were renting. She expected her nephew to sign all the official paperwork for both, as in Saudi. It took her several days and different incidents to get her head around the fact that in Australia she is a legal adult, with attendant rights and responsibilities. She described her early days as "a surprise after a surprise", and herself as still carrying 'the Saudi mentality'; i.e., she was still influenced by the Saudi law of having a male guardian. This shows how in different fields people often assume different social positions as they experience power differently depending on the values and worldviews of the culture which determine the importance of people as social agents at a given moment (Bourdieu, 1991). The context here influenced Deema's habitus. This conforms with Moncrieffe (2006) who used Bourdieu's theory to explain the contradictions that arise when African women encounter different contexts and how they resist power in one context but not in another. In Deema's case it shows how the distribution of power is different in different social fields, i.e., Saudi and Australia, between men and women and how they are socialised to behave differently in different fields.

> I was thinking at that time, there is no sincere desire in Saudi Arabia to know a woman and what she really wants. There is a kind of a given belief that whatever the man brings, it will be the truth, men do not lie. The first few months in Australia 2011, I knew that I have a responsibility to give a value to

> myself, in Saudi Arabia, they say that you have a value, but when you come to the real life, they don't.

The lease incident got Deema into cultural shock. She went home and started to dive into her memories and comparing women's legal situations in Saudi and in Australia. She started questioning how culture can dominate the law and prevent applying it correctly. The agent's insistence on her presence and having her own signature reminded her of an important and sensitive situation in Saudi. It was when one of her sisters signed the marriage contract on behalf of the bride and nobody knew. She knew that the bride approved the marriage, but she kept thinking about other Saudi women. What if they were forced to get married? What precautions are done in that regard? How can the law protect women from such actions? Regardless of what the legal guardian says, how can they make sure that one wants to get married? The same way the agent made sure that she is the one to sign the contract.

This incident was an eye opener for Deema. She was simply 'unaware' of her rights to be legally independent (Andersen et al., 2011). Just remembering that made her achingly tired of doing what is expected. It is not just a simple act of signing a paper, it is a ground-breaking issue around what it means to have legal rights and responsibilities. It took Deema a few months to acculturate and rebuild herself. She tried to balance between the two cultures and see what would suit her from both. She recognised the new responsibility of giving value to herself as a woman in a society that values women. She did not want to submit to her culture anymore, she did not want to be less than men or even dependent on them. Her identity developed through the continuing interaction and participation in the new society (Norton, 1997). Through her adaptation of the new culture, she was aware of the different statuses, relationships and roles prescribed by the two societies (Norton, 1997). She is understanding herself across time and space, changing, growing and creating new relationships with the world (Norton, 1997).

This incident did not change Deema's ways of thinking, but it awakened her buried desire of

being independent and free, to be her own guardian. The same thing happened to Arwa when she came to Australia, but it was not a big deal for her, as deep inside, Arwa believed that women are weak and should have male legal guardians. Deema adapted to the Australian culture and considered it a valuable resource and an opportunity to safely escape traditions of the Saudi culture. She saw the differences between the two cultures as positive and adapted her behavior to the new cultural norms of the new environment (Bennett, 2011). Again, Deema is referring to these values and acts as cultural and explained how they are harming women and taking advantage of them, which was discussed in many studies (e.g., Hamdan, 2005; Hunter & Ali Sallam, 2013; Pharaon, 2004).

6.2.2 Linguistic and cultural gains: Language empowerment

At the time of the interview, Deema has been in Australia for almost four years, and was in the third year of her PhD. She spoke to me in English in a relaxed and confidant way even before starting the interview and had no trouble in expressing herself well in English. She loved to speak in English, and even when speaking in Arabic, she reports code-switching all the time. However, she does not like to show off her English abilities everywhere as some would consider it arrogant.

Deema's attitude towards English has not changed after coming to Australia. As she has always appreciated bilingualism and what comes with it:

> It [English] opened doors for me, it helped me a lot… My job is based on speaking English… and at the same time, it helps me access a lot of information and books that I would not be able to read or understand if I do not speak English… The general thing that I have noticed that people who speak English have certain mindset. They are open-minded. Being exposed to that kind of language and what comes with the language, the culture. So usually they have like high hybrid personality that usually is very interesting than those who are monolingual people. But some monolingual people could be very interesting as well. So, the language is not the main key in judgment when you deal with people.

English was a passion that became a future. It provided Deema with many opportunities; it

gave her a job, where speaking English was a basic requirement. It also aided her education; by giving her opportunities to read many books and more access to information. She also appreciates bilingualism as a mind opener, a way to see life differently as a result of being exposed to different languages and their cultures. It can transform cultural norms and provoke people to think outside of their cultural box (Ramanathan & Atkinson, 1999). It is a means to develop cultural hybridity and to have multiple identities. Bilingualism showed Deema new ways where she can belong and become. Her imagined identity is to be bilingual and her imagined community are those 'interesting', 'open-minded' bilinguals, with a 'certain mindset' and 'high hybrid personality' (Norton, 2001). In Saudi, Deema started building an attachment to this imagined community, by learning the language and getting the job, and being in Australia is her engagement in active attempts to reshape her surrounding contexts and built her way to reach that community (Pavlenko, 2003). However, considering herself a member of that community, she retracted from that saying and tried not to show off and to be less judgmental by stating that language can't be a means of evaluating people.

Deema also deeply believed in the power of English language:

> English has powers, it is part of the language itself. At least for myself, in numerous situations in Saudi Arabia and Australia, it really gave me powers that you would be surprised. I will give you an example; when my daughter was in the hospital (in Saudi), the doctors were talking together and paid me no attention, one of them said Dialysis then I got up and said does she have a kidney failure! They were all so surprised to hear such question. Then he asked me are you a medical student! From that moment they started to explain everything to me! They recognized me! They started taking me seriously, I had power there! Just for speaking the language otherwise you are dismissed a lot in Saudi Arabia. With English they deal with you in equal power, instead of looking down at you.

Deema recognised the power of English at a young age and since then her admiration and belief in it has increased. She witnessed such powers in many unusual situations in Saudi and Australia. She noticed how attitudes can change quickly towards those who speak English and how it does not only give you voice but also existence and respect. When she understood

what the doctors were saying, they recognized her, took her seriously and considered her equal to them. They did not dismiss her as they often do in Saudi hospitals.

In Australia, Deema did not report any difficulties in her studies or in academic writing like some of the other participants. However, she mentioned that occasionally her supervisor would ask her to "Rewrite, it is more like ideas not writing. Brainstorm or whatever, you talk about something, and he asks you to reexplain." She explained this to be a cultural issue, and how her culture affected the way she expresses herself and the way she acts and talks in class. She deeply believed that studying and living in Australia has a huge impact on how she expresses herself in person and in writing. Being in Australia helped her to intellectually develop which mirrors (Saba, 2014) results of how studying abroad improved Saudi students' academic literacies. She also picked up Australian slang and idioms and even her accent has become a mix of American and Australian. Overall, her language skills have improved: "If you live with the language and use it more, it would be better. Practice makes perfect". And most importantly, being here added to her religious vocabulary:

> Learning English in Australia… made me better in expressing religious aspects of my life in English than before. In Saudi Arabia they teach you how to speak English 'it is raining cats and dogs' and stuff like that, things you cannot use to talk about yourself and your religion. When I came here, because I have to strive, to express these things to them, I started to find my ways and sometimes they give them to me.

Being a Muslim woman and wearing hijab in Australia encouraged Deema to learn new religious and Islamic vocabulary and expressions to be able to educate people about herself and her religion. Vocabulary as such is not taught in Saudi schools as the focus is on grammar and idioms, etc. So being in Australia gave her the chance to learn about her own culture too, to search and look for such concepts and how to express them and sometimes she would ask and learn such expressions from the locals.

Discussing this aspect of her journey, Deema talked about her classroom experience in Saudi

and how it affected her personality and her studies:

> In Saudi Arabia, it is more about the quantity, in here it is more about the quality, here it is supportive in a surprising way. It is more about helping the students to learn. In Saudi Arabia, it is more about student's responsibility. They give you the homework and they expect you to deal with it. So competitive: Look at other students. I never had real problems, I was smart I do not mind it, but this new approach was an eye opener. I feel that it affected me. After studying here, I became more understanding and helpful, I feel that we are more into thinking of students as human beings more than as numbers. Not everyone can do this. It made me a better teacher. I feel what the students feel. At least I am a student now and I know what being a student feels like. To be inflexible or to be helpful and understanding teacher. So now as student I know.

As a person who value learning and education, she recognized the best qualities of schools and teachers in Australia. She is criticizing the Saudi educational system and how the focus is on the number of students in class, books and lessons being taught without paying attention to the quality of all that. How it lacks the support and help which is given to students in Australia, and how students are being compared to others: "look at other student!" which drives students to be competitive. Surviving such a system along with studying in Australia made her "more understanding and helpful" and allowed her to look at the situation from a different angle as a teacher. By reliving the experience of being a student and understanding how to be a better teacher, she created knowledge through experiential learning (Kolb, 1984). She is using this knowledge to plan her teaching methods when she goes back to Saudi, which is called the 'Active experimentation' stage of the experiential learning (Kolb, 1984). She was determined to "embrace different educational ways of teaching, interacting with students", which she knows will not be an easy task, but she is enthusiastic and willing to engage in that new experience. It also made her reflect particularly on the ways English is being taught in Saudi:

> It (studying here) made me feel that it (teaching English) is very flexible. Learning a language should not be as rigid as we are teaching in Saudi Arabia. In Saudi Arabia it is very grammar oriented. Especially when learning words in English, it should be about helping a person express their own identity, their

> own culture and language, it's completely stripped of that by following America English or British English or Australian English. Ok! They speak this way, because it expresses their identity, but our English should express our culture. I think that's something I've learned here.

She is emphasising the idea that English teaching should be more flexible and less focused on grammar. She is promoting for a focus on building students' English vocabulary so they would be able to express their own identity and culture. And while most of my participants wanted to master the Australian accent, Deema is advocating for a Saudi English and accent; a variety of English to express the identity of Saudi people.

Overall, Deema's educational journey in Saudi and Australia was a successful one, though she hoped to be socially exposed to English:

> Lulu: Which do you think has more influence on you; the exposure to English language through studying and English media in Saudi or the experience of living in Australia?
>
> Deema: I think both, I cannot say in percentage, I think both. But living in Australia, the thing is I am not 100% exposed to Australians, I am exposed to Australians in the classrooms, we have been in the academic atmosphere. Not like exposing to Australians in friendship, there is no relationship with Australians. I see them on the bus, I am exposed but in a very limited scale. So, I would say education in Saudi and here more than Australians.

Coming to Australia with an overall IELTS score of 8 shows how successful Deema's journey was in learning English in Saudi. Her academic journey in Australia was also a success and had an impact on her language and academic skills. However, what is missing here is social interaction with native speakers, which will be discussed in the next section.

6.2.3 Struggling to make friends

In Australia, Deema has been very well integrated and perfectly managed the academic demands. She was academically focused and driven by her studies, describing Australia as*:* "up to the standards; the education is great!". However, her social journey was not easy or exciting, but a struggle. Her biggest problem was mingling with people and making friends.

She showed great interest in making friends with Australians to grow culturally and linguistically:

> Lulu: Do you socialise with Australians at the university/ make friends with them?
>
> Deema: At university sometimes I do of course, sometimes you have contact with them, but you won't call them friends, you call them colleagues.
>
> Lulu: Have you ever tried to make friends, go out with them, and do some activities?
>
> Deema: I have not tried, and I do not think they are very willing. You can feel that, if someone is willing to make an effort, but there is some kind of resistance and to be honest with you. Most of them are resisting me.
>
> Lulu: Why do you think that?
>
> Deema: They have their own friends! They have families here, they don't need me, it is like I'm an outsider to them, also one of the things that I hated, is that I do not have any relationship with my neighbours. I tried to make friends with them, but there is also resistance, on the Eid day I gave away some chocolate you know as an attempt to build something between us, but nothing in return. I expected to have a response, but no! I spent two years there, but no one could've introduced himself.
>
> Lulu: Have you tried again!
>
> Deema: Nah, I was done.
>
> Here they (relationships) are very limited; I cannot be anything more than being Deema the student.

Deema knew where she stands as a newcomer in Australia. She positioned herself as an outsider and reacted accordingly by having basic and limited contact with natives in school. Though she wanted a deeper relationship, she did not make any attempts to have one, assuming that they were against it. This might be due her cultural background as Ranta and Meckelborg (2013) argued that sometimes learners' cultural background might have a negative impact on their ability to initiate interaction. In Deema's case, she was expecting hospitality – the Arab's outstanding trait to a foreigner (Almaney & Alwan, 1982). By positioning herself as an outsider, she became the guest and expected the hosts to make the

effort of initiating a relationship. As an Arab, she expected immediate and extensive welcomes or assistance (Almaney & Alwan, 1982; Nydell, 1987). And the absence of hospitality affected the hosts' status and reputation (Feghali, 1997). Deema couldn't figure out a way to solve this situation as the social situations in Arab societies are vague, complex, and defined by context (Yousef, 1974). She made an attempt with the neighbours but shut down when she did not receive the expected response and decided not to initiate anything with anyone anymore.

From the interview it became clear that a number of factors were influencing Deema's tendency to avoid interaction with native speakers. We have seen that she had received negative affective feedback from them, such as signs of disinterest during interactions which has a demotivating effect (Derwing et al., 2008). Like many internationals students, she was time poor and this affected her ability to invest (Peirce, 1995) in building social relations or simply because this intangible resource (friendship) would not increase the value of her cultural capital and social power (Norton, 2000).

Deema came to the conclusion that relationships are very limited in Australia. She cannot be the friend or the neighbour that she always dreamed about. She is just the student, the thing that she knows for sure that she is good at. So she used her English knowledge as a tool for her academic and career pursuits similar to the Chinese students in Gao (2006). This conclusion was emphasised throughout the interview as she kept on mentioning that she is in Australia to study and get a degree "my life in Australia is nothing extraordinary, it is completely academically focused", though she wished it to be more.

This shows the complexity, multiplicity and discontinuity of the social nature of identity which lead to struggle over time (Peirce, 1995). Deema's investment is changeable because her views of capital resources are also changing. Her investment now is education, not social life. Since identity is multiple, complex and a site of struggle, investment is also complex,

contradictory, and fluid (Peirce, 1995).

Deema felt comfortable as a student, in the academic zone, as this position gives her the right to speak, but struggled in social life, as she felt like an outsider. She has not been able to befriend people in Australia, and at various points she offered different explanations. At one point, she says that Australians do not like her and attributed that to their racist nature:

> Lulu: How do you think Australians in general see Saudi Arabians?
>
> Deema: Not in a positive way, they tend to say good things, they tend to be very polite and everything but because they cannot not be polite. It the law forcing them, but if that law is not there, you will see their ugly faces, I am sorry to say that.

Similar to the dark-haired Chinese ESL students in Miller (2000) who felt discriminated against because of their hair colour, Deema felt discriminated against because she was Saudi. Though not reporting any racist incidents, she believes that they were being polite and nice to her because of the anti-vilification laws. Whether Australians are racists or not, it is interesting to see how Deema positioned them. At another point, she put it on herself and her lack of reference to proper social interaction:

> "Sometimes you see them in films, and they are very friendly, when you try to apply what you see in the films in real life, sometimes you come as inappropriate person and you do not know it. So, you do not have reference.

She applied what was promoted by media, which was her only reference on how to behave in Australia. However, her pre-conceived ideas and assumptions based on sources other than real experience led her to disappointment. Her initial TV-based perception of Australians as friendly has been greatly challenged by her real experience in Australia. So her feelings and reactions can be understood as an adjustment to reality. She turned away from the host society and held a negative attitude towards them:

> Lulu: Do you act/feel differently with your Saudi friends than with your Australians friends or other nationalities?

> Deema: yes, because we have a lot in common, if you are with Saudi friends, there is a lot of shared knowledge, history and references. But you do not share anything with Australians. I would crack jokes about Saudi Arabia with my Saudi Arabia, but I would never accept any bad words about Saudi Arabia with my Australians friends.

Australians became the others, and she took an 'us against them' position and distanced herself from them. At this point she believed she will never be one of them because they do not share knowledge or history; it is curious that she did not consider education as something she could share with them since it was one of her main reasons to come to Australia. She also sat some boundaries between herself and the Australians. She wouldn't accept any kind of disrespect from them even if it was just a joke; a joke that was used as a conversational strategy by other students like Eva, who used to use humour to help her communicate with the host society (Norton, 2013b). The position of Saudis in Australia was not comfortable for Deema. Like Eva in Norton (2013b), she felt marginalized from people's social life. However, contrary to Eva's experience, this has not stemmed from a lack of confidence or comfort in her English competence, but her lack of social competence in this unfamiliar environment. Among all the participants Deema was the most sensitive one with such views about being Saudi. Most of the others talk positively about Australians. Though Deema was overall accepting Australian culture, it seems that she would, at times, regress to a previous stage, in this case she is being defensive as she was threatened by them (Bennett, 1993).

On the other hand, it seems that she was one of the few participants who dealt with the issue of gender mixing in a more relaxed way:

> In Saudi Arabia, we have 100% gender separation, when I came here, the thing is that I noticed that we do not have the culture of dealing with the opposite sex. It was difficult, you do not know what is appropriate and what is not.

Growing up, Deema had been opposed to gender roles and coming to Australia has given her the chance to break such roles and defy them. However, after arriving in Australia, she

realised how gender segregation had an impact on her and other Saudi women. She realised that they have no clue on how to address men due to lack of experience:

> When you come here, you have to start observing and learning how men and women are interacting appropriately in order to be within the specific culture. So, it was challenging.

Recognising her lack of experiences, she started to observe Australians' interaction with each other which could be her key to act properly with men. Still, her previous experience in dealing with men, or lack of it, did not prevent her from interacting with them in Australia:

> Relatively I am not young, and I am dealing with younger men than me, and that in itself gives me little confidence. The second thing here is, the level of politeness of the guys gives you a sense of relief, in Saudi Arabia, if you talked to a guy, then 'what is your phone number?' They have different kind of attitudes toward women.

Deema did not avoid interaction with men and kept on trying to figure it out. In this pursuit of opposite-sex interaction, two factors helped her: first, her age. Being older than most of the men around her gave her confidence and freedom to interact and seek relationships with them. It is important to note here that in Islam elderly women are permitted to remove hijab if they are not seeking relationships and marriage (Ibn Adam, 2016). This, in some way, gave Deema a relief as she was not interacting with intention to build such relationship. The other factor is the level of politeness and respect she encountered with Australian men, which gave her a push to go forward with such relations. Something she has not witnessed with men in Saudi who, due to their culture, view women and interaction with them in a different and negative way. Still, these previous experiences have not stopped her from dealing with Saudi men in Australia:

> I do not mind them [Saudi men in Australia] at all, honestly in the beginning, I heard stuff like 'they stare! avoid them here!' for myself I interacted with a lot of them, I do not have a problem in talking to them. but if I would talk to them, it would be merely academic. I mean I won't call them friends.

Warnings did not stop her, as deep inside Deema wanted to break this cultural wall between

the two sexes. Yet, she was careful with her interaction and kept it academically focused with no intentions to start any kind of friendship. She went along to explain why she is being cautious about such relationships:

> Not because they are bad, because the Saudi mentality is still there. I would go and have coffee for example, if we have data collection, or working on this or that. If the Saudi man is married, his wife won't be happy. While the Australian wife would be ok with her Australian husband working with me… if that person is single that would steer talk, if it is just for coffee. And I do not need that kind of talk about me. It is ok, I can meet with them, I can go in group and have fun. But I am not going out with a single… prophet Mohammad cared about his reputation, so I profoundly think it is a religious thing.

Deema believes that the way Saudi men look at women is affected by their culture. Even in Australia their Saudi mentality is in action. Therefore, she keeps her relationship with Saudis merely academic. Opposite-sex friendship is culturally unacceptable and would affect her reputation among the Saudi community. She was protecting her ired. Again, contrary to Arwa, she did not consider interacting with men, or gender mixing, as religiously forbidden but more as a cultural duty, however, protecting her reputation hence her ired was a religious one.

This weight placed on protecting women's ired and attributing it to religion is a result of the Sahwa time. It is, in this specific context, a pre-Islamic concept derived from ancient Arabian civilization. It was not mentioned in the Quran, though appears in some of the prophet's sayings with equal weight on both men and women (Patai, 1983). And though considered religious and believed to be the essence of gender segregation in Saudi (Alhazmi & Nyland, 2010), it did not stop Deema from appearing in gender-mixed places, even if that would imply bad connotations by itself. She was alert and careful and knew how and when to deal with men. She was progressing and this was a step forward.

6.2.4 Personal growth

Deema came to Australia seeking change, a change in the self. Excited and proud, she talked about her gained independence and strength and how this experience has made her "more accepting of people and less judgmental". Being in a multicultural country and meeting people from different backgrounds and religions would have such an impact on someone who had lived in a monocultural country all their life (Bennett, 2011). Deema had reached a stage of acceptance of cultural differences (Bennett, 2011):

> When I go back to Saudi, I click in right away, I do not criticize. I never say (you still do this or that) no no to the contrary, I go back not hating anything, I accept them as is. I have changed but this is still my country this is Saudi.

She learned how to accept unconditionally and to take people as is. She understands that other people have not lived her experience and have different perspectives in life. By accepting, she is trying to bury the gap between them, as after all it is the culture of her country, and she is part of it. Her acceptance does not mean absorbing their actions and her judgment is not ethnocentric. She is becoming curious but respectful of their cultural differences (Bennett, 2011). Showing off is not appealing to Deema, as she repeated many times in the interview. She tries to keep her own views to herself "I don't show that I have changed I go out have fun as there is no need to show that I know better and I'm smarter." For her, criticising is an act of showing off.

6.2.5 New understanding of religion and religious identity

Deema perceived Saudi religious culture to be an obstacle, something that held her back from success and progress. This might be related to her mother's negative attitude toward the English-speaking society while she considered it as an opportunity to develop. It might also be related to how the society used to prohibit and condemn so many things in the name of religion:

> I always say I am not a religious person, because of what I am comparing myself to. But I pray on time, fast Ramadan and read Quran. I do the things that I believe Allah wants me to do, you know. I used to think I am not religious person, When I came here, the comparison shifted to what is here, apparently, I am a strict Muslim. The change is very strong. I would say that I am very proud Saudi, very proud Muslim. I am. I was and I'm still. I pride myself that living here and I am still that one, now I feel like I was not enforced. That feeling in itself feels very good. In Saudi Arabia, you are forced to wear hijab, when I came here and I had the choice to take it off, and I did not. This means I was not enforced. That feelings helped me to realize my identity. This is something that I want, I could change, but until now I feel it is part of my identity, the way I pray, act, do not shake hands with guys. All these things are parts of who I am.

Deema's religious culture has changed, and her views of her religious identity have also changed. In Australia her reflexive position has changed from 'a bad Muslim' to a good one. Context is all. Her religious identity, as any other aspect of identity, is dynamic, fluid and a site of struggle (Peirce, 1995). She held beliefs that were not reflected by her religious culture in Saudi, and when that religious culture changed, her beliefs were strengthened and were put into action. An example of that is the change in her dress code by removing abaya and face cover. However, she is still wearing hijab "my hijab now became a lifestyle I don't wear it as a religious practice". Her old identity and previous beliefs are still present (Brimhall-Vargas, 2011). And though she embraced her new religious culture and start questioning and rejecting her old one, her previous religious identity is still solid (Edwards, 2018) and embodied in as a lifestyle. Her previous familial, social and cultural influences remained as a part of her worldview and identity (Clack & Clack, 2019).

Deema's mindset has shifted. She is criticising the Saudi religious culture and how it dictated certain practices onto her for years. Her stand here echoes Alahmadi's (2016) explanation of the religious culture as being based on sacred rituals and devoid of spirit, as being based on religion but conforming more with the old traditions:

> Religion became more of a matter of faith, rather than matter of practice. Reading [religious] books make you look at religion in a way which is what we have been dictated to when we were growing up. (if you do your eyebrow

> you will go to hell, if you touch a man you will go to hell) … They [society and books] make religion as a number of practises that you have to follow correctly in order to go to heaven. Now! I do not know if it is right or wrong; but I deeply believe that religion is faith. Faith for me is like a language, you can express it with practices. Religion is not just practices. My perception of religion shifted drastically, I am more now into faith, into Allah. I found Allah, here in Australia. I became more into loving Allah. That is what I believe now, it is a matter of faith, not a matter or practice.

Away from the societal pressure, Deema found her way to faith, to Allah. She understood her relationship with him and connected to him in her own way. She is a committed person and realised that religion is not an obligation but a need for her soul. It is not what other people want you to do, it is what you want to do to be closer to Allah. And that for her, being a real Muslim, involves having freedom of choice and choosing to practise. In doing this she is questioning the unquestionable in the Saudi culture. Religious observances for her mean nothing without faith. She is still practising but now it is more of a feeling than an act. She is setting her soul free from all the previous dictated actions as she wants to express religion her way.

Her views of hijab have also changed. Contrary to Carland, hijab for Deema is no longer an act of worship but more of a lifestyle. Which might be because it was one of the religious practices that was enforced on Deema but chosen by Carland. However, both agreed that hijab is exaggerated in the Muslim world (Carland, 2017). They believed that hijab is originated from the Islamic emphasis on modesty, and it is highly valued for both men and women and equally in behaviour and dress:

> I am not very big fan of abaya and hijab, but I am strongly for decency. Don't wear the abaya but don't neglect and disrespect your culture. I am talking about men and women, they really need to respect the society, because actions could offend other people in the society. You have your own right to do what you want to do but do not attack other people for thinking differently.

Like the Muslim women in Carland's (2017), who developed a new understanding of Islam in the modern world and truly implement Sharia in their lives and used their religion as a

weapon to fight sexism, Deema here is doing the same. She is using Islam to redefine what it means to be a Muslim woman. Her fight is against forcing hijab and judging those who don't wear it.

She is explaining that Islam emphasises modesty for men and women and how hijab and abaya are examples of the Arabization of Islam, i.e., whatever Arabs do is Islam (Khan, 2019). Abaya, for example, is an act of belonging to her community not an affirmation of her faith (Khan, 2019). It is a cultural act which is derived from the old Arabian civilization.

Modesty is Deema's way to submit to God, and it is a duty for men and women. She would continue to wear hijab and abaya out of respect to the culture of her society. She is also looking for a cooperative society, where people can live in harmony, where no one is criticising the other of what they believe in and at the same time having their freedom to do what they want. She is advocating for acceptance of difference and not to question others' faith just because they are struggling with one aspect of it (Khan, 2019).

Studying in Australia improved her critical thinking skills and increased her autonomy which made her available for religious questioning and doubt:

> I feel it (Quran) differently. Before all I felt was duty. Now you read it and feel 'do you not then reflect' these are Allah's Words. Praise Allah, before it was all about Hell but now I see the meanings of what I'm looking for! I walk down the street and I look around and reflect, 'do not they look at camels, how they are created' this is what Quran is about. Reflection.

She is comparing between the two religious cultures of Saudi and Australia, and how each culture affects the way one understands life and reflects on it. Being in Australia helped her to reflect on her religion and other religions and exposed her to diversity. Moving from a monocultural to a multicultural country has opened her eyes to different facts:

> Before leaving Saudi Arabia, I used to think that all those Christians, Jews and Buddhists are going to Hell! And Muslims are the only one going to Heaven! But when you see this whole world, people from everywhere expressing faith, expressing God, expressing worship, you become to believe that these are

> beyond us! We're not supposed to think this way! There are no guarantees. We should think and work on ourselves and leave people to God.

She has religiously broadened her horizon by questioning her previous beliefs about other religions. In Saudi, she has never met a Christian, a Jew or a Buddhist, and deeply believed that Muslims are the only ones on the right track. Being in Australia gave her the chance to listen to different people and admire the way they believe, talk and express their religion and God, the way they practice and worship. This made her rethink everything and stop judging and classifying people and work on how to make herself a better person. Reaching this conclusion, she wanted other people to do the same with Muslim women and the way they are classified as oppressed:

> I think it [Muslim women's oppression] is over generalized. There is certain oppression, there are laws that oppressed women, but it is over generalized. You and I and many women are a living proof that it is not true. There are people who are oppressed all over the world, and they do not care because women are not wearing abaya. In Russia, women are practically white slaves, sex slaves and no one cares.

Admitting a certain level of oppression, she is arguing that it is not to be overgeneralised to all Muslim women. Connecting this oppressed view of Muslim women to their religion, is exactly what Carland (2017) explained; as religion is not to be blamed, sometimes it is culture or poverty that cause Muslim women harm. She is concluding that misogyny is faced by all women around the world, and not only Muslim women. She then gives an example of how culture can be the reason of women's subordinate position:

> There is a huge difference [between the Australians' gender roles and Saudis'], here it is more equal, men and women are equal, of course in Saudi Arabia, we do not have that level of equality. But it is all assigned to Islam, I really want all to know that is not true, so, we can make a lot of changes, I would love for Saudis' gender roles to be more like Australians', but I think it will be defying culture in itself…. it is all cultural, yeah. So, it needs a lot of work in order to get there. A lot of work in upbringing kids, women and men. A lot of work on how they respect and view each other. The thing is, it did not happen by chance in Australia, they are working hard towards it.

Stressing that culture is the cause of women's place in Saudi, Deema explained that the

inequality in Saudi is being wrongfully connected to Islam. She wanted the real situation to be clear not only to the West but to Muslim people too.

Between this quote and the previous one, Deema is creating for herself a neutral space between the West's views on Muslim women and the Saudi women's situation. She is not allying herself with the West against her own community and at the same time she is speaking up about the cultural misogyny in Saudi. She is taking a stand in the middle, trying to balance between what is true and wrong, exaggerated and understated, and what should stay and what should be changed. She is trying to tell the story of Saudi Muslim women as she knows it, as she is one of them, and as she knows better.

6.2.6 New meanings to the Saudi identity

While abroad, Deema understood that there is a huge difference between Islam as a religion and the Saudi cultural traditions. Her Saudi identity now carries different meanings, meanings she didn't think about before:

> Being here reinvented Saudi identity for me. I can be Saudi and respectful and at the same time be a free woman. Back then [in Saudi], It [Saudi] was the chains, the jails and all the bad things come together. When I was in Saudi Arabia, when I was young, I told you we did not go out, we did not do this and that. For me, certain jokes [about restrictions in Saudi] were so real... No fun, no out! You have to do this; you have to do that. Too many [cultural] rules and restrictions... so that is it, you feel suffocated. In Saudi I have a driver, I do what I want to do, I'm an adult and married, when I want to go out I go out, but still limited entertainment places, you feel there is something suffocating there.. and when I came here, I could breathe. It is one of the simplest things that I felt here. When you walk in the street there, the religious police would come and say 'cover up lady, be decent' no way people, can't I walk in my own country! Being out in the street is, by itself, a crime. You are minding your own business, 'why are you walking here! Men might hurt you, go home!' and then you come here 'the freedom of being' that is it.

Deema is redefining what does it mean to be 'the ideal Muslim woman'. She can be Saudi in her own terms, by setting her own limits and boundaries. Being in Australia gave her space and social freedom and she kept maintaining her respect. In Saudi she was banned from doing

the simple action of walking the street in the name of religion and with the aim of her protection, and she found this suffocating. Being in Australia gave a new meaning to her identity. She is a Muslim, Saudi, and a respectful woman. She is still Deema, but the difference here is that she can breathe now. She is free.

Unlike Arwa, Deema separated her Islamic and Saudi identity. She believed that being Saudi, does not necessarily mean being religious, or worse, forced to be religious. For sure, religion is essential to her, but now her Saudi identity has a new sense of religion, and it is becoming more valued to her. Deema respects the society and wants the society to respect her. Her respect was shown when she defended the preservation of religious rituals like prayer calls:

> I have changed but this is still my country this is Saudi. I hate it when people try to change the basic religious practices like Athan (prayer call) it is the most religious thing I like in Saudi. I want religion the same, I want the identity the same. But the only thing I do want to change is the force into religious practices, I want freedom of religion. Pray if you want to pray! Do what you want to do, but do not change the religious identity of Saudi, without it, Saudi means nothing.

Deema deeply believes that religion is the main identity marker of Saudi Arabia. Saudi cannot be like any other country; it is the land of Islam. She is against any debates about deviating from this identity such as stopping prayer calls, which is a basic spiritual and religious practise. She believes that enforcing religious practices and specific behaviour on everyone is what should be ended. She believes Saudi should always have an Islamic identity, but Saudis should not necessarily be religious people. She is calling for a disconnection between traditions /culture and faith / religion. She is calling for this 'third space' (Kramsch, 1993) between the two cultures she lived in which she believes is balanced space where every individual can share their own culture, their own habitus. Thus Islam can still be Saudis' large culture (Holliday, 1999) but they should not be hailed to respond to themselves and their surroundings in specific ways.

Deema is proud Saudi woman. This pride arises from the achievement of Saudi women who

succeeded and proved themselves. On their evolution she said:

> [It] is brilliant, I am so proud to be a Saudi woman; they strived to get what they want and a lot of them got it. We still have a lot to go through, but the ones who are working, they are doing a hard work that we all should be proud of. They are working hard to push around to get their rights. Many laws have changed; cultural norms have changed; you know women are more visible now and more respected publicly and privately. They are Working towards achieving better equality in Saudi.

Though the Saudi culture is not women friendly, Deema's pride of being Saudi is connected to her gender. She is not only a proud Saudi, but a proud Saudi woman. Proud of Saudi women's hard work despite the patriarchal society. She admires their strength and determination to change their societal status. This might be connected to the stereotyped picture of Saudi women as oppressed, so she feels that the work of these women is not only benefiting Saudi women in Saudi, but also changing this picture. Deema here is acknowledging the contribution of Saudi women as active agents to the making and changing of the Saudi large, dominant and patriarchal culture. They are confirming that culture is manmade (Geertz, 1973) and that what is accepted in a certain time might not be accepted at others. She continues to mention their biggest achievements in the country:

> I won't say driving! I would say the work of the women in the Shura Council, gaining more rights especially for divorced women, alimony and criminalizing violence against women.

She is looking at the bigger picture, she does not consider driving to be an accomplishment compared to women being assigned in the Shura Council, as the latter can do more to advance issues like the former.

Deema's new sense of Saudiness is connected to her new understanding of her identity. Now she knows and understands that she is a free woman, and she is Saudi, and that Saudi women can be more. Her sense of proudness is derived from the achievements of the modern Saudi women, to whom she belongs. Her feeling of Saudiness is strengthened by that sense of proudness. With every new accomplishment of Saudi women, she feels more Saudi, more

connected to that group of Saudi women as she positioned herself as one of them. Unlike Arwa, whose sense of Saudiness is connected to their past, the old ways of being, Deema's Saudi identity is highly connected to the future of Saudi women, with high positions and more visibility which will be discussed in the next section.

6.3 After studying abroad

6.3.1 Future dreams and making change

Contrary to her dream self before coming to Australia, Deema did not carry many dreams or plans for her future back in Saudi. With her new self, power and confidence she was more mature with high determination to work hard and achieve:

> I'm not going to plan anything for the future, I'm going to live the day at the time, I did plan before, and it did not work for me. But I'm going to work hard toward where I'm going.

She believes in actions now. Talking and dreaming would not get her anywhere. She is more into setting reasonable goals and working hard to reach them. This way she can avoid disappointment. However, this does not mean that she is not optimistic about her future. She is eager to go back to Saudi and start the next chapter of her life:

> Lulu: Would you consider staying in Australia after graduation?
>
> Deema: No! I can't approve myself. I really love home. Australia is a nice place to live, the laws and everything. It has the materialistic side of life here; I think I can get a good job here. But when you come to the social life, to your memories, to your childhood, people who look like you. It is home. I cannot leave it. Even if my daughter is with me, Saudi Arabia is my home. I cannot wait to finish and go.

Deema has an academic passion which flourished in Australia and provided her with better opportunities in life which could be seized in Australia. However, she is rejecting the temptations of the good life in Australia for her sense of belonging. She came to feel that she cannot belong anywhere but Saudi. Where she can have her past and her future. A future

which she hopes will be better for her daughter:

> I really hope by the time, my daughter is a grown-up person, that she really looks up to herself. She looks up for what she wants, who she is and what she can achieve and take it from there, not let other people tell her what she can and cannot do. I really hope by that time; that regulations and laws in Saudi Arabia are changed in order to give her better chance to self-realize her dreams better.

Deema's dreams for her daughter reflect on her own dreams and longing to be independent and free from the society's restrictions. She wanted her daughter to grow up in a better society and to have a better reflection on herself. These hopes for her daughter are encouraging her to go back to Saudi, and work to make a bigger change and to build a better future for her.

6.3.2 Excitement for the new Saudi: Vision 2030

Unlike Arwa, Deema was excited about the changes happening in Saudi. Vision 2030 and the changes coming with it were what she has been looking for in Australia and what is motivating her to finish and go back:

> Lulu: After living in Australia, is there anything you would want to see done differently in KSA?
>
> Deema: a lot, yes of course! the thing is that the changes in Saudi are now happening in quick base, it is too overwhelming for everyone. We are witnessing too much change, but it is changing for the good… it (vision 2030) is more about the society's mentality, about women empowerment, being able to have a safe and just environment in your own country. we are taking really good steps towards them. Woman driving is just the first step, we have many other issues like the male guardians, I am really confidant that it is going to drop soon.

The developmental changes of Vision 2030 were enormous, especially for someone observing from the outside. The issued decrees and decisions made were overwhelming for her since they were what she has been waiting to hear and see for a long time. However, what is thrilling her is the changing behaviour of the society's members.

Deema's desire to fit into Australian society faded away and was replaced by a longing to

belong this new Saudi society, with people who had experiences like her, look like her and think like her:

> I am not the only person changing, even Saudi Arabia is changing… I am not the only one in a scholarship and going back. The identity of the country is changing, and I am noticing it. It has never happened in Saudi Arabia. So, it is not only me.

Deema is acknowledging the effects of the scholarship program on the identity of Saudi society. She believes that this program is the main driver of change. She is here confirming the expectations of Ottaway (2012), that with scholarships, the minds of Saudi people will be reformed, and returners would push for making a new culture that shares components of both their home culture and host culture, a third culture (Kramsch, 1993).

6.4 Deema in review

Deema grew up in a religious traditional family, where more weight was put on cultural traditions. Though trying to rebel against such practises, she was forced to go along. She was never content or satisfied with her social position in Saudi and learning English was her way out and coming to Australia was her salvation.

Prior to travelling to Australia, Deema loved to be identified with English and the West. She came to Australia with excellent English and a dream to have many Australian friends and live this experience to the fullest. However, seeking interactions on her own term led her to shut down after her first attempt. Attributing this to the locals' discrimination at times and on her own behaviour at others, she felt as an outsider, an ascribed identity that conflicts with her desired one. This made her prefer to refrain from interactions with the host community (Jackson, 2008).

She could not maintain her social position as a friend or a neighbour but managed to transform her academic one. Affected by the unequal relations of power (Norton, 2000). She was pushed to seek more opportunities in the academic zone to maintain a higher status and

to gain power, rather than a marginalized position in her social life. This displays her deep investment in the language, regardless of her negative attitude towards its society. With awareness of the 'linguistic and cultural capital' of English (Bourdieu, 1991), she managed to make English 'part of herself' and developed a more international identity (Ryan, 2006).

Arwa and Deema's limited exposure to the host society supports Jackson's (2008) argument that "the use of rich qualitative data provided insight into what actually happens during stays abroad and dispelled the myth that all sojourners automatically benefit from mere exposure to the host speech community".

In her journey, Deema developed a different and deep sense of her religious and national identity. All her life she dreamed about running away from Saudi and living abroad. Surprisingly, in Australia she found herself longing to go back, to belong and find a place in her new society.

Chapter Seven: Belle the Rebel

Belle's Journey

If I wasn't Saudi, I'm not sure I would be Muslim! I might be anything!

7.1 Before studying abroad

Being an only child, a girl, and raised by a single mother among a conservative and a patriarchal society contributed to the identity of Belle. In this section, I discuss the different factors that impacted on her life. Here I discuss her life before going to Australia; her family background, factors that shaped her identity, her history with English and her expectations and reasons to study abroad.

7.1.1 Profile and family background

An adventurous 30-year-old, Belle was the mother of a little girl. She had a continuous smile on her face and a playful sense of humour. At the time of the interview, she was in her first year of her PhD in physiotherapy. She has been in Australia for three years as she also did her master's degree in Australia. During her master's, she used to wear hijab with shirts and pants, but after starting her PhD in another university she decided to take on a new identity and removed her hijab. She described herself as 'persistent, independent of identity and ideas' and with laughs she continued "and a survivor of the societal and religious conflicts in Saudi" and because of such pressures, she always dreamed about living abroad. Through laughs, she expressed a long-lasting frustration with Saudi society.

Belle is from the central region of Saudi. She was brought up by a single mother, after her father passed away when she was just a baby, and she has no memory of him. She grew up in her grandparents' house. Her mother comes from a conservative family and her uncles used to interfere in her life. When Belle was seven, her mother remarried, and they moved to live

with her stepfather, who was a father figure to her. She described him as an open-minded man who opened many doors for her.

Her mother was an English teacher, one of the "first graduates from the department of English language and literature" in Saudi. She was strong, independent and not strictly religious observant but cared about the norms and culture of the society, especially since she was a widow with a little girl. And though she was Belle's legal guardian after her father's death, Belle couldn't travel abroad or get married without a legal permission from her uncle from her father's side.

Driven by the idea of helping people, Belle chose a medical field for tertiary study. After completing her bachelor's degree, she worked in a hospital before getting a job at one of the Saudi universities as a teaching assistant. She got married soon afterwards and started preparing for her scholarship, which was also a job requirement.

Like Deema, Belle was thrilled by the idea of sharing her experience with me.

7.1.2 Identity

Growing up, Belle felt angry, powerless, abandoned and without control over her life. The loss of her father at a young age made her life difficult. She remembered one of those times:

> I felt unjust at certain moments... once we were at the airport going on a holiday, they stopped me there, I wasn't allowed to leave the country without the consent of my uncle. Imagine that! I broke down...I got angry… I shouted... then I cried.

Being fatherless, Belle was subjected to constant interference from her uncles (on her mother's side), which continued even after living with her stepfather. She was expected to behave in certain ways:

> Belle: Everyone wasn't listening to music, but I did, they used to tell me 'You will burn in Hell' and I would just do it.
>
> Lulu: Who used to say that to you?

> Belle: Relatives, friends, even my mother. She contributed to this somehow. She was not religious. My stepdad wasn't religious. He was pretty much into music, concerts, he would even take mum to a concert. My mum had a feeling of guilt towards me. She didn't want me to deviate from what is supposed to be the right path. Because I was her responsibility. My stepdad used to tell her 'Why are you forcing her to wear hijab? She is still young! But my mum used to say 'she has to' just like that. I used to play out with boys, it was fine with mum, she used to give me instructions, but she was fine with everything. It wasn't a big deal all the time… My relatives weren't like my mum, they didn't want me to sit or play with boys, like when I was in high school and my cousin was older than me, but he was my best friend we used to play and have fun together, but everyone made a big deal out of it. They used to call me 'Belle the shameless'. They used to throw stuff at me, like hijab and say, 'cover up Belle' and I used to shout at them 'I don't want to'. I used to speak up not with disrespect but to tell them not to cross their boundaries. I used to resist authority and they used to say 'Belle has a loudmouth' but I didn't care about my reputation over my friendship.

She believed that her relatives reflected the society at that time, the Sahwa time (see section 3.1.4). Her mother, though not observant, supported their ideas out of her sense of responsibility and fear that her daughter might get in trouble. However, like Deema, Belle was determined to rebel and defy those gender expectations. She used to resist authority and clearly express her ideas against those expectations, even if submitting to them eventually. She admitted that the norms of life at that time affected her deeply:

> When I was in high school, I was so close with my relatives, I mean we used to see a lot of each other. And I was somehow influenced by their ideas, like the idea that it is ok for girls to get married at a young age, it was fine by me. They used to tease me about such idea - that I will get married in secondary school! But I didn't think I would ever do it! As I have a living example of my mother being able to take care of me after my father's departure. I knew I have to be financially independent.

Belle held different ideas, but she went with the flow, just like her mother. She hated gender separation and tried to rebel against it but deep inside she knew that had to submit to those norms as "we lived there forever, and we get used to it".

Belle's mother was a strong independent woman. Belle talked about how educated her mother was, and how her grandparents encouraged her mother to get her bachelor's degree before thinking about marriage. And though she had an arranged marriage, her mother defied

society's norms by getting married three times after two of her husbands passed away. About her, Belle said:

> My mum is my role model. Growing up I resisted her authority, and I didn't appreciate her till I grew up. I was affected by the authors, books and stories I used to read.

Belle understood how her mother felt from the inside, she could see through her mother, and that is why her mother was her role model. Her mother can be considered as an early follower of Islamic feminism even without knowing. She fit the profile of women who are doing unusual things but at the same time want to protect their beloved ones. With a bachelor's degree in English language and three marriages, she was deviating from the stereotype of Saudi women, and with the conservative dress code she was showing that she is still a 'good Muslim woman'.

After her mother's second marriage, they lived in an international compound and Belle got the chance to make friends with foreign children from Korea, India, and other Arab countries. Living in the compound really contributed to her identity, notably by being in contact with different religions:

> I met people who are not Muslims and had relationships with them and visiting them made me a more accepting person.

Her stepfather was a keen traveller and he used to take them to different countries on holidays. At the age of 14 she went to a summer camp in Lebanon for a month:

> It shaped my personality, and I came out as a different person, I lived there for a month. My mum didn't agree but my stepdad pushed me into it, and in the beginning I thought he wanted to get rid of me, but it really changed who I am.

As a teenager, she felt abandoned by her stepfather's act. But soon she realised that the camp was a turning point in her life. This experience gave her confidence to be herself and express her own ideas. It was also a chance to speak English, as will be discussed in the next section. She believed that living in an international compound in Riyadh, going into the summer camp

in Lebanon and reading at a young age were her early window to the outside world, which contributed to her identity and made her a tolerant person. And again, her mother's disagreement was out of her concern for her daughter. She knew what is against them and realised the price a woman would pay for defying or deviating from the society. It is interesting how her mother as a woman saw issues better than her stepfather. In Saudi, women and men have very different perspectives on what the opportunities or costs of different courses of actions are, simply because they don't see as much of each other's fears in life.

The education system, schools and teachers used to push little girls to behave in certain ways, religiously, culturally and socially:

> In school they used to force us to cover up. And many girls told me how their teachers used to play religious tapes for them; preachers talking about Allah's punishment… but it used to go in one ear and out the other. I was not affected by school much, by their intimidation.

Belle rebelled against religious authority and intimidation, and explained that she used to listen to preachers who would speak nicely and quietly and kind of storytellers and how they used to affect her. She was looking for a conversation about Islam, someone to gently talk to her soul. She was looking for a connection, something to relate to, in a society which used to force its principles on everyone. She found that religious connection that spoke to her mind and soul together with certain kinds of preachers:

> I was born in the eighties, you know, the time of Sahwa, I was exposed to a lot of things, but I feel that it did not really impact me… I had a friend who wouldn't listen to music and would extremely cover up and they would talk about scary things happening in the afterlife and would put posters on the wall of stuff like a snake squeezing a body. I have always questioned these things; I don't know why or what factors made me think this way but I was mostly not affected.

Belle managed to develop tolerance and open-mindedness while these abilities are challenged in the context she lived in at that time. However, she submitted to some cultural and social

expectations and seemed to be absorbing them as she mentioned above. Also, the portrayal of women in Saudi TV channels, and how they were different than women in other countries, had some impact on her views on the position and status of Saudi women.

> The old beliefs that a wife should listen to her husband and that this is her role in life, and she shouldn't talk loudly with men... they make you feel that you have to live in a shell and this is really affected me. However, though all that, I used to be the bold one among other girls and used to talk to men all the time… We were in the middle of the mess! I didn't notice (the effect) much but now when I see a Saudi woman talking about her achievement, I say 'wow' a Saudi woman achieved that! I don't feel that way if it was an American woman. It is a shock and unexpected for Saudi women to do so! This exact feeling is the result of what we have been through in schools, family and society in general.

Belle is a good illustration of how socialisation results in in-group attitudes and beliefs as shown by Tajfel's social identity theory. All those messages from school and media and the wider society unconsciously affect how people position women in Saudi, even if they were against them like Belle here. She consumed these messages and accepted them without even knowing.

7.1.3 Language ability and use

Belle started learning English formally at the age of eight when her mother transferred her to a private school. As an English teacher, her mother held a highly positive attitude towards the language:

> My mum was an English teacher... she was always focusing on making me read more, so I was reading since a very young age say five years old or something like this. But I didn't speak English till I was in the third grade.

Her mother was actively encouraging and motivating her to learn English and promoting the importance of that and passively communicating positive attitudes towards English and its speakers (Gardner et al., 1985). Belle embraced her mother's general attitudes toward English communities, which in return developed her integrative motivation. Parents play a major role in fostering or undermining their children's motivation, as parents' attitudes toward L2 and

its community can influence their children's attitudes which affect their motivation and their success in learning that language (Feenstra, 1969; Lambert, 1967).

Belle's mother was highly educated and tended to act as a role model to Belle, which had a positive impact on her English learning development. Portes and Hao (1998) argue that parents' English proficiency might play a significant role in providing their children with English support that might serve the function of passive modelling. Belle's mother's proficiency in English reflected her positive attitude towards the target language and provided Belle with a new medium of communication.

Her mother's attitudinal influence was conveyed by Belle through her beliefs on the different ways she acquired the L2. She used different ways with her; taking her to different Western countries as holiday destinations, enrolled her into a summer camp abroad where English was the medium of communication, and helping her to read different English materials.

Television also played an important role as a means of building L2 knowledge. After moving to the international compound, Belle reported an increase in her daily consumption of English TV programs as she wanted to get involved with what other kids were watching and talking about. Media can assist L2 learners in different ways, for example "to facilitate the process of social integration, in general, and to fit into the local youth culture, in particular" (Elias & Lemish, 2011, p. 36). So Belle used to watch what other children were watching to find something common to talk about, and hence developed her English skills. So while TV was Deema's only source of reference, Belle used TV and social interaction with other internationals to develop her English and social skills.

Before the age of 7, Bell hadn't been socially exposed to English. She was exposed to it through her mother, books and TV, but her main exposure was when they moved to the international compound:

> At that time, I was a kid, and I could switch [English] dialects and that was funny. So, this part played a big role in my language development, and I practiced English a lot with my Indian and Korean friends. We were just kids, so we were communicating in English or even sigh language to figure out a way to play.

At that time, Belle got the chance to make friends with children from everywhere in which they tried their best to communicate and English was the way to go. Being there motivated Belle to speak English and learn it. She believed that this experience helped her to develop linguistically and culturally. It also helped her make sense of who she is and how she relates to the world. Belle's motivation was affected by an external factor, interaction with a wider population (Dörnyei, 2003). In that international English-speaking environment, motivation to learn a language can arise from interaction with people who speak it, as motivation is based on social and cultural environments (Brown, 2007). This is supported by Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, that considers learning as first social then individual (Ohta, 2001). So Belle's social environment was "full of language that provides opportunities for learning to the active, participating learner" (Van Lier, 2000, p. 253). It was also a source of international cultural knowledge i.e. values, norms, practices and ideologies (P. A. Duff, 2011). This cultural knowledge assisted her to take part in the social interaction, which developed her language skills. In other words, Belle was immersed in an international context, where different cultural norms, local and international, were negotiated and English was the main means of communication. So as Belle's social and cultural competency developed, her language abilities also developed, which enabled her to successfully function in that community (Shvidko, 2016). And most importantly, it helped her to develop an international identity.

The school environment, as an external factor, has also influenced Belle's motivation (Dörnyei, 1994). She had a fruitful experience since she was enrolled in a private school. Her teachers, peer-group and the instructional materials played a role in encouraging her to learn

English. At the age of 15 she was enrolled in a school known for its good English teaching:

> They taught us in a good way, an excellent way, I used to read many English books and my friends used to talk in English all the time, it was a thing you know to be able to speak in English. They were not excellent in English but good enough.

She also reported having a teacher who noticed her English abilities and paid her special attention. Which in turn played a role in her overall achievement and proficiency in English.

7.1.4 Pre-departure expectations

Like Arwa and Deema, studying abroad and getting master's and PhD degrees was a job requirement for Belle. So, after getting the job, she started looking for universities that offer her major. She found a master's course in only one university in America and many universities in Australia. She applied and got the quicker reply from Australia, something that she liked as her major was advanced in Australia and had many subfields to specialize in if she wanted to continue her studies. However, she was not excited about life in Australia:

> I used to think that Australia is a far primitive country, not as developed as Europe or America. I didn't know that Melbourne was considered one of the best cities to live in. never heard of anything special about it. When I came here, my views have changed. It is a liveable city, a nice place to live in.

Anticipating nothing but good education, Belle decided to study in Australia. Education was her main concern, and once she got accepted in one of the high ranked universities in Australia, nothing else mattered. Another factor is that she wanted to leave Saudi as soon as possible; her dream since a young age, so being accepted in Australia accelerated the process of leaving. She was content with her English skills, and ability to manage life there, and she had no concerns about religious or social life.

7.2 While studying abroad

Belle's journey in Australia started by taking English courses for six months. She believed she did not need them but was a good way to start her life in Australia and to get to know the

norms of the new society.

7.2.1 Cultural shock: Friendliness in academic atmosphere

Belle used the first six months of her arrival to observe and learn about this new culture which she had no previous knowledge about. Unexpectedly her few early days were shocking for her:

> I was shocked at the way teachers and students interact. So simple. I noticed that at the English school everyone was friendly, you don't know who's the teacher and who's the student. and I thought they don't take us seriously it just the English school. But when I started my master, it was the same! No titles. This is what I want to take with me to Saudi. I'm not better than anyone, the only difference is the age. Though my friends told me that it won't work in Saudi, culturally they are not prepared.

Coming from a strict disciplined academic background, the way teachers and students interacted was shocking for her. In the Arabic culture, teachers have been given high status and are usually compared to 'the status of a messenger'[5] and Muslims usually consider teachers as an embodiment of the Prophet, who was a teacher of morals and values (Elyas & Picard 2010). Though Belle used to travel abroad since a young age, this experience of studying abroad was completely new to her. She found herself in a completely new situation and it took her a while to get used to it. For six months, Belle was waiting for this kind of interaction to end. It was not real for her, she was thinking that once she started her master's course, everything would be normal, her normal, the Saudi normal, with the titles and extreme politeness.

This early experience made a huge impact on her. Though it did not cause her any stress or depression, but it made her uncomfortable and she waited for this period to end. She came to Australia willing to adapt to their norms and culture, and reached this integration stage (Bennett, 1993) and was willing to absorb such norms and take it home with her. She

[5] There is a famous Arabic saying: stand up for (respect) your teacher, for a teacher's status is almost as that of a messenger. Prophet and messenger are largely interchangeable terms in Arabic, and the official translation of this saying used the word 'messenger'.

appreciated the simplicity of interaction, the humble attitude of the teachers. And even though she was warned that her society are not prepared to such ways, she was willing to try. This attitude of Belle confirms her as a rebel against authority and intimidation. It shows the other side of her, one that relates to conversation and mutual understanding. It reflects her kindness, humbleness and helpfulness.

7.2.2 Linguistic and cultural gains

At the time of the interview, Belle has been in Australia for more than three years and was in her first year of PhD study. We started the interview mainly in English but after a while she switched to Arabic to express herself better especially since she was talking about deep cultural issues in the Saudi society. She was relaxed and confident in English and even after switching to Arabic, she naturally code-switched between the two languages.

After coming to Australia and starting her studies, Belle's appreciation of English has increased. She felt that English is the main reason that got her where she is now:

> I feel privileged to speak two languages in Australia than in Saudi. There are limited places to speak English in Saudi, so I don't feel that I'm better or gifted to speak two languages there but here it's different, I got the chance to study in an excellent university and to research and read book in a second language.

She did not feel as special as Deema did for being able to speak English. It seems that in her community, family and neighbours, English was popular but with limited usage. For her, English was not a passion like it was for Deema, and she took it for granted. But after going abroad to study, she realized the great opportunity that English gave her:

> Being able to speak and understand English makes one different. Open to different resources. They are not restricted when watching tv or reading a book or when studying or working, and when you're not restricted you will be able to shoot for the stars, you'll have more, and it will affect your personality… with English you are not restrained! You have resources which will eventually affect your identity.

Being in Australia, getting the ability to widen her horizon, and fulfilling her dream of

completing her higher studies emphasised the importance of English to Belle. She understood that English is a necessity for all this to happen, but of course not the only thing; she is consistent and patient:

> I have always dreamed of being a researcher in Saudi in sha Allah. I imagine in the future there will be cooperation with other researchers. This is what I do now I try to build relationships with different researchers in my field.

Bilingualism paved the path for Belle to join her imagined community (Norton, 2001). Since in Saudi, she desired to be a researcher and build relationships and work together with others in her field. With English, Belle is less restrained. She started to make an attachment to her imagined community, by trying to build relationships with different researchers in her field. She recognised the potential of future collaboration with colleagues and knew she must work hard to make it happen. She is determined and patient, as we will see in other sections of this chapter. Being in Australia and being able to speak English was her first step to reach her imagined community which, as explained by Pavlenko (2003), will help her to engage in active attempts, beyond the language, to change the surrounding contexts and achieve her goals. So, in Australia English became more than just a means of communication, but also a tool that can guide her for a better future and a better self. It also gave her a sense of power:

> If I didn't speak the language I wouldn't be here. My language is better than my husband's, so I have the power to do everything here. I read contracts, I take the lead in every conversation, even help my husband with his homework while he takes care of the baby.

Unlike Deema, Belle only realised the power of English in Australia. Being the one who speaks better English, she led the life and became the one in charge inside and outside the house. Like Deema, her new field offered her different social positions. The new field gave her more importance with English as her capital, which in turn affected the distribution of power (Bourdieu, 1991). However, this gained power of learning English did not affect her view of Arabic as her mother tongue

> I don't speak English with my daughter, I recently started, and she is getting better and better in Arabic. I want her to be bilingual.

Belle here understands that the power comes from being bilingual and not only from speaking English in itself. She wanted her daughter to speak two languages and not only English, and carry two cultures, two world views and two mindsets as language is not only a voice but also a culture (Kramsch, 2001, p. 4).

7.2.3 Highly interested in making local friends

In Australia, like Deema, Belle was academically very well integrated, but had some problems making social relationships with Australians. However, unlike Deema, she kept on trying to make things work. She started by using a more westernized name 'Belle', short for her name 'Nabila'. This gave her a way to hide her local Arabian identity and provided her with a more international one. The idea of a westernized name was not born in Australia as she used that name while working in a Saudi hospital in a way to help foreigner co-workers pronounce her name. She also came up with a similar name for her husband 'Jesse' instead of 'Jasim'. The idea of having a westernized name did not only serve as a way of mingling but also to protect herself:

> It made it easy for me to hide my Arabian identity, especially after being harassed a couple of times by people after knowing that I was Saudi. So, my name is Belle and I look like an Indian. Nobody will know.

Belle also removed her hijab when she came back to do her PhD. She wore it for nearly three years while doing her master's. The decision to remove it stemmed from the same reasons as changing her name; to mingle with locals and to protect herself from any harm:

> Belle: Hijab was a barrier and a cause of harm and abuse! I can't tolerate being abused, that's why I took it off!... when I was wearing the hijab, people used to respond to me differently, Australians in general, they used to perceive me differently than now. When I enter a place people used to stare, I don't know if it's real or not but I believe that they don't do it now. They can't tell anything about me now, before it was clear that I am Saudi and Muslim. Now

> people everywhere are nicer with me, talk more and act differently, and I feel more open to them.
>
> Lulu: did people tell you that they perceive you differently now without hijab?
>
> Belle: yes, I asked few people that I knew from before, I wanted to know if it was only me that feels this way. They said we feel that you are closer to us now. It was the first time they saw me without hijab, so it was something to talk about.

Belle's investment in social interactions encouraged her to make efforts and try to gain a status in the new social environment. So instead of withdrawing from the host society like Deema when was subjected to negative attitudes and signs of disinterest, Belle tried to influence those unequal power relations by removing the hijab and taking on an international name. This shows the interesting relationship between others' perceptions based on her Saudi identity as revealed by her name and Saudi dress-code, and her explicit choice to choose to 'westernize' herself. All these efforts seem to be slowly working for her and she was patient and willing to wait to see the result:

> I started to make friends; it is a little better now than on my master days! May be because back then I had my Saudi best friend with me all the time and we used to spend all the time together. But even now I struggle to make friends with Australians, when I sit with them, I feel like a stranger. You know. I don't know why! We do have lunch together sometimes and went to parties with them, but there is a strange barrier, I go out with them sometimes, but it didn't last. I won't call them friends! The only person I made friends with was a Vietnamese guy and another Indian lady.

With her brown skin, Western name and without her hijab, Belle positioned herself as an international person. Her international self was always a strong part of her identity. Growing up, she did not connect with the Saudi society much and was in constant struggle with its norms. She found herself in the international compound with international friends. This part of her identity is quite strong, and she would do whatever it takes to work on it.

Her social situation is better than before, as she feels safer as unmarked. Though she managed to make friends with some other international students, she struggled with making

local friends. She continues to explain what might be the reason behind her feeling of strangeness:

> I feel that I'm stronger and more confidant with Arabs than with Australians. Though my English is good, I feel myself more when I speak with Arabs. You express yourself better in Arabic. So, I talk more and easily with them, but I find more common ideas with Australians.

Mentally she is connected to Australians. She believes that they think the same way she does. However, she could not be herself when speaking English, the same way when she speaks Arabic: "when I speak Arabic, I'm more fun, Nabila is funnier than Belle, Nabila is funny because she speaks Arabic". She couldn't be funny in English, which is an important aspect of her personality. She finds reason with Australians, and humour with Arabs.

The idea that one is a different person in L2 is not new, and it is argued that all bilinguals experience such shift when switching languages, however, only those with specific personality profiles, like Belle here, notice and report such subtle changes (Ożańska-Ponikwia, 2018). Koven (2007) called it 'Cultural Frame Switching'. It is when bilinguals often report different values and self-descriptions in their first or second language. It does not propose that bilinguals have completely different personalities in their different languages, it is that they show a slightly different side in one language than to the other. This was well explained by Belle as in Arabic she was witty, while in English she was serious. The fun side of her personality shows her 'real' self, while the serious side seems more 'performative' which mirrors Pavlenko's (2006) participants who observed a feeling of 'real' and 'natural' self when using their first language compared to the second one in which they felt more 'fake', 'artificial' and 'performative' (p. 18). Bilinguals "may perceive the world differently, and change perspectives, ways of thinking, and verbal and non-verbal behaviours when switching languages" (Pavlenko, 2006, p. 29). However, Belle did not only change the language, she changed the environment and interlocutors, which can also be the reason

behind her feeling of difference. So, it seems that it was not only the language that makes the difference as the environment and interlocutors might cause the difference in feelings than the language itself. Dewaele and Nakano's (2013) participants also reported a change in the context (environment, interlocutors) in which they use their languages. Belle used English mainly with her colleagues and stressed that she connects mentally with the Australians, as English shows the intellectual side of her personality.

Belle came to Australia and did not want to be identified as a Muslim, Arab, Saudi or even Australian. She just wanted to be herself, the international Belle. This international self pushed her forward to pursue relationships and act in a more open way not only with Australians but also with Saudis in general and Saudi men in particular:

> It [dealing with Saudi men] depends somehow on the person in front of you, you know, how a man acts and reacts in your presence. On my second day here, my colleagues told me that 'there is this Saudi guy in my building' and in my head I was like Aaah! do you need to introduce us to each other! When I met him, he was a very respectful person, and his body language was very normal. And I started to deal with him the same way I deal with Australians… When you live in Saudi, within the mess, you just go with the flow. You don't see anything unusual, we are separated in restaurants, separated in banks, separated everywhere. You feel that's ok, that the normal, and then I started to travel abroad and I was not shocked or anything, I used to think we are different nations and people live differently, that's all.

Belle worked in a hospital which is a mixed-gender workplace in Saudi and believed that this experience has made her more relaxed when dealing with Saudi men in Australia. However, she would take precautions to figure out what kind of men they are and act accordingly, being careful not to be dragged down by disrespectful men:

> You know in public places in Saudi we act in certain ways, and then I started working in the hospital, I was interacting with men, it was intense in the beginning, and I couldn't talk at times and I felt strange all the times. But with time I have changed, I feel more at ease now with men especially here. The experience in the hospital made me realise the gender segregation that we live in. the feeling of doing something wrong faded away with time. But still there were times that I felt that some men were looking at me differently I mean as I was doing something wrong! You know it confuses you! you worry that your actions will be wrongfully interpreted. So yes, now when I see Saudi man I

> want to run away, not run away but not go close. But in general, the way I act with them is much relaxed here (Australia) than there (Saudi).

Belle here summarised the traditional view on the role of gender in Saudi society: the belief that men are responsible for working outside while women take the inside role, although it is a worldview that has nothing to do with Islamic principles (AlMunajjed, 1997). And though women are working outside in gender-segregated workplaces as teachers, and mixed ones as medical workers, this traditional worldview created the male dominant society in Saudi. In it, the authority and power are still vested in men (Kabasakal & Bodur, 2002), and the existence of women in these mixed-gender workplaces is considered strange or unusual, which is clearly manifested in Belle's word choice "intense, couldn't talk, felt strange, doing something wrong".

Belle also touched on the idea of ired (see section 3.1.4). Growing up in an environment where all friends, schools and university are of the same sex, relationships with the other sex have been limited to family members only. Therefore, the first exposure to mixed-gender environment would be a critical experience (Alhazmi & Nyland, 2010).

In Saudi, the culture of dealing with the other sex is limited. Some might develop such culture through traveling abroad or working in mixed-gender workplaces yet they sometimes have to deal with those who have no previous experience and might hold a traditional mentality about the other sex. Hence, caution must be taken, as Belle put it: "your actions might be wrongfully interpreted", and lead to loss of ired. This means that even the act of simply talking to a man might be interpreted by that man or other men as an invitation to something else as her presence in this mixed-gender workplace is sexually pictured by men.

And again, this cultural history of Saudi did not seem to stop Belle from interacting with men. However, she tried to be cautious and smart to figure out the intentions of men interacting with her, e.g., by reading body language. She built her own culture of how to deal with men. Just like Deema, she tried to keep her relationship with Saudi men completely

academic and work related, as in the Saudi culture there is no room for friendship with men and women. However, she built a relationship that turned into a long-lasting friendship with a Vietnamese man. Like Deema, she considered interacting with men and making friends with them to be a practice forbidden only by culture but not religion.

7.2.4 Personal growth

Running away from the Saudi traditions, Belle came to Australia for more space and freedom. She always felt different in Saudi, and coming to Australia confirmed that feeling and led her to change:

> Every time I go to Saudi on vacation, I feel different. Every time I let go of one of my family members, I feel that difference in me. Being away makes you look at things differently because you saw a different world and then you go back and you see people still there, holding their own old ideas. And if you ask my relatives, they will say she has changed, and she doesn't like us anymore. But I didn't mean to change, we don't have anything in common anymore. We're the same age, but I feel much reasonable. I don't know maybe it's not fair to say that about them but I feel that I have grown up but they didn't. We used to be close friends but now I only like two of them one did her master in Saudi, so it might be education that brings us together, and the other one lived most of her life in America, so we think the same. The others they like to gossip a lot. I have bold opinions

Unlike Arwa or Deema, Belle does not belong or click back when she returns to Saudi. The feeling of being different increases every time she goes back, which is understandable as she never felt connected there. She is recognising the differences between herself and society, and she could not bear dealing with old and narrow-minded people, and because of that she is letting them go:

> I used to care about what other people think! But it doesn't matter anymore! Especially old people in my family! But now their scales are falling from my eyes.

She is not only criticising girls her age, but also the old members of her family who held such thoughts. The only ones that she really connects with are those who completed their higher education or those who lived abroad. As she can find connections with them, and common

topics to talk about. With different interests and ways of thinking and acting, the gap between her and the other Saudis is getting bigger. Belle started criticising not only people around her but also the social and cultural norms:

> I used to wonder about Saudi gender roles, they provoked me for a long time. I used to wonder why they must do stuff that way or this way. I used to hate how they judge women for the same mistakes men do!... I used to accept that. Also, when it comes to parenting, like when they tell you must have kids, but after coming here I understood that people can be what they want to be. They can get married and decide not to have kids. They know that they can't raise kids and they decided not to have any. This kind of thinking is new to me, because of the culture where we have been raised in.

What bothers Belle the most is the bubble that society forced her to live in, the injustice against women and the social duties enforced on them, keeping them from their freedom of choice, like the decision to have a baby or not. Coming here opened her mind to this simple fact, that people should have the freedom to choose the life they want to lead.

7.2.5 New understanding of religion and religious identity

In Australia, Belle met people from around the globe, and learned a lot about them, culturally and religiously. However, talking about religion is not her favourite topic:

> I don't like to listen to such topics, religious discussions I mean, I feel stressed if someone bring up such topics, because it is a sensitive topic.

Belle was seeking internal peace. She tried to avoid anything that could distress her or make her uncomfortable. She did not want to justify anything or argue with anyone. She wanted to belong to this new environment, which is why she removed her hijab. Her desire to be accepted and to feel part of the new community was bigger than holding to what marks her as a Muslim. She wanted peace, and hijab was a barrier and a cause of harm. Deep inside she knew that Islam is not about harming someone at any cost:

> Hijab is a basic in Islam, but I have an opinion on that which made it easier for me to remove it, if it is going to be a source of trouble, remove it… abaya on the other hand, is a cultural thing not a religious one… there has to be a

> freedom of choice to wear them or not… if people want to wear them, ok, if they don't want to, it is also ok. We need to adapt to the society and live in peace.

In few words Belle showed a great deal of understanding and analysing of her religion. She understood that 'Islam is all about making it easy and not difficult'[6]. Though considering hijab as a basic Islamic practice, she is echoing Deema's ideas of abaya being a cultural and not religious one.

Her decision to remove the hijab was not made without the consultation of her husband:

> My husband told me it is up to you, but mum was upset about this, but I didn't ask for her permission. I phoned her and told her it is about my safety and my wellbeing. She didn't like it and said what if this or that person sees you, but I don't care about what they think. Before I used to consider what, other people think but I don't anymore. To be honest if I was to live with mum, I would've listened to her because I don't want to live in tense atmosphere. And the same thing goes to my husband, I like to live in peace.

Belle defied authority all her life, but she was done with all the struggles. She wanted peace. Peace was her main reason to remove the hijab, but she would not have removed it if it caused her trouble inside her home. So like the Muslim women in (Cole & Ahmadi, 2003) Belle removed her hijab to avoid conflict as she believed that modesty can be achieved without it.

Her husband's support was not only in Australia, but also in Saudi:

> Even in Saudi I don't cover my face anymore. I told my mum that when I visited her last time. I keep on surprising her every time I go there, ha-ha. She told me you are big enough to make your own decisions. But I influenced my sister too, she doesn't cover her face now. I became stronger here. I lived years here showing my face, so it became normal to me. I started to think and not listen to fatwas… I used to travel abroad for years and not cover my face, but I have never thought about showing my face in Saudi but when I came here and spent years away from Saudi, away from the societal pressure. The same thing with my husband, he has changed a lot, and I feel if the husband is okay with it, the wife will be okay too… What matters is you as a human, when I think now, I think of myself first, not others or what they think. I do

[6] A saying of the Prophet Muhammad.

> not care what they think or say. I want my mum to be happy with me, but she needs to know my reasons and accept them.

Removing the face cover in Saudi was not Belle's only change. Every time she goes back to visit, she would surprise her mother with something new. And though overwhelmed with such changes, her mother accepted her decisions, especially since she is married and her husband is happy with them. This is the norm in Saudi, as males have social authority over women, even if their actions are against religion.

Belle did not seek fatwa (asking clerics for permission) for removing hijab. She positioned herself as capable of making such decision without any religious interference. She felt the need in her heart and consulted her husband, and figured it out:

> May Allah keep clerics for themselves not for us, I don't hate them, but they mean nothing to me. I don't listen to them. I hear about them from my family. I like the ones who speak about self-development through religion, trying to really help people. You know there are the preachers and the scholar. I respect the scholars for what they have studied and learned but still I search about everything now, as some fatwas are not really needed.

From a young age Belle negatively positioned religious preachers, she did not like them or accept what they say or the way they say it, and hence rejected their religious authority; but she respected religious scholars with deep religious knowledge. She is against preachers who lead people in one direction by frightening them. And with all her respect to scholars, she was trying to find her own way in life, to look at things from different angles:

> I once read the translated version of Quran. It was so beautiful. Especially when there was this description of Heaven. Maybe because we used to read it in Arabic, so when I first read it in English I felt 'oh wow so nice' I imagine if I read the whole Quran in English, I will understand it completely different.

Being in Australia not only changed Belle's perspective towards hijab, but also enabled her to read religious texts in English which touched her soul. Like everything else, the Quran is being understood differently and she found new ways to relate to it, as if English gave new meanings. She also started to question the unquestionable:

> I started to question many things, Hadith for example, its attribution and correctness, I shyly started to read about it, and I don't want to go deep in it, I don't want to shake all my old beliefs,, but I allow some level of questioning and thinking, and I studied here how to criticise a paper which made it easy for me to question Hadith especially Sahih al Bukhari and Muslim[7], I don't say they are wrong but this person collected Hadith 300 years after the prophet! How sure was he that some words were not changed! He worked hard I know but for me as a researcher now I see this differently. Quran on the other hand is not questionable.

Religion is a big part of her identity, of who she is, and she believed that if she dives deep, she will get lost and will struggle. So to keep her peace, she allows a certain level of questioning. Questioning Hadith narration alone was not an easy task, especially for someone who has been told all their life to take such texts for what they are, and when in doubt, you ask those who know better, as there is no room for speculations. Questioning and criticising led her to reject some of the society's widespread practices:

> My views on certain Saudi norms have changed after coming here. They were fine by me but after looking at them from the perspective of people in here I changed my position. Relative marriages[8] for example are widespread in Saudi, and when I first mentioned it here people were shocked at the idea 'wow how would someone marry their cousin! He is like a brother!" I started to search it up and started to question such a norm, it's harmful and they should be forbidden.

Looking at relative marriages from a religious point of view, Belle ended up rejecting this practice, as it might be a source of harm to families. She understood how such acts might risk birth defects, and hence should be prohibited or at least not encouraged.

Belle here is gradually evolving. She understood the Quran differently, questioned Hadith narration and rejected some of the Saudi cultural norms from a religious perspective and she was also furious about the situation of women in Saudi, and how women themselves disrespect each other:

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[7] Sahih al-Bukhari and Muslim are two of the six major Hadith collections of Sunni Islam. These prophetic traditions, or Hadith, were collected by Muslim scholars 200 years after the prophet's death.

[8] In certain areas in Saudi, first cousin marriage is encouraged and sometimes enforced.

> Whatever women do, it is nothing in their eyes. Honestly it hurts. Even women themselves, they look down at themselves and criticise each other, one would say I had a male boss, and he was better than having a female one etc., why! Many women say the same thing. But I can't tell the reasons. I don't know. May be culture...Whenever a woman holds a high position, people would say she won't succeed, you know in Quran Allah mentioned Queen Balqees and how she ruled, and prophet Suliman wanted to reach her for her great importance. So why in our society women and oppressed and attribute this to religion.

Belle is distancing herself from Saudi women and trying to figure out reasons for their fighting and underestimating each other. She attributed this to Saudi culture, as the Quran has supported women and showed their wisdom in ruling and making good decisions. She also criticised the West's stereotyping of Saudi Muslim women, and how they are caught between two fronts:

> The West looks down at Muslim women. But we are not the only women who are oppressed. The way they stereotype makes me angry. and I always try to show them the real situation in Saudi, I try to clear the picture with all its angles.

Like Deema, Belle is admitting a certain level of oppression, but arguing that misogyny is faced by all women around the world, and not only Muslim women. She also believes that some Saudis contribute to this false image of Saudi women, but she is determined to clear it:

> One time, a Saudi guy did a presentation about diabetes in Saudi, and how Saudi women have it more than men... and one [of the Audience] asked whether we have places for sports, gyms and such for women. And he [Saudi guy] responded that we don't ... but I stood up and said that is not true, we have everything, gyms and walk areas but the real obstacle is the culture and how women think that exercise is not important. Some were raised to think sports are of secondary importance… the presentation was a shock to me.

Belle was surprised by the Saudi man's response and how he aided misconception about the situation in Saudi. Standing up and confronting him shows Belle's strong desire to reveal the truth, which is why she took part in this study. Again she is distancing herself from Saudis and is blaming the culture and people's narrow minds and ways of thinking. It is also culture that prevents a movement like feminism to take place in Saudi:

> People in Saudi hate the word feminism, especially since it is a Western term, and Westerner care so much about it… I feel it is an important movement and has to flourish in Saudi, and I feel a feminist inside me, but I don't like to argue with people 'we have to do this or that' I don't want to lose my energy on such arguments, but I really want a voice for feminists in Saudi, but through others, not me… I would support individuals, like girls at my university, I would educate them and help them if they need it, but not wider than that… the current time is the best time for their voice to reach wider audience, especially since everything is changing now and might change more and more, people are in shock of all that change and might accept feminism as well… Women have brains and can think, they can read the Quran and understand it differently than men... yet women scholars in Saudi are affected by the patriarchal interpretation of Quran and they don't have the courage to interpret it differently.

In Australia, Belle reached a level of satisfaction about her life; having a husband who supports her decisions, and a mother who accepts who she became. She is done fighting and arguing. She believes in Saudi feminism but not through her. She is hoping that women could awaken from this Saudi patriarchal slumber. She explained how sexism is widespread in Saudi: "they accept boys' drinking, but they would bury girls alive if they removed their hijab". She also explained how all their actions are wrongfully attributed to religion. She believes in women's abilities to be more, not only socially but even religiously. What she means here, if sexism is wrongfully attributed to Islam, then it is on women to get up and interpret the Quran and find their answers to change the situation.

7.2.6 Meaning of the Saudi identity

Being Saudi to Belle was associated with the difficulties that she faced growing up. So to survive and thrive in her life, leaving the country was the answer to her problems:

> When I was in Saudi, I was always thinking that I will leave this country forever, especially with all the injustices that happened to me growing up… After coming to Australia, I started to grow a strong sense of my nationality. I started to feel love for Saudi, I miss Saudi. I used to be grumpy about everything there, about things that we can't do. I felt that coming to Australia was not strange for anyone in my family because I have always talked about leaving Saudi.

Like Deema, Belle dreamed of leaving the country and living abroad, and it was then when

she realised her love for her country and the strength of her national identity. However, though Deema was eager to go back after finishing her studies, Belle was considering the possibility of staying in Australia:

> Lulu: Would you consider staying in Australia after you graduate?
>
> Belle: Yeah, possible. If I had the chance, it is possible. I can live here and go to Saudi for visits. But just to be clear, I don't mean that Saudi is a bad place to live in, I just want my daughter to live in peace. Possible because of the society, to some level, I consider myself a survivor of the struggles of that time and I believe my daughter would survive too.

She is not fighting to stay in Australia, as she knows the process is not easy and visa approval will take time, at the same time, she is not eager to go back. At the top of her mind is her daughter's well-being. She survived the tense environment, closed society of Saudi with a single mother, so surviving would be easier for her daughter who has supportive parents and open society. She found her peace in this international position.

Like Deema, being Saudi was connected to being a Muslim:

> If I wasn't Saudi, I'm not sure I would be Muslim! I might be anything!... I don't know. People look at you this way. You are Saudi you are supposed to be religious.

She understood the connection between being Saudi and being religious or even being Muslim. As mentioned before, Belle is rethinking everything without limits. She is crossing all the religious and societal boundaries. She is wondering about the essence of her religious identity and trying to understand if it was a belief or just a habit, something that she was raised to be. While Arwa accepted this imposed position of being religious just because she is Saudi and considered it a complement and a high status, it was a burden to Belle. So like Deema, Belle is rejecting this large dominant culture of Saudi and looking at herself as an independent individual who is capable of making her own culture.

7.3 After studying abroad

7.3.1 Future dreams and making change

Belle's desire to stay in Australia stems from her concerns about her daughter's future. However, just like Deema, Saudi means a lot to her, it is where her home and family is:

> Nothing can replace my family. I have always imagined myself living with a family; open-minded or closed, I always feel better with my family.

All her life, Belle defied authority and narrow-mindedness, and it will not stand between her and her family. When she was in Saudi, she always talked about leaving the society and living abroad, but now she is showing belonging to it despite the differences in thinking. When we talked about the future, she mentioned her daughter first, how she is going to raise her when she goes back:

> I believe I would be more tolerable with my daughter in the future, I will try to be her friend and not to force anything on her… I will treat my kids equally boys or girls, I might try to protect my daughter more, form the society, but I will treat them the same, what is forbidden is forbidden for both.

Belle wanted to start the change within her family first, and just like her mother, she wanted to protect her daughter. She wanted her to be strong and aware of her rights and not to be like some ignorant Saudi women:

> I want to change everything from small rules to common social norms! Women's position in Saudi is heart breaking. I want to change the way they think. I want to see more independent women. One of my relatives broke my heart! Her brother came to her on the day of the king's decree of women's driving and told her 'if I see you behind the wheel, I will kill you' she is my age, divorced and doesn't work.

Belle is frustrated with social norms and traditions and how they are hindering the progress of Saudi women even with the changes in the laws and the government support. She is eager to enlighten these women and empower them.

7.3.2 Excitement for the new Saudi: Vision 2030

Belle described the current changes in Saudi as "too much and overwhelming". Not only the changed laws but also the societal changes. She was 'shocked' at how people are changing and accepting what used to be forbidden., but it confirms that culture is constantly changing over time (Geertz, 1973). Belle was largely in favour of progress and has been waiting for change her whole life, and she appreciates this rapid change, but needs time to process and absorb it as she never thought that the time was coming so soon. That is why she is frustrated by those two-faced religious people who would just go with the flow with no principles. She always thought that religious people are calling for what they believe in, that is why the scales are falling from her eyes as she expected them to stick to their beliefs. She is angry at them and blaming them for the wasted years of her life. Study abroad for example was considered by the conservatives as a huge matter, and a means of corruption but lately she noticed how people are accepting it more and consider it a way to the future.

So, like Deema, Belle was excited about these changes happening in Saudi, but frustrated about the past, especially when it comes to restrictions on Saudi women:

> What's been wrong is now right, just because of the society not religion … Now women become the society's favourite… We are still far behind the gulf countries, Kuwait for example, they are more open and have more freedom… I don't know why but since the seventies, women have more freedom, they are on TV, they wear what they want to wear, more relaxed when dealing with the other sex. And I feel that the Kuwaiti man considers Kuwaiti woman as his sister.

Belle lost her trust in and respect for the conservative society of Saudi. She blamed the society for the complicated relationship between men and women. With the laws changing, the situation of women is also changing and everyone including the religious people, who used to put everything on women, are changing their attitudes. She believes that this time is the time for Saudi women to thrive:

> Women also are exploring different heavy sports, I personally know few girls who are doing Karate, and participated in international championships to represent Saudi, I imagine how proud they are, they did something… This time is the best time for it [feminism] to thrive. The situation now is changing and will continue to change. People are still in shock of such changes, but it will continue… women now are able to express themselves and talk. I can't imagine someone telling me now that I can't drive… as long as there is law to protect women, they can… when the law changes, ways of thinking also change immediately, all the parents who used to say no to women driving are now encouraging their daughters to learn how to drive… it [driving] is how they are changing their position in the society.

Belle was excited about the achievements of Saudi women. And like Deema, she was attached to them and wanted to be one of them and to contribute to their new female friendly culture. A new culture that has components from both of the cultures they have experienced. She talked with passion about them and was proud and thrilled about their achievements. Unlike Deema, she believed that driving was the first step for their changed position in the country. With these changes happening, Belle still believes that some women's issues will never change as they are deeply entrenched in the culture:

> It [girls' ired or honour] will not change in the future, I feel that it will never change, the success of women also won't be highly appreciated, men are still appreciated more, whatever you do, they won't feel that you did enough.

Belle was not being pessimistic, she was showing a great awareness and understanding of her culture and society. She has been an active agent defying patriarchy for most of her life and she knows for sure that less entrenched issues took forever to be changed, or even modified, let alone issues that touched the dominant patriarchy of the Saudi society.

7.4 Belle in review

From a young age, Belle developed an international persona that couldn't tolerate the strict cultural norms of the Saudi society, and she rebelled. She used to express her rebellion with clear words and acts, however, she unconsciously went along with some of society's norms. Her mother played a great role in making her who she is today, by being a strong independent

woman and defying the norms of the society herself.

Her decision to leave and study in Australia was expected by everyone who knew her. As she was clearly expressing such intentions all the time. However, in Australia, just like Deema, Belle found herself a stranger roaming this new world that she wants to call home. She decided to take serious steps and do whatever it takes to fit in, and she was very patient to see results. Taking off her hijab and taking on an international name were some of her efforts to mingle.

Belle came to understand religion differently. She started by reading the Quran in English which gave it a new meaning. This caused her to question not only cultural norms but also religious matters. By searching and criticising, she was taking on an international religious identity, understanding religion from an international perspective and looking at it from a different angle.

After rebelling for years, Belle found her peace in Australia. She felt relieved from all the familial and social restrictions and started to feel her international self. This gave her more confidence to take her right of freedom of choice and do what she wants to do, with the support of her husband, which made it easy for her to live anywhere.

Chapter Eight: Dare to Speak

Leen's Journey

I've always known something good awaits me.

8.1 Before studying abroad

Among all the participants, Leen seems to be the one who has gone through the hardest time growing up as she came from one of the most conservative regions in Saudi. I was shocked by the informative and detailed life stories that Leen shared with me, and grateful for her honesty and transparency. She was determined to be heard. So, in this section, I will go through the different factors which had impacted her life before coming to Australia and made her who she is today. We will go through her family background, factors that shaped her identity, her experience with English and her reasons to study abroad.

8.1.1 Profile and family background

Leen was enthusiastic but soft-spoken woman in her thirties. She has a look on her face that tells how much she has been through. She is happily married and the mother of a girl. Her study abroad journey started in America which was her first trip abroad. She studied English there for a year before moving to Melbourne to do her master's degree. After graduating from her master's, she went back to Saudi, got married, had a baby and then returned to Melbourne to do her PhD in applied linguistics. Overall, she spent five years abroad and at the time of the interview, she was in the first year of her PhD. Leen wears hijab but not Abaya, just modest pants and shirts. She described herself as "an independent woman" and believes that others saw this in her but gave it another name: "my mum used to call me 'stubborn' and I was". Leen believes that she was different from her siblings, they all have strong personalities, and she was the weakest among them: "my little sister has a strong personality.

And I always thought I must do something, be more". Leen's personality made her invisible compared to her siblings, so she wanted to do something in her life to be seen.

Leen, like Arwa, comes from the southern region of Saudi Arabia, which she believes to be one of "the most conservative and traditional regions of Saudi". Her family were strongly connected to their extended family members, who were very strictly traditional and loyal to their tribe. She lived in a closed environment, she never travelled abroad, watched a movie, or had a phone of her own before her scholarship.

Her mother is illiterate and a housewife, and her father is a soldier and the breadwinner. She has three brothers and three sisters, and she is the eldest girl with one boy older than her. Her parents supported her academically but when it came to study abroad, they initially baulked at the idea. Leen spent a year trying to convince them, and at last her father agreed and warned her that nobody will marry her if she proceeds with this. As for her mother, she did not agree at all and did not accept the idea until recently.

8.1.2 Identity

Having an illiterate mother had a huge impact on Leen's identity and the way she looks at herself, her mother and other women. Her mother was not only illiterate but an orphan with no brothers to support her. The male support represented in fathers and brothers is an important social pillar in the southern community, which affects relationships and status. In the case of Leen's mother, this forced her into an arranged marriage:

> My mother was forced to marry my father, and he was forced to marry her too. My mum fought against that marriage and said I won't marry him even if he was the last man on earth. I mean it was a traditional arranged marriage and my mum says there was no love between them till this day I hear them say we got married without love but only respect.

Leen's mother foregrounds 'respect' in her marital relationship, but in reality, respect was not always there. This lack of respect deeply touched Leen, who paid close attention to the way

her father treated her mother, which she hated:

> My dad is a traditional man who keeps on giving her orders and dismisses her. He used to motivate and push me, but he used to criticise mum, I mean the way he looks at her, that she is not educated. This was always happening in front of me. I used to ask him: why are you supporting us but criticising mum? I mean this was something that made me cry during my undergraduate days. He used to tell her: you don't understand anything, you are not educated, it is not supposed to be this way. He used to remind her every now and then that she not educated and doesn't know anything about how to raise us… So, what encouraged me to pursue my studies was the way my dad treated mum. He looked down at her, underestimated her because she is illiterate.

Leen's father was her number one supporter for education and his love of education seems to be the reason for his underestimation and disrespect for her mother. His attitude towards Leen's mother is what pushed Leen to study, and not his support. Leen noticed the unequal power relations, and how her mother was not given the chance to speak because of her lack of education. She allied herself with her mother and defended her. Her motivation was to fight patriarchy and misogyny within her household. Her brother's attitude towards women was also a source of frustration and anger for her as he would go to the extreme in his views on women, something her father did not even do:

> My own brother keeps telling me 'Seriously you are going to be a doctor!' he always looks down at women and criticises them all the time. He is well educated but he has this idea that he must control women. He believes that a woman without a male legal guardian will do something wrong! He didn't allow his wife to finish school and have her own business. He got this from the society around him! My dad and other brothers are not the same. However, I always stop him when he tries to interfere in my life and tell him to mind his own business.

Leen is attributing her brother's actions to the influence of their closed southern society. And unlike all the other participants, Leen did not see herself in her mother in any way: "I used to say I will never be like my mum." The weak position of her mother was connected to her lack of education, so, by continuing her studies she is was guaranteed a better position. Deema's mother was also illiterate (section 6.1.2); however, she was strong and independent and pushed her children forward.

Having an orphan mother without family support, was Leen's reminder to be independent and pursue her education. Her mother was an example of what not to be:

> My mum, not because she is illiterate but because she is pure, would accept anything they tell us in school. She used to ask us about stuff, learn from us. We taught her everything and not the other way around. My dad also enforced this idea, that whatever school gives you is the truth, not the society. He supported our education and pushed us to learn.

Leen's father was aware of the closedness of the southern society, how traditional and strict they are from the other parts of Saudi, and how patriarchy can be seen in its finest picture. So, what is perceived by other participants as strict religious teachings in school, like not listening to music and face covering, was perceived by Leen as easy compared to the society's standards and traditions. For example, certain haircuts and eye lens were considered haram (religiously forbidden) in her community. It can also go beyond religion:

> In my society, men look at women in a disrespectful way. We have this idea that you must be modest or else men, even your closest relatives like your uncles, might sexually harass you. So, my dad used to ask us to wear hijab in the presence of them. And my dad used to say it frankly, if something bad happens to you it is your fault not them. This idea changed my life. I always thought that this is wrong. This must stop one day. Now I don't do that, and whenever one criticizes or comments on my clothes, I would stop them and tell them to respect me and know their limits, relatives or strangers.

Her father's attitude was affected by other members of the society in two different ways: he was trying to protect his girls from being harmed by covering them up, and by pushing them towards education which would enlighten them and make them think differently. However, Leen did not let her father, or her brother, get away with their ways of treating and underestimating women. She made sure that they both hear her voice, even if it was not loud enough to stop them. She stood up to her father when he looked down at her mother and did the same with her own brother; she also tried to stand in the face of society and challenge its standards and ways of looking at women:

> I struggled during my undergraduate days, cause in my society girls get married at a young age… So, if you are 20 and not married that's a big deal and attracts gossip in the family. Let alone that I completed my studies and did not drop after secondary school. Add to that, I used to study in a different city… I used to travel every day for more than one hour to get to campus.

Though Leen referred to herself as having a weak personality, she was strong enough to confront her society on different occasions. She went against the flow and "broke the rules in so many levels". Being a target of gossip did not stop her, instead it was a push that kept her moving on in confronting the society. She was one of the first people in the southern area to get a scholarship, let alone the first single female:

> When I heard about the scholarship program, I knew I have to do it… When I told my parents about it for the first time, they didn't know what I was talking about! It was new to all of us, and we have never heard of anyone from my region ever got a scholarship or even travelled abroad. Even men. Nobody has ever thought of life abroad…Nobody can even imagine what is it like. So, when I told them that I want to apply for the scholarship they started laughing at me and did not take me seriously.

Travelling and studying abroad was a mystery to Leen and her family, something strange, new, and not for them, which was a cause of laughter. Leen felt differently as deep inside she knew it was meant for her, the future that awaited her. She went through with the application without telling them and "when I got the initial approval, I froze". She was scared to tell them, scared to stand up against them. However, with the encouragement of her sister she dared to challenge her parents, she fought when they tried to talk her out of it, and went through to complete all the official papers and was issued her passport:

> I told my dad that I fought a lot to graduate and I'm not going to wait for someone to propose and get married, I was already stirring some talk around me. I told them I will go and make my future and will not wait for opportunities to come to me. Life is not only about marriage.

Leen is resisting this imposed position of being a dependent woman waiting to be saved by marriage. She spoke up, but her words fell on deaf ears. Her father would come around to her position, but once he goes out and meet other family members, they would win him over

again. It was a fight between her and society and Leen was determined to win, no matter at what cost, even if it was her parents' approval and blessing:

> My mum still doesn't accept studying abroad, she is proud of what I have achieved but she would prefer if I did it in Saudi. She doesn't want me to live abroad.

Her mother was never against education, but it was the mystery of studying and living abroad. The mystery of the West and what would come with it, the values, beliefs and morals. She was against what she did not know and understand. She was proud and happy with the achievements of her daughter but if it was up to her, she would not have allowed it.

8.1.3 English language ability, attitude and use

Leen's journey with English started at the age of 13 in a public high school. She was not interested in learning the language and used to study just to pass exams:

> My whole life I used to reject English and learning it. I chose Arabic as a major at university. I used to say I don't need English. My other siblings were a bit more into it than me, but me and the oldest of my brothers used to say English isn't that important.

Like Arwa (section 5.1.3) English at school meant nothing to Leen – it was just an extra subject that she needed to pass. Both Leen and Arwa were from the same region and their southern community shared similar negative views about the West and English as the language of Westerners, the language of the Non-Muslims (Alzahrani, 2017; Mahboob & Elyas, 2014). As a child, she preferred her own language and culture over that of English which affected her willingness to learn it as L2 (Schumann, 1975). Her parents on the other hand, held a neutral attitude towards English and did not encourage or motivate her to learn it. In addition, though her mother's lack of education motivated her to pursue her studies, it seems that her parents' limited education and lack of English abilities might have played a role in her rejection to learning the language.

Leen graduated from university with no English ability. She reported that she was not able to

understand even a very simple conversation in English as she majored in Arabic and took no English classes during her undergraduate years. All the English she learned in high and secondary school was forgotten, and the idea that she did not need English for her studies was reinforced.

After graduation, there was nothing left for Leen to do. She wanted more but was stuck with her society and was looking for a way out and realised that it was through a scholarship which could not be done without learning English. At this point, she realised the importance of learning English:

> I didn't use to like English. I thought that I don't need it. I didn't know a single English word before the scholarship and coming here, but at a certain moment I realized that my freedom is hanging in this scholarship program. if I want to live away from that society and if I want a degree, I need to learn English. I realized it is importance. So, when I applied for the scholarship, I spent 7 months learning few words in English. I knew that when you speak English you reach! Without it you're stuck.

Growing up, Leen did not see English as having any power or adding to her cultural capital. To the contrary, English was not popular among common people, as it was considered the language of the infidels and Saudi students barely used it in contexts other than classrooms, as reported by Elyas and Picard (2010). However, after applying for the scholarship program and even before getting the final approval, Leen appeared to be recognising the importance and need to learn English and did not waste any more time and started learning by herself at home.

When talking about languages, Leen described Arabic as her favourite language. For her it was more than just a mother tongue but the language of her future, her major and her area of study. During her undergraduate years she started writing and posting Arabic prose and poems in Twitter, which meant a lot for her. She found herself in Arabic. It was a language that best described her feelings and emotions. It was her one and only language. However, at a certain moment, she realised that it was not enough and for a better future she needs more

than Arabic, she needs another international language. A language that will make her go far and reach her future, as she described it.

In short, Leen had negative attitudes towards English on her early years as a child. Later, in her early adulthood, the idea that she does not need English in her life faded away and started to see a different future offered by a different language.

8.1.4 Pre-departure expectations

Unlike the other participants, studying abroad was not a job requirement for Leen. Getting an advanced degree was her choice and goal. She had just finished her undergraduate study when she decided to apply for the King Abdullah scholarship program. Her future was vague, and she did not give as much thought as to where she was going, as when she could leave. She just wanted to leave as the days before her flight were so tense:

> When the news spread, people started calling my parents warning them that I'm going to come back pregnant, and I'll never get married… When everything was done and I was leaving in few days, my dad told me 'I'm not going to stand between you and your future but do not blame me for anything. People are already talking about you honour'. So I knew that this is a defining moment in my life. And it wasn't easy.

With all this pressure from her relatives, Leen was waiting patiently to leave and start building her future. She did not read or search about where she was going as she was busy preparing and facing her community in Saudi.

She went to America first to study the language. And there she was harassed a couple of time because of her face covering. After a year she moved to Australia to start her master's and again she did not read up about it simply because it did not matter to her. She was willing to face anything to get a degree:

> Because of what happened to me in America, I was a bit worried about my safety, I didn't expect multiculturality and was prepared to be uncomfortable… I wanted a degree and nothing else mattered, I was determined to face hell, nothing will hold me back.

She did not expect life to be easy abroad, but she was sure that whatever she faces is worth it as her future is lying there and nothing was left to do in Saudi.

In Saudi and among her society, Leen was positioned as a second-class citizen and a minor just because she was a woman. She hated that imposed position and tried to resist it, but she was voiceless, her words were never heard, and her protest was never noticed. She knew that the only way to negotiate and reposition herself in that society was to leave it and reach out for a better place and status in different societies. English was her main means to do that. And though her context changed, it took her a while to change her perspective on life as we will see in the next section.

8.2 While studying abroad

Leen's journey abroad started in America to study English and then in Australia to do her master's degree and PhD. She started her journey with her brother as her mahram and after finishing her master's she went to Saudi as she got a job as a lecturer in a Saudi university. She got married and came back to Australia to do her PhD. At the time of the interview, Leen was in the first year of her PhD, everything was going smoothly with her studies, and she was happily married.

8.2.1 Cultural shock: Niqab must go

Leen was determined to build her future and find meaning in her life. When in America, Leen gave it all. She worked hard and followed different techniques to learn fast and finish the English course in a short time. And she did, especially for a person who went abroad with almost no English skills. At that time, Leen was fully covered (niqab and abaya) and she used to believe in its importance and "go in deep discussion about it with non-Muslims and uncovered Muslim girls". She also surrounded herself with Saudi friends and limited her interactions to them. So, though abroad, she was living according to the Saudi norms and

culture. She felt her own culture is the superior one (Bennett, 2011). Her long discussion with others shows that she was in the defence stage and carried negative attitude about the host culture considering them the other. Threatened by the host culture, she tried to maintain a strong hold on her home culture values (Bennett, 2011). Like Arwa, the cultural distance between Saudi and America affected the smoothness of her experience (Bochner, 2003). Surrounding herself with Saudi, she was keen to find people with similar values, beliefs and practice (Bochner, 2003). In America, she was not happy or comfortable:

> When I was in America, I couldn't pray in public places, or in campus, it was against the university law. You have to go to a private place to pray not in public. And people did not accept the idea. People reacted badly towards me in different occasions. They don't want to see strict Muslim woman and I was fully covered when I first went there. I used to wear niqab, and me and my friends were shouted at by different people in different occasions. Once an old guy passed by me and started shouting: 'take it off, you understand!' and he was coming towards me and getting closer and closer and I was quiet, I couldn't say a word, I couldn't say anything back, I didn't know what to say in English, my language was very poor. I started crying and I was very scared. My brother was not there with me. And I took it off. I felt that I was humiliated by it, I was silenced by it, and I was weak because of it. I didn't want to think that about it. for sure it was important to me.

Leen was denied the right to be herself in America. She was assumed the position of a strict Muslim, or worse a terrorist. She could not pray or wear her desired clothes which were very important to her. She saw herself back then as a strict Muslim and how people wanted her to loosen up a little. And though she was confronted about her niqab many times before this incident, she did not take it off. She never challenged this assumed position. She used to be accompanied by other friends or her brother, but when she was all by herself it affected her deeply.

Having no Saudis around her added more difficulties to her experience and undermined her security (Bochner, 2003). She did not find a way to stop the abuse other than by taking off the niqab. She did not like it at that time, she did not like the idea that niqab, an an important aspect of her identity, could be the reason for her humiliation, silence, and weakness. She was

in a culture shock as she felt that niqab was a source of stress and depression:

> After a while I started to think; why restrain yourself. Be free, live your life. It was not a religious choice; it was a life choice. I wore in the beginning because I used to think that we have to, never thought about life without it. It was a must and life can't go without it.

Taking the niqab off gave her the chance to negotiate that position, the strict Muslim position. When Leen removed the niqab, she let go of a part of her identity. Wearing it was never a choice in her life, it was a forced traditional practice, an essential part of being a member of the Saudi culture, her Saudi habitus, and she could not imagine life without it. She was assumed the position of Muslim women who cover up and when she removed it, she felt free and alive. This shows that wearing the niqab before was never referred to as a religious practice, rather it was a cultural one as she comes from a very traditional family. It is worth noting that there is no direct verse in the Quran that discuss niqab, yet there are different interpretations of scholars (Nadjib, 2020). The Prophet did not problematize it and the obligation only fell on his wives. Other scholars argue that "Niqab is Culture not worship" and explain that the origin of wearing niqab is in the Arabic tradition (Nadjib, 2020, p. 2).

So this incident of removing the niqab challenged Leen to change and to open her mind to the others. The discrimination against her made her more acceptable to the others which gave her a chance to accept change within herself. When she decided to move to Australia, she wanted a new start with a new identity:

> When I came to Australia, I felt that I should have a different identity, an identity that could be easily understood. An identity that will allow me to speak, cause when I was wearing niqab I didn't dare to speak. I used to be scared. So, in Australia, I decided not to wear niqab or abaya, and just keep my hijab with casual decent clothes. I felt more outgoing with my own boundaries. It turned out that Australia is nothing like America, it is multicultural, and I can pray anywhere, and you can find praying places everywhere even at the airport.

Leen believed that in America she was not understood correctly and was wrongfully treated. She blamed that part of her identity that was shown in her dress as a strict Muslim, which she

was not. She was just following a tradition. She decided to show a different side of her identity, a side that will allow her to speak and feel safe. And though she understood that Australia is nothing like America and she can practice her religious duties everywhere, she decided not to wear her niqab or abaya; simply because it is not who she is, and it is not part of her identity anymore. So contrary to many Muslim women around the world, Leen here is not considering her clothes, abaya and niqab, as "an affirmation of [her] faith or an act of submission to God" (Khan, 2019, p. 66). Leen here reached the adaptation stage (Bennett, 1993), she begun to see cultural differences as a valuable resource that allowed her to evolve. In short, Leen was shocked that she was forced to remove and change part of her identity. And though she complied with it, she was shocked again by the realisation that it was never part of her, but a part of her community in Saudi. So being abroad was a discovery of who she really was.

8.2.2 Linguistic and cultural gains

At the time of the interview, Leen has been abroad for almost five years and was in the first year of her PhD. Before we started the interview, she requested it to be in Arabic, as she wanted to express herself better and wanted to include all the small details and explain everything and did not want language to be a barrier. She occasionally code-switched but mainly used Arabic.

Growing up, Leen did not learn English and her attitude towards it changed the moment she decided to study abroad. She had a typical instrumental motivation for learning English as she was looking for a future and a job. She believed that learning and speaking English will help her to reach her goals, so she gave it everything. She was focused and determined to learn English and finished her English course in a year, with an IELTS score of 6.5. This allowed her entry to her chosen master's course in Australia. However, she was aware that her English skills still needed to improve. She believed that the academic life, her master's,

and PhD, have helped improve her language:

> After starting my master's and PhD I felt like I'm more confidant with English I believe that I can speak, even if I make mistakes, it's ok, before I used to be shy and get nervous when I make mistakes

She understood her position as a L2 learner and knew that she needs to practice to be better and mistakes are part of the process. She also believed that her confidence arose from her conversations with native speakers as she talks to them at ease without expecting criticism:

> I love to talk to Aussies more than Arabs, I feel that Saudis are always correcting you when you make mistakes. They judge your language by your accent. They don't understand that language is a means of communication. It is something that I suffer from, even with my husband. He keeps saying you are doing your PhD why don't you speak like Aussies. He keeps on criticising me.

The criticism of Saudis and their expectation of high fluency after studying abroad was mentioned by Arwa (section 5.2.2) as they consider SA a "magical formula" for fluency (Kinginger, 2011, p. 58). Such criticism forms a pressure on some L2 learners like Arwa, and instead of learning, she started defending herself. Also the fear of making mistakes held Arwa back even when she was in a different educational context. However, Leen figured this out and started to get into conversation with natives or international students to improve her language. She was proud to be able to speak English and knew when to practice it:

> I feel proud to be able to speak another language, when I travel to other countries, I have an international language to communicate with people. Also, when I search for information, I have two languages which means I have two sources of information, I have two different cultures. I am proud, I am always proud to be able to speak English, though I don't like to show it in Saudi… nobody will understand anything so why bother, they would just feel that I'm showing off.

Leen recognised that learning English will open doors for her and increases her chances for getting a good job. She also understood its importance for cross-cultural communication and acquiring knowledge and accessing the internet. So, it is not only instrumental importance but also required for socialising and entertainment. And this new importance to English did not

make her undermine her mother tongue:

> I don't want to say that English is better than Arabic, but English is the language of this world and this generation.

English was not only a window to a different world, different information, and different mindsets in Australia and other parts of the world, but also in the monolingual country of Saudi:

> In my department, there are people who did their PhD in Arabic and those who did it in English. Those who did it in Arabic are suffering when trying to publish, when communicating with [foreign] students. They always request translators to help them specially with foreign students. It is a weakness, to need someone to translate articles for you, so you know what is new in your field. So with language you are not better, but you can reach.

English is used in cross-cultural communication in Saudi. In being a lingua franca, English is different from any other languages as it is used around the world (Chew, 1999, p. 43), even in Saudi. Leen's view of English went to a deeper level. Its instrumentality turned into empowerment and transformation:

> English has empowered me and enabled me to communicate with the world… people who speak two languages are always braver, I'm not talking about personality, but the power of words, power in talking. English gave me this. When I gave the graduates' speech I spoke loudly, I don't know how, I never spoke in public before, it was my first time. Now I feel I can do that anywhere, I can speak up, it is because I speak two languages not because of studying in America or Australia.

English has given Leen a voice, a loud one. She believes it made her braver as she now has weapons, i.e., words. She can speak, and people will listen. She is connecting her gained power and loud voice to her new learned language as she noticed that she can speak up now and her voice is louder. She believes that it is English more than the experience of SA in general. However, with that gained power, Leen believes that Arabic culture still has huge effects on her: "when I talk to people, I still feel shy and fear, it didn't go away completely". Like Arwa (section 5.2.2), Leen faced some cultural issues in the academic zone, especially

the way she addresses her supervisors in her emails. She believes that she is still influenced by the Arabic culture as she starts every email by asking the supervisors about their day and what they have been up to. She could not be direct, something that her supervisors kept criticising her for. She also kept on repeating herself in her assignments and emails:

> I kept asking myself: why did I do that and decided to search this and found that there are many Arab students who are doing the same thing, they believe that it is the Arabic culture and religion as in the Quran, you know, the repetition, the Quran is all about repetition and it affects us.

Leen is embracing this new academic position. She knew that she is doing something culturally inappropriate and searched it to see where this comes from. Hyland (2003) explained how cultural factors can be the reasons for academic writing differences, and how different cultures have different ways to form meanings. He also discussed how educational contexts are quite diverse and students' previous learning experiences must be given consideration (Hyland, 2003). In Leen's case it was repetition that affected her writing style which was discussed by Barakat (1993) and Patai (1983) who stated that Arabic argumentation is characterised by repetition, overemphasis, stylistic elaboration, and stylistic exaggeration which are deeply rooted in the language.

Searching the internet, connecting with other Arab students, and figuring out that it is something arises from her own culture and religion, shows how Leen has developed her critical thinking. A skill, as Leen and other participants believed, was acquired after studying abroad. This acquired new skill made her think about her learning years in Saudi:

> In Saudi I didn't learn much! I spent four years doing my undergrads and didn't learn what I have learned abroad. I learned the language quickly; it didn't take so much time. I believe it was because nobody was laughing at me, they support you. I mean they connect with you. They encourage you to speak and correct you in a nice way by repeating what you said and using the right words and correct grammar. Teachers also give you feedback for your work. I never got feedback from my teachers in Saudi, you submit your work, and you receive your grade. That's it! I don't know what I did right or wrong.

Leen spoke highly of the way teachers helped her in studying English. The way they

communicated with her, answered her questions, and encouraged her to speak. And like Deema, she was impressed with this way of teaching and was determined to take such teaching methods with her to Saudi:

> When I went back to Saudi, I got a job to teach Arabic to non-speakers. And started to compare between my teaching methods and others between my style and those who studied abroad and those who didn't. they reminded me with our professors during my undergrad's days. They go to class with this authoritative attitude that I am a teacher, and you are a student and do not ask much while we who studied abroad are more flexible, we understand that it is not their first language, as we have been there. We always tell students language is a way to communicate you can't spoon-feed it, we repeat one two three times and try to explain everything and be patient.

Leen was grateful to all the small details and ways of teaching and studying abroad. She mentioned how the group assignments helped her in communicating with other students, something was totally new to her, as in Saudi everything is done individually, and students compete intensely:

> Everyone wants to be the best, the smartest, the one with high grades, that's why they don't share anything with you, they don't want to help you. So, it was different to work with peers and share knowledge.

The competitivity among students in Saudi school system was also criticised by Deema (section 6.2.2). Although this strategy of comparing students with each other is used by Saudi teachers to encourage students, it seems that the outcome is not as desired. Instead of sharing information and expanding their knowledge, everyone was acting selfish.

Overall, Leen's educational journey in America and Australia was a successful one. Travelling abroad with poor English skills and managing to get a score of 6.5 in IELTS, finishing her master's with excellent grades and managing to get an offer to study in one of the best universities in Australia show how successful her journey was linguistically and academically.

Leen came out with a more positive experience of learning English than Arwa. Though both studied English abroad, it seems that Leen saw more in English and gave it all. She developed

not only an instrumental motivation to learn English but also an integrative one. She held a different mindset than Arwa, and a degree was not enough for her. Unlike Arwa, she was not satisfied with her life and wanted to accomplish more, and English offered her a desired position, socially and professionally. English classes were not enough, so she was open to the society and was eager to make local friends, as we will see in the next section.

8.2.3 Highly interested in making local friends

In America Leen limited her social circle, outside university, to the Saudi community due to different factors, e.g. the language barrier. When she came to Australia, her English was better, and with her decision to change her appearance, she was willing to open up to different social relationships. She wanted to live the experience of study abroad:

> Lulu: Do you socialise with Australians and make friendship with them?
>
> Leen: I have three close international friends and my relationship with them is better than my relationship with the Saudi girls, but this didn't happen from the beginning, it was by the end of my master. It took me some time to learn how to make friendship with them but when I came back to do my PhD, we reconnected, now we visit regularly, and we introduced our husbands to each other.

Leen, like Belle and Deema, was focusing on her studies, but held a positive attitude towards building social relationships with English speakers. When she arrived in Australia, she started learning how to initiate such relations. She also realised that with Australians she does not worry about being judged about the way she talks, dresses, or acts. She feels as being herself among them. No restrictions and no pretending to be someone else:

> Lulu: Do you act differently with your Saudi and Australian friends or colleagues?
>
> Leen: Yes, with Saudis, I have to be conservative and watch out what I say. I fear that they would reject my ideas and it would steer talk, as most of my Saudi friends are conservatives and complicated, they always think that this is temporary so why change… So yes I don't talk frankly with them, because I will be criticised for it. But with Australians, whatever I say, it is never a big

> deal. I can tell them frankly about how I met my husband and about our love story.

Leen is investing in the social interactions with English speakers as when talking to them she gets her freedom, and she became someone she always wanted to be. So she was willing to make efforts and try to gain a different status in the new social environment.

Though Leen had bad experiences abroad, she did not withdraw from the host society like Deema, instead she tried to use her ethnic and cultural background to influence the unequal power relations. She used her culture as an advantage and changed her position to assimilate into the host society. She did not let her differences determined her position (Davies & Harré, 1990) but used them to choose her desired one. And though Deema felt excluded from the social interactions of Australians and attributed that to her race, Leen here resisted this position, repositioned herself as someone with unique knowledge of her culture and the one who has all the answers. She developed an independent voice, and she used that voice and knowledge to practice the L2 and access its society. So unlike Deema, she tried hard not to take anything personally; and she would speak about the situation in Saudi and explain unclear issues to Australians:

> They always ask about women drive; they didn't know that it is allowed now. I used to practice driving in my friend's car and she asked me how are you going to drive in Saudi, so I told her it is ok now. They ask me about niqab and hijab, and if I keep them when I am at home or at the presence of my in laws for example.

Unlike Arwa who was in similar situations, Leen has considered these situations as chances to practice English and strengthen her relationship with others. She was interested in what is beyond the conversation itself. When they showed interests in her culture, it gave her a chance to speak, explain and correct everything culture related, and improve her language. Leen has made it clear before that she was not going to wait for anything to happen to her, she is going to make her future, hence she forced her way to social interaction and did not

wait for anyone to provide her with access. She made sure that she was a legitimate speaker, her voice was heard, and her identity was a seen as a usable capital (Blackledge & Pavlenko, 2004).

Talking about socialisation in Australia brought us to the issue on the effects of the Arabic culture on gender mixing which was a huge issue to Leen as the Arab and Saudi culture has also affected her social life, especially in dealing with men:

> I still feel, though I see myself as an openminded, an educated person and I learned a lot after coming here but still Arabic culture deeply affect the way I interact with men. Even affects my behaviour as a woman; I deeply believe that my voice should be low and quiet and that I shouldn't interrupt when men are talking, and I feel shy to initiate a conversation with men. when I talk to anyone. I always feel shy, you know there is fear inside me, it is still there, it didn't go completely.

Leen here is referring to the way she was raised; the way girls are supposed to talk and act as the 'ideal Muslim girl'. They are supposed to be shy and quiet when men are talking. Although she believes that she has changed and overcome that, she is admitting that when she talks, she still feels fear deep inside her. However, she tries her best to beat that fear by participating in talks and workshops in mixed-gender environments. She believes that conversing with men strengthened her and prepared her for the future. She even went further than that by volunteering with the Saudi association in Australia, where she interacts with Saudi men in organising events and preparing for Saudi special occasions. Leen knew what she wanted and started working on it by pushing herself to do what she was afraid of doing, as it was her way of accomplishing her dreams. She did not consider this shyness and fear as part of her nature, like Arwa, but as part of her culture and she was doing her best to try and change that about her.

It is worth mentioning that Leen used to be strongly against gender mixing in Saudi and other countries, however, she changed her views after studying abroad:

> I used to have this idea that when a guy sees a girl, he'll defiantly harass her, you know it is true in Saudi, but when I travelled and lived abroad, I saw different societies, so now I believe we have to change, we have to change the way we look at the situation. In Saudi there is gender segregation everywhere, at work and even in restaurants! What's the point of going outside and eat in a closed place, men in one section and families in the other! We don't need to sit together but we need to interact with each other. We need to learn how to deal with the other sex, that way we will have limits and the young generation will learn to deal with each other and respect each other.

Like Arwa, Leen held these conservative views about gender mixing. However, she came to understand that it can be done with boundaries and that gender mixing can actually carry benefits to both genders. She is not accepting everything Western, she is measuring and appreciating what could benefit her society:

> When I first arrived there, I didn't accept the idea of talking to a man, Saudi or else. At first, I was petrified because this is wrong, but then life taught me that I have to communicate with men cause sometimes you need to, you know he has what you need! He is either a teacher, a supervisor or even a student. We share academic knowledge; we help each other without crossing any limits.

Leen allowed herself to question her long-held traditions. She allowed herself to think and analyse and look beyond the action itself. She was petrified to interact with men but understood the benefit of doing that. And though she did not face any difficulties dealing with Australian men, she struggled with Saudi men:

> There are some Saudi men who won't change the way they look at women and I faced some of these men here in Australia, you talk with them about a work you have to do together, and they try their best to give the impression that you're just a Saudi girl, like you're nothing and they interfere with your private matters. No limitations.

Some Saudi men were raised in a conservative way. They view interaction with women in a negative way. They expect Saudi women to be quiet and shy as it is the standard for them and experiencing something different affect the reputation of Saudi women. So, they feel that it is their job to remind that woman of who she is and where she come from, and they feel the responsibility of their actions and their private life and to be the guardians of her ired (section 3.1.4). For them, such behaviours and affirmative positions of Saudi women need to be

corrected as they are culturally unacceptable. Like the women in (Shaheem, 2014), Leen is rejecting this aspect of her cultural identity and wants to be treated as an individual and be herself. These challenges that Leen reported in working with Saudi men mirror those reported by Carland's (2017) participant Waajida who described her experience of working with them as combative. She talked about how men used to look upon her and categorised her as a feminist, which is 'a dirty word' in the Muslim community, just because she stood out and voiced her opinions. And though not satisfied, Waajida started working solely with women, similar to Deema and Belle, who kept their distance from Saudi men. However, those previous bad experiences have not stopped Leen from dealing with Saudi men in the future. She was willing to face anything and everything to change and get what she wants "talking and dealing with men makes me stronger and prepare me for the future", which will be discussed in the next section.

8.2.4 Personal growth

Leen applied for a scholarship and travelled abroad to get a degree and to live far away from her society. She was willing to do whatever it takes to succeed. But she did not consider the personal changes that may come with this experience. Unlike the other participants, she neither set out to change herself nor worked hard to resist change. Nevertheless, studying overseas had a profound impact on her:

> I used to be a pessimistic person. I used to feel trapped within my society and being judged. I used to feel that my life is miserable. I used to see everything in a negative way; even after the scholarship, at times I felt that this has changed my future and I will have different future than my sisters and it scared me. I used to think that I'm not going to marry the person I love, I will never have a job because of my area of study, my community won't accept me when I go back. I was deeply pessimistic, and it affected my early achievements and my grades during my master's. But living here changed me gradually, the last three years been completely different; whenever bad thing happen, I say to myself something good will come out of it and this hugely affected my accomplishments in life. I tell myself yes, I won't have a future like my sisters, and I don't want to. Everything is possible now that I'm optimistic.

None of the participants were in such a dark place like Leen. She was completely in the dark, and while others had support of at least one of their parents, Leen was completely alone in this, except for the encouragement of her younger sister. She followed the light at the end of the tunnel just for a degree and did not expect this change of mindset. Her gained optimism pushed her forward to make decisions and work harder for a better future. When she was in Australia, she applied for work at different universities in Saudi while doing her master's, and was accepted as a teaching assistant in one of the Saudi universities. She also did not want to wait for a man to propose or for an arranged marriage. So after finishing her master's and going back to Saudi she approached a man she liked and started a respectful relationship with him. She called him and met up with him without the permission of her family "after all it is my life and I wanted to make sure I did the right thing and marry the right person". Leen believed that she was entitled and capable to make her own decisions.

Leen also developed strength and independence. She speaks up about her future and dreams and lets everyone know that she is determined, focused and will not let her hard work go to waste:

> I always tell my husband this 'I love you so much and I can't imagine my live without you but if you try to stand between me and my future let that be a position or anything, I will leave you… and he got really sad about it, but I built myself, I suffered, I counted days and nights to get where I am today and will never let that go even for him.

Though Arwa said similar things to her husband, she did not mean it and she was scared by the idea itself. However, Leen here is showing an affirmative position. She is considering herself before anyone else, she positioned herself as Leen first and a wife second. It was not only big positions and jobs that Leen was talking about, but also simple gender roles inside the house:

> I always argue and dare him, especially when in Saudi as he transforms to this typical Saudi man and wanted me to follow the rules and ask for permission

> when I want to go out. But I do what I want to do, and he could never stop me because he knows that I'm right even if he doesn't like it.

Not only with her husband, but also with the wider community and family, Leen would still stand up for her father and his way of treating her mother and even to her newly married brother who tries to control his wife:

> I would always tell her in front of him 'why would you accept that treatment from him, or he doesn't have the right to treat you that way or take your money' and my brother always gets mad, but I don't care, I have to speak up.

Leen developed this strong voice and personality. She speaks her mind and strongly criticises people's actions especially among close family. She could not tolerate the Saudi gender roles anymore.

8.2.5 **New understanding of religion and religious identity**

Like the other participants, Leen has two sources to learn about her religion: school and society. The difference here is that her society is much stricter than other societies in Saudi and the mix between religion and culture is greater. So, since a young age, she struggled to understand contradictions between religion as it was taught in school and practises that she observed in her society:

> I learned religion in school, like everything I need to know about religion, and we used to apply what we learn at home, ask mum and dad about it. But when we are faced with the society, aunts and uncles, it is completely different. Everything for them is forbidden. There was always this struggle and confusion inside me about religion as I learned it in school and what the society tells me. From a young age I used to ask mum about stuff and search about the truth.

Learning religion in school and searching for the truth did not stop Leen and her family from going with the flow, as nobody dared to be different. Her society's traditions were the reason for the opposition she faced from her parents and society when she decided to study abroad. These traditions are deeply rooted in the society and challenging them was not easy. So her experience in Australia has transformed her not only personally in "the way I act, look and

think" but also socially and religiously:

> I have always believed that a woman should be fully covered in black, she must stay at home, if she wants a job then she has to be a school teacher. And her money must go to her male guardian. I have an aunt who used to work, and her husband gets all her money. I have never thought that a woman can lead her own life and can be independent till I got the scholarship and travelled abroad… I didn't get the permission of my husband to get the driving license! Something the old me would've never think of doing

Comparing her old self and the new one shows how far Leen has gone. She used to position herself and women in general as incapable of making decisions and as minor citizens, which has completely changed after SA. Again, the change of fields led to a change of the distribution of power (Bourdieu, 1991). Her beliefs about religious practices have changed and now she is considering them cultural ones. She is rejecting wearing niqab, opposition to gender mixing, blindly following husband's orders and the status of women in the Saudi society, which have always been stressed as religious practises while mainly following the norms of the Saudi culture. She also emphasised the fact that scholarships have a major influence on her identity, as being the one who holds the scholarship changes her social status within her marriage:

> Women who are here on scholarships are different than those who are with their husbands. They experience life differently. They deal with the outside world! They are stronger, they have a degree, a language, they have weapons.

Being the one studying offered her the chance to go out and meet others. It gave her the ability to change. She was in a powerful position through learning a language and getting a degree. This gave her the ability to see things differently and the ability to challenge fixed stereotypes about women. She formed a new meaning of the femininity of Saudi women, which is usually connected to religion:

> It is not motherhood as people usually advertise, not staying at home and listening to your husband and being pretty for him all the time, no it is not that. For me it is now being independent socially and financially while watching religious boundaries not social ones! This is the femininity that life needs now.

Femininity has always been promoted in Saudi as being shy, quiet, and modest which together make 'the ideal Muslim woman'. This was also confirmed by Arwa and her interpretation of femininity as being dependent on males of her family. Femininity has been given a new meaning by Leen, a meaning that is suitable for this time and this generation. A meaning that she herself needed. She is independent and does not see herself as less feminine or less Muslim. Leen here is reframing this Islamic image of Muslim women by giving it new dimensions. As a Muslim woman she is also trying to make sure that this new image of independence does not conflict with religion as her religion gives her a sense of power, identity and freedom (Yamani & Allen, 1996). So, though she is crossing social lines, her religion still informs and regulates her life (Yamani, 2000). Unlike Belle, Leen did not seek approval from males in her life, she was willing to dare all:

> I used to believe that as a Muslim woman you must obey your husband, if he says you are not to work then I won't work. Not only your husband even your father but now it's different. When I was applying for jobs [in Saudi] while I was single [in Australia], I didn't apply in my family's town I applied in big cities, in places that give me the chance to be myself, I want my kids to live in a better environment and an open one. And it was difficult for my family to accept that.

Leen believes that obedience to male family members is a choice and independence is also a choice as a strong woman is highly appreciated in Islam and better than a weak one. She criticised other people and her old self for being afraid to do anything socially, rather than religiously, unacceptable. What Leen learned abroad was to listen to her inner voice, no matter how loud the outer voice is. This inner voice led her to understand her real relationship to Allah:

> I used to understand religion the wrong way. I admit that I used to pray for people's praise, I pray for a long time and wait for them to say something about it. Then I travelled abroad. Nobody sees me when I pray! Nobody really cares. I then knew it doesn't matter. It is between you and Allah! I became closer to Allah and only watch him no other people. I have strengthened my religious identity, I practise more now, and nobody is watching or praising.

Like Deema, Leen's religious culture has changed. She is here alone, away from the praise and the criticism which has affected her religious identity. She discovered her real and deep relationship with Allah. So away from her society, her religious identity, which is dynamic, fluid and a site of struggle (Peirce, 1995), has changed and strengthened. Now she has faith and seeks Allah's praise and no one else's, and for him she practices more. She, just like Deema, is criticising the Saudi religious culture which is based on sacred rituals and devoid of spirit, the mere practices that do not stem from faith.

Like Belle, Leen does not seek fatwa anymore, and when she finds herself reading one, she would look for a support from the Quran and she would then try to explain the meaning of the Quran verse to see if it supports the claim, or it was used literally:

> When I read Hadith now, I try to understand the real story, its attribution and correctness. Even with Quran, I try to understand the meaning of Quran verses and why it is there. I don't like to hear what this or that cleric says, honestly, I don't believe them anymore. Not that they are lairs, God forbid, but I want to learn by myself. I didn't memorise the whole Quran and I have little religious knowledge, but I want to try and learn by myself.

Like Belle, Leen here is crossing a red line and questioning the Hadith, looking deep into it and also trying to understand what lies beneath Allah's words and his prophet's. Like Belle, she does not want to ask those who know better as she believes now that she is capable of searching and learning about her own religion.

8.2.6 Meaning to the Saudi identity

Like all the other participants, Leen missed her country and her family especially the first time she went visiting, however, being abroad gave Leen the chance to see things from a different angle:

> When I first visited Saudi, I was very happy I missed my family and everyone there. I didn't pay attention to anything else and it was a short trip. The second time, I don't know I felt like being in a closed box, it was a long time ago, now things have hugely changed. Last time I went to Saudi it felt better, huge

> difference. Still somethings are the same, but you feel that the box is opened now…

Travelling back and forth, made Leen compare her country with others. She could not bear living in constrains after enjoying freedom. However, as a visitor she recognised the changed happening in the country. And though appreciating these changes she still preferred to live in Australia rather than Saudi:

> One of our wishes, me and my husband is to stay here, we are more relaxed here than in Saudi, we're more ourselves.

The reason for such a wish was associated to all the norms of the society and about obeying and confirming to them, even if they do not make any sense to her. In Australia they can just be themselves. However, this did not mean that she feels less Saudi:

> Lulu: describe your national identity before coming to Australia?
>
> Leen: I was loyal and respectful to all the Saudi Laws… everything in Saudi was right and it was all wrong everywhere else. I used to be scared to do anything just because of the society.
>
> Lulu: not religion or law?
>
> Leen: yes, it was only the society. Honestly, you don't know what religion, tradition and culture is. They don't want to hear your voice and they tell you it is (awrah[9]). They want you silenced… they mix them all together within the society. When I got out, I learned to criticise, you have to learn to evaluate what is religiously forbidden and what is culturally unacceptable.
>
> Lulu: So, your national identity has changed?
>
> Leen: No, I'm still loyal to my country, for sure, in a huge way. But now I criticise to reach and be better.

Like the other participants, studying abroad gave Leen the chance to evaluate and differentiate between what is religious and what is traditional. She is still a proud Saudi, and that is not in conflict with her desire to improve herself and her country. By criticising she is contributing to the making of this new Saudi culture, and she deeply believes that her voice is

[9] The intimate parts of the human body which, according to Islam, must be covered. This requirement is usually enforced concerning women's awrah than men's. Certain scholars have concluded that women's voice is also awrah in some cases.

needed for the development of her country.

Like Deema, she is recognising the thin and blurred line between religion and traditions and trying to separate them. She is differentiating between being 'the ideal Muslim woman' and 'the ideal Saudi woman'. In Saudi, she was reminded to keep her voice down. In Australia she understood that being Saudi means having a loud voice and expressing her ideas and never being quiet:

> When I go back to visit, I speak up and give my opinion on everything, people keep telling me and hinting that I have negatively changed and I criticise a lot, because I used to be silent. I don't look at it as criticism but as an opinion. But look at them now. They have all changed and opened up they don't point me out as before.

She is becoming an active agent. She is speaking up, and claiming the right to give her opinion, because she was silenced for most of her life. But she is not the only one now. She is not signalled for that anymore. She is one of many and each is contributing to their country's development. However, the change she is looking for is still did not happen:

> I want to change the whole Saudi, and most of all gender segregation. I wish that one day men and women mix naturally to learn their boundaries and understand each other.

She still believes that more work is needed as gender segregation is a basic matter that is holding the Saudi society back. Men and women need to learn how to deal with each other, as together they will develop the country. She is also criticising the cultural bubble that Saudi men have put themselves in which affects their personal and intimate life:

> I always say that in Saudi it is impossible to see a man holding his wife's hand in public, even if he does, he will let go in few seconds. Here you see them hugging and laughing like best friends. I always say this to my husband. Here they appreciate and value family life, like weekends, in Saudi we run away from family on the weekends.

Leen felt that change should start from home, from the way men are raised to the way they treat their wives. The country will not change if men do not respect and appreciate their

families. When that happens, change will. Being Saudi for her now is being who you are, no matter what the society thinks of you.

Leen's new sense of Saudiness is connected to her new understanding of her identity. Now she positions herself as an active woman with a loud voice, and she has the right to speak and criticise. Her position as Saudi is strengthened every time she speaks up, as if she is defending the Saudi aspect of her identity and feels more connected and closer to her country. Like Deema, her sense of Saudiness is highly connected to the future of Saudi, with huge changes which will be discussed in the next section.

8.3 After studying abroad

8.3.1 Future dreams and making change

Contrary to her quiet and pessimistic self before studying abroad, Leen became dreamy and optimistic about the future. With her new powerful self, she was confident that women have what it takes to lead the country. She was determined to work hard and achieve, and she wanted that for all the young girls of Saudi, especially ignorant girls from her region. Her biggest future dream is to become a public speaker of women's rights:

> Getting a doctorate degree is not enough for me, I want to be a bilingual public speaker of women's issues.

She wanted to represent Saudi women, inside and outside the country. She wanted to use that other voice, the English one, to tell the world about Saudi women. This dream reflects how being bilingual is important to her, and how English has really given her a voice. She also cared about Saudi women's situation and deeply wanted people to stop criticising and judging people on their appearance, which is widely spread in Saudi especially for women:

> It always bothers me [people judging women on their appearance]. I still remember that lady; Haya Awad who was in high position and did a lot to the country. She used to cover her face, and everyone was praising her, once she took off her niqab, she was fiercely attacked on social media. They treated her

> differently than men. They wouldn't care about what men wear. I keep telling my husband I wish to go back in time and give the graduate speech without niqab. I wore it for my father and didn't want to embarrass him… I covered my face while presenting, I was not convinced to do that, but the ceremony was live podcasted, and all my family members and relatives were watching. My dad told me do not humiliate me. People will talk badly about me. They do not need to know how you live. I cried that day. I felt like a hypocrite. But even people from the embassy told me if you are from the south, it is better to cover up, this way your voice will reach up to them. The society there are not open and do not know how life is here.

Leen was eager to make a change but started slowly and tried to give it time as she knew who she was dealing with. However, she seemed to be tired of following the norms just to please people. She is resisting this long-lasting position as the 'ideal Muslim girl' who is covered up. She regrets listening to people before and wishes to go back and have the courage to be herself. She did not want to be only heard.

Leen is quite progressive. She is highly invested in going back to Saudi and contribute to making change especially for women, especially with the new laws supporting. As much as she wanted to escape, Leen seems much more grounded in an ongoing future in Saudi than the other participants.

Leen also showed no reservations about any conflicts that her new views and positions might cause with her family back home. She knew that confronting her family is going to be hard, but she was happy about who she is becoming, especially since she has her husband who is on her side. Add to that the fact that she was going to live in the capital not in the southern region, and most importantly that the whole of Saudi is changing and opening up to the world, as stated by her and discussed in the next section.

8.3.2 Excitement for the new Saudi: Vision 2030

Leen, like the other participants, is observing the changes happening in Saudi: "The society is changing, women have freedom of choice now." However, what is different than the others, is that she is not shocked or overwhelmed, she is done waiting for that change and just

relieved that it is finally here:

> My society has changed, women are more independent now. They've started their own businesses. I came to the conclusion that I'm not doing enough here. They have even published books with their real names, which is not very common in the southern area. Even those who talked bad about me they have changed, they wish for an opportunity like mine, every time I see them, they ask me about the process. They consider me a role model for their girls.

Leen's position has changed from being a bad influence on the southern young girls to the position of a role model, from the one who broke the rules to the one who made her own future. This change of positions clearly reflects the changes in the mentality of Saudi people. She speaks as if she already knew that this was going to happen soon. She believes that Saudi now is not about the old traditions of the past but about the new voices of the future and the ideas of the young generation. It is not about the old dominant large culture, but about vision 2030, the youth contribution to the making of their country:

> It [vision 2030] is the voice of the young men and women who studied abroad and were open to the world. They have made huge changes. Most of them came back and changed Saudi. They have lived the study abroad experience.

She is mirroring Deema and Belle in that the change happening in Saudi is the result of this scholarship program. Those who studied abroad are the ones who are bringing in components from their host culture to their home culture to make a new culture, a third one (Kramsch, 1993) a culture that will support the country and lead the social and economic changes. A culture that will make the vision a reality.

8.4 Leen in review

Coming to Australia and living abroad was not a dream of Leen's. It was a sudden decision as her life seemed to be reaching a dead end in Saudi, and there was nothing else for her to do. She was lost, and did not know what to do with her life until she found her answer in the scholarship program. She decided to study abroad in an attempt at building a future and

getting a degree.

Leen was not satisfied with her life and her role as a woman in Saudi. She hated the way women, especially her mother, are treated in her society, however, she was silenced.

After travelling abroad and learning another language, Leen found a meaningful existence and a powerful voice. Her experience has given her the strength to speak up not only to demand her rights but also to change the society's norms and attitudes towards women.

She travelled abroad and held on to her old identity and defended her old beliefs and values, to discover later that this was not who she is. Abroad she found a new self, an identity she relates to. Within herself, she found a woman with a loud voice. A woman who speaks, only to be heard.

Leen's time abroad was more about emboldening her and showing her a new path rather than strictly benefiting from English per se. She still seems instrumental in her view of English – but instrumental in a very successful way.

Chapter Nine: Conclusion

9.1 Overview

In this study, I set out to gain a detailed understanding of the development of the multiple identities of Saudi women in their study abroad journey, with a particular focus on the role of English as L2 on their identity formation. I respond to an identified gap in SA research around how this experience has impacted the identity of Saudi women and specifically their religious one. Through the voice of my participants, this study answers more general questions: What is Saudi as a country and as a culture? What is meant to be an "ideal Muslim woman" and "a modern Saudi woman"? What are the attempts, plans and goals of the scholarship program and what has been achieved?

In this chapter, I return to my research questions and show how the stories of my participants have answered them. I then give some possible avenues for future research, implications, and limitations of this study. I finish the chapter with a final concluding statement to reflect on the journey of this study which bring the thesis to an end.

9.2 Research questions revisited

The aim of this study is to investigate the different components of the identity of four Saudi women and these three main questions were addressed:

1. What religious and cultural relationship did the participants have with English, and English-speaking countries pre study abroad?

2. How did the identities, beliefs and practices of Saudi women develop during studying and living in Australia? What role did religious and cultural beliefs and positioning play in this development?

3. How do they believe this experience will shape their future goals, relationships, and their

country?

Each of these three questions will be discussed and answered over the following pages.

9.2.1 Research question one

My first research question asked what religious and cultural relationship the participants had with English, and English-speaking countries pre study abroad. The stories of the four women advances our understanding of the attitudes of Saudi students towards English, which have been almost absent from SLA literature. They also show the role of agency and environment in the learners' investment in learning the language.

Their narratives showed the connection between these attitudes and the social and cultural circumstances that shaped them. These attitudes were circulating in Saudi during Sahwa time, and they demonstrate the tension that was originated towards the West, which still exists.

In Saudi there is this central tension and a love/ hate relationship with English as a language and culture. English as a language has long been considered as a necessity and was needed to build the country and assist in terms of modernizing and in the time of globalization. So, for quite some time now, English has been considered as a requirement to guarantee a good career and a must to ensure a better life for individuals. But it was also seen as anti-Islamic and a tool for westernization.

Highlighted in the participants' stories of growing up was that most of them had endured some of this confusion about English and the West and its confrontation with Islam. They have been raised in a society that carries a tension between wanting the academic worldliness of English, but not the non-Islamic culture of it. Their stories of growing up disclosed a traditional upbringing, to different degrees, which included gender segregation, extreme emphasis on the notion of ired, male superiority and forced religious practices. And English represented the opposite of all of that, gender mixing, adultery, equality and lack of religious practices.

The women's stories illustrated how their relationship with English started, encouraged or confronted by close or extended family member or the society in general. They illustrated how they responded to their circumstances and how they connected more to English (Deema and Belle) or drifted away from it (Arwa and Leen).

The background of these women had impacted on their investments in learning English. It was manifested in different ways for the participants; Belle and Deema came from big and somewhat multicultural cities and were open from a young age to different languages, English, and others. Both were motivated by a parent to learn English. And though confronted by anti-English society for its Western values, it was these Western values, culture and lifestyle that motivated Belle and Deema to pursue learning English. They did not allow these traditional attitudes towards English to set boundaries for their imagination and constrain their valued identity and better position in their society. They kept on acting in ways that provoked their families.

At one extreme, Belle had many resources (English speaking mother and supporter of English, private school, and travel abroad) which helped her develop intercultural competence and better English skills. At the other, Deema lacked all this except her father's encouragement. She was determined to make use of the one and only source available to her, i.e., TV. Belle and Deema could have gone with the flow, yet, because of their strong agency and regardless of the social tendency of their society they have chosen a different path. English and its culture, which was gained via TV or socialisation, empowered them to reject their ascribed traditional positions.

Arwa and Leen, both came from a southern conservative background with a strong hate relationship with English and its culture, and hence English was not only unneeded but also unwanted. And though Arwa lived in a very multicultural and open city, she had a strong attachment to her cultural background. As a result, both have grown up resisting English,

even when resources were provided like in Arwa's case, a British teacher, and extra English classes. However, Arwa was consistent with her resistance, even after realizing the importance of learning the language. Leen, on the other hand, took it on herself to change her life course and English was her means of survival to escape a toxic environment. She was determined to learn and master the language which led her to absorb the culture later. So, they came from a similar background, yet they followed different trajectories.

All these women reported not using English in front of Saudi members as they do not want to show off, which mirrors the behaviour of Kim's (2003) Malaysian students who used to switch identities in a very complex way. Just like Kim's participants these women felt that speaking English would distance them from their friends which can be traced back to the fact that English is considered a non-Islamic Language.

In Saudi, these women were socialised into particular habitus (Bourdieu, 1984) when they came to Australia, their field has changed, which accordingly influences and changes their habitus, but in different ways and to different degrees. Consider Arwa: although she was socialised into different ways of living and was exposed to new sets of attitudes, beliefs and ways of dressing in Australia, she nevertheless held onto many aspects of her old habitus. Arwa was a peace seeker. She drew some lines and never crossed them. She came from a religious family and was married to a traditional man, who was with her during her time abroad. So, there was a social penalty to every action. English language was offered through gender mixing and chatting with men which were unacceptable for her husband who was the embodiment of her traditional culture. So though her 'field' has changed, there were still some 'social structures' that were influencing her decisions (Bourdieu, 1984). However. Arwa showed agency by taking on a male supervisor, which caused her ongoing trouble with her husband. Hence, she decided to lie low and go with the flow. Besides her supervisor, she would not and did not allow anyone to approach her. She avoided seminars and conferences

and other gatherings to maintain her peace of mind. So as a social agent, Arwa did not try to occupy the available positions in the new field as they meant struggle for her, which arose from the conflict that took place between her two fields. She did not want, or did not dare, to change because change would disrupt her peace. She was settled, even if not content, and English for her was still just the language of the non-Muslims.

Arwa's case showed her limited investment in English, as she was doing the minimum to get through and not setting herself up. She was satisfied with her English level, even when she knew that she needed to practice and learn more. She also avoided many opportunities to thrive academically by avoiding social and academic gatherings. Whereas for people like Belle, SA was more than just a job requirement. Belle took her time in Australia to a whole different level of thinking, learning, and exploring. She was always ready to seize opportunities and make some for herself.

Arwa's experience was affected by different factors that impacted her ability to freely exercise her agency. On top of these factors was her husband, who was pushing her towards a corner. The others were either single, had supportive husbands or were divorced, which meant that they did not have this barrier to push against. However, the fact that Deema was divorced shows that women can have agency, and are not doomed to live out an unwanted life. But of course, it is an added barrier and there is a social penalty associated with it. This social penalty is directly connected to the long-standing law of male legal guardians in Saudi which has clearly impacted on women's agency. This was clear even in Belle's case, as she clearly stated that she would not done anything without her husband's support.

Arwa's case summarises the huge tension for many Saudi women who wants things to be done differently but are fully aware of the social penalties which might face them. They have the agency to manage their lives and respond to these penalties in different ways according to their difficulties.

This is a well-known issue for Muslim women around the world. Carland (2017) discussed how some women fight to take up desired roles within Muslim societies, while others just go along with them. One of Carland's participants, Waajidah, talked about the social penalties she has faced and how men could be combative with her when she tried to widen her role in the mosque but let her be when she just kept her role as a Muslim women's teacher. In the case of the women of my study, they come from vastly different families and backgrounds, had different levels of support and openness from their own families, which had a huge effect on what is possible for them and what the costs are for acting otherwise.

Leen, for example, came from a very traditional family, yet was abroad, away from them, with a younger brother. Her field has changed, and she was influenced by a different 'social structure' that pressured her and allowed her to change, i.e., she was intimidated to remove the hijab. She was not married and had some social freedom, some agency to make decisions without worrying about such social penalties. So, while Arwa was trying to manage her life with studying and taking care of her family and trying to maintain her religious and cultural beliefs, Leen had the time to reflect on her life, take on new social positions and make real changes. This does not mean that Leen would not face any difficulties when confronting her family over the changes she has made, on the contrary, she was fully aware of the 'social structure' in Saudi when she goes back. Her advantage of being single in Australia provided the chance to grow and build some confidence to stand up for her new beliefs. She was determined to lead her life and not let others lead her, which was clear when she proposed, in Saudi, to the person she loved and the one who she believed will help and support her to lead her life the way she wants. This shows her agency and strong will to change her future. So, she was re-socialised in her old field, where she was constrained by a 'social structure' and subject to a set of roles, relationships and ways of being and acting in that social domain, and where different forms of social capital are at stake. She did not accommodate to those roles

and relationships in that context. She did let that 'social structure' limit the choices and opportunities available. She was able to act independently and to make her own free choices, even if it was behind her parents' back. She acted as a free agent and not in a manner dictated by the dominant 'social structure'.

The wider social and cultural influences displayed in the participants' narratives suggested that English offered an attainable key to a valued social position that would give them respect, independence and valued identity within their society or their chosen ones. It was clear that their investment in learning the language helped them acquire a wider range of symbolic and material resources, which in turn increased the value of their cultural capital and social power (Norton, 2013a).

The different attitudes towards English show how members and families from different backgrounds are negotiating this tension between English as a language/medium of communication and culture linked to this language. It also shows how the cultural traditions of a closed society like the southern region can hinder the process of language learning. It also shows that it is not about having access to different English resources, but about being invested in learning the language. This investment is based on the learner's intentional choice and desire and it highlights the role of human agency and identity in engaging with the process of language learning and in acquiring economic and symbolic capital (Norton, 2013, p. 195).

Most importantly, the four cases show that it is not enough to have this extrinsic non-cultural view of English i.e., you cannot have English without its culture as language is culture, not just words, and different cultures can promise more than just a language, but a future.

From a different perspective, these women's narratives can help in breaking the classical stereotypical image of Saudi women as passive members of society with little to no agency. It shows the originality of their evolving identity and how they have attracted different impacts

of the study abroad experience. It also shows how individuals with different background, religion and culture can react differently to the extent of the influence of their socialisation which will be discussed more in the next research question.

9.2.2 Research question two

My second research question asked how the identities, beliefs and practices of Saudi women developed during studying and living in Australia and what role religious and cultural beliefs and positioning played in this development. The central story behind most of these women's narrative accounts of being abroad and away from the constrains of their society and becoming equipped with the English language, was that of a significant turning point in their lives. They described the study abroad experience and learning English as opening doors to faith, hope, independence, and agency. They negotiated their identities and creatively adapted to their new environment and positions. They reported more confidence, independence, and intercultural growth, to different degrees.

9.2.2.1 The influence of culture and religion

The women of this study showed different pathways and certain commonalities. They were distinct and showed both the influence of people's religious and cultural backgrounds and the limit of that influence. They came from different backgrounds and had different experiences in Australia. Each of them experienced a certain level of cultural shock on arriving in Australia, which was a response to where they came from, their previous beliefs and lifestyles. However, these cultural shocks were described as meaningful, ones that helped them discover new aspects of their identity.

The women's narratives revealed that religion and culture mediated their interactions, impacted on the development of their identity and shaped their overall experience of study abroad. Some of the major cultural and religious influences were the emphasis on the notion

of ired, extreme gender segregation, forced hijab, and family and tribal affiliation (section 3.1.4), which were all enforced during Sahwa time. The participants were deeply affected by these cultural and religious beliefs and values which was reflected in their unconscious actions and reactions and the way they position themselves within Saudi and Australian societies.

Dealing with the other gender, for example, was a major story thread. It was repeatedly described as problematic by the participants throughout their time in Australia, which mirrors the findings described in other studies of the experience of Saudi women studying abroad (e.g., Ahmed, 2016; Alamri, 2017; Alandejani, 2013; Alhazmi & Nyland, 2010; Alrefaie, 2015; Song, 2019). Though Arwa was the only one who maintained a strong belief that gender mixing is against Islamic teachings, the others still found it challenging in practice. There was still this traditional wall between Saudi men and women even abroad, which is caused by the extreme gender segregation in Saudi. And though Leen, Belle and Deema were trying to climb this wall and interact with men, it seems that the notion of ired was still engraved in the heads of some Saudi men's, which lead them to completely avoid interaction with Saudi women or to assume that they want something more than just interacting with men, hence affecting women's reputation.

Among all of them, Deema was the most relaxed, to a degree, at dealing with the opposite sex and attributed that to being older which gave her confidence in interacting with men without further assumptions about her intentions. Leen on the other hand seemed to be the one who suffered the most from such interactions as she kept on receiving negative comments from Saudi men. After some attempts, Belle was content and happy with only interacting and making deep friendship with men of other nationalities. Deema, Belle and Leen believed that segregation was only a cultural practice, not a religious one. Therefore, they were happy enough to mix. But they did find the power dynamics difficult and the situation unfamiliar

especially with the Saudi men's resisting such interaction. This confirms that Saudi men position themselves as ambassadors for Saudi Arabia and for Islam; this position controls their behaviour as discussed in (Barnawi, 2009; Groves, 2015; Hall, 2013; Heyn, 2013; Alraddadi, 2015; Shaw, 2010). Additionally, there were concerns sometimes about what others would think of them, and hence being in an unwanted position. So even if Arwa came to change her beliefs about gender segregation, her cultural background of extreme sex-segregation would be a huge barrier, just like the others.

This difficulty of interacting with the Saudis of opposite sex has been explored in other research on Saudi students (Alhazmi & Nyland 2010; Song, 2019, Ahmed, 2016; Alamri, 2017; Alrefaie, 2015; Alandejani, 2013). Alrefaie's (2015) study in particular showed how this high level of discomfort and embarrassment faded away in relation to students of the opposite sex of non-Saudi origin. Yet, interactions with Saudi students of the opposite sex remained extremely difficult. She explained this difficulty to be connected to their national identity as Saudis which obliged them to maintain the Saudi cultural practices and keeping the culturally appropriate distance from Saudis of the opposite sex. In this study, the Saudi women showed different attitudes towards opposite-sex interaction. While rejected by Arwa for religious reasons, Deema, Belle and Leen rejected its ties to their Saudiness and pursue such interaction especially in the case of Leen.

So, culture and religion pushed these women towards certain positions. Arwa defended her cultural position and held back into it. She did not see culture as separate from religion, but a big part of it. However, the others were differently impacted by those cultural norms. And they were able to manage them and place themselves in more favourable positions.

9.2.2.2. Identity development through positioning and SA socialisation

The women's narratives revealed the development of their identities as they began to discover positive personal traits that they had not previously recognised in themselves. They

described how they are proud of their gained independence and confidence. Their English language, research and thinking skills also improved during their time in Australia. Their religious and national identities have been shifted and strengthened in different ways and to different degrees, and most importantly they ended up rethinking the meaning and the role of religion in their lives. However, though they shared these common thoughts, their experiences varied, and they have responded to them in different ways. These responses are not random, but reflect their backgrounds, personalities, or their reasons for SA, which in turn led to different degrees of change.

The women's religious and cultural background had an impact on how they positioned themselves and how they believe others positioned them. Their narratives demonstrate how people deliberately take on certain positions that exert particular identities in order to rationalize their interpretations and reactions to various aspects of their SA experience. Their identities developed through their negotiation of their positions and their social interaction in Australia.

Though having different preferences regarding socialising with locals, both Arwa and Deema, positioned themselves as 'outsiders' and acted accordingly, and slowly withdrew from the host society and avoided interaction with it. For Arwa, English was not her language. Her satisfaction in her lack of competence in English was justified by and emphasised her religious and cultural identity. She decided to isolate herself from the host society and take the 'stranger position' and only socialise with Saudis. She positioned herself close to them, as they shared similar cultural backgrounds, norms, and most importantly religion. Her isolation from the host society and positioning them as 'non-Muslims' and distancing herself from them, was a result of her religious self as she positioned herself as a strict and devoted Saudi Muslim woman. Her concerns about loss of identity made it difficult for her to integrate into the host culture which mirrors other studies (e.g., Hilal, 2013). For

Arwa in particular, as coming from the southern region and devoted to Islamic teaching, three identities were intertwined, namely, tribal, religious, and national. These mixed identities added, in a way, to the difficulty of her experience. It also hindered the development of her identity which conforms with other studies (Alhazmi & Nyland, 2010). It is important to note that though the idea that 'learning English is against Islamic teaching' was popular during the Sahwa time among the common traditional people of Saudi, the effect of those ideas as a hindrance to learning English has not been mentioned in previous studies of Saudi students SA experience.

Deema came to Australia having in mind that her good English would allow her to assume a position of being an Australian. At first, she distanced herself from the Saudi cohort in Australia and positioned herself as a 'guest' among the Australians with an expectation that she would receive hospitality, an expectation derived from her home cultural background. However, when her expectations from the hosts were not met, she distanced herself from them.

So, although linguistically competent, Deema lacked social skills and cultural knowledge and couldn't communicate with the host society. She was a "fluent fool," as Bennett (1997) labeled it. She imagined a position of 'a competent English speaker', as an Australian, yet she was a reluctant one even though she was yearning to converse with them and make friends. Her reluctance and waiting to be approached led her to distance herself from them too, and to position herself as a 'devoted student' which in a way strengthened her position as a 'legitimate English speaker', which in turn reinforced her position as a 'devoted Saudi' who is eager to go back. This attitude of Deema mirrors Alazzi and Chioddo's (2006) study of Jordanian students in the USA, however, those students, unlike Deema, considered themselves from the beginning of their journey "as guests and would want to return to the Middle East as soon as possible" (p. 79). And though the Jordanian students' self-positioning

led them to resist and avoid the beliefs, attitudes, and traditions of the host society, Deema was eager to benefit from her experience for personal change and development.

This position of being 'foreign' to the host culture could reinforce attachments to the cultural background and result in failure to engage in the new community hence rejection of the host culture and its language, and hindered identity development. However, this study showed that this has not stopped Deema from benefiting from her experience abroad and growing personally, academically, and religiously.

On the other hand, Belle and Leen were more open and outgoing in seeking interactions with English speakers. They took on the position of 'internationals'. These two women saw socialisation primarily as a means to develop favourable subject positions that would allow them to pursue imagined social positions in life, rather than to conform to their home culture socialised norms.

Leen was more like Arwa when she first travelled abroad, aligning herself with Saudi and positioning herself as a stranger, due to her lack of linguistic and cultural competence. However, when she changed her position from "traditional Muslim" to "an international student" and after acquiring some linguistic skills, she started to approach the locals and international students and gained some intercultural competence in her attempt to seek personal growth and development. Leen used her position as the 'other' as a way to access linguistic resources. Being a cultural guide for other nationals and explaining her religion and culture made her understand them more.

Belle, on the other hand, was the one with better intercultural and linguistic competence, and like Deema, she expected friendship and relationships with the hosts. However, when things were not changing, she changed. She gave herself an international position with an international name and appearance to gain more opportunities for interactions and, hence growing. Both Belle and Leen considered hijab and niqab to be a religious or cultural

obstacle that prevented them from full participation with people from other cultures.

We cannot talk about the experience of these women and their socialisation in Australia without bringing English language to the conversation. Though English skills were not a major factor that facilitated or hindered these women's socialisation process, learning and speaking English played an important role in their progression and identity development. And since it was a major element in the life of Deema and Belle as they were growing up, and was a factor that helped shaping their identities and beliefs, it was also a source of power, which was clear in the case of Leen who came to understand and witness the power of language in giving her a voice. In this way, Leen was similar to the participant Norah in Alsufyan's (2020) study of the identity development of a Saudi woman during SA, who was delighted to speak English and partake in conversation about different cultural issues. Leen learned the language at a later age, she came to appreciate it more and try to practice it whenever she can, to defend her religion and explain misconceptions between religion and culture. And though Norah did that from a position of a 'devoted Muslim', Leen here was taking a position of an 'English learner' and discussing such issues was her means for improving her language. This position of Norah mirrors that of male Saudi students abroad (Barnawi, 2009; Groves, 2015; Hall, 2013; Heyn, 2013; Alraddadi, 2015; Shaw, 2010) who feel responsible to represent Saudi and Islam during their SA time. In order to be positioned as ambassadors, and then because of this positioning, they hold into their traditions and maintain their old identity and fight change, like Arwa.

Arwa and Deema's limited exposure to the host society supports Jackson's (2008) argument that "the use of rich qualitative data provided insight into what actually happens during stays abroad and dispelled the myth that all sojourners automatically benefit from mere exposure to the host speech community" (p. 240). Also, the narratives of the women revealed that even when full participation with locals was a goal for some of them (Deema and Belle), they were

not offered an access to interactional opportunities. This indicates that the interactional process is really complicated not because of linguistic limitation of students but by their reactions to the host society, their own background, religious considerations, intercultural competence, among others. Moreover, this lack of interaction and relationships with the locals did not hinder their identity development process as being in this country gave them the chance to evolve and thrive, which was clear in the religious side of their identity as will be seen in the next section.

9.2.2.3. Religious identity

The women of this study relied on different resources, including linguistic, social, sociocultural, or religious as their capital to claim certain preferable positions that helped them in their identity negotiation and development. During their time abroad, these women's identities, the way they look and define themselves, and the way they understand the world around them have changed.

Coming from Saudi, these women were bound within a certain context, and influenced by their communities and the culture in which they lived. They have always been positioned as ideal Saudi Muslim women, as followers who do not get to question (Alsweel, 2013; Deo, 2006; Pharaon, 2004). Being Muslim was understood in a certain way, and it was nonnegotiable. And going on a SA journey was never considered or thought of as a way of strengthening one's faith; on the contrary, it was looked at negatively and considered a means of corrupting one's religion as living among native Western people would surely entail "more English" which would lead to "less Islam" (Elyas & Picard 2010, p. 141).

Living in a Western country, among non-Muslim, was indeed a means to question and find one's own way to faith. If we closely look at the situation, it is a logical outcome since these women changed their religious context. They moved from Saudi where Islam is the religion of the majority, and relatively unquestionable, to a different context where it is minoritized,

stigmatised and diverse, i.e., many people are practicing it differently, the field has changed, hence habitus has changed. So, it makes sense that people deeply examine their practices and beliefs, and consequently challenge their faith and strengthen their conclusions.

Religion is a major component of these women's identities and Islam informs and regulates their lives and is central to their self-perception (Yamani, 2000). However, the religious culture of Saudi was perceived by these women as an obstacle, a cause of stress, confusing and full of contradiction. Religion was the reason for their inability to position themselves where they wanted. As explained by Edwards (2018), people might hold different beliefs than the norms of their religious culture, however, they were obliged to follow them as they were members of it. However, during their SA journey, when their religious culture has changed, they came to understand this ambiguous aspect of their identity. They dared to cross a red line and look beyond the practices and even challenge them, or simply just question them silently. They came to understand the spirituality of their religion and understand it differently. They challenged the assumed position of being just a follower, to be a thinker, a questioner, to be a good Muslim woman in their own terms. This courage gave them the ability to see the thin line between religion and the Saudi religious culture, to think and rethink all of what they know, and free themselves from the unwanted obligations. So it seems that SA could be the answer to the difficulties that Saudis face to differentiate between religion and its culture as discussed by Alahmadi (2016).

Their narratives showed how SA experience provided them with an escape from their societal pressure and gave them a chance to reflect on themselves. They found new meanings in their isolation. Their views of religion were organised by the meanings and practices of their communities and families and with those views came the feeling of guilt over being bad Muslim women. However, SA was a means to explore this side of their identity as they began to make sense of how to be a good Muslim in their own terms, and they brought new

meanings of faith and new understanding of their practices. Though Arwa believed that shyness and leaning on males is how to be feminine and related that to religion, Leen on the other hand considered strength and independence as the new definition of femininity and argued that the strong Muslim is better and dearer to Allah than a weak one.[10]

They are also coming up with new religious practices which carried new meanings to their faith and identity. Deema talked in detail about reflection as a new religious practice. And though reflection was emphasized and mentioned more than 300 times in the Quran (Considine, 2020), it was never promoted in Saudi as a practice of faith. And while hijab was Arwa's means of showing religious commitment, this commitment was shown by Belle through removing it. One faith, yet different perception and practice.

Their narratives illustrate the considerable development in religious identity they went through while abroad regarding their regular practices, like praying, fasting, and reading the Quran. It was Leen who reflected on the way she prays in Australia, away from the evaluation of her relatives. Deema and Belle also reflected on their lives and the way they started to read and understand the Quran. Even Arwa, who was the only one who felt less of a Muslim in Australia, found the time to widen her religious knowledge and her religious practices. All of them came to Australia as Saudi Muslims, evident in the way they wore their hijab, and though some of them were less strict than the others, they all have loosened up a little and have a certain level of questioning. This new reflection on their religion and identities was acquired by some of them through reading the religious text with fresh English eyes.

It seems here that English was not only a means of power, transformation and of giving them voice, but also a tool to understand their religion as a need for their souls. English gave them the opportunity to see the text from a different angle, in which it fulfilled a gap which has

[10] A saying of the prophet.

long existed. When they read the Quran in Arabic, they understood it literally and through the interpretations they learnt at school. Seeing the English translation choices gave them new perspectives which led them to search, investigate and question their beliefs. English here offered a bridge between the old traditional readings of the Quran and modern feminist ways of reading it. English offered them new means to apply feminism within the limits of their religion. It is their version of Islamic feminism even if they did not recognise it. While Arwa was reading the religious texts and the existing interpretations of them in Arabic and searching the websites for evidence that supports these interpretations, the others read the English interpretations and used Islamic feminism as a lens to the rereading and reinterpretation of the Islamic texts to find answers to their problems, and to validate their actions and reactions. They used Islamic texts as a justification for their arguments against patriarchy just as in (Badran, 2013; Barlas, 2001; Wadud, 1999).

Despite the widespread notion that religious texts are usually lost in translation and that the spirit of the original text cannot be adequately conveyed in another language (Dazdarevic et al., 2013), and despite a conventional insistence that the Arabic version of the Quran is the only authentic one, it seems that the English translated version has yielded different and positive conclusions with some of this study's participants. It seems that the quality of the translation does not really matter here, especially since they are already Arabic speakers and familiar with the original texts. So, what the translation did for them is that it opened their eyes and minds to different interpretation of the text. Critical thinking gave it a kind of spirituality. So, the question here is not whether the spirit of the original was adequately conveyed in translation, simply because a new spirit has been found. So though they started reading the English versions of the Quran in a position of 'English learners' to learn new vocabulary and strengthen their English language and a desire to discuss religious matters, they ended up reading it from a position of 'religious learners' to strengthen their religious

identity.

They got used to reading the Quran in a certain way, so when they started reading it in a different language, new meanings started to flow, and along with these new meanings came a new understanding of their religion. It is not only the language, but also being in a different context. Being able to go out and wander the streets freely, just looking around and contemplating, and being away from their society and the cultural and religious pressure, helped them to reach a certain level of spirituality they had never reached before. These women proved that religion as a culture is not collective but individual. It "is a social construct, the product of self and other perceptions" (Kramsch, 1993, P. 205).

In SA literature, the emphasis is always on the importance of social relationships and how they are the key to change and develop, however, the women of this study showed that the societal is more important that the social. Especially since it is the religious side of their identity that we are investigating. As religion is after all a personal matter, a spiritual relationship to God and no need for anyone to mediate that relationship. So, their experience of living in a non-Muslim country is more important than their experience of engaging in relationships with other Muslims from other countries.

The narratives of these women embodied a developed new understanding of Islam in the modern world. They truly and deeply implement Sharia (Islamic law) in their lives and used their religion to find peace and strength. It is through Islam that they redefine what it means to be Muslim women. Their fight is against forced practices and sexism just like the Muslim women in Carland's (2017) research. Veil, gender segregation, male superiority, and low status of women were some of these practices.

Many studies have shown that study abroad is a space for personal, social, academic and linguistic development. Previous research has not yet considered religious development. This study showed how SA can be a journey of finding one's faith and spirituality. It also showed

that religious identity is like other aspects of identity; dynamic, fluid and indeed a site of struggle (Norton, 1995). And though other studies (Alsaweel, 2013; Alsufyan, 2020) have touched on that aspect of identity, their studies have shown that there is one right way of being religious or Muslim, which confirms to the religious norms in Saudi like wearing the hijab.

9.2.3 Research question three

My third research question asked how they believed this experience would shape their future goals, relationships, and their country. The women of this study are thinking about and imagining what their lives would be like when they return to Saudi, especially with the huge changes happening there. To most of them, being Saudi does not mean holding on to the past, rather it is about belonging to the future. It does not mean following, but leading. It is not about who they were, rather who they become. Yes, Saudi Arabia is a small growing nation, and in the past few years, it has been growing fast, and these participants want to be part of that growing and help building and shaping their country. This is contrary to Alrefaie's (2015) participants who connected their national identity to the Saudi traditions and accepting that as part of their Saudi national identity.

These women came to Australia with the main goal of getting a degree and to thrive academically. Some of them had other goals on their personal and social levels. After living and studying in Australia their identities evolved, and they started to imagine what their lives would be like when they go back home and what they can do. Deema and Belle were eager to make changes on their familial and personal levels for the sake of their daughters and providing them with a better future. Arwa was not clear about what she wanted and how she wanted it to be done. However, she wanted her daughter to be stronger and to achieve what she herself could not do, so she did want a better and a different future for her daughter.

Belle, Deema and Leen also talked about educating young women and helping them to know

and understand their rights. They believed that Saudi women could lead change in the county. They are the missing piece. Deema set herself as a role model for her daughter and other young girls, while Belle wanted to quietly make a change by talking and advising girls in her society. Leen, on the other hand, seemed to be much more grounded in this ongoing change in Saudi than the other women. She wanted to defend Saudi women publicly and internationally and challenge stereotypes linked to the traditional positioning of women in Saudi society. She believed that the power of English should be used to elevate such cases. So from being publicly invisible, these women are willing to fight to be seen, heard and recognised. The change in women's mindset regarding their position in society and how to merge their new beliefs into their culture has been discussed in other studies (Alamri, 2017; Alandejani, 2013; Mcdermott-Levy 2011; Heyan, 2013). In this study, the women not only changed their perspectives but were willing to spread awareness and lead change.

For these women Saudi is home, childhood memories, family, old friends and people who look like them. Building relationships with locals in Australia was a bit difficult for them and made them feel that something is missing from their lives. However, they were able to make new Saudi friends in Australia from different parts of Saudi. This added to the value of their imagined community of their new Saudi which will be discussed later. They developed a sense of belonging to that new Saudi and a desire to fit in alongside all the other returnees.

It is both interesting and concerning to note that these women with their new strong understanding of religion are subject to negative stereotyping of being feminists (as this term still carries bad connotations in Saudi) and hence, bad Muslims. This could significantly impact on the development of their identity and prevent them from being able to grow and thrive as humans. A shared narrative among the women was being stigmatised as 'changed' among their relatives in Saudi. While Belle was very upfront about that change and clearly displayed her changed views and values and was determined to end relationships, Deema and

Leen took it easy on their relatives and tried to balance between their changes and societies, especially since they had the chance to live freely as they wanted. Arwa's narrative demonstrated a different story. She felt insecure and watched over not only by her husband in Australia but also by her society in Saudi. Arwa was very cautious and took some measures so as not to change e.g., limited socialisation, passing the norms of her society on to her children, even if she does not agree. This was a burden as she tried to resist and fight possibilities. She let stigmatization from others shape how she sees herself and allowed them to be the writers of her own story.

The burden of the home society's culture and norms and the difficulties of maintaining social relationships after SA have been discussed in many studies. The struggles that the SA students go through when they return is well known and identified as a 'reverse culture shock'. In this study, Arwa's case has showed how one can go in resisting change, development and life opportunities in favour of others' acceptance and content. Holding on to one's core Islamic values was reported by female Saudi students (Alamri, 2017; Alandejani, 2013; Mcdermott-Levy 2011), yet they acknowledged small changes in their mindsets. In this study, Arwa's case is evidence of the idea that people who come into contact with other cultures, ideas, beliefs and lifestyles, are not always invested in embracing them, especially if it means confronting their society back home. However, it seems that her identity was a site of struggle and study abroad may not be causing her to change, but it is certainly causing some questioning and navigating tensions.

These women knew that with the changes they encounter it will be difficult for them to socialise to their old societies. They had different experiences and they want to move forward, that is why they try to find a different community; one of their own with people who lived the same experiences, with whom they can connect and belong. Like the other scholarship returnees, they share a third culture, one that exceeds time and place with those

who share the same experience (Kramsch, 1993). This confirms that the social change happening in Saudi is the result of the scholarship program. This is exactly what Ottaway (2010) has predicted; that the scholarship program was not only meant to develop the country economically but also socially by changing the mentality of the Saudi youth which will benefit the county.

Though people abroad usually identify themselves by certain values, norms, and roles in relation to their home community which strengthen their national identity and create "a feeling and recognition of 'we' and 'they'" (Lee, 2012, p. 29), in the case of my participants, 'we' were those who had a SA experience and developed certain mindset and were eager to change and develop the country, and the 'they' were the traditional Sahwi people holding back the country. This imagined community is the essence of their new identity grounded in their national background (Anderson, 2006).

Each one of the participants constructed her own belonging to that new community through her imagination of how to be part of the new Saudi. These women are showing that Saudi national culture cannot be reduced to a homogeneous entity, as each one of them is coming from a completely different Saudi region with different traditions, customs and habits than the others. So the way they define their Saudiness is somehow connected to their beliefs and values which, though similar in general, are different in the details. Their narratives also showed that they are heading towards a new culture as well. This new culture is what Holliday (1999) calls a sub-culture, emerging out of larger cultures in Saudi, and is a critique of the dominant and conservative large culture.

Belle, Deema and Leen were always positioned as 'different' in their societies, they have been called 'shameless', 'boy-like' and 'stubborn'. Over time they started to see their community through this subject position. The community in which they lived became a strange place in which they felt they might never belong, because the community did not

allow them to belong. This in turn affected their behaviour, which was deviant from expectations and norms (Warren & Moghaddam, 2018). And this in turn reinforced their sense of exclusion. This exclusion, through the changes happening, was replaced by a strong sense of belonging to their new society.

The women's narratives also showed how they have adapted to the complex social situation they found themselves in. They are fighting on not one but two fronts. On the one hand was their society and the religious and cultural pressure to act as told, and on the other was the Western stereotyping of Saudi women as oppressed. This orientalist tendency was to view Saudi Muslim women as living in a monolithic country and having minimal agency. They all acknowledged the existence of such oppression, while Arwa took a defensive stance and rejected all the accusations at once. The others created a neutral space between their society and the West's views on Muslim women. They spoke up knowing that keeping silent is not going to change anything. They are Saudi Muslim women; they are well acquainted with their situations, and they have the right to speak and explain the real situation. The stance of these women mirrors that of the Muslim feminists in Carland (2017) who chose to speak up and make a change in the situation of women. This study foregrounded the importance of agency in SA and the need to investigate it further. The narratives of these women showed their agency even before coming to Australia, when they were in their traditional, anti-female societies.

These participants shared one notion which is rebuilding and redefining their nation, and since culture is used as a definition of a nation (Gellner, 1983), these participants are creating their own culture. Their shared culture here includes a shared language, a shared education, and a shared new understanding of religion, all gained during their study abroad experience and in which they can recognise each other as members who belong to the same nation (Gellner, 1983). So though Saudi Arabia was built on the collaboration of religion and

nationalism, these women are calling for the separation of them, as religion must be recognised and understood by the individuals and not the groups, as something spiritual and essential for the soul rather than a label to group people. They distanced themselves from the Sahwis, the traditional and religious Saudis, and positioned themselves as the builders of the new Saudi.

Arwa was very much like Norah (Alsufyan, 2020) who developed a love for Saudi through yearning for the Saudi culture and traditions which signals her position as 'a devoted Saudi'. However, the other women heightened their sense of national identity through their excitement for the future Saudi, the new one, which promises more changes and a better future away from the old traditions.

Other SLA studies discuss the experiences of SA students who are finding a place in the new society, their imagined community, whereas in this study the participants are looking at finding a place in their old, yet new, society, their imagined future Saudi, and how they are going to change it. This explains how the scholarship program is essential in Saudi nation building. And though the existing literature on Saudi female students returning to Saudi Arabia have discussed the struggles that those students face when trying to reintegrate into Saudi culture and negotiate their new identities (Alamri, 2017; Alandejani, 2013), the recent changes happening in the kingdom might facilitate better integration and more possibilities for the participants of this study.

This new and deeper understanding of religion helped the participants redefine their religious identity, and to identify the blurred features of their national identity with a new understanding of their position in relation to their country. As discussed in chapter 3, the history of Saudi Arabia and the unique connection between religion and nationalism established the country and shaped its society, but "despite this long history – the nation and its citizens today suffer from a lack of a national identity" (Al-Hassan, 2014, para 3). This

study showed how the blurring between religion, nationalism and culture can cause confusion which leads to identity loss. The women in this study have shown that once their position is understood, they can redefine their religious identity which can lead to better understanding of other components of their identity. They came to understand that being Saudi does not necessarily require them to be religious or to carry the old Arabian traditions. And that whatever Sahwa brought was not necessarily religion, it is rather certain people's interpretation of religion. They understood that being Saudi does not require them to blindly follow religious people, but they can question, ask and research to reach their own answers and conclusions.

9.3 Limitations, future research and implications

Investigating the development of the identity of Saudi women in Australia helped us to understand how the scholarship program is facilitating the momentum of social change happening in Saudi Arabia. It also adds to our understanding how the participants' new understanding of religion and national identity can help them participate in rebuilding their country. However, since this study relied on the reports of a small number of Saudi female students studying in Australia, their attitudes, beliefs and experiences cannot be generalised to all Saudi women in Australia or in other countries.

The findings from this project signify a clear need for further research in the area of identity, religion and study abroad. Given the fact that this study has shown the huge influence of culture and religion on the students' identity abroad, further research on the experiences of Muslims from other countries or Christians from the Middle East in Australia and in other countries is needed to get a sense of the religious cultural interfaces happening with Saudi women. Exploring the similarity or differences in their experiences could enhance our understanding of the interrelations between religion and culture and study abroad and how

each of them impacts on the others and in what ways students could benefit more from their experiences.

Additionally, it is worth examining the impact of such experiences on the identity of young Saudi female students in their twenties. As all the participants in this study were over thirty and most of them witnessed the Sahwa time. Now that the Saudi society has undergone huge changes, these young women would have been socialised in different ways than the participants of this study. So an investigation into the identity of younger women could give a different perspective to the situation of Saudi women and the changes they may encounter, especially in regard to the tension between English, culture and religion.

Being in Australia provided certain positions to these women for intercultural contact and the multiculturality of Australia helped these women and gave them the opportunity to evolve religiously. It would be worth investigating the experiences of Saudi women going to other, less multicultural countries or even to the rural areas of Australia, with more opportunities to interact and socialise with the locals, to explore how different places can result in different experiences, positions and hence outcomes. The women of this study went through some major changes in aspects of their identity with minimal contact with locals, it would be interesting to see how their identities would develop in such areas, if they were offered more chances to build relationships.

Moreover, examining the experiences of Saudi male students in Australia or other anglophone countries and the change in their religious identity is of interest to me. Although they come from the same background and were subject to the same religious influence as Saudi women, they were treated differently, considered first class citizens, and were given power over women, based on a certain interpretation of Islamic texts. So, their experiences and the impact of SA on their beliefs and faith might be different than that of women.

Finally, the identity of the Saudi female returnees who graduated from Western universities

and returned home is worth investigating. These women have experienced life in a different culture and were subject to different experiences that had impacted on their overall identity. How would they go about their lives when they go back? What would they give up and hold on to if they were confronted?

This study closely explored the experiences of Saudi women in Australia during their study abroad period which may assist the Saudi and Australian government authorities and higher education institutions in taking actions to prepare them for their new journey, support them and improve their experience. It may also be of benefit to Saudi women themselves as it can work as a guide to what they may expect from studying in Australia (socially or religiously), and how they may become more competent co-contribute to their experience**.**

9.4 Concluding statement

I was cautious and wary when I started this project. All that I had in mind, and what other people kept warning me about, was to be careful not to discuss religion. As a Saudi woman, who went through what my participants have gone through, I felt that there is a red line when it comes to religion, and it indeed should not be crossed. I was aware of Saudi women's situation, the injustice they face and how it is always justified by people's interpretation of religion. I was totally taken by the principles of Islamic feminism, but I had the idea that this is our 'dirty laundry' and if talked about I would be considered a 'bad Muslim', not only by others but that I would feel it myself.

What I did not know was that deep inside me I desperately wanted to reveal such issues. It was clear in the interview questions that touched on the sensitive issues of religion, tradition, and nationality. Especially since these issues are pretty tangled within the Saudi society. My participants were eager to talk about them and gave me more than what I asked for, especially since such issues have never been discussed in SA literature. What I wanted was to change

the narrative and give Saudi women a chance to tell their stories and for their voices to be heard, and for the world to hear them.

I came to the conclusion that everyone has their own dirty laundry, and the courageous ones are those who speak up and change their situation and not let others speak and make assumptions about them.

There are many Saudi women who discussed the situation of Saudi women, however, they were dismissed and considered secular and a representative of 'Bad Muslim women'. Most of these women attacked Islam and considered religion to be part of the problem, which is why they lost the Saudi audience and their voices were not heard. What these women have missed, and this study caught, was how complicated the situation in Saudi is, and how all these issues of religion, nationality and traditions are completely overlapped.

This project was born of hesitation. One step forward and one step back. The interview questions were asked, and deep, emotional, strong, and truthful answers were received from my participants. However, their statements seem to be answering the unasked questions. They dug deep in their souls until they reached mine. My hesitation turned into determination to deliver their voices as they carried so many answers to many questions. I listened to their stories over and over, they talked about their backgrounds, their motivations, their journeys and how they have overcame the many obstacles they have encountered, and most of all their passionate dedication to their faith and country. What most of these women have in common is that they had enough, they were restless and fearless.

My conversations with these women, my reading and rereading of these conversations helped me find my own way to Allah. To re-evaluate my relationship with him and rebuild my bridge to him. I understood what it really meant to be a Muslim woman and a Saudi one. I started to see the bigger picture regarding my religion. I understood that Islam is not relegated to the small practices, but rather it draws this larger picture of spirituality that can shape who

I am. These women helped me to derive logical conclusions not only about my religion, but also my Saudiness.

The women in this study gave a new understanding of how to be a modern Muslim Saudi woman. One that is suitable to the Saudi society, the new one. One that is based on the Quran and derived from their own understanding of it. One that is passionate about being part of those who are rebuilding their country. And though this new Saudi is putting huge emphasis on the youth who are enthusiastic about changing their country, one might argue that these women are not young, 30 to 42 years, but they feel that they were just born and feel that their life has just started. They were imaginative and constructive and started here what they wish to finish there. This understanding of their Saudiness, may not adhere itself to how common Saudis define it, and yet – or perhaps because of that – it falls within a new space, one that is connected to their future. This new space is a response to their experiences abroad and influenced by their dreams and hopes of the new Saudi, which was initiated by King Abdullah who paved the way and is continued by the young crown prince who is determined to see such changes happen and such dreams fulfilled.

This change is what the country expected from the scholarship program, but it got more than that. It produced better Saudis and better Muslims. They have got ideal Muslim women in a modern way who are willing to take their country to the next level.

The women in this study, including myself, survived the Sahwa time. No matter where you grew up in Saudi, or how open your parents or family were, the society managed to steal Allah from us, and this scholarship program gave us the chance to look for him, search deep within ourselves, and find our ways back to him. The stories of these women contribute to the new understanding of how to be a good Muslim as an individual and to find your own faith.

My participants claimed their own religious path which helped to develop a new understanding of Islam in the modern age and change the dominant picture of Islam as a

repressive religion. Their insistence on finding their own way and continuing to walk that way even after returning is a powerful proof of what this scholarship program has offered them.

I am a Saudi Muslim woman, like the women in this study, and this shared identity allowed them to share personal stories, struggles, conflicts, feelings and beliefs with a high level of intimacy and trust. They gave me authentic, honest, and vivid responses. They knew that I understood and could relate. They knew I would not dismiss, criticise or belittle their ideas and experiences, not only as a researcher but as a Saudi woman abroad who lived their past and shared their present and dreamed their future.

The women in this study are not famous or prominent figures in Saudi society, but they are pioneers in shedding some light on a very ambiguous aspect of their identities and adding a layer of significance to the experience of Saudi students abroad. Without their contribution this work would not be done. The voice of these women can lead others to find their own.

One of the most interesting findings of this study is that women of the past generation, our mothers, were the ones holding us back; with good intentions of course, trying to protect us from the harsh patriarchal world, from the unknown. However, it is the women of the present who are in a position to bring the country forward.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Explanatory Statement

MONASH University

EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

Project Title: The Effects of Learning English as a Second Language on the Saudi Females' Identity

Project Number: 1955

Chief Investigator's name Dr Louisa Willoughby
Department of Linguistics
Phone: 9905 2237
email: Louisa.Willoughby@monash.edu

Student's name Luluh Alfurayh
Phone : 0402631183
email: luluh.alfurayh@monash.edu

You are invited to take part in this study. Please read this Explanatory Statement in full before deciding whether or not to participate in this research. If you would like further information regarding any aspect of this project, you are encouraged to contact the researchers via the phone numbers or email addresses listed above.

What does the research involve? The study investigates the relationship between learning a second language in a Western country and social identity and values. You are invited to participate in this study because you are a Saudi women living in Australia. You will be asked to answer a few questions via an online survey, which may take approximately 10- 15 minutes.

Why were you chosen for this research? All Saudi women who are currently living in Australia are invited to participate in the project. The link to the survey has been posted to various social media that the student researcher uses, with an invitation for people to also share with their friends.

Possible benefits and risks to participants: By participating in this study you will help to develop a better understanding of the identity of Saudi women, and to help others see life from their own perspectives to better understand them.

Confidentiality and data storage: Your participation in this study is voluntary and your answers to the questions will be kept anonymous. All collected data will be stored on password protected computers at Monash University and only members of the research team will have access to it.

Results: If you would like to be informed of the research findings you can email the student researcher via email.

Payment: No payment is offered.

Complaints: Should you have any concerns or complaints about the conduct of the project, you are welcome to contact the Executive Officer, Monash University Human Research Ethics (MUHREC):

Executive Officer
Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee (MUHREC)
Room 111, Building 3e
Research Office
Monash University VIC 3800

Tel: +61 3 9905 2052 Email: muhrec@monash.edu Fax: +61 3 9905 3831

Thank you,

Appendix 2: Consent Form

Project: **The Impact of Study Abroad on the Identity of Saudi Women in Australia.**

Chief Investigator: **Dr. Louisa Willoughby**

Student investigator: **Luluh Alfurayh**

I have been asked to take part in the Monash University research project specified above. I have read and understood the Explanatory Statement and I hereby consent to participate in this project.

I consent to the following:	**Yes**	**No**
1. I Read and understand the information in the explanatory statement.	☐	☐
2. I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary and I have the right to withdraw at any time without explaining my reasons.	☐	☐
3. I agree that the interview is being audio recorded.	☐	☐
4. I agree to the use of anonymous quotes.	☐	☐
5. I agree that the data collected might be published in anonymous form in academic books or journals.	☐	☐

Name of Participant:

Participant Signature: Date:

Appendix 3: Interview Questions

Section 1: Demographic information

1. Age?
2. City/Region of origin?
3. Years of study in Australia?
4. Undergraduate or graduate student?
5. Area of study?
6. Years of program completed.
7. Single or married?
8. Have you lived in any countries other than Saudi Arabia and Australia?
9. Have you ever lived or studied anywhere else besides Saudi Arabia and Australia?
10. What made you choose Australia as a place to study?
11. Did you learn and speak English before coming to Australia? Or you learned it here?
12. Do you speak any other languages?

Section 2: Interview Questions

A. You

1. Growing up, what was your childhood like? (Family structure, daily routine, holidays, etc.)
2. What has contributed to your personal/ academic identity development? (Religion, education, etc.)
3. What messages did you receive about the role of women when you were a kid? (Family, school, media)? How do you think those messages shaped your own identity as a woman?
4. What messages do you currently see in Saudi regarding the role of women? (Media, society)
5. How do you define yourself as a woman? What role did your mother/ father / society play in shaping who you are?
6. What differences are there between yourself, your mother, and your grandmother? (prompt: education, marriage, career)
7. What aspirations do you/ would you have for your children! Your daughter/ granddaughters?
8. How would you describe the path that led you to your current situation? (education, role models, experience)
9. What did you want to be when you grew up?
10. To what extent do you feel your current situation is/was a compromise on what you really wanted to do? Please explain.
11. Who/ what have been the biggest influences on your life choices? In making you what you are today: religion, education, family, friends, etc.
12. If you had to describe a defining moment in your life, what would that be?

B. Living in Aus.:

1. How do you typically spend your day here? Do you spend your day differently than when you were in Saudi? And now when you go back on holidays?
2. Do you socialise with Australians and make friends with them? Do activities with them? Arrange play dates for your kids..etc?
3. What were your perceptions of Australia before you came to Australia? Have they changed after living and studying in Australia? How? Give an example.
4. What's your thoughts on gender mixing or separation? In general? In Australia compared to Saudi Arabia? Or both?
5. Do you feel that having male classmates/ teachers has had any impact on you and your previous experiences of the male gender? In what ways? Give an example.
   Do you think that this exposure to different types of relationship/gender interactions have influenced or are influencing your respondents' relationship with their own family male members (i.e. their partner, their son, their father, uncles, etc.)
6. What were your thoughts of women driving before and what are they now?
7. Were the Australians you know aware of changes happening in KSA, What did they mention/are mentioning about these changes?
8. After living in Australia, is there anything you would want to see done differently in KSA?
9. Would you consider staying in Australia after you graduate? Why or why not? Why is it important to return to KSA? What factors would encourage you to remain here?
10. How do you think others perceive you as a Muslim/ Saudi Arabian/Middle Eastern female? Describe an experience that made you feel or think that way?
11. How do you think Australian /non-Arab students perceive Arabs in general and Saudi Arabians specifically? How has this affected or impacted you?
12. Do you act/feel differently with your Saudi friends than with your friends from other backgrounds? WHY?

C. English Lang:

1. Do you think learning a 2L is important? Why? What does learning and speaking Eng. mean to you?
2. Are you comfortable with speaking English with native speakers, and with non-native speakers of English? How do you feel when speaking English?
3. When and where do you use English and why? Do you use English in your daily life outside of class?
4. Do you embrace the English language and or keep it out of your life? If you have kids, do you try to get them use English more while they are here or you emphasize the use of Arabic Lang?
5. Describe your journey of learning English language? When did you start learning the language? Was English accessible to you in KSA?
6. How do you feel about people who can speak English in Saudi Arabia? And those who don't?
7. Describe/compare your educational experience (in general) in Australia and in KSA?

8. Which do you think has more influence on you; the exposure to English language through Studying and English media in Saudi or the experience of living in Australia? I.e. do you think that the exposure to a new language (English) in Saudi has the same, more or less effect on you as the exposure to a new culture (Australia)?
9. In general how has the experience of life in Aus. changed your views of Eng. Lang learning**?**
10. How do you feel about being able to speak two languages or more in Saudi? In Australia? Do you think it had any effect on your life?
11. In what ways do you think learning speaking the language in Australia has opened new windows to you? Socially, religiously and academically?
12. When you go back to Saudi would you embrace different educational ways of teaching, interacting with students?
13. Do you think that culture affects the way you write, speak, and interact in the class? Do you notice differences in verbal and nonverbal communication/behaviour you are familiar with, in comparison with other students who don't have the same background?
14. Have you ever got any feedback from your supervisor or teacher asking you to rewrite or explain yourself?
15. Do you think that learning and speaking English has empowered you or transformed you in any way?
16. How do you imagine yourself in the future? Do you think that image affects how you go about your life/ studies now?

D. Cultural identity:

1. Describe yourself before you came to Australia; social, religious, and Saudi identity.
2. What did it mean to you then to be Saudi Arabian (before you studied and lived in Australia)? Was religious identity important to your Saudi identity? Does being Saudi Arabian mean the same thing it does to you now, as it did before you studied in Australia? Describe.
3. Have you travelled back to Saudi Arabia since you have been in the Australia? Can you describe this trip? Did your perceptions of home change after being in Australia? (Example: religion/ gender dynamics/ education /social norms, Family obligations)?
4. Do you think other Saudis saw you differently? Give examples.
5. Have your perceptions or ideas about religion changed? Has the role of religion changed in your life? How? Has exposure to different cultures affected your religious identity? Do you feel a difference in your religious identity? Do you see other Saudis of both genders engage in behaviour that differs from Saudi norms when they come to Australia?
6. What do you think has changed the most for you since you've lived and studied Australia?
7. How do you think being an Arab/Saudi has impacted your experiences in Australia? Do you feel it has had a positive or negative impact? Give examples.

E. Your gender role

1. Do you see any differences between the Aus. gender roles and Saudi's? Which ones do you prefer? Do you think it contradicts the gender roles assigned to women in Islam?
2. Would you sacrifice getting married and having kids with having a good job or a high position in the society?
3. Do you accept your traditional gender roles? How about the injustice that may come with those roles?
4. Do you see yourself as equal/ less/ complementary to men?
5. What do you think about women being the hallmark of the culture? The ones responsible for passing on the cultural norms? E.g. her honour and the honour of the family is measured and valued?

F. Women in Saudi:

1. How do you understand the difference between women's high educational achievement and low societal status?
2. How would you describe the evolution of Saudi women within your lifetime? (Education, employment, social life, politics)
3. What do you think have been Saudi women's biggest achievements? How were these achievements reached?
4. What do you think are today's biggest challenges for women in Saudi? (Political, legal, societal etc.)
5. How might various demographic variables impact a woman's status in Saudi? (age, income, tribal affiliation, education)
6. How do Saudi women compare to other women in the Gulf? In the greater Middle East/Arab region? In the world?
7. How did you see the role of women in Saudi society? How do you see that role now?

G. Islamic feminism

1. In what ways do you see your identity related to Islam?
2. What is your perception of the abaya and hijab within your personal understanding of your religion and culture?
3. What is your response to the Western stereotype that Muslim Arab women are oppressed?
4. Did you know of someone, who went against what their family and/or society deemed as "appropriate"? Please explain.
5. Have you heard of the term "Islamic Feminism"?
6. How do you/ would you describe the term "feminism"? What is your reaction to it / what does it mean to you?
7. How do you think feminism can/does fit within Saudi culture and society?
8. Do you consider yourself a feminist?
9. Do you think that the power of the current interpretations of the Quran depends on its correctness? Or on the social and political forces supporting its claims to authority?
10. Do you think that living and studying in Aus. gave you a new perspective to understand religion? I.e. do you read the Quran or Hadith and understand it differently?

11. Have you ever tried to explain a culture related to religion habit to someone and the conversation made you rethink or requestion your beliefs?
12. Do you try to learn and think when you read the Islamic texts/ fatwa? Or blindly follow the words of those before? Why?
13. Do you believe that women are capable of interpreting the Quran/ issuing fatwa? Why? Do you think that this would lead to progress for women?

Appendix 4: Interview Transcripts

The interview transcripts can be found at:
https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1lL7Yplzjm4IGTiW8Y9I7i8mYuYZBGkqP?usp=sharing

Deema's interview was the only one mostly in English.

For the rest, only relevant quotes were translated.
Few pages of Belle's interview were handwritten, so I just took photos of them and insert them in the word document.