



**A Qualitative Study of Saudi PhD Returnees'
Readjustment Experience: Their Perceptions and
Impressions**

GADAH SULAIMAN ALMUARIK

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Abstract

This doctoral thesis provides a longitudinal, qualitative examination of the ‘Repatriation Experience’ of eight Saudi Postgraduate students upon their return to their home country. It seeks to make a contribution to current knowledge by exploring the impact of the experience of studying abroad on these individuals who spent between four and eight years pursuing their studies in the United Kingdom (UK). The research has a specific focus on the challenges these individuals may have faced and whether there had been any need for readjustment upon their return. Moreover, this thesis considers the changes that the participants had introduced to their worldviews, identifications and practices including, but not limited to, their language behaviour as a result of their overall study abroad experience and provides an indication of the degree of personal growth resulting from it, supporting Kim’s (2001) findings on the benefits of becoming intercultural.

Despite the large number of Saudi students studying abroad, all of whom constitute potential ‘eventual returnees’, repatriation remains an under-researched area in the context of Saudi Arabia. There is a demonstrable lack of qualitative research on issues relating to adjustment after re-entry (Martin, 1984), with few longitudinal studies (e.g. Martin, et al., 1995; Thomas, 2009; Pitts, 2016). By conducting in-depth qualitative interviews, this study comprehensively revisited the social, psychological, professional and linguistic issues associated with this type of transition. A further area of interest dealt with in the research was the strategies utilised by the returnees to deal with the return-home experience to overcome any challenges they encountered during and after their return. Data collection took place over a period of 12 months and covered three phases. In Phase I, participants’ expectations about their return and feelings about home were explored. The second interview focused on participants’ experiences after returning home and how they actually felt about being there in terms of how they perceived different aspects of life in Saudi Arabia. This analysis included whether their feelings had influenced their readjustment to major aspects of daily life such as professional life, family relationships, social activities, language behaviour and overall wellbeing. In the third interview, participants were asked to comment on what appeared to have changed for them since the second interview and emerging ideas were followed up. In addition, participants were encouraged to provide any recommendations or tips they felt necessary for those currently experiencing, or about to undergo, this kind of transition. By using Thematic Analysis informed by Grounded Theory procedures, findings revealed different aspects of the repatriation experience. Psychological and sociocultural aspects of the return were interwoven, supporting the ‘spill-over’ and ‘cross-over’ factors and their effects on returnees’ readjustment. Besides

addressing a methodological gap in the literature, the study also considered whether there were any gender-related differences or commonalities in the repatriation experience. Although participants experienced the return in different ways, certain issues stand out as being common, especially during the first few months of the return supporting previous findings. Finally, the study suggests that two models of cross-cultural adaptation i.e. The Transition Model (Bennett, 1998) and The Stress-Adaptation-Growth Model (Kim, 2001; Kim, 2005) appear to be the most relevant in explaining the repatriation experience of these individuals.

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Dedication

To my parents, who have been showering me with their prayers throughout my life.

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Table of Contents

Abstract.....	ii
Acknowledgments	iv
Dedication.....	vi
Table of Contents	viii
List of Tables	xiii
List of Figures.....	xiv
List of Abbreviations	xv
Chapter 1 : Introduction.....	1
1.1 Preface	1
1.2 The Beginning: A Researcher’s Perspective.....	1
1.3 Background and Rationale for the Study	2
1.4 Research Questions	6
1.5 Setting the Context.....	7
1.5.1 <i>The Concept of ‘Culture’</i>	7
1.5.2 <i>Home Culture: Saudi Arabia</i>	9
1.5.3 <i>The Arabic Language</i>	12
1.5.4 <i>Attitudes, Norms, Values and Social Behaviour: A Saudi Identity?</i>	12
1.5.5 <i>People’s Orientations and Patterns of Behaviour</i>	15
1.5.6 <i>Education in KSA</i>	19
1.5.7 <i>Scholarships in KSA</i>	21
1.5.7.1 <i>The Foundation Period (1927-1953)</i>	21
1.5.7.2 <i>The Growth Period (1954-2004)</i>	22
1.5.7.3 <i>The Expansion Period (2005-present)</i>	22
1.5.8 <i>Studying Abroad</i>	22
1.6 Summary and Organisation of the Thesis.....	23
Chapter 2 : Literature Review	24
2.1 Introduction	24

2.2 Re-entry: The Homecoming Transition	24
2.3 Adjustment vs. Adaptation.....	27
2.4 Some Theoretical Approaches to the Re-entry Process	28
2.4.1 <i>Reverse Culture Shock and the W-curve Model</i>	28
2.4.2 <i>The Transition Model</i>	31
2.4.3 <i>Integrative Theory of Communication and Cross-Cultural Adaptation (ITCCA)</i> ..	31
2.4.4 <i>The ABCs of Acculturation</i>	32
2.5 Cultural Identity Changes	34
2.6 Types of Returnees.....	36
2.7 Contributory Factors to Returnees' Re-adjustment	37
2.7.1 <i>Gender</i>	38
2.7.2 <i>Marital Status</i>	39
2.7.3 <i>Age</i>	39
2.7.4 <i>Cultural Distance</i>	39
2.7.5 <i>Relationships Dynamics</i>	40
2.8 Re-entry Issues: Some Empirical Studies	41
2.8.1 <i>Studies in Arab and Islamic Countries</i>	42
2.8.2 <i>Studies in KSA</i>	43
2.9 Chapter Summary	44
Chapter 3 : Research Design and Methodology.....	45
3.1 Introduction.....	45
3.2 Research Design.....	45
3.2.1 <i>Philosophical Assumptions: Ontology and Epistemology</i>	47
3.3 Procedures.....	48
3.3.1 <i>Ethical Issues</i>	48
3.3.2 <i>Pilot Study</i>	49
3.3.3 <i>Participant Recruitment</i>	49
3.3.4 <i>The Interviews</i>	50

3.3.5 <i>Transcription and Translation</i>	53
3.4 Data Analysis Procedure	54
3.5 Validity, Reliability and Generalisability in Qualitative Research	59
3.6 The Position of the Researcher	61
3.7 Chapter Summary	63
Chapter 4 : Study Findings	64
4.1. Introduction	64
4.2. Getting Started: Approaching the Data	64
4.3 Findings from Phase I: Prior to the Return to KSA.....	65
4.3.1 <i>Counting down</i>	65
4.3.2 <i>Feelings about Doing a PhD</i>	71
4.3.3 <i>Relationship Dynamics Abroad</i>	72
4.3.4 <i>Here and There: Host and Home Environments</i>	73
4.4. Findings from Phase II: Between 1-5 Months after Returning to KSA	80
4.4.1 <i>Fitting in and Facing Reality</i>	80
4.4.1.1 <i>Theme 1: Structural and Logistical Issues</i>	80
4.4.1.2 <i>Theme 2: Cultural Norms and Social Obligations</i>	86
4.4.1.3 <i>Theme 3: Self-impression</i>	89
4.5. Findings from Phase III: Between 6-12 Months after Returning to KSA	90
4.5.1 <i>Theme 4: Stages of Readjustment</i>	90
4.5.1.1 <i>Getting by</i>	90
4.5.1.2 <i>Acceptance</i>	94
4.6. Chapter Summary	98
Chapter 5 : Discussion.....	100
5.1 Introduction	100
5.2 Summary of the Study Themes	101
5.3 Theme 1: Structural and Logistical Issues.....	101
5.3.1 <i>Transportation</i>	101

5.3.2 Education	103
5.3.3 <i>The Structure of Public Universities in KSA: Hierarchy of Authority and Bureaucracy</i>	105
5.4 Theme 2: Cultural Norms and Social Obligations	109
5.4.1 <i>The Pressure of ‘Wasta’</i>	109
5.4.2 <i>PhD Status and Its Effects</i>	111
5.4.3 <i>The Notion of ‘Albir’</i>	113
5.4.4 <i>Individual vs. Collective Self</i>	114
5.4.5. <i>The Notion of ‘Face’</i>	117
5.5 Theme 3: Self-impression	120
5.5.1 <i>A Sense of Transformation</i>	120
5.6 Theme 4: Stages of Readjustment	125
5.6.1 <i>Getting by</i>	125
5.6.2 <i>Acceptance</i>	127
5.7 Revisiting the Research Questions	129
5.7.1 <i>RQ1: How do Saudi PGSs find the experience of returning home after studying abroad?</i>	129
5.7.2 <i>RQ2: In what ways does the experience of studying abroad appear to have ‘influenced’ these individuals, from their own perspectives?</i>	131
5.7.3 <i>RQ3: What strategies do these individuals use to deal with their return-home experience, if they feel there is a need to do so?</i>	132
5.8 Chapter Summary	133
Chapter 6 : Conclusions	136
6.1 Introduction	136
6.2 Synopsis of the Study	136
6.3 Theoretical Contributions	137
6.4 Methodological Contributions	138
6.5 Implications for the State	138
6.5.1 <i>The Saudi Cultural Bureaux Abroad</i>	138

6.5.2 <i>Higher Education Institutions</i>	139
6.6 Limitations of the Study	139
6.7 Recommendations for Further Research	141
6.8 Concluding Remarks	141
References	143
Appendices	168
Appendix A	168
Appendix B.....	169
Appendix C.....	170
Appendix D	171
Appendix E.....	175
Appendix F.....	182

List of Tables

Table 3-1: Participants' Profiles..... 50

Table 3-2: The Longitudinal Data Collection Procedure 53

Table 3-3: An Example of Initial Coding..... 56

Table 4-1: Preliminary Study Themes..... 79

Table 4-2: Spill-over effect on returnee 86

Table 4-3: Final Study Themes 98

Table 5-1: Example of changed problem-solving habits based on Mezirow's (1990) perspective transformations 122

List of Figures

Figure 1-1: Map of Saudi Arabia.....	10
Figure 1-2: the first scholarship holders	21
Figure 2-1: The U-Curve Model of Cultural Adjustment (Lysgaard, 1955).....	29
Figure 2-2: The Reverse Culture Shock Model (W-curve theory) Gullahorn & Gollahorn (1963)	30
Figure 2-3: The Stress-Adaptation-Growth Dynamic (Kim, 2001, p. 59).....	32
Figure 2-4 Re-entry Coping Modes (adapted from Adler, 1981).....	37
Figure 3-1: Procedure for Data Analysis	58

List of Abbreviations

abbreviation	explanation
CA	Colloquial Arabic
CS	Culture Shock
GT	Grounded Theory
KSA	Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
PGSs	Post Graduate Students
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
RCS	Reverse Culture Shock
RQ	Research Question
SA	Standard Arabic
T	Transcript
UK	United Kingdom

Chapter 1 : Introduction

1.1 Preface

This study captures the experiences of eight Saudi post graduate students (PGSs hereafter) on their return home, after having spent between 4 and 8 years in the United Kingdom (UK),¹ and having completed a PhD. The group was made up of a mixture of males and females. The research explores how these individuals faced their transition back into their home country and whether there was any need for conscious re-adjustment upon the return, with a specific focus on the impact of the experience of studying abroad on them. Re-adjustment, or re-entry, are terms used to describe the transitional experience of moving from a foreign country back to one's home country and the issues raised through facing previously familiar surroundings after living away from home for a period of time (Adler, 1981). The study considers the social, psychological, and academic issues associated with this type of transition, and the findings shed light on specific strategies utilised by the returnees or 'home comers' to overcome any challenges they encountered during and after their return.

1.2 The Beginning: A Researcher's Perspective

The decision to undertake this study was triggered by a brief discussion that I had with a close friend of mine who had just completed her PhD abroad and returned to Saudi Arabia (KSA hereafter). When I asked her how things were going back home, she replied with a sigh that *'things didn't go the way I expected!'* The disappointment in her voice ultimately prompted me to delve into an issue that has been labelled in the literature as 're-entry adjustment' or 'reverse culture shock'. In addition, the opportunity to study abroad in the UK, with its markedly different culture, language, customs and traditions, stimulated my thoughts about the numerous consequences this experience may have on individuals and societies (see Section 1.3).

During the short holiday visits back to my country of origin, KSA, I became engaged in situations where my attempts to adhere to the norms of either culture were problematic. For example, when it came to arranging a meeting with someone and deciding on a time, the question, 'Is it a British or a Saudi appointment?', immediately sprung to mind as concepts of punctuality in the two cultures are very different. I had to decide whether to arrive on time, or half an hour later. I mused on the point that working to a time schedule based on what I had become accustomed to in the UK, keeping relatively strict to an agreed meeting time, would result in disappointment on my part if the person to be met did not meet that expectation and

¹ The UK consists of England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales (WHO, 2017).

was late, as would be customary in KSA. From the Saudi perspective, my adherence to a specific time could be interpreted as me 'being British' and involve an implied criticism of my deviation from Saudi cultural norms and, consequently, seen as 'showing off'. On the other hand, following the norms and conventions of KSA could also be viewed as evidence that I had learned nothing from my experiences abroad and so minimise the value of the entire experience. What to do for the best and how to meet expectation from all parties in such a situation remained a doubtful point and I continued to debate with myself whether I should tolerate certain aspects of my home culture or not, and whether I should continue to practise my newly acquired habits or abandon them. However, returning to my busy life abroad after having spent a few weeks at home restricted any serious attempts to reflect on, or consider, the reasons behind my concern about these matters.

How these PGSs *find* and *deal with* the experience of returning home after studying abroad, and whether they feel that studying abroad has had an impact on them in any way, is the focus of this study.

It is worth mentioning that the inclusion of my personal experience in this study is quite deliberate. In this, I follow Clandinin & Connelly's (1994) approach, in *Personal Experience Methods*, in acknowledging the researcher's own narratives of particular experiences as starting points. However, including the personal experiences and the researcher's voice is not without its challenges in research and these are addressed in detail in Chapter 3 (see Section 3.6).

1.3 Background and Rationale for the Study

Students' mobility and their ability to study across national boundaries is a growing phenomenon and, indeed, a reality for many individuals around the globe today. Among the main reasons for studying overseas are lack of domestic facilities, especially in certain subject areas, perceived academic superiority of the institutions in the host countries, and the commercial value and status of a foreign degree (Cummins 1993, cited in Varghese, 2008). In addition, the advantages of knowing about, and gaining experience in, another country and culture (which is explained later in this section) has encouraged the provision of many governmental scholarships, as well as persuaded individuals to seek an education in foreign countries. KSA is no exception. KSA has witnessed a tremendous growth in higher education over the last decade, which reflects the high level of support from the government, and this support has been accompanied by significant changes in educational policy (See Denman & Hilal, 2011; Bukhari & Denman, 2013).

These changes are manifested in numerous study-abroad programmes, such as the ‘King Abdullah Scholarship Programme’ (KASP).² This programme was established in 2005 and is funded until 2020 under the supervision of the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE).³ It is available to all Saudi students, regardless of gender, and aims to help students fulfil the requirements of the labour market. It is hoped that these scholarships will diversify employment, encourage global competitiveness, and promote institutional reform (Altbach & Engberg, 2014). Moreover, governmental scholarships are open to teaching assistants, lecturers and faculty members in all higher education institutions. This further illustrates the efforts made by the Kingdom to mobilise scholars and provide them with valuable, relevant opportunities to immerse themselves in other cultures and to benefit from global exposure. It is also an attempt to reduce KSA’s dependence on the oil industry, which is its primary source of economic growth (Denman & Hilal, 2011).

Hamdan (2014) concurs that KSA is now moving towards a knowledge-based economy that emphasises human intelligence, rather than a resource-based economy that emphasises oil. As a result, governmental scholarship programmes have opened the door for many Saudis to study abroad. Sending Saudi students abroad helps to reduce the prevalent stereotypical characterisation, in the Western media, linking Islam and terrorism, and which re-enforces the tension between “East” and “West” and the historical “us” and “them”; i.e. Orientalism, a phenomenon that misrepresents and distorts the East or the Orient (see Said, 2003).

A speech made by Prince Charles of England in 1993 about Islam and the West emphasised this point saying:

‘If there is much misunderstanding in the West about the nature of Islam, there is also much ignorance about the debt our own culture and civilization owe to the Islamic world. [...] The medieval Islamic world, from central Asia to the shores of the Atlantic, was a world where scholars and men of learning flourished. But because we have tended to see Islam as the enemy of the West, as an alien culture, society, and system of belief, we have tended to ignore or erase its great relevance to our own history.’ (Al-Hassani, 2004, p. 2)

Thus, student mobility has the potential to reduce and clarify these misunderstandings. According to a report by the Institute of International Education (IIE) in 2016,⁴ KSA ranks third out of the countries sending the largest numbers of international students after China and India. In 2012, the number reached 142,628 (MOHE). These figures confirm the conclusion that an

² The world’s largest overseas scholarship programme (Bukhari & Denman, 2013).

³ Now under the Ministry of Education (MOE) as the two were merged in January 2015 by King Salman’s Royal Decree. Retrieved from: <http://www.moe.gov.sa/en/Pages/default.aspx>

⁴ Retrieved from: <http://www.iie.org/Research-and-Publications/Open-Doors/Data/International-Students/Leading-Places-of-Origin/2014-16>

overseas study experience attracts many Saudi students. Denman & Hilal (2011) suggested that the main reasons for this include the perceived advantages of immersion in another culture and studying in a different educational system, and is an issue to which I will return later.

Another reason is the fact that the provision of financial support, including accommodation and general living expenses, is very attractive (Bukhari & Denman, 2013). The prospect of studying overseas also has a growing 'social' appeal among Saudi youth, in terms of becoming a 'global citizen' which, according to Lewin (2009, p. xv), refers to 'critical individuals who are capable of analysing power structures, building global community, or tangibly helping to improve the lives of people around the world'. The term 'global citizen' could also be related to 'awareness' or acting with awareness (Bourn, 2010). Lilley et al. (2016, p. 10) call it, an 'ideal global graduate' showing 'openness, tolerance, respect, and responsibility for self, others and the planet.' In other words, these individuals are more likely to develop a global mind-set and become comfortable in dealing with uncertainty and diversity. This could contribute positively to creating mutual understanding among individuals from different cultures and enhancing cultural exchange which could also reduce any stereotypical image.

Triandis (2006) introduces the term 'cultural intelligence', which means being successful in cultural interactions and which requires affective, cognitive, and behavioural training that could be attained through the experience of studying abroad which has 'transformative potential', offering an opportunity for greater personal freedom, increased assertiveness, independence, confidence, and cultural awareness (Brown & Brown, 2009; Brown & Graham, 2009). Moreover, identity development and self-discovery have been acknowledged as key features of students' intercultural learning experiences (Kim, 2008; Brown, 2009). Delanty (2011) highlights that each intercultural encounter makes a unique contribution to an individual's learning experience, leading to the development of a cosmopolitan identity.

The large number of international students sent by the government implies that it considers this a worthwhile investment for the community as a whole (Altbach & Engberg, 2014), since students can implement and apply what they have learned abroad, helping to reform systems, increase knowledge, and enhance social change. However, whether these new, and potentially challenging, ideas and experiences, given KSA's historical, religious and cultural identity, are in fact implemented and, more importantly, welcomed, requires further research as pointed by Denman & Hilal (2011), but this goes beyond the scope of this study.

The need to develop a better understanding of the psychological, social, and practical matters associated with this cross-cultural⁵ transition and homecoming experience is well attested (Szkudlarek, 2008). The issue of repatriation, or the re-entry process, of expatriates has not received as much scholarly attention compared to the research on expatriation or the cultural adjustments of sojourners⁶ when they move to a foreign country. This gap in the research exists despite the fact that scholars have argued that the former is more challenging and more in need of in depth study (Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963; Adler, 1975; Adler, 1981; Black, et al., 1992; Storti, 2001). According to Storti (2001), the challenges could be attributed to returnees' expectations that, when back home, family, friends, and themselves, will be the same as before they left. Consequently, they expect to deal with this perceived situation, only to realise afterwards that both the environment and they themselves have changed during their time abroad (Martin, 1984).

Other challenges could be the result of 'transformative learning'⁷ (see Hamza, 2010) or how these individuals perceive and respond to the differences between the 'academic cultures' of host and home universities (Robinson-Pant, 2009). The physical journey that an individual embarks upon from their home country to the host country also often includes a social and psychological journey of cross-cultural adaptation which may, in turn, alter the sojourner's way of behaving, thinking, and feeling (Arthur, 2003; Yang, et al., 2006). It may also bring intercultural growth and a shift in understanding of self (Kim, 2001; Brown, 2009). Newly acquired values, attitudes and behaviours may become part of the individual's social system, creating new patterns of relations, roles and expectations (Al-Mehawes, 1984; Storti, 2001). However, if all or any of this happens, it might do so to varying degrees, depending on how well a person adapts to his/her new settings abroad.

I would add that challenges upon return might be encountered in presenting or in *re-presenting* oneself to a community which is already familiar with one. A returning individual is more likely to *reconstruct*, regardless of what this process involves, various elements in his/her life, including relationships, rather than make a fresh start, which could be deemed easier. Brabant, et al. (1990) and Gaw (2000) claim that re-entry shock is by no means an unavoidable feature

⁵ The terms 'cross-cultural' and 'inter-cultural' are used synonymously throughout this thesis, although there is some debate about the distinction between the two (e.g. Gudykunst, 2003).

⁶ Sojourners are 'people who travel internationally to achieve a particular goal or objective with the expectation that they will return to their country of origin after the purpose of their travel has been achieved' (Safdar & Berno, 2016).

⁷ Transformative learning involves changes in people's understanding of significant aspects of their world (Mezirow, 1991 cited in Hamza, 2010).

of the students' repatriation experience. By affecting the psychological wellbeing, social readjustment, and identification of these individuals, they may face a 'different reality' rather than a 'shocking reality' upon their return, and this aspect of returning deserves more scholarly attention (see Section 2.2).

Besides being part of this new wave of KSA expats (see Section 1.2), and in addition to my personal interest, one of the other primary reasons for conducting this study is that, despite the substantial number of Saudi sojourners abroad that, in due course, become returnees, to date only two studies, to the best of my knowledge, have specifically addressed this issue of readjustment in the context of KSA (see Section 2.8.2). This could be related to the fact that the number of overseas students in KSA was not significant until 2005. However, these two studies lacked the comparative element between genders which is a concern in the literature (Martin & Harrell, 2004) and is addressed in this study. That having been said, both studies, as is discussed in more detail in the next chapter, concluded that all Saudi Arabian returnees experience readjustment problems to varying degrees (see Al-Mehawes, 1984; and Alandejani, 2013). The significance of researching this particular group stems from its sophisticated nature as students while abroad, and staff members upon their return. The fact that this group encompasses the characteristics of both types of sojourners makes this cohort particularly special. Within the available literature, very few studies have focused on this kind of returnee (e.g. Gama & Pedersen, 1977; Alandejani, 2013).

This global and growing phenomenon deserves further investigation (Kidd, 2010; Szkudlarek, 2010; Pitts, 2016). Especially since this cultural transition may be accompanied by a degree of identity transformation, which needs to be highlighted in order to understand, enhance, and support the re-entry process.

1.4 Research Questions

In response to the gap identified above, three research questions were formulated to bridge this gap and contribute to the relatively scarce knowledge about re-entry and re-adjustment processes:

1. How do Saudi PGSs find their return-home experience after studying abroad?
2. In what ways does the experience of studying abroad appear to have 'influenced' these individuals, from their own perspectives?
3. What strategies do these individuals use to deal with their return-home experience, if they feel there is a need to do so?

In choosing these research questions, I followed the advice of some scholars. For example, Creswell (2009, p. 130) suggested that RQ in qualitative research begin with words like: ‘*what* or *how* to convey an open and emerging design’ and that questioners are often stated broadly without specific reference to the existing literature i.e. open ended questions. He also recommended to begin with a single focus to explore in depth. While the first question was meant to be neutral and general to better explore the topic, the two other questions (were narrow to reflect personal experience) aimed at adding meaning to the experience of reentry by connecting and reflecting on past experience of the study abroad and present experience of reentry.

Gough, et al. (2003, p. 5) emphasise that qualitative research questions ‘should have some social relevance and originality’. The sample and context of this study is relatively new. In fact, the current study can be considered one of the first attempts to focus on gender variation and avoid the limitations on data collection that Alnehawes (1984) and Alandejani (2013) faced.⁸ Hence, analysis of findings seek to generate a deeper understanding of the reentry experience as perceived in a Saudi context, taking into account gender variation in dealing with this cultural transition. In addition, it will inform other returnees of what to expect and, if necessary, how to readjust.

1.5 Setting the Context

Since this study is concerned with Saudi Arabian returnees, the provision of relevant background information relating to the participants’ home culture in KSA facilitates the reader’s understanding about those individuals’ lives, behaviour and reactions upon their return, and helps place the participants’ re-entry experience in context. A brief overview of KSA is provided below. However, before that, it is essential to explain the concept of ‘culture’ as used in this thesis.

1.5.1 The Concept of ‘Culture’

The concept of culture is controversial and difficult to define (Baldwin, et al., 2006). Despite the diversity of scholars’ perceptions on the notion of culture, most agree that it is not innate, but learned (Anderson-Levitt, 2012). Others differentiate between the concepts of ‘culture’ and ‘country’, and state that they are not synonyms and cannot be used interchangeably (Sawang, et al., 2006; Jandt, 2013) (cf. Sussman, 2000). The authors defined a ‘country’ or ‘nation’ as ‘a government and people occupying a particular state or territory’ while ‘culture’ includes ‘a system of shared meanings or values that members of a particular cultural group use to attribute

⁸ That is, being unable to have contact with opposite gender because of cultural norms.

to the persons and objects making up the culture' (Sawang, et al., 2006, p. 207). Yet, assuming that citizens of a certain country think and behave in the same way is too simplistic as cultural diversity clearly exists within countries, as well as between countries (ibid). Anderson-Levitt (2012, p. 443) described culture as 'the making of meaning'. She elaborated that the term meaning 'refers not only to the act of interpreting what is going on, but also to the know-how and norms required to behave like a sensible person.'

Although meanings are often shared among a group (See Hofstede, et al., 2010), it is not necessarily the case that every member in the group shares the same beliefs and norms (Anderson-Levitt, 2012). This illustrates Kluckhohn's distinction (1949, cited in Baldwin, et al., 2006, p. 7) between 'society' and 'culture' in that the former refers to people who share 'a social space and mutual interaction, but not a way of life.' Whereas the latter refers to people sharing a way of life. This definition associates 'society' with 'country' rather than with 'culture'. However, when using the word 'culture' in this thesis I refer to what Sussman (2000) states as the majority culture found in a country. It is also important to acknowledge the existence of 'cultures within cultures' (Jandt, 2013, p. 337) which, according to the author, are based on economic or social class or geographic region. Gudykunst (2004, p. 43) define these kinds of cultures as 'groups within cultures whose members share many of the values of the cultures, but also have some values that differ from the larger cultures.'

In a similar vein to Anderson-Levitt (2012), Spradley (1979, p. 5) defined culture as 'the acquired knowledge that people use to interpret experience and generate social behavior'. Spradley's (1979) notion of cultural knowledge as being 'acquired' rather than 'shared' (see Hofstede, et al., 2010), together with Fischer's (2009, p. 44) idea of 'approximate' sharing within a culture rather than 'absolute', are most appropriate to the context of this study and better account for individual differences and changing circumstances by considering the returnees as a culture within the mainstream of Saudi culture, having acquired similar characteristics abroad that differ from those of the mainstream. According to Fischer (2009, p. 44), 'approximate sharedness is necessary to allow a relatively smooth functioning of interactions between group members', which was the case between the returnees and the home nationals (see chapter 5). However, he adds that this criterion still lacks empirical evidence. Fischer (2007, p. 43) argues that culture is 'relational' and that it is 'where meaning is woven and renewed'. To him, culture is a form of knowledge rooted in human beings' understanding of self, emphasising the concept of 'change' as new realities are seen. By following Fischer's (2007) notion, individuals' re-entry experience in this study can be interpreted as adding some elements to their 'cultural knowledge'. Culture, as used in this thesis, is best understood by

reference to the above conceptions which incorporate its mental, behavioural, and functional elements. In doing this, I avoid a simple concept of culture, as recommended by Anderson-Levitt (2012).

While Saudi culture embodies certain social-cultural practices (Al Lily, 2011), only those related to the context of the study will be discussed below.

1.5.2 Home Culture: Saudi Arabia

KSA is situated in the south west of Asia and occupies nearly 90% of the Arabian Peninsula, making it the largest country in the Middle East. It lies at the heart of the Arab and Islamic worlds. It is the custodian of the two Holy Mosques, in Makkah⁹ and Al-Madinah, where Islam was born at the end of the sixth century AD. It is in these cities that the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him (PBUH),¹⁰ lived and preached Islam and where the religion's holy book, the *Qur'an*¹¹ was revealed and written (AlMunajjed, 1997). All Saudis are Muslims and Arabs (Long, 2005). The population is approximately 31 million people, including 6 million foreign residents (World Health Organisation (WHO), 2016).¹² The majority of the inhabitants are Arabs of nomadic or semi-nomadic origin who have, under the influence of rapid economic and urban growth, migrated to the major cities. Arabic is the official language and it occupies a sacred status, as it is the language of the Holy *Qur'an* (see Section 1.5.3). Many of the foreign workers or expatriates in the Kingdom are from other Arab countries or from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Indonesia and the Philippines.¹³ The neighbouring countries are Yemen, Oman, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Kuwait, Iraq and Jordan (see Figure 1-1).

⁹ Also spelt 'Mecca', it is the birthplace of the Prophet Muhammad and the location of the Ka'ba (Qibla). Muslims, also spelt 'Moslems', turn to pray in the direction of Makkah five times a day and try to make a pilgrimage there at least once in their lifetime (AlMunajjed, 1997).

¹⁰ Muslims, when speaking of Prophet Muhammad, follow with the statement 'peace be upon him' and as a practising Muslim and researcher, I follow this convention. However, to avoid repetition in this thesis, the statement will be abbreviated as PBUH.

¹¹ Also spelt 'Koran'.

¹² Retrieved from: <http://www.who.int/countries/sau/en/>
<http://www.stats.gov.sa/en/4068>.

¹³ Retrieved from: <http://www.uksacb.org/uk-en1313/page/kingdom-geography>.



Figure 1-1: Map of Saudi Arabia¹⁴

The country was founded and unified into a kingdom by King Abdul-Aziz Al Saud in 1932. The ruling system is monarchy: the King is Prime Minister, the Crown Prince acts as the deputy of the King, and there is a Council of Ministers¹⁵ who are appointed directly by the King. The King has political, religious and economic authority (Alkhazim, 2003). The country is mainly administered through a bureaucracy although the municipal elections in 2005 marked the first limited exercise of democracy. Political parties are banned unless they support the government (Khayat, 2017).

KSA culture is conservative in nature. The law is derived from Shari'a law, which was established after the death of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH to guide Muslims in all aspects of life according to the *Qur'an* and *Sunnah*.¹⁶ Islamic law includes 'a societal framework, an economic structure and behavioural and scientific teachings' (Alselaimi, 2014, p. 22). Shari'a law is integrated into all education programmes (AlMunajjed, 1997). Islamic values include knowledge, cooperation, compassion, honesty, justice, equality, human dignity and *shura*, consultative governance. Accordingly, there is a consultative council, *Majlis Al-Shura*, which

¹⁴ Retrieved from:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geography_of_Saudi_Arabia#/media/File:Saudi_Arabia_2003_CIA_map.jpg

¹⁵ Responsible for executive and administrative matters such as foreign and domestic policy, defence, finance, health, and education.

¹⁶ The traditions and sayings of the Prophet Muhammad recorded by his closest companions.

consists of 120 members whose primary function is to advise the King on local issues. They are appointed by the King and act as a parliament (Alkhazim, 2003).

The country is divided into five major provinces. The Central Province, Najd, is the centre of power in KSA and is where the capital city, Riyadh, and all ministers are located. It used to be one of the most socially conservative regions in the country and was not open to outsiders until the 1970s (Long, 2005). Many of the people who live in the central region of Najd are of Arab Bedouin origin. The Northern Province, Tabuk, borders Jordan and Iraq. Hail is the most famous city in this region. The Southern Province, Asir, is well known for its agriculture, and one of the Kingdom's summer resorts, Abha, is located there. The Western Province, Al-Hijaz, is characterised by its heterogeneous, ethnically diverse and cosmopolitan nature. The people there are of mixed racial origin¹⁷ and have long been involved in intercultural communication experiences with nationals from different parts of the world¹⁸ (AlQahtani, 2015). The major cities of Al-Hijaz, in addition to the holy cities of Makkah and Al-Madinah, are Jeddah¹⁹ and Al-Ta'if. Al-Hijaz women, in particular, are more "used to going outdoors" and expressing themselves publicly, a phenomenon more usually reserved for men in other regions, especially Najd (Yamani, 1996, p. 264). This may explain why all the women in this study are from Al-Hijaz where the number of female students enrolled in higher education is higher than elsewhere (Onsman, 2011) (see Section 1.5.6). The Eastern Province is known for its oil-production industry and has one fifth of the world's oil reserves. KSA is ranked as the largest producer and exporter of oil in the world and the export of oil is the main source of income for the country. People in this province tend to adopt attitudes that are more liberal than other Saudi regions. According to Onsman (2012), this could be a result of hosting American soldiers during the Gulf War and of the province's proximity to Gulf countries such as Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates and Oman that have a less conservative approach to Islam. I would argue that even before the Gulf War, the establishment of Aramco,²⁰ which required the presence of, and interaction with, American families, facilitated this openness. According to Long (2005), the Eastern Province is the most Westernised region in the Kingdom. The major cities in this province are Al-Ahsa, Al-Dammam, and Jubail, which is well known for its industrial complex.

¹⁷ They are Muslims who came on pilgrimages from various countries such as India, Indonesia, Turkey, North Africa, Yemen, Iran and others, and settled in the major cities of Makkah, Al-Madinah and Jeddah (AlMunajjed, 1997).

¹⁸ Due to providing services for the Muslim pilgrims (Long, 2005).

¹⁹ The commercial capital of KSA and the 2nd largest city, which serves as an entrance to the rest of the peninsula and contains the main commercial ports. The diplomatic community and the foreign ministry were located there before they were moved to Riyadh (Long, 2005).

²⁰ Formerly Arabian-American Oil Company, now The Saudi Arabian Oil Company.

Despite regional and social diversity between these provinces, they all share, to some extent, certain Arabic traditions, customs, and manners, regardless of any adaptation to urban modern life, in addition to the common language. These are discussed below.

1.5.3 The Arabic Language

Arabic is a Semitic language that is spoken by more than 200 million people throughout the Arab region. There are two existing varieties of Arabic, Standard Arabic (SA), which covers both Classical²¹ and Modern Standard Arabic, and Colloquial Arabic (CA). While SA refers to the variety of Arabic that is taught at school, has formal and official status and is, to some extent, uniform across the Arab region, CA refers to Arabic dialects that are spoken across and within Arab countries, with mutual intelligibility decreasing as the geographical distance increases, and does not have standardised orthography (Albirini, 2016). Ferguson (1971) described this situation as an example of diglossia, with SA representing the “High” variety and CA representing the “Low”. Shouby (1951, p. 286) explained this gap between the two by referring to medieval Europe ‘when educated people wrote and read Latin but spoke the different dialects which later developed into what are now the various European languages.’

The implication of this situation will be touched upon in Section 5.3.2 However, colloquial dialects also indicate a sense of ‘individuality’ within the larger Arabic language collective (Zaharna, 2009). According to the author, ‘one may use the vocabulary or idioms of a regional dialect to define one’s self, create bonds of shared identity with those familiar with the dialect, or draw boundaries with others unfamiliar with the dialect’ (Zaharna, 2009, p. 188).

1.5.4 Attitudes, Norms, Values and Social Behaviour: A Saudi Identity?

While the Saudi identity comprises many aspects as will be discussed below, the Islamic religion constitutes one of the main elements in it (Denman & Hilal, 2011) and this is reflected in people’s appearance and their behaviour.

A common element of KSA culture includes wearing what is considered decent Islamic clothing when in public. Saudi women wear the *abayah*, which is a long black robe-like dress covering the entire body, with a hijab and, for some, a veil.²² To most Saudis, this clothing is linked to chastity, purity, modesty, and acts as a safeguard for the preservation of family honour and the protection of Saudi women from men who are not relatives (AlMunajjed, 1997). Although some Saudis may adopt a more liberal stance and reject this religious obligation or, as some may perceive it, ‘social practice’, adherence is mandatory in public (see Quamar, 2016 for further

²¹ The variety of Quranic revelation.

²² Head and face cover respectively.

debate about veiling in KSA). Men in KSA usually wear a white loose-fitting, ankle-length robe with long sleeves similar to kaftan called *thobe*. Arabs, according to Nydell (2006, p. 69), a well known writer on Arab culture, pay considerable attention to their appearance when in public and they tend to adopt the attitude of ‘why would a person dress poorly when he or she can afford better?’ They believe that the way a person dresses indicates his wealth and social status.

KSA is a family-oriented society in which the family, rather than the individual, forms the most important unit (Long, 2005). This can be attributed to the tribal nature of society, where the individual’s aspirations and status are usually subordinate to the group (Zaharna, 2009; Jandt, 2013). I would further argue that Islamic teachings also emphasise unity and harmony among members of the group regardless of people’s poor adherence to these teachings at times. Islamic teachings also call for respect for the elderly, which contributes to this Saudi characteristic. Long (2005) states that all Saudis are socially organised into extended families which Patai (1969 cited in Long, 2005) described as patriarchal,²³ patrilineal,²⁴ patrilocal,²⁵ endogamous,²⁶ and, occasionally, polygamous.²⁷

According to Long (2005), of these five features only its patrilineal organisation remains unchanged. However, parental authority is a respected norm in Islam and children in KSA are socialised into obedience to the parents even when they have reached adulthood (AlMunajjed, 1997). This also indicates the survival of patriarchal features. Hence, marriages are usually arranged by mothers, sisters or relatives and, to a large extent, are parentally controlled. However, parents rarely force their children to marry someone against their will and conversely it is a deviation from the norm to marry someone against the wishes of the parents. The Saudi family tends to be tightly knit and ‘members expect to share responsibilities, achievements, joys and their good reputation’ (Alqahtani, 2011, p. 202). As a result, the behaviour of an individual member affects the family as a whole, whether it is a cause for pride or embarrassment. For example, children’s success or failure is often attributed to their parents who are, in consequence, given the credit or blamed.

For Hamod (1963), ‘the harsh environment of the Arabian desert, where one does not survive alone, spawned a nomadic Bedouin culture of fierce competition for resources and magnanimous hospitality’ (cited in Zaharna, 2009, p. 182). This may also explain the need to

²³ This refers to family authority being concentrated among the elders, male and female.

²⁴ This refers to tracing descent through the male line.

²⁵ This refers to family members living in close proximity.

²⁶ This refers to choosing spouses from within the same tribe, extended family or social group.

²⁷ This refers to having multiple wives.

be associated with in-groups or the favouring of group members over outsiders (Holliday, 2011). Jandt (2013, p. 240) described Arab cultures as ‘polychronic’ i.e. ‘oriented to people, human relationships, and family.’ Gender segregation is another common element in KSA culture that is derived from Islamic law and is evident in almost all aspects, whether in the public or private settings (i.e. outdoors or indoors respectively). Public facilities are, in general, segregated and socialisation processes rely on clear definitions of a male and a female way of life in education, the workplace, and when attending public and social events. While this practice is not welcomed by some individuals, it is mandatory by Islamic law and government policy (see Meijer, 2010 for further debate about gender segregation in KSA).

This is also reflected on men’s and women’s roles and positions in society. Men are more engaged in the public domain which is described as political and broad while women tend to stay within the private domain which is described as narrow, restricted and falls mainly within the domestic affairs (Nelson, 1974; Barakat, 1985; Long, 2005). According to Jamjoom & Kelly (2013), thirty years ago it was possible to characterise KSA as ‘the society of men’ because men dominated all the major positions of authority whether social, political, economic or professional. This was also reflected in social resistance to female’s formal education (discussed in 1.5.6). However, this description is no longer valid as the situation is changing nowadays and, according to Quamar (2016, p. 319), is ‘changing fast’ as many more Saudi women now also participate in the public sphere,²⁸ and occupy numerous such positions in society (see Quamar, 2016). However, I would agree with Nelson (1974, p. 558) that ‘women do approach public affairs but they do so from private positions’ (i.e. by following Islamic and social norms in terms of segregation and modesty). This has implications regarding power, authority and when women occupy senior positions in society (see Section 5.3.3).

While it is argued that women have been assigned a subordinate status in the Arab society (Barakat, 1985), feminism movement first started in Europe (Hannam, 2007) which indicates that the subordination of women is a universal phenomenon. However, regardless of the differences in roles and responsibilities between men and women in Islam, which adheres to their nature, and contrary to common misconceptions, Islam liberates women (see Syed, 2008). Idris (2007, p. 37) emphasises that shared language and religion make KSA culture ‘fairly homogeneous’. However, Yamani (1996) believes that the country is culturally heterogeneous with varying customs among tribal members and urban residents even within the same region, depending on the socio-economic position of the family. Yet, I would say that it is not the

²⁸ For example, in 2013, 30 women were nominated in the consultative council (*Majlis Al-Shura*).

financial status per se that affects this heterogeneity as educational level and cross-cultural experiences are of equal importance. Alsaggaf (2015) states that heterogeneity is also due to how religious the people are, which part of the country they live in, and how much they adhere to tribal traditions and family values. Thus, despite KSA ethnic and religious homogeneity, heterogeneity may be observed in certain aspects of the life of individuals.

1.5.5 People's Orientations and Patterns of Behaviour

Cultural variations are described in several theoretical frameworks, one of which is Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory, which explains the notion of individualism vs. collectivism:

‘the degree to which people in a society are integrated into groups. On the individualist side we find cultures in which the ties between individuals are loose: everyone is expected to look after him/herself and his/her immediate family. On the other collectivist side we find cultures in which people from birth onwards are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups, often extended families (with uncles, aunts and grandparents) that continue protecting them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty, and oppose other in-groups.’ Hofstede (2011, p. 11)

Triandis (1995, pp. 43-44) identified four aspects that characterise individualistic and collectivistic cultures:

1. The definition of the self is interdependent in collectivism and independent in individualism (see Markus & Kitayama, 1991) (Section 5.4.5). This is reflected in various aspects of daily life, including the extent to which individuals share resources with group members and conform to norms.
2. Personal and in-group goals are compatible in cultures with a collectivistic nature while personal goals have priority in individualistic cultures.
3. In collectivist cultures, norms, obligations and duties guide much of the social behaviour while attitudes, personal needs, and rights guide that of individualistic cultures.
4. In collectivist cultures, emphasis is on relationships, even when they are disadvantageous, while in individualist cultures the emphasis is on rational analyses of the advantages and disadvantages of maintaining a relationship.

Consequently, people's attitudes towards time vary accordingly. For example, in collectivist cultures delays are expected as time may not be as fixed as it is in individualist cultures (see Section 1.2).

Holliday (2011) claims that individualism hints at potential positive characteristics of critical thinking and being open to new experiences, characteristics that collectivists lack. He then explains that this lack of critical thinking is related to the tribal nature of those societies that

‘prize stability, where norms and obligations do not change.’ (Holliday, 2011, p. 9). Thus, according to Holliday, (2011, p. 10), collectivism is associated with ‘closed societies’.

Triandis (1995) added that people from the upper-class,²⁹ metropolitan, and usually younger generations, tend to be more individualist, in most societies, than lower-class, rural, and older generations. Males and females conform to this classification respectively (ibid).

The degree of individualism and collectivism in any culture, according to Triandis, (1995, p. 52) can be influenced by factors such as cultural ‘tightness’ and ‘looseness’. He described a tight culture as one whose members ‘conform to ingroup norms, role definitions, and values’, while members of loose cultures ‘either have unclear norms about most social situations or tolerate deviance from the norms’ (Triandis, 1989, p. 511). However, ‘Both tightness and looseness are situation-specific’ (Triandis, 1995, p. 53). For example, a culture may be tight in social and political situations and loose in economic or religious situations (ibid). Following Pelto’s (1968, p. 37) conception that ‘tight and loose societies form a continuum, with extreme cases at either end and varying degrees of tightness or looseness in between’, KSA can be considered as ranging between the two extremes and incorporating elements of both.

Zaharna (2009, p. 184), in describing the Arab populations, states that ‘the Arab world may reflect the Western-defined criteria of “collectivist.” However, there is a caveat to Arab cultures as collectivist—namely, individuality.’ Condon and Yousef (1975) emphasised the distinction between individualism and ‘individuality’ and stressed that while ‘individualism may suggest independence from the group, particularly group pressures to conform, ‘individuality refers to the person’s freedom to act differently within the limits set by the social structure’ (cited in Zaharna, 2009, p. 184). While individualism, as conceived in Western cultures, limits group involvement, individualism in Arab-Islamic cultures embraces both individual and group identification which is a ‘central value in the Arab-Islamic worldview’ (Ayish, 2003, p. 85). The author asserts that the ‘deeply ingrained individualism in Bedouin society’ can be traced back to pre-Islamic traditions and values e.g. honour, dignity, poetry and courage (Ayish, 2003, p. 82). Zaharna (2009, p. 185) points out:

‘The sense of individuality, and even speaking out against the collectivity, is evident in Islamic and cultural icons in the region. In the Quran, the idea of an individual proclaiming his or her belief in God, even at the risk of not only going against the group collective but being exiled from it, is exemplified in the related stories of the prophets [...]. The prophet Noah is shunned and called a madman. The prophet Abraham destroys the idols of his tribe and forsakes even his father. The prophet Lot is threatened for denouncing sin. These stories of earlier prophets give context

²⁹ The upper-class in KSA consists of the royal family and whoever relates to them, some tribal shaykhs and wealthy members of successful merchant families who have attained an upper-class life style (Rugh, 1973).

to the Prophet Muhammad, who is persecuted by his own tribe, the powerful Quraish of Mecca, and migrates to Medina.’

AlQahtani (2015, p. 54) concurs that ‘these religious examples, where the events are believed to have taken place in the Arabian Peninsula, show that Arab individuals could be just as individualist as so-called Western individuals’. Therefore, it would be inadequate to assume that Saudi individuals are totally influenced by the collectivistic nature of their culture as some writers argue (Long, 2005; Alwazzan & Rees, 2016). Labelling KSA culture as collectivist rather than as individualist is far too simplistic because the concepts of both collectivism and individualism are ‘problematic’ (AlQahtani, 2015, p. 51), ‘fuzzy’ and ‘difficult to measure’ (Triandis, 1995, p. 2). Holliday (2011, p. 11) asserts that using these terms should be handled with care because they have become ‘unavoidable’ and ‘on everyone’s lips’.

Voronov & Singer (2002) argue that a reductionist approach to explaining cultures is inadequate and does not take into account the complexities of human behaviour in varying situational contexts. In addition, individuals may not represent the entire population and researchers must be cautious with a classification that does not take into account individual differences, such as level of education, income, and adherence to the tribe. KSA ranks high in the collectivistic category in terms of religion, family structure, social obligations, respect for the elderly, and not openly challenging authority. Helping others is a moral obligation rather than personal choice among collectivists (Triandis, 1995). Also, financial assistance is expected between relatives and children constitute social security to their parents with the expectation of supporting them in any way necessary.

The values of collectivists according to Triandis, (1995, p. 74) include ‘security, good social relationships, in-group harmony, and personalized relationships’. Personal contacts may be more efficient in business than following rules and regulations as people rely on personal influence and intermediaries (Nydell, 2006). This is called *wasta* (see Section 5.4.1). The use of *wasta* according to Nydell (2006) may also save face (this is a concept I return to in Chapter 5) in the event of any refusal as collectivists are more likely to be embarrassed in social situations.

Collectivist behavior depends heavily on the situation and the context (Triandis, 1995). Reconsidering a decision or a regulation in view of personal circumstances is common (Nydell, 2006). Reciprocal favours are an indication of good manners and if one is not able to fulfil a friend’s request, refusals are usually expressed indirectly to maintain positive face-to-face encounters (ibid) (see Section 5.4.5). Modesty and humility guide most behaviour while

criticism is avoided and arrogance or overt displays of confidence may be criticised (Zaharna, 2009).

Another cultural variety according to Hall (1989, p. 113) is high-context and low-context cultures:

‘High-context cultures make greater distinctions between insiders and outsiders than low-context cultures do. People raised in high-context systems expect more of others than do the participants in low-context systems. When talking about something that they have on their minds, a high-context individual will expect his interlocutor to know what’s bothering him, so that he doesn’t have to be specific. The result is that he will talk around and around the point, in effect putting all the pieces in place except the crucial one. Placing it properly-this keystone- is the role of his interlocutor.’

Levine (1985) described the Arab communication style as indirect and emotionally rich while Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (1961) characterised the Arab culture as one of “being” as opposed to the Western culture of “doing”. Family background, age and rank are much more important in Arab culture than achievement and accomplishments (cited in Zaharna, 1995).

Sampson (1977) further highlights the point that in collectivistic cultures individuals have less privacy due to their dependence on the whole group. Nydell (2006), explains the concept of privacy among Arabs as equating to loneliness. Refusing to socialise and a demand for privacy may be taken negatively. She further adds that ‘people want to be surrounded by others when they are sick in the hospital or in a state of mourning, times when a Westerner might prefer to be alone’ (ibid, p. 21).

Triandis (2006, p. 21) expanded this notion and explained that ‘within culture, there are individuals who are *idiocentric* (think, feel, and behave similar to people in individualist cultures) as well as individuals who are *allocentric* (similar to people in collectivist cultures).’ He adds that ‘idiocentrism increases with affluence, when the person has a leadership role, much education, has done much international travel, and has been socially mobile [...] or has been acculturated for years to a Western culture.’ Whereas allocentrism increases with the person being ‘financially dependent on some in-group, is of low social class, has had limited education, has done little travel [...] is traditionally religious, and has been acculturated to a collectivist culture’ (Triandis, 1995; Triandis & Trafimow, 2001; Triandis, 2006).

While participants in this study have been acculturated into aspects of life in the UK, certain patterns of behaviour regarding, for example, education or transportation may have an effect on them. In relation to transportation, living in the UK does not require an individual to own a car as public transport provides a comprehensive and reliable travel network. In KSA, however,

public transport is still under construction³⁰ and women have minimal freedom of movement as they were,³¹ until very recently, forbidden by law to drive (Yamani, 1996). Women in KSA need to be accompanied by a male guardian³² or *mahram*³³ while commuting and the presence of a chauffeur in almost every ‘middle class’³⁴ house is essential.

‘Power and distance’ is another cultural variation (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005) that would be useful to describe the context of the academic system in KSA. In large-power distance cultures like KSA, power is accepted as part of society and ‘older people [are] respected and feared’ (Hofstede, 2001, p. 98), while in low-power distance cultures ‘older people [are] neither respected nor feared’ (ibid). This extends to the teacher-student relationship and results in great dependence on the teacher from the pupil’s part. Thus, the quality of one’s learning depends highly on the performance and excellence of the teacher whereas in small-power distance societies like the UK, this is determined by the student (i.e. teacher-centred vs student-centred approach) (ibid). Teachers in KSA use traditional teaching methods which include ‘rote memorization [...] and tests’ (Alsuwaida, 2016, p. 105) and they are treated with respect to the extent that they are almost never criticised or contradicted. The teacher-student relationship is said to be more formal than it is in the West (See Mostafa, 2006) where ‘each person is encouraged to be autonomous, self-directing, unique, and assertive, and to value privacy and freedom of choice.’ (Kim, et al., 1994, p. 7).

All these features may have an impact on the returnees’ attitudes towards their repatriation after being exposed to a very different culture while abroad.

Summing up, I have not sought to cover all aspects of cultural differences between KSA and UK in a single section, but rather to provide context with the intention of assisting the reader to comprehend the setting of the study and implications arising from it.

1.5.6 Education in KSA

Since the main reason behind the overseas experience of the participants in this study was to pursue education, it is worth mentioning elements of its origin and development in KSA.

Prior to the unification of the country in 1932, education used to take place in study circles, informal *kuttabs*, which were run by male or female religious scholars in mosques or homes

³⁰ The Riyadh Public Transport Project (RPTP) consists of trains and buses, and is scheduled to start running in 2018. Retrieved from: <http://www.railway-technology.com/projects/-riyadh-metro-saudi-arabia/>

³¹ A royal decree by King Salman was issued in September 2017 to lift the ban on women from driving and to ensure full implementation of the order by June 2018.

³² A guardian is typically a woman’s father, husband or brother.

³³ A relative with whom marriage is not permissible in Islamic law.

³⁴ People occupying a middle level in prestige and socioeconomic power (Rugh, 1973).

and whose purpose was to assist participants to memorise the Qur'an (Al-Rasheed, 2013). In addition, there were a few private schools funded by individual sponsors in Al-Hijaz region (AlMunajjed, 1997). Education at that time was limited to Islamic and Arabic teachings, Shari'a law and its interpretations. The first Directorate of Education was formed in Al-Hijaz in 1926 to supervise these private schools and start a government-supported education system for boys (ibid). After the Kingdom's unification and the discovery of oil in the 1930s, a huge change took place. The traditional, largely nomadic, nation began a modernisation process, as there was a need to utilise the significant revenues generated by the oil resources in the Kingdom. Plans for formal education were put forward. However, due to the world economic recession at that time, the development of modern education in KSA remained slow until the 1950s. The Ministry of Education was established in 1953, and the first public schools for boys were opened in the same year (AlMunajjed, 1997). Many Egyptian and other Arabic-speaking teachers were hired by the King and some Saudis were sent to study in Egypt (Abir, 1993) (see Section 1.5.7.1 below).

Even though in Islam education is considered to be highly important for boys and girls alike, the first public schools for girls were not established until late in the 1950s, when a group of young, educated middle-class men, who had been educated abroad in higher institutions, appealed to the government to establish schools for girls (Baki, 2004; Alsulami, 2016). These middle-class families used to enrol their daughters abroad in the boarding schools of Egypt and Lebanon. The first private school for girls was established in Jeddah in 1956 while the first official primary school for girls was opened in Riyadh in 1960 (AlMunajjed, 1997).

Since gender segregation is embedded in the very structure of society, by a combination of Islamic law and local traditions, coeducation is overwhelmingly perceived negatively as it is seen to violate the norms of society (ibid). However, King Abdullah University of Science and Technology (KAUST), which was opened in September 2009, was the first to allow coeducation and has become the symbol of reform in KSA (Meijer, 2010).

There are some differences in the male and female educational system due to the expectations of society in relation to gender role. It was not until recently that lifting the ban on physical education for girls in state schools was considered. Certain activities, such as sports, were exclusively for boys, while girls were encouraged to develop their home economic skills (an attitude related to public and private domains discussed earlier in 1.5.4). In spite of these differences, the importance of education is generally acknowledged and manifested in many study abroad programmes.

1.5.7 Scholarships in KSA

Historically, the availability of scholarships in KSA can be categorised into three phases (Bukhari & Denman, 2013):

1.5.7.1 The Foundation Period (1927-1953)

The first scholarship was granted in 1927, 50 years before the establishment of the first university in KSA. King Abdul-Aziz granted scholarships to 14 Saudi students, all from Al-Hijaz region, to pursue undergraduate studies in Egypt, chosen due to shared language and religion (see Figure 1-2).



Figure 1-2: the first scholarship holders

<http://www.alriyadh.com/1036160>

Based on the success of this programme, a second group of students was sponsored to study the management of wireless communications in England, and a third group was sent to Italy to study aviation. This period concluded with the sending of a group of students to Switzerland and Turkey to study law, political science and engineering. The scholarships were provided because there was an urgent need for efficient specialists and specific training that was not available in KSA at that time. In 1936, a Scholarship Preparation School was established by the Directorate of General Knowledge, now the Ministry of Education, to prepare students for overseas studies (Bukhari & Denman, 2013).

1.5.7.2 The Growth Period (1954-2004)

Until the foundation of the first Saudi university in Riyadh in 1957, King Saud University, the major focus for scholarships had been on undergraduate degrees. Then, the emphasis shifted to postgraduate studies.

According to Yamani (1996), the tendency towards seeking higher education abroad resulted from the increased oil income at that time, which affected the whole structure of society. She adds that from the end of the 1950s until the end of 1970s, wealthy families sent their children to study abroad, mostly to other Arab countries, Europe, or the United States. In the 1980s, parents became more reluctant to educate their children abroad as schools in KSA began to develop higher standards and started offering subjects such as computing and modern languages (ibid).

1.5.7.3 The Expansion Period (2005-present)

Since 2005, a significant number of Saudis have studied abroad or are currently studying abroad in order to achieve a higher standard of education for themselves and their country. This may have some implications for returning individuals as explained below.

1.5.8 Studying Abroad

As stated by Denman & Hilal (2011), although the United States (USA) is the most popular destination for study abroad in KSA, the UK is the second most popular and is increasingly favoured by Saudi students. This could be due to its proximity to KSA compared to other English-speaking countries and its better travel facilities. For example, the UK has less visa restrictions compared to the USA, especially following 9/11. In KSA, English is considered the *lingua franca*, so familiarity with the language may explain this increasing flow to English-speaking countries (ibid).

When students spend no less than four years in a country such as the UK, which is exceedingly different from what they are used to, they may become accustomed to new ways of life and introduced to differences in attitudes, roles and expectations. For example, the concepts of masculinity and femininity may differ, as well as the ideas about authority and relationships. This may have an impact on students' re-adjustment upon their return. Alhazmi & Nyland (2013) argue that living and studying in gender-mixed societies has the potential to change Saudi students, both socially and educationally, and may affect their experience of returning to KSA, albeit dependant on their own perceptions of gender in the world (AlQahtani, 2015).

Another example is related to *queuing* which is a common practice in the UK. When I first arrived here I went to the ATM³⁵ to withdraw some money. There was a long queue for one of the machines, but nobody was queuing for the other. Impatiently, I decided to try the other machine and was surprised to find it working as I assumed from the lack of a queue that it was broken. This illustrates that queuing is an aspect of cultural behaviour that is the norm to people in the UK. The social anthropologist Fox (2004) concurs that queuing in the UK is a sacred social rule that no one dares to break!

However, after having spent one or two years in the UK, I went home on a holiday and while I was shopping and heading to the till to pay, I was unconsciously queuing when actually there was no queue. It took me a few seconds to realise that this was not the custom in KSA, so I moved forward with a few people to negotiate with the cashier. This is not to say that queuing is not practised at all in KSA, as it is sometimes. Yet, it is not the norm. In fact, I appreciate this learned rule, which has become a habit, but I also know that I need to let it go on certain occasions.

1.6 Summary and Organisation of the Thesis

This introductory chapter outlines the purpose of the study, sets the background and presents the reader with the research context and relevant general characteristics of KSA culture that facilitate the reader's understanding of the study and assist in comprehending the findings. The second chapter provides a comprehensive literature review of research on cross-cultural re-entry, re-adjustment and repatriation phenomena. This is followed by a study design and methodology chapter, which includes a brief overview of my ontological and epistemological standpoints, information about the participants and the data collection procedure. The fourth chapter scrutinises the study findings, while the fifth chapter provides a thorough discussion and analysis of these findings. The last chapter offers general concluding remarks for the study as a whole, pointing out the implications, limitations and recommendations for further research.

³⁵ Cash machine

Chapter 2 : Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents an overview of the repatriation phenomenon by discussing the concept of 're-entry' as defined and explained by a number of scholars. Following this, a number of theoretical approaches to cross-cultural adaptation and the re-entry process are examined in order to attain a comprehensive understanding of the factors and consequences that underpin this transition and the way individuals deal with it. The discussion will then highlight the outcomes of the acculturation process and emphasise some factors that contribute to returnees' re-adjustment and which are commonly identified in the literature. The final part of the chapter will reveal issues around re-entry in relation to empirical studies devoted to different returning groups, but with a specific focus on the context of KSA.

To accomplish this, some computerised databases were examined, including ProQuest and JSTOR, with Google Scholar³⁶ being the primary web search engine. Search terms utilised to identify relevant studies were: cross-cultural adjustment, re-entry experience, repatriation, readjustment, international students, Saudi returnees and reverse culture shock. Moreover, a systematic review of the available re-entry literature was conducted (Szkudlarek, 2010; Knocke & Schuster, 2017) reflecting the need to explore this issue of 'returning home' further, as the implications remain hugely underestimated.

It should be noted that although this literature review includes many recent studies, some references are out-dated due to the fact that the field of readjustment is still under-researched and advances in it remain scarce despite the increased interest in this topic (Knocke & Schuster, 2017). This further highlights the importance of the current study in contributing to the existing body of literature on re-entry and to the field of cross-cultural adaptation.

2.2 Re-entry: The Homecoming Transition

Re-entry is the process of returning to one's home country after an extended period of time in another country. It is 'the experience of facing previously familiar surroundings after living in a different environment for a significant period of time' (Adler, 1981, p. 343). This process, like many other transitions, requires adjustment and can be viewed as a form of adaptation to one's environment (Hoang, 1999). It is referred to in the literature variously as 'repatriation transition' (Sussman, 2001), 're-acculturation' (Martin, 1984; Berry, 2005), 're-entry

³⁶ Recent research shows that Google Scholar is a credible and valuable internet-based search engine (Kousha & Thelwall, 2007).

adjustment’ (Uehara, 1986) ‘repatriation adjustment’ (Black, et al., 1992), and sometimes referred to as ‘reverse culture shock’ (Spradley, 1979). Meleis (2010:11 cited in Schartner, 2013) defines a transition as ‘a passage from one fairly stable state to another fairly stable state’, which is ‘triggered by critical events and changes in individuals or environments’. Arthur (2003) describes this transition as being more psychological than physical in nature, in which the returning individual presents him/herself to the home environment and feels accepted. Adler (1975, p. 18) depicted this experience as one that ‘begins with the encounter of another culture and evolves into the encounter with self’, highlighting its effect on one’s sense of self and its facilitating impact on growth. However, the literature seldom describes this subjective experience, which Osland (2000) calls ‘the journey inward’, and which may have a number of consequences on the self and others.

For this study, the definition provided by Westwood, et al. (1986, p. 223) will be adopted, viewing re-entry as:

‘the continuum of experience and behaviors which are encountered when an individual returns to a place of origin after having been immersed in another context for a period of time sufficient to cause some degree of mental and emotional adjustment’.

In this definition, time span plays an integral part with immersion and best fits the context of this study as participants have spent between 4-8 years in the host country, the UK, and have completed their PhDs, which involved some degree of immersion. Mental and emotional adjustment implies change and this has been mentioned in the literature as being a significant outcome in the process of adaptation that could, in particular, impact re-adjustment. Having developed specific routines and encountered countless experiences and situations while abroad, individuals’ ways of thinking about themselves and others, and their manner of behaving, may be altered. All of which may result in the adoption of new attitudes and conduct, including a change in self-concept or definition (Adler, 1975).

Consequently, returnees may well need to adapt to a new routine in their life upon their return, for example a new residence, role, or relationship. In other words, trying to accept the “new” normal (Roberts, 2012), which may be accompanied with a degree of personal turbulence, creates disturbance and involves challenges that require time for adjustment.

Despite the assumption that adjusting to a foreign culture, that is acculturation, during expatriation can be significantly demanding upon the sojourner due to being immersed in a foreign country, with different language, weather, customs, food and, in this case, the additional challenge of studying in a different academic system, many scholars argue that the second

process of *re-acculturation* is equally, if not more, challenging than that faced when leaving home (Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963; Adler, 1981; Martin, 1984; Black, et al., 1992; Storti, 2001; Chamove & Soeterik, 2006). Challenges are likely to occur because individuals expect to return to a familiar environment, but instead find that their perceptions regarding their home country have changed. During their absence, things have changed internally (at the individual level) and externally (environmental level). Returnees may find it challenging to continue from where they had left off when they initially moved away from their home country and may experience re-entry shock. Upobor (nd: 20 cited in Martin, 1984, p. 123) attributes the shock that sojourners experience upon their return to:

‘Change within the home environment itself during the intervening period of the individual’s absence, and change within the individual himself as a consequence of his stay abroad. In theory, the severity of re-entry shock is related to the magnitude of change in either the home environment, or within the individual and his circumstances’.

Martin (1984) further claimed that *expectations, change and awareness of change* are the main differences between the two processes, i.e. acculturation and re-acculturation. Thus, individuals may not expect to face challenges upon the return home in the same way as they expected them before studying abroad. They may also not be aware of the changes that have happened to them or to their home environment during their absence. Taking Martin’s claim into consideration, a number of terms have been introduced in the literature to differentiate reverse culture shock (RCS) from culture shock (CS): ‘return culture shock’ (Hogan, 1996), ‘transition shock’ (Bennett, 1998) and ‘self-shock’, highlighting ‘the double-binding challenge of identity,’ i.e. the individual’s *need* to confirm his/her sense of self and the *ability* to do so through shared meanings of behaviours (Zaharna, 1989, pp. 516-517). Likewise, Anderson (1994, p. 297) suggested the term ‘change shock’ as a substitute for CS as she considered the latter misleading, vague, overgeneralised and far from being culture specific. She added that change anywhere requires accommodation. Her conceptualisation is similar to that of Bennett (1998) in perceiving this process to be a normal one. Hence, explaining the concept of ‘change’ becomes vital in this part of the study. Change is a normal and gradual process that is likely to occur in any transitional experience when moving away from a ‘comfort zone’ in which self-confidence and self-esteem may be at risk. Change also happens as a matter of maturation, regardless of any cross-cultural experience. However, this experience of moving away and returning home may trigger a change in one’s cultural identity (Kartoshkina, 2015) (see Section 2.5) and may act as a catalyst to growth (Adler, 1975; Kim, 2005). According to Pitts (2009), cultural

immersion in a long-term sojourn paves the way for intercultural growth. Thus, individuals may also develop different coping strategies to deal with this change (see Section 2.6).

Re-entry has been described in the literature as a grieving process ‘grieving the loss of friends, experiences, and, to a certain extent, a way of life’ (Butcher, 2002, p. 356). Returnees may experience academic and interpersonal difficulties, work-related issues, social withdrawal, depression, anxiety and grief (Martin, 1984; Black, 1992; Rogers & Ward, 1993; Gaw, 2000; Butcher, 2002; Cox, 2004; Chamove & Soeterik, 2006; Wielkiewicz & Turkowski, 2010). Besides, a great number of returnees do experience maladjustment to their home country (e.g. Christofi & Thompson, 2007). Asuncion-Lande (1976 cited in Martin, 1984) categorised returning international students’ difficulties into six areas: academic, professional, social, cultural, linguistic and political. However, the degree of these difficulties, and the specific problems that are observed, vary³⁷ according to place, personality, attitude, type of cultural congruity, as well as other significant factors.

2.3 Adjustment vs. Adaptation

Having thrown some light on the reasons for the challenges upon a return, it is worth unpacking some of the ambiguity and inconsistency in the literature surrounding the terms ‘adjustment’ and ‘adaptation’. Although some researchers use the two terms interchangeably (Searle & Ward, 1990; Ward & Kennedy, 1994), others state that they do differ in meaning (Sussman, 2000). For example, Matsumoto, et al. (2006, pp. 387-388) define adaptation as ‘the process of altering one’s behaviour to fit in with a changed environment or circumstances, or as a response to social pressure’ (i.e. sociocultural domain), while adjustment was described as ‘the subjective experiences that are associated with and result from attempts at adaptation’ (i.e. affective evaluation of one’s life situation). On the other hand, Pitts (2005) views adjustment as a process in itself, leading to adaptation as an outcome of that process, while Anderson (1994, p. 300) states that ‘both terms refer to the achievement of a fit between the person and the environment, although the objectives and time frames differ’ i.e. adjustment relates to the satisfaction of short-term drives whereas adaptation is concerned with an individual’s long-term survival. Thus, for the purposes of this study, and since no attempt has been made to assess or evaluate whether these individuals have been successful or not in their re-entry experience (i.e. their

³⁷ Variations include individual differences in personality (Ditchburn, 1996; Harrison et. al., 1996), nature of the sojourn (purpose, length of the stay), organisational characteristics (Mendenhall et. al., 1987), familial and social networks (Adelman, 1988), connections with home and host co-nationals (Stone Feinstein & Ward, 1990) and cultural factors such as the cultural distance between home and the host countries (Searle & Ward, 1990) (cited in Sussman, 2002).

adaptation as an outcome), both terms are used synonymously, especially as the focus is on the subjective experiences of individuals as they encounter the process of re-entry as a whole.

2.4 Some Theoretical Approaches to the Re-entry Process

Theories underpinning re-entry have not advanced significantly since Martin's (1984) conceptualisation that re-entry is one form of cultural adjustment with its challenges being unexpected (Szkudlarek, 2010). Martin (1984) attributed the unexpected challenges to the assumption that home is a familiar place and no one from the home country expects the returnee to face any challenges. Hence, it becomes equally important to consider adjustment and readjustment literature in this chapter. Sandhu (1994) suggests that adjustment can take place both intrapersonally (psychologically) and interpersonally (socioculturally), along a personal-social continuum, which makes these issues of primacy.

Different approaches have been proposed to understand a sojourner's adjustment and readjustment. These include stage theories (e.g. Adler, 1975), curves of adjustment (e.g. Lysgaard, 1955; Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963), coping styles (e.g. Adler, 1981), culture learning (e.g. Furnham & Bochner, 1982), and intercultural communication (e.g. Martin, 1986). However, as Kim (2001) suggests, the field of cross-cultural adjustment remains inconsistent and perplexing and there is a lack of a single comprehensive theory of sojourner adjustment (Church, 1982). The section below outlines some classic and contemporary approaches to the study of sojourner adjustment.

2.4.1 Reverse Culture Shock and the W-curve Model

To understand the re-entry process, a concept that has been labelled in the literature as reverse culture shock (RCS) (see Section 2.2), it is essential to acknowledge its origin. RCS was initially derived from culture shock (CS), a process by which individuals adapt to significant contextual changes in their environment (Church, 1982). CS received critical attention in the late 1950s and early 1960s (Spradley, 1979) and among the first who studied it were Lysgaard (1955), Oberg (1960) and Gullahorn & Gullahorn (1963). Oberg (1960, p. 177) described culture shock as an 'occupational disease of people who have been suddenly transplanted abroad' and saw it being triggered by the anxiety that results from losing all familiar signs and symbols of social contact. As a result, individuals may feel like strangers when they arrive in a new country and face new challenges that make them uncertain and sometimes stressed while trying to adapt. Based on the emotional feelings and reactions of these individuals, Lysgaard (1955) presented a U-curve model covering three general stages: a 'honeymoon phase' or a 'peak' where individuals express excitement about their new experience (i.e. initial adjustment). This is

followed by a period of frustration and depression as they encounter daily activities and become confused by cultural differences leading them to the bottom of the curve (i.e. crisis). Finally, there is a move toward the top of the curve as they become more integrated and adjusted into their host culture (i.e. regained adjustment) (see Figure 2-1).

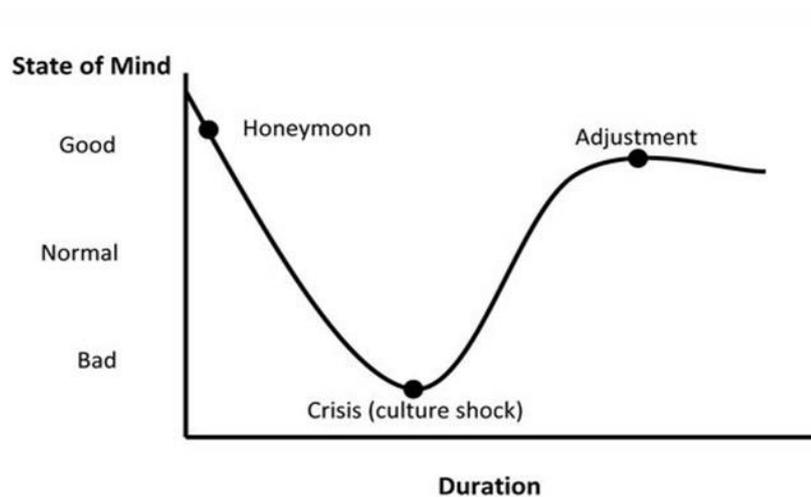


Figure 2-1: The U-Curve Model of Cultural Adjustment (Lysgaard, 1955)

While the classic U-curve model has gained in popularity due to its intuitive appeal, evidence to support it has been ‘weak, inconclusive and overgeneralised’ (Church, 1982, p. 542). Critics have suggested that the model is anecdotal and a-theoretical (i.e. lacking in theoretical underpinning) (Ward, et al., 2001). In line with the literature on stress and coping, recent findings do not support the idea of an initial honeymoon phase and suggest that this initial period can be overwhelming, with the sojourner experiencing negative feelings of apprehension and tension upon arrival in the host country (Ward, et al., 1998; Brown & Holloway, 2008). Longitudinal studies of sojourner transition emphasise that psychological adjustment is not predictable and remains variable over time (Ward, et al., 1998).

As a final phase of the sojourn, individuals return to their home country. Based on these psychological feelings during a sojourner’s adjustment, Gullahorn & Gullahorn (1963) extended the U-curve model with another U-curve depicting the return home experience as a W-curve cycle. This includes sojourners entry into the host country, adjustment, preparation to return, their return and readjustment (see Figure 2-2).

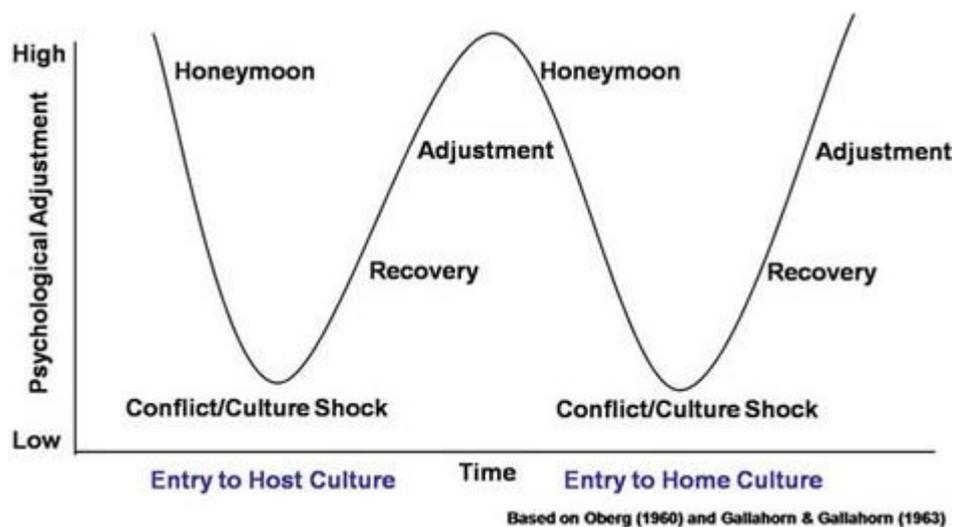


Figure 2-2: The Reverse Culture Shock Model (W-curve theory) Gullahorn & Gollahorn (1963)

It should, however, be noted that empirical research also finds limited support for the W-curve hypothesis. For instance, Sussman (2001) questions the curvilinearity of the readjustment process, while Adler (1981) argues that the transition is better explained by a flattened U-curve shape where the initial high period is short, lasting from a few hours to a month, and the low period beginning earlier. Similarly, Cox (2006, p. 23) points out that the honeymoon stage has been described in ‘a very simplistic way of labelling a complex cultural reaction’, and suggests a lower start of the curve, as people face immediate distress, and then a gradual rise towards adjustment, progressing from initial to complete adjustment.

In fact, some researchers (Ward & Kennedy 1996) have found a contrasting shape among sojourners, typically low satisfaction in the beginning and end of the sojourn and higher satisfaction in the middle (cited in Sussman, 2002a), which is referred to as an upward trend or M-shape (Hotta & Ting-Toomey, 2013). This further highlights the controversial nature of the debate, especially in relation to the initial stages. Onwumechili, et al. (2003) have concerns about the model in that they argue it incorrectly assumes the ultimate correspondence between cultural adjustment and readjustment, which may be similar in some ways but not in others, and further question the applicability of this model to multiple transition processes. Another drawback of the W-curve model is that it does not account for individual differences and identity changes. Cultural adjustment is a personal experience and every individual may identify the high and low points in the curve differently, which may result in a very personal version of the curve (Adler, 1975). It is these individual differences which make the adjustment process a subjective phenomenon (Rhein, 2018) and makes further research on affective

challenges of re-entry transition necessary to provide conclusive evidence as to the validity of this model (Martin, 1984; Szkudlarek, 2010).

From another perspective, both the U and W models conceptualise sojourners' adjustment and readjustment as a negative experience, neglecting the positive aspects of intercultural encounters and its growth-facilitating nature (Kim, 2001). Kim (2008) argues that by engaging in multiple intercultural encounters over time (e.g. interaction with host nationals, managing a new academic system, and dealing with everyday activities) sojourners will be able to build a repertoire of cultural knowledge and experiences that can lead to intercultural growth and identity transformation. This is in line with the revised version of the W-curve model, which was proposed by Ting-Toomey (1999, p. 251), who conceptualised the peaks and valleys in the curve as part of the 'change-and-growth process' leading to identity change.

For this study, Ward et al.'s (2001) view of culture shock as an active process dealing with change rather than considering it a stressful event is useful to best understand the re-entry experience of these individuals.

2.4.2 The Transition Model

Within this model, Bennett (1998) perceives culture shock as part of the general transition experience, which involves a reaction to loss and change. Cultural adaptation is considered a natural process and part of the human experience. Thus, a person's responses to the experience and how well he/she adapts depends on his/her personality traits rather than predictable stages as conceived in the U-curve model outlined in Figure 2-1. This makes the adaptation process a subjective experience and one that is unique to the sojourner (ibid). The significance of self-awareness was also highlighted in this model. Sobre-Denton & Hart (2008) assert that this model is robust in considering adaptation to be a normal phenomenon and one that is acceptable because everyone else will experience it in some way. However, the authors also point that this model could be 'too person-specific', questioning its applicability to group settings (Sobre-Denton & Hart, 2008, p. 540).

2.4.3 Integrative Theory of Communication and Cross-Cultural Adaptation (ITCCA)

This model was developed from the Stress-Adaptation-Growth Model (Kim, 2001; Kim, 2005) which conceptualises the process of cultural adaptation as a spiral shape of three stages: stress, adaptation and growth (see Figure 2-3). It depicts the relationship between two conflicting forces, 'the need for acculturation and the resistance to deculturation'³⁸ which ultimately leads to growth (Kim, 2001, p. 55). According to Kim (2005, p. 384), the spiral shape shows the

³⁸ That is, 'unlearning' some of the old cultural elements (Kim, 2005, p. 382).

response to each stressful situation with a ‘draw-back-to-leap’ attempt. The circular motion becomes smaller over time, and the sojourner becomes more capable of managing the stress. This, as Kim argues, eventually leads to growth. Moreover, the spiral interaction can only occur through personal (within the self) and social (between two or more individuals) communication, and continues as long as there are new challenges, leading to adjustment over time (ibid).

While this model embraces both the negative and positive perspectives to cross-cultural adaptation in a complementary manner, and often simultaneously, i.e. a stressful, but growth stimulating process (Kim, 2005), Sobre-Denton & Hart (2008) believe that it does not take into account individuals’ differences and its impact on adjustment. For a more detailed application of this model see Pitts (2009) and Pitts (2016).

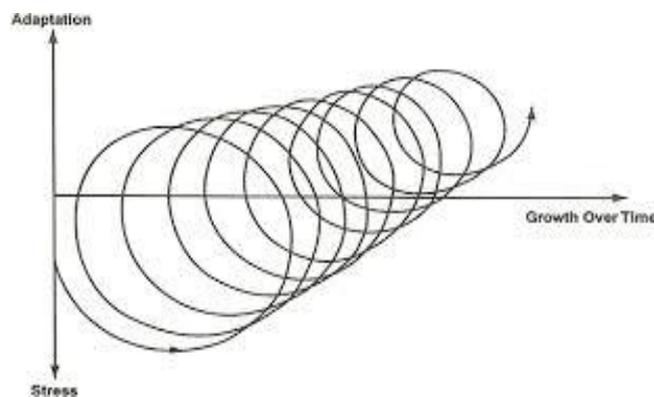


Figure 2-3: The Stress-Adaptation-Growth Dynamic (Kim, 2001, p. 59)

2.4.4 The ABCs of Acculturation

In line with the concept of perceiving sojourners as dynamic members rather than victims of culture shock, and by following Martin & Harrell’s (2004) assumption that re-entry phenomenon involves affective, behavioural and cognitive processes, three theoretical approaches to the study of cross-cultural transition have become pertinent in recent years (Hammer, et al., 1978; Ward, et al., 2001; Szkudlarek, 2010; Scharner, 2013):

1. Stress and coping approaches, representing the ‘Affective’ element of cross-cultural transition.
2. Cultural-learning and social skills approaches, representing the ‘Behavioural’ aspect.
3. Social identification approaches, representing ‘Cognitive’ processes.

Within the first stream, many frameworks have been proposed, one of which is Berry’s (1997) model of acculturation which conceptualises the acculturative experience as a significant life

event, comprising changes in life and characterised by stress that may include changes in individuals' attitudes or changes in their social behaviour (Berry, et al., 2006), affecting the individual's psychological well-being and requiring his/her cognitive evaluation of the situation. If the experience is perceived negatively by the individual, he/she will experience acculturative stress and will have to develop coping strategies to deal with it (Berry, 1997). In a similar way, and by assuming some similarities between the two processes (i.e. acculturation and re-acculturation), the return home experience can be viewed as comprising emotional reactions and mental responses, which may affect the psychological well-being of returnees. The psychological consequences of re-entry are influenced by individual and situational variables (Westwood, et al., 1986; Ward, et al., 2001), i.e. micro and macro level factors, including personality attributes which are believed to be critical in re-entry (Martin & Harrell, 2004), e.g. openness, personality strength, and positivity (Kim, 2001), gender (e.g. Gama & Pedersen, 1977; Brabant, et al., 1990; Rohrllich & Martin, 1991; Cox, 2004), marital status (e.g. Cox, 2004; Hyder & Lövblad, 2007), age (e.g. Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963; Rohrllich & Martin, 1991; Cox, 2004; Hyder & Lövblad, 2007), coping styles (e.g. Adler, 1981; Sussman, 2002b; Cox, 2004) and cultural distance (e.g. Furnham & Bochner, 1982). Some of these variables are discussed in Section 2.6 and Section 2.7 below.

While psychological consequences among different groups of returnees have been acknowledged in the literature (Szkudlarek, 2010), research to date tends to emphasise the negative aspects of re-acculturation (e.g. Sussman, 2000; Christofi & Thompson, 2007). Moreover, there is limited literature that examines coping responses over time, an issue that is addressed in this study.

In contrast to stress and coping models, which underscore the affective element of sojourner adjustment, cultural-learning and social skills approaches focus on behavioural aspects. The emphasis is on learning the relevant characteristics of the new environment (Furnham & Bochner, 1982) including language, communication patterns and social skills, in order to be able to function effectively. Upon repatriation, however, re-activation, due to familiarity with the environment, rather than learning this social conduct, is what is required. However, as a result of the changes that took place while abroad, personal and social expectations may be distorted and lead to psychological disturbances (Westwood, et al., 1986). Black et al., (1992) argue that one of the essential characteristics of repatriation adjustment is behavioural control which can be facilitated by cognitive modification before the return by forming realistic expectations (see Black, 1992). However, Rogers & Ward (1993) found no significant relationship between the two, calling for a further investigation on this topic.

The third approach to sojourner adjustment is concerned with the way in which individuals view themselves and how they perceive 'in-group' and 'out-group' members (Ward, et al., 2001). Drawing on social identity theory (Tajfel, 1978; 1982), this approach also investigates the cognitive element of adjustments such as cultural identity (e.g. Kim, 2001), and people's awareness of change and their ability to cope with it (e.g. Adler, 1981; Schlossberg, 1981).

Having outlined the interconnected nature of these theoretical approaches to the study of cross-cultural transition, it becomes vital to explain their effect on re-entry. There is a need for a dynamic theory that combines the impact of the experience of studying abroad on re-entry, taking into account time since the return with other personal and situational variables. This will overcome the limitation of Gray & Savicki's (2015) study which focused on the affective and behavioural domains upon re-entry but did not consider its cognitive side. I would say, based on the above explanation, that the cognitive element is implicit within each approach and is one that cannot be avoided.

Bearing in mind that cultural identity changes, and different coping styles that returnees are likely to embrace upon repatriation are outcomes of the acculturation process, both will be discussed below.

2.5 Cultural Identity Changes

The effect of changes in cultural identity on returning to the home country has been investigated and considered by many scholars. However, defining cultural identity seems to be a challenging task due to the complexity surrounding each separate term, 'culture' and 'identity' (Dervin, 2012). According to Dervin (2012, p. 183), 'cultural identity is what we construct whenever we are in contact with other human beings - regardless of the fact that they are from the same 'environment' or not'. For example, a returnee may share different aspects of culture with another returnee from a different country rather than with a Saudi who has never experienced cross-cultural encounters. This indicates the acceptance of our own plurality, as well as that of others, and a recognition that we have different cultures (ibid) (see Section 1.5.1 for an explanation of the concept of culture). Clifford and Marcus (1986) stated that 'culture cannot be but plural, changing, adaptable, constructed ...' (cited in Dervin, 2012, p. 183). The above definitions are useful here in taking into account the impact of the host country environment on individuals' reconstruction of the self upon return, and how this may affect their overall adjustment.

Sussman (2002b) examined the relationship between cultural identity and the repatriation experience among 113 American teachers who had lived in Japan. The findings suggest that

different changes in cultural identity act as predictors of different repatriation experiences. Sussman's (2002b) Cultural Identity Model (CIM), a social psychological framework, offered four types of identity alteration: affirmative, subtractive, additive, and global (intercultural), with each type predicting a specific repatriation outcome. An affirmative cultural identity means a strengthening of the positive feelings for the home country and a positive repatriation experience. She characterises those types of returnees as 'grateful repatriates' (Sussman, 2002a, p. 8), as they maintained their cultural identity and had an easier repatriation adjustment. Those with subtractive and additive characters integrate, to a large extent, into the host culture and are expected to experience repatriation negatively. Individuals with an additive cultural identity still identify strongly with the home culture, but have also "added" values and behaviours from the host culture, while those with a subtractive identity find it difficult to relate to people in the home country as they perceive themselves differently and feel less positive about their home culture (Sussman, 2002a; Sussman, 2002b). Global or intercultural identifiers feel part of the "global society" due to their multiple international experiences, and they can quickly shift their behaviour and their way of thinking from one culture to another, becoming bi-cultural or multicultural. This familiarity makes the return a moderate to a positive experience.

Cox (2004) used different terms to describe cultural identity outcomes of 101 American sojourners returning from work assignments in 44 different countries. Cultural identities were categorised as home-favoured, host-favoured, integrated and disintegrated. Cox (2004) found that the home-favoured and integrated had more positive repatriation adjustments than the host-favoured and disintegrated. This partly supports the findings of Sussman (2002b) who, when comparing affirmative identity with home-favoured, concluded both have a positive impact on repatriation. However, when comparing Sussman's (2002b) additive identity with Cox's (2004) integrated identity, the former had an adverse effect on the return experience while the latter had a positive one (Hyder & Lövblad, 2007).

Kohonen (2008) examined the concept of identity construction among 21 Finnish expatriates who had returned from long-term international assignments of between 2 and 5 years. The narrative data revealed three types of identity modifications: identity shifters, balanced identities, and non-shifters. Identity shifters are those who experienced profound change during their experience abroad. This type resembles Sussman's (2002b) subtractive and additive identities and Cox's (2004) host-favoured and disintegrated identities in their unpleasant repatriation experience compared to the other two.

Having outlined the variation in cultural identities upon repatriation as seen by different authors, there is a possibility that they may co-occur or convert one to another. By this I suggest that more than one type of identity can occur simultaneously, be relevant, or be in tension against each other at any given time, according to the situation. For example, individuals might adapt to the education system but not to broader society, or vice versa. Thus, drawing a clear-cut distinction between these types of cultural identities may, at times, not be possible. To the best of the author's knowledge, no study has investigated the effect of cultural identity changes on Arab or Saudi returnees. Assuming that the original cultural values (e.g. more collectivistic than individualistic, strong affiliations and some religious aspects) may influence cultural identity type, this would yield a fruitful study within the context of readjustment.

2.6 Types of Returnees

In an attempt to highlight potential growth as an important aspect of the re-entry experience, Adler (1981) studied 200 corporate and governmental employees returning to Canada after working overseas for an average of 2 years, using interviews and questionnaire surveys. In her exploratory study, a distinction between adjustment and growth was highlighted. While adjustment was indicated by participants' recognition and appreciation of both the overseas and re-entry experiences, growth was characterised by their awareness of how they and their environments had changed. Adler (1981) suggested that awareness of change is a requirement for a re-entry experience characterised by growth. She proposed four types of returnees based on their modes of coping and adjustment to work. She emphasised attitudinal responses to re-entry: re-socialisation, proactivity, alienation, and rebelliousness. These four types were distributed between two groupings: overall attitude, showing the degree of adjustment, whether optimistic or pessimistic, and specific attitude, reflecting the degree of growth, whether passive or active (see Figure 2-4). Findings revealed that re-socialised returnees are 'optimistic and passive' as they tended to detach themselves from the overseas experience and not implement any change on a personal or environmental level. They experienced adjustment rather than growth. Proactive returnees are 'optimistic and active' and they tended to integrate both the foreign and home country experiences. They demonstrated the most growth. Alienated returnees are 'pessimistic and passive' and tended to distance themselves from their home culture and organisations, whereas rebellious returnees were 'pessimistic and active', acting aggressively, rather than passively, to the home environment. While both the re-socialised and alienated returnees experienced little growth, the re-socialised acted positively upon their return, whereas the alienated exhibited a more negative attitude towards adjustment.

This model is based on Lewin's suggestion (1972, cited in Martin 1984) that for growth to occur, there must be awareness of self-change and an openness to learn from experience. It was tested by a number of scholars, including Alandejani, (2013). However, an individual's tendency to embrace one type rather than another may not be consistent over time (Church, 1982), thus bringing into question the validity of this description. Other factors, such as gender and age, may influence the choice of a particular coping mode rather than another, at certain times, and settings, other than a work setting, which was the focus of Adler's (1981). For example, a young female may re-socialise with her friends but become alienated when meeting with family members, or vice versa. This suggests the need for further exploration of this issue.

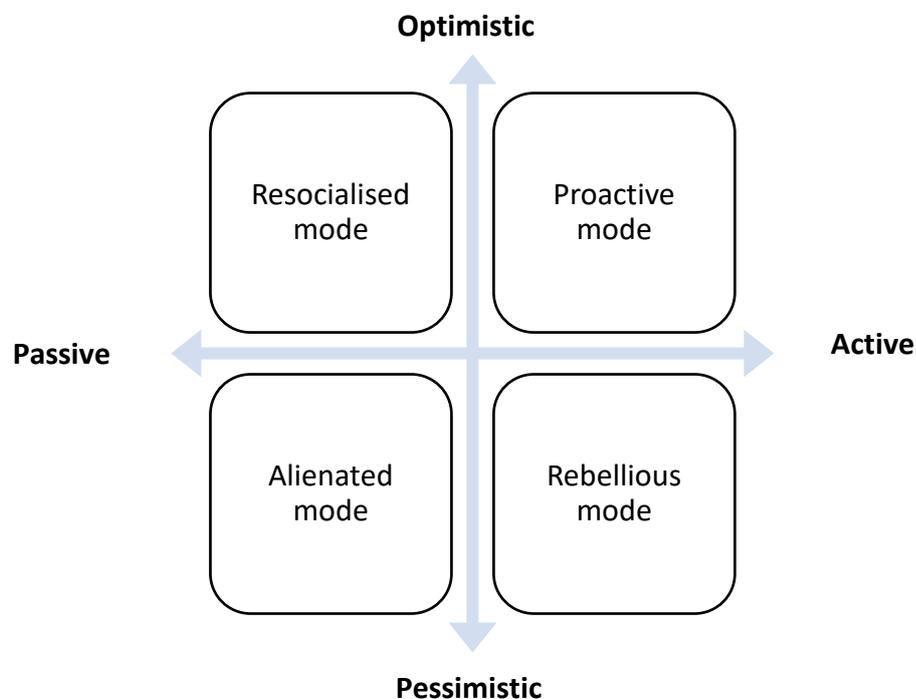


Figure 2-4 Re-entry Coping Modes (adapted from Adler, 1981)

2.7 Contributory Factors to Returnees' Re-adjustment

Both macro and micro-level factors have been found to affect adjustment and are addressed in acculturation literature (Ward, et al., 2001). Macro-level factors include characteristics of the society of origin, aspects of the host society, and inter-group relations (Schartner, 2013), while micro-level factors refer to attributes of the individual such as gender, age, personality, religion, prior intercultural experience, marital status, educational level, and characteristics of the

situation, for example, length of the sojourn, cultural distance, time since return, social contact and attitudes of individuals within the home country towards returnees and housing conditions (Szkudlarek, 2010). While both individual and situational variables have been found to affect readjustment, only those that are of direct relevance to this study are discussed in the following section.

2.7.1 Gender

While men and women have been found to experience re-entry quite differently (Cox, 2004), literature regarding the importance of gender in re-entry adjustment remains inconsistent and mainly reflects the context of the USA, whether it be American sojourners or foreigners in the American context. Empirical studies of international students who underwent education in the USA and returned to their countries state that women, in general, experience more difficulties upon re-entry, particularly those with children (Gama & Pedersen, 1977; Brabant, et al., 1990). Both these studies contend that this may be the result of other factors, such as cultural distance (see Section 2.7.4). In addition, other studies (e.g. Brown & Brown, 2009; Jung, et al., 2013) report that females who develop a new gender role abroad find the return to be challenging as their new identity becomes incompatible with the traditional gender role expectations from their society i.e. returning from an individualistic to a collectivistic culture (see Sections 1.5.4 and 1.5.5).

In contrast, Rohrlich & Martin (1991) examined the experience of American students who sojourned in different countries in Western Europe for one semester and returned to the USA. They found that females were more satisfied than males upon re-entry and attributed this to the fact that they returned to a more independent lifestyle than the one experienced overseas when living as part of a host family. This again highlights the active role of culture in re-entry and the significance of host and home cultural distance (see Section 2.7.4). On the contrary, Wielkiewicz & Turkowski (2010) explored the experience of American college students who sojourned to 13 different countries and returned home. They found that females were less able to cope with anxieties and had a stressful relationship with a significant other upon return. Similarly, Stringham (1993) studied the repatriation of American missionary families and found that re-entry transition was relatively more difficult for women. However, Sussman (2001) found no relationship between gender and repatriation distress, calling for more exploration on this issue.

2.7.2 Marital Status

Some studies show that single sojourners experience greater difficulties upon the return than married ones (Cox, 2004; Hyder & Lövblad, 2007). According to Cox (2004), single sojourners identify more with the host culture and upon return experience higher levels of social difficulty. Marriage, on the other hand, seems to provide a framework of social support upon return. However, these empirical studies are limited to just one returning missionary group and further studies are needed to validate this conclusion.

2.7.3 Age

There is inconsistency in the literature regarding age as a factor in re-entry adjustment. Some research shows a positive relationship between age and re-entry adjustment, with the older the returnees, the fewer challenges they experience upon re-entry (e.g. Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963; Rohulich & Martin, 1991; Cox, 2004; Hyder & Lövblad, 2007). Gullahorn & Gullahorn (1963), studied the experience of 5300 returning American scholars using cross-sectional methodology and applying culture shock theory. Their findings revealed that the readjustment process was not as stressful for older scholars as it was for younger ones. The researchers attributed this to the fact that older people are well established in their careers while younger ones felt lost upon their return. It seems likely that returning to a secure job minimises any feeling of uncertainty and contributes to a positive re-entry. However, it is the type of re-entry concerns that may affect readjustment, as young individuals are more concerned about rebuilding personal relationships while older returnees are more concerned about work-related issues (Szkudlarek, 2010). Thus, in relation to Gullahorn & Gullahorn's (1963) study, older returnees experienced a change in their evaluation of certain situations and practices and sometimes felt nostalgic for their host universities while younger returnees faced identity conflict and discovered a shift in values as a result of 'psychological relocation' which they had never experienced before. Having experienced cross-cultural transition for the first time, young returnees are given the opportunity to feel independent and as a result, returning home could restrict this independence and contribute to any stress. On the contrary, Stringham (1993) examined the readjustment of missionary families and found that children seemed to readjust more easily than their parents. However, some researchers (e.g. Uehara, 1986) question the existence of any relationship between the two.

2.7.4 Cultural Distance

Cultural distance, the differences between the host and home country environments, has been shown to affect the adjustment process (Furnham & Bochner, 1982; Searle & Ward, 1990), as well as the repatriation experience (e.g. Kidder, 1992). In their study of international students'

adjustment to British society, Furnham & Bochner (1982) classified 29 different countries into three groups (near, intermediate and far), according to similarities in religion, language, and climate to British society. KSA was categorised as being far and very different. The authors found that culture distance and social difficulty are strongly related, i.e. the adjustment is more difficult for students coming from cultures that are very different from the host. This is consistent with other findings in the literature (Searle & Ward, 1990; Faragallah, et al., 1997; Razek & Coyner, 2013).

Variables related to cultural distance include individualism/collectivism, masculinity/femininity, uncertainty avoidance, and power distance (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005) some of these are discussed in (Section 1.5.5).

Another way to conceptualise cultural distance is through the categorisation of 'tight' or 'loose' cultures (Pelto, 1968; Triandis, 1989; 1994) (see Section 1.5.5).

It is theorised that sojourners who come from 'tight' cultures, where a behavioural code of conduct is, to some extent, strictly defined, and sojourn in a 'loose' culture, with few confining norms, experience negative re-entry compared to those who come from 'loose' cultures and sojourn in 'tight' cultures (Rohrlich & Martin, 1991). This could be related to the increased restriction on personal freedom during the sojourn which makes the return home a chance to regain this freedom, resulting in a positive re-entry. By contrast, in an ethnographic study of postgraduate international students in the UK, Brown & Graham, (2009) found that students from 'collectivist' societies, which could be considered 'tight' due to mutual obligations and expectations of conformity, develop individualistic characteristics while abroad, particularly independence and personal freedom, which may be incompatible with the home country norms upon re-entry and, as a result, may cause some issues (e.g. McDermott-Levy, 2013). However, our individualistic and collectivistic tendencies differ according to the people with whom we interact and is different, for example, towards one's family as opposed to strangers (Gudykunst, 2004). Where and when we tend to be more individualistic or more collectivistic also differs according to the situation and time. This point raises further questions about whether such labelling is in any way useful.

2.7.5 Relationships Dynamics

One of the challenges that returnees face upon their return to their home country is the possibility of needing to redefine their relationships with family and friends who did not study abroad (Martin, 1986). Martin (1986) explored the change in relationships between family and friends of returning US students and found that relationships with friends were more

challenging than with parents or siblings, which were perceived to have changed more positively. This finding was also supported by Kartoshkina (2015). Wielkiewicz & Turkowski (2010) found that romantic relationships with a significant other did not seem to be negatively affected by the return to USA from different countries.

From another perspective, Al-Krenawi & Graham (2005) examined the re-acculturation process in relation to the marital distress of two Palestinian families who lived in the USA and returned home. The authors concluded that marital distress upon re-entry was a result of a husband's adherence to the traditional gender norms of the society (e.g. polygamy), while the acculturation process abroad challenged aspects of the wife's traditional role (e.g. being part of the extended family), and this was further reinforced upon re-entry.

2.8 Re-entry Issues: Some Empirical Studies

Despite the growing scholarly interest in exploring factors that influence re-adjustment, a great deal of research has focused on the context of the USA (Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963; Martin, 1986; Stringham, 1993; Gaw, 2000; Sussman, 2001; Sussman, 2002b; Cox, 2004; Arouca, 2013; Kartoshkina, 2015; Pitts, 2016). For example, Kartoshkina, (2015) found that US university students articulated a balanced view towards re-entry, describing it as a bitter-sweet re-entry. However, while the aim was to provide a deeper understanding of the nature of the return, the study lacked the depth³⁹ required to fulfil this aim as the focus was on general tendencies and did not take into account the personal, cultural, or situational factors that may affect this experience such as gender and cultural distance. The present study aims to rectify this limitation.

In her qualitative study, Pitts (2016) used a grounded theory approach to elaborate on Kim's (2001) model of the Integrative Theory of Communication and Cross-Cultural Adaptation (ITCCA) (see Section 2.4.3) and expanded its scope to include the experience of American returnees. Findings revealed that it is not the sojourn per se that is behind any experience of growth experience, but the difficulty of handling communication competence, personal and cultural identities, and interpersonal relationships upon return that contributed to this experience and led to 'intercultural personhood' (Kim, 2008). Although the study offered insight into the immediate and long-term re-entry experience with data collected once at re-entry and six years later, the six-year gap made it difficult to establish temporality. Thus, this study will benefit from more frequent intervals in terms of data collection.

³⁹ For example, there was no 'Why' questions.

2.8.1 Studies in Arab and Islamic⁴⁰ Countries

Within the context of Arab and Islamic nations, Jaradat et al. (1984) investigated Jordanian returnees' attitudes to family life and social relations, as well as their attitudes towards political and economic issues. The authors found that while returnees' attitudes to family life and social relations were positively related to the length of time since the return, i.e. the longer the time since the return, the more positive views the returnees expressed, place of graduation was the main contributor for variability in attitudes towards political and economic issues. That is, the returnees were more likely to be influenced by the political ideology of the host country, especially if they had left the home country at an early age when their attitudes were not fully formed. Attitudes towards family life and social relations were positively influenced by religion. It is therefore not surprising that Jordanian Muslims expressed better adjustment to mainstream Jordanian Islamic society than did Christians, since the attitudes held by the latter may differ from the primary Jordanian norms (Jaradat, et al., 1984).

It would be interesting to see how similarities in these variables⁴¹ would affect re-adjustment, especially given that the context in which this study has been conducted differs financially and politically from KSA.

In her exploratory study, Şahin (1990) examined the psychological and educational problems of second-generation Turkish adolescents returning from Germany, taking into account variables that affected their adjustment including age, gender, time since return, and time spent abroad. The author concluded that re-entry was problematic for these students but that its psychological and educational challenges tended to decrease by time, supporting the findings of the above study. However, both studies were quantitative, and called for more in-depth studies to understand the relationship between these variables and re-adjustment.

Within the Gulf region, in a recent qualitative study, McDermott-Levy (2013) explored the re-entry experience of seven Omani female nurses who studied in the USA and returned to Oman. It was found that their re-entry experience was influenced by the personal and professional transformation resulting from studying abroad. Some of the challenges they faced included trying to resume family responsibilities upon their return and readjustment to the simple, yet restricted, life in Oman. This is consistent with other studies in the literature (e.g. Brabant, et

⁴⁰ The word "Arab" is a linguistic grouping of individuals whose primary language is Arabic, whereas the word "Muslim" is a religious grouping of individuals who follow or practice the Islamic faith. Therefore, many Arabs are not Muslims just as many Muslims are not Arabs (Hastings, et al., 2011). Islamic countries have been classified according to the official religion of the country i.e. Islam. Another classification is related to the majority of the population being Muslim.

⁴¹ Length of time since the return, religion, and the host country from which the participants graduated.

al., 1990) who found that Muslim female students had difficulty adjusting to family and personal life upon return, especially when returning to countries that have prescribed gender roles (Ward, et al., 2001). However, one drawback of this study is that the participants had to respond in English while they are non-native English speakers. This could have had an impact on the quality and quantity of the data.

2.8.2 Studies in KSA

Empirical studies have been scarce within the context of KSA. In his large-scale study, Al-Mehawes (1984) touched upon the experience of 280 Saudi male returnees who spent a minimum of 2 years in the United States and studied different academic majors. By examining the degree to which various difficulties⁴² with re-entry were experienced using surveys, he found that the returnees identified the most difficult issues to be cultural, social, professional, interpersonal, health related and educational, ranking them by degree of difficulty from the most to the least. The study revealed that most Saudi returnees experienced re-adjustment problems, with younger returnees facing greater difficulties. However, the first six months after the return was a particularly volatile period for all. The author mentioned the use of both qualitative and quantitative methods. However, qualitative findings could not be traced, leading to purely statistical conclusions. In an attempt to overcome this limitation, Alandejani (2013) examined the re-adaptation and re-adjustment experience of six Saudi female scholars upon their return to KSA from the USA and the UK. More specifically, in her narrative enquiry, she explored the challenges the returnees faced in the workplace in transferring their newly acquired knowledge to their institutions. She found that all participants went through reverse culture shock. While challenges to implementing knowledge varied among these females, they all agreed that patience and a positive attitude were the keys to overcoming any challenges. One limitation of this study, however, is that the time of the interview in relation to the participants' return was not mentioned and this may have affected the responses. Relying on memories in a narrative enquiry may be unreliable in terms of retrieving accurate descriptions of specific moments and feelings. That said, both studies concluded that Saudi Arabian returnees experience re-adjustment problems to varying degrees (see Al-Mehawes, 1984; and Alandejani, 2013). It is, therefore, evident that this global, and growing, phenomenon deserves further investigation, especially since this cultural transition may be accompanied by identity transformation, which needs to be highlighted to understand, enhance, and support the re-entry process.

⁴² Based on a previous study by The National Association for Foreign Students Affairs (NAFSA) in 1974, six re-adjustment categories were developed: cultural, social, linguistic, national/political, educational and professional.

It is hoped that this study will contribute to the literature on repatriation in several ways. First, the qualitative nature of the study will rectify any limitation in previous quantitative studies which took only a single measure in viewing the experience of returning home. This research aims to provide a holistic understanding of the entire repatriation experience, including what returnees face and how they manage the transition. This compensates for the limitations of other studies which have focused on identification of re-adjustment problems and the outcome of sojourns rather than on the dynamics or process of re-entry. Second, approaching this study longitudinally enables a better exploration of the re-entry process and one that involves multiple dimensions and fluctuating moments (see Section 3.2). Consequently, this study will contribute to the knowledge of Saudi returnees which is currently lacking in published research. More specifically, gender comparison in re-adjustment is informative and this study can provide a better understanding of the repatriation experience that could benefit organisations, as well as individuals.

2.9 Chapter Summary

This chapter reviews the relevant literature on adjustment and re-adjustment. The first section introduces the concept of re-entry and presents the main theories in the field. I then discuss how simplistic some of these theories are in predicting a general approach to the experience of adjustment, as well as highlighting some cultural and personal characteristics that pave the way for other arguments that have been ignored previously. I argue that it is necessary to pay more attention to the complexities surrounding re-entry rather than providing a neat, but limited, description of the experience, for example, by depicting the process only in stages.

In the second section, I discuss the outcomes of the acculturation process, the changes it brings to one's cultural identity, and coping strategies identified in the light of the available literature. Some contributory factors to returnees' re-adjustment were also highlighted to show that re-entry is not just a social experience, but one that is experienced differently by every individual.

In the final section, I review the studies that have been conducted on re-adjustment and discuss how the majority of them focus on the USA while others have analysed separate variables in their descriptions of re-entry. This is carried out with reference to the Arab world and the Saudi context.

Chapter 3 : Research Design and Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodological approach implemented in this study. This includes an overview of the research design and the rationale for adopting a qualitative longitudinal approach. The chapter also provides information regarding the research context including participants' selection, data collection procedures and analysis techniques. My role as a researcher is then discussed together with some issues surrounding validity, reliability and ethics.

3.2 Research Design

Bryman (2016), provides a clear distinction between the terms research design and research method that he believes can be, at times, muddled. While research design gives an outline and guides the collection and analysis of data, the latter is the specific technique used to obtain data. This study follows a qualitative longitudinal research design and studies a single group of participants over a period of time⁴³ (Goodwin, 2010). This period enabled me as a researcher to monitor the participants' reentry to their home country, from their own perspectives over time, and capture their thoughts and feelings. It also allowed participants to experience and recognise a sense of change, if a change appears to present itself, either at a certain phase and/or throughout their journey. According to Saldaña:

‘we conduct a longitudinal study for two primary purposes: to capture through long-term immersion the depth and breadth of the participants’ life experiences, and to capture participant change (if any) through long-term comparative observations of their perceptions and actions’ (Saldaña, 2003, p. 16).

This was accomplished by using in depth interviews (see 3.3.4). Adopting this approach seemed appropriate for several reasons. First, qualitative interviews can reveal how individuals understand themselves and their experiences within their social world as they provide us with:

‘evidence of the nature of the phenomena under investigation, including the contexts and situations in which it emerges, as well as insights into the cultural frames people use to make sense of these experiences. Combined, they offer important insights for theoretical understanding’ (Miller & Glassner, 2016, p. 63).

Second, the use of regular in-depth interviews was in response to the observed scarcity of qualitative research on reentry adjustment, especially a longitudinal approach (Martin, 1984; Stringham, 1993; Alandejani, 2013). In fact, McLeod & Thomson (2009, p. 61) believe that a qualitative approach to longitudinal research is able to provide the ‘close-up’ shot of real lives

⁴³ That is, from the time Saudi PGSs begin to plan their return to their home country and throughout the first year of their arrival back there.

which is necessary for this type of study, providing us with detailed moments and turning points in life after returning home. As discussed in the previous chapter, most studies on readjustment are quantitative, relying merely on retrospective accounts (Wolfe, 2005; Altweck & Marshall, 2015) and, therefore, adopting a longitudinal approach could minimise, but not solve, the problem of relying on memories as it allows the investigation to take place during the process of readjustment rather than after. As Black, et al. (1992, p. 755) suggest, ‘while most social science research can benefit from longitudinal research designs, the processional nature of repatriation adjustment makes this type of design even more appropriate’. However, as Plumridge & Thomson indicate:

‘there is always *some* time lapse and intervening events between interviews [in longitudinal studies]. The analyst still has to strive to make sense of contradictions in accounts which may be accumulated and amplified over time’ (Plumridge & Thomson, 2003, p. 214).

Moreover, one of the greatest challenges in a longitudinal design is participants’ availability, in addition to managing and analysing the extensive amount of data (Saldaña, 2003).

As qualitative research aims to understand the meaning of human action in a particular context (Schwandt, 2001), it corresponds to my aim as a researcher to understand the returnees’ behaviour in a specific social context (i.e. KSA). In addition, it addresses the gap identified by McLeod & Thomson (2009), and the need for a deeper understanding of the dynamic processes involved in transitions which can best be attained through discussion in a natural setting i.e. qualitative interviewing. Qualitative research methods are valuable when researchers seek to examine phenomena ‘about which little is yet known’ (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 19). Qualitative approaches seek to discover and develop new concepts rather than proving preconceived ideas about the people and events under investigation (Gerson & Horowitz, 2002). This involves some sort of direct encounter with ‘the world’, in this case selected people, and how they construct, interpret and give meaning to certain events or experiences (e.g. returning home). Hence, adopting a qualitative approach contributes to the researcher’s understanding of how individual experiences differ across contexts and provides the mechanism through which to examine the complexity of the real world from all angles (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

In designing this study, I was aware that other methods, including focus group (FG), could be suitable to elicit a variety of perspectives or understandings of the reentry experience as its interactive nature might help in any exploration of the topic and clarify participants’ views (Kitzinger, 1995). Moreover, FGs could be ‘empowering’ in the sense that participants share their views and realise that others have had the same experience (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 111). However, FGs do not allow in depth follow-up of individuals’ experiences and are

logistically difficult, especially when participants are invariably busy professionals, as is the case here (ibid). Therefore, individual interviews were preferable, given the aim of the study is to elicit detailed personal experiences rather than broader socio-cultural meanings. However, this choice is not without its flaws. The issue of how interviewees respond to us remains open. According to Block (2000, p. 759), the data from interviews do not necessarily reflect the underlying memory but rather they represent ‘*voices* adopted by research participants in response to the researchers’ prompts and questions. These voices might or might not truly represent what the research participant thinks or would choose to say in another context and on another occasion’ (emphasis in original). Similarly, Deutscher, et al., (1993), believe that a person’s choice to say something may not always represent what they actually do in real life. In addition, Charmaz (1995) concurs that people may not want to, and they do not have to, reveal everything about themselves. My position, however, is similar to Nunkoosing’s (2005, p. 701) who worked on the premise that the interviewees’ accounts, whatever they choose to tell or are interested in, are ‘authentic rather than true’ and are of equal importance since they contribute to an understanding of their experience.

It is worth mentioning at this point, that the choice of a specific research design rather than another is triggered by some philosophical assumptions that social researchers usually bring to their study i.e. the ontological and epistemological positions (discussed below) and how they conceptualise our reality and our images of the world (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

3.2.1 Philosophical Assumptions: Ontology and Epistemology

While ontology refers to one’s view of reality, and whether it is dependent or independent of our own practices and understandings, epistemology reveals the nature of this reality, whether it is discovered or created through the process of research i.e. the nature of knowledge and how one acquires it (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The belief predicating this study is that we can reach reality through socially constructed meanings between the researcher, who is involved in the production of that reality, and the active role of individuals (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Bryman, 2016). Hence, the ontological position adopted is constructivism⁴⁴ which implies that social phenomena are not just the outcome of social interaction but are also in a constant state of revision (ibid). According to Richards (2003, p. 39), constructivists ‘seek to understand not the essence of a real world but the richness of a world that is socially determined’; that is, the lived experience from the point of view of those who live it. This position corresponds to the nature and aim of this study, where there is more than one reality as seen from the eyes of the

⁴⁴ Often also referred to as constructionism (Bryman, 2016).

participants. With regard to epistemology, the study adopts an interpretive approach, through which I have described and interpreted participants' feelings of a social phenomenon (i.e. returning home) as they perceive it. This was accomplished by means of in-depth interviews which permitted the coconstruction of meaning between the researcher and the participants and provided an element of interpretation of data that offered a meaningful insight into the phenomenon (Mills, et al., 2006).

Within this paradigm, our basic understanding is formed by interpreting what people say they encounter, and how they view their realities (e.g. returning home). Furthermore, in this approach, researchers need to be aware of the necessity of not imposing their own expectations on interviewees, or allow their expectations to influence what they hear and see. To achieve this impartiality, the researcher must know what his/her biases are, and how they may impact on the research. This issue is discussed in more detail in section (3.6).

3.3 Procedures

3.3.1 Ethical Issues

Needless to say, qualitative research can be more intrusive than quantitative research because it deals with people's experiences and how they feel (Dornyei, 2007). As such, there were ethical considerations that had to be taken into account early on in the research study design. First, ethical approval to conduct the study was obtained from both my research supervisor and the relevant committee at Newcastle University. Second, prior to the first interview, participants were informed of the purpose and the aim of the study and that their participation was voluntary. They were also informed about the duration of the interviews and the fact that they would be recorded for analysis purposes. Bryman (2016) asserts that one of the disadvantages of recording is that it may be slightly unpleasant for interviewees. Indeed, one candidate was averse to the idea of recording and subsequently withdrew from participating in the study. Participants were also informed that their participation required some degree of commitment, as they would take part in three one-to-one interviews (see section 3.3.4) and that they had the right to withdraw at any time during the study. Consent forms were sent out and signed by both the participants and the researcher (see Appendix B). It is worth noting, however, that one of the ethical dilemmas in this kind of research is 'the ongoing negotiation of informed consent' (McLeod & Thomson, 2009, p. 74). Participants' agreement to take part in the study does not guarantee the nature and amount of personal information to be shared, as this is an unpredictable process that can only be ascertained during the actual conversation i.e. there is less control over the data set (Nunkoosing, 2005) as no one knows in advance what will "come out" of a conversation (Gadamer, 2004, p. 385). Consequently, confirmation of permission to reveal

details was sought after each interview. In addition, participants were assured that their personal information and the data they provided were secure,⁴⁵ confidential and would only be used for the purposes of this study. Pseudonyms were assigned to protect the identity of all participants and ensure their privacy.

3.3.2 Pilot Study

In order to test the research applicability, determine any difficulties that might arise during the actual data collection phase, and make any modifications if needed, a pilot study was conducted with one female participant who fit the criteria of the study⁴⁶ (Maxwell, 1997; Roberts, 2010) (See Appendix D). The participant was interviewed via telephone and the interview lasted for about 45 minutes. The aim of the interview was to explore how the returnee herself experienced various aspects of life when returning to the home country and how she felt she was adjusting, her expectations, sense of wellbeing, social interaction with others and her professional life. While the participant thought the interview questions were suitable for the purpose of the study, minor modifications had to be done to avoid closed-ended questions and allow more depth. In addition, the participant appreciated having enough space to share her experience, as she said she felt comfortable throughout the interview. As a way of giving and not just getting information about her, I shared some of my experiences as well. Two months after the pilot interview, a follow-up interview was conducted with the participant on some of the challenges that she mentioned in the first interview; this was a pilot test of how the second interview might proceed. Interviews were then transcribed and analysed.

3.3.3 Participant⁴⁷ Recruitment

To recruit participants, an email was sent to the Saudi Students Club in Newcastle, asking them to provide me with the contact details of PhD graduates with whom I could start my correspondence. Twelve PhD graduates (both males and females) were sent an email with an explanation of the project (see Appendix A) and a copy of a consent form to be signed if they agreed to participate. However, only one student replied, which gave me an indication that this technique would not be as fruitful as I had anticipated. I then decided to approach prospective participants from those whom I was already familiar or those known to friends and colleagues, as I was aiming for theory construction from participants with experience in the phenomenon of study rather than general population (Charmaz, 2002; Charmaz, 2006). This purposive

⁴⁵ Hard copies of collected data were stored in a locked filing cabinet and soft copies on the researcher's password-protected computer.

⁴⁶ A Saudi PGS who had recently returned to KSA

⁴⁷ The use of the term 'participants' rather than 'subjects' or 'interviewees' confirms my belief in the importance of the co-construction process of knowledge.

sampling⁴⁸ was necessary for this particular study which involves a degree of commitment in attending three interview rounds over a one year period (see 3.3.4). Maxwell (1997, p. 87) defines purposive sampling as a type of sampling in which ‘particular settings, persons, or events are deliberately selected for the important information they can provide that cannot be gotten as well from other choices’. Although this strategy was useful and ten participants showed initial interest in the project, I had to consider that the availability of the interviewees might impose constraints upon data collection (Mason, 2002). This proved to be true later in the process when two participants did not take part in the second interview round and had to be completely withdrawn, resulting in a sample of eight participants (see Table 3-1 for a brief summary of the participants).

Pseudonym	Gender	Marital status	Length of sojourn
Ali	M	Married and has children	6 yrs. (Lang+PhD)
Farah	F	Single	Between 7 and 8 yrs. (Lang+MA+PhD)
Huda	F	Married and has children	5 years and 6 months(PhD)
Khalid	M	Married and has children	Between 7 and 8 yrs. (PhD)
Nasser	M	Single	4 yrs. (PhD)
Nora	F	Married and has children	8 years (MA+PhD)
Omar	M	Married and has children	7 years (Lang+MA+PhD)
Sara	F	Married and has children	Between 6 and 7 years (Lang+MA+PhD)

Table 3-1: Participants’ Profiles⁴⁹

3.3.4 The Interviews

In-depth, responsive interviewing was a reasonable method to employ to generate data and explore how returnees feel about their return (see Sections 3.2 and 3.2.1). The use of this technique, which is very similar to semi-structured interviews, gives researchers the freedom to shape the interview questions according to the interviewees’ responses rather than relying exclusively on a fixed set of questions. Moreover, it allows new questions to be posed when the context or participants’ perspectives change, and new interests emerge on the part of the researcher (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). In responsive interviewing, the tone of questioning is friendly and the pattern is flexible since the goal is to gain a deep understanding of the topic

⁴⁸ Also known as theoretical sampling (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Tuckett, 2004). Theoretical sampling involves searching for additional data, whether returning to raw data with new insight or collecting new data by asking further questions (Charmaz, 2006). However, Bryman, (2016) considers theoretical sampling a form of purposive sampling.

⁴⁹ Note: ‘Lang’ stands for the language programme taken as a requirement for the PGS, while MA stands for Master of Arts.

through the experience and from the perspectives of the interviewees (ibid). Being aware that the relocation of the participants afterwards may require some telephone or Skype interviews, creating trust, rapport and mutual commitment within a short period of time was crucial (Gerson & Horowitz, 2002). Fortunately, by sharing common grounds (see Section 3.6), rapport had been developed during the first interview and this helped the interviewees to remain committed throughout the study. What made this rapport evident is that some information (that could have been mentioned earlier) were not revealed until the second interview indicating that the more engagement with participants, the more I was trusted and they felt relaxed.

In this study, both telephone and face-to-face interviews were used as a data collection method. Telephone interview is a valid option when the researcher would not otherwise have access to participants (Creswell, 1998). This was the only option when conducting the pilot study, and the outcome gave me an indication that this type of methodology was successful for the purpose of the study as I deemed the amount and type of information shared was as appropriate and adequate as I would have elicited from face-to-face interviews.

Although it was assumed that all participants would have sufficient knowledge of the English language due to their experience abroad [in the UK], it was planned to conduct the interviews in Arabic as it was believed that using their native tongue would put the interviewee at ease and, therefore, be more comfortable to express emotions and share more information more freely. While there was a total agreement by the participants with this decision which enabled the in-depth conversation I was seeking, there was also a great amount of code switching from both the researcher and the participants due to their familiarity with both languages (i.e. Arabic and English). While many factors may influence the choice of their codes, this is beyond the scope of this study.

The first round of interviews took place in one of the study rooms at the university library,⁵⁰ while all participants⁵¹ were still resident in the host country, the UK, but were preparing for their return to KSA. The aim of the first interview was primarily to build rapport and trust, but in addition, I set out to capture expectations about their return, and their feelings about home. Although this interview was not completely focused on the re-entry experience, gaining insights into the ways they feel about it enhanced my understanding about their return (see Section 4.3.1).

⁵⁰ One interview had to be conducted via phone as the participant was in another part of the UK.

⁵¹ With the exception of two female participants, Sara and Nora, who had to return to KSA earlier during the PhD correction period due to family obligations. As a result, their expectations about the return were elicited retrospectively.

The second and third rounds of interviews took place once all participants had been back in KSA (as specified in Table 3-2) except for one (male) participant, Khalid, who returned to the UK on numerous occasions, to visit his family⁵² and with whom I had the opportunity to interview face to face. The second interview focused on participants' experiences back home and how they actually felt about being there i.e. how they perceived different aspects of life in KSA and whether this influenced their readjustment or not (e.g. daily routine, professional life, family, social activities and overall wellbeing). Initial interview questions were open ended (e.g. 'Could you recall your experience when you first arrived back in Saudi?' 'How did you feel?'). This technique allowed topics to emerge from the participant's own account. These initial 'grand-tour' questions were followed by more directive 'mini-tour' questions (Spradley, 1979), probing more specific aspects depending on the interviewee's initial response (see Appendix C for interview guide⁵³). It is worth noting that some of the interview questions were derived from the literature (i.e. what others have found previously in terms of the patterns of integration e.g. Al-Mehawes, 1984; Alandejani, 2013 and Pitts, 2016), while other questions were guided by my own intuition and interest in the field (i.e. based on my and friends' experiences and their suggestions).

In the third interview, participants were asked to comment on what appeared to have changed for them since the second interview i.e. follow-up on emerging ideas. In addition, they were encouraged to provide recommendations for newcomers, if necessary, on how to deal with this kind of transition. To allow comparison over time, as the study progresses, McLeod & Yates (2006 cited in McLeod & Thomson, 2009) suggested that a set of standardised topics should be raised in each interview round e.g. family, children, social and professional life. However, when the context is changed, new interests emerge demanding new questions to be posed. This is discussed in detail later in the analysis.

The time interval between the interviews was guided by the expectation that re-entry transition can last from six months to a year following repatriation, based on previous literature's findings, e.g. Adler (1981) and Martin and Harrell (2004).

Thus, this time frame kept the returnees close to their experience while it also gave them a chance to reflect on and find meaning from it.

⁵² Khalid's wife and children are still in the UK to complete their education.

⁵³ I followed Charmaz (2002, p. 679) guidelines about interview questions, that they must be 'sufficiently general to cover a wide range of experiences as well as narrow enough to elicit and explore the participant's specific experience.'

Pseudonym	Duration and means of interaction for each interview		
	<i>1st Interview</i> <i>Prior to the return to KSA</i>	<i>2nd Interview</i> <i>Between 1-5 months in KSA</i>	<i>3rd Interview</i> <i>Between 6-12 months in KSA</i>
Ali	40 min, via phone	45 min, via phone	Ali did not undergo a 3 rd interview round since there was no need to follow up from the 2 nd interview as we reached saturation point i.e. nothing new was heard (Patton, 2002; Stern, 1994)
Farah	25 min, via phone	20 min, via phone	15 min, via phone
Huda	25 min, face to face	40 min, via phone	30 min, via phone
Khalid	35 min, face to face	60 min, face to face	75 min, face to face
Nasser	40 min, face to face	35 min, via phone	25 min, via phone
Nora	expectations were expressed retrospectively	75 min, via phone	75 min, via phone
Omar	30 min, face to face	75 min, via phone	50 min, via phone
Sara	expectations were expressed retrospectively	40 min, via phone	30 min, via phone

Table 3-2: The Longitudinal Data Collection Procedure

I was also able to communicate with the participants using “WhatsApp⁵⁴”. This application was mostly used to clarify a point or to follow up with an issue. Participants were able to record a short audio file and send me voice notes to elaborate or emphasise a point. Using this technology enabled the participants to respond at their own pace and assisted in collecting further data.

3.3.5 Transcription and Translation

Issues surrounding transcription and translation, including, but not limited to, the level of contextual information to be provided, should not be overlooked (Mann, 2011).

A transcript according to Green, et al. (1997, p. 172), is ‘a text that “re”- presents an event; it is not the event itself. Following this logic, what is re-presented is data constructed by a researcher for a particular purpose, not just talk written down.’ (see Section 4.2 about reporting the participants’ experiences). Thus, having carried out the interviews, the decision to transcribe them by the researcher was deliberate. Moreover, verbatim transcription was preferable and beneficial given the theoretical underpinning of the research (i.e. Grounded Theory) and the necessity of remaining close to the data (Halcomb & Davidson, 2006). Since the interest was in

⁵⁴ An instant messaging application for smartphones.

the content of the interview, checking the accuracy of the transcripts' content was also crucial. Transcripts were then anonymised for analysis (See Appendix E for an interview transcript).

As the interviews were carried out in Arabic, the participants' mother tongue, translating relevant sections of the transcripts was vital. This could potentially have been a complex process, involving a focus on the interpretation of words, as well as the provision of an intelligible translation in the light of contextual meaning (Esposito, 2001). Therefore, to minimise potential threats to the validity of the translation, an approach highlighted by Esposito (2001, p. 572) is adopted; to translate according to a 'meaning-based, rather than word-for-word interpretation'. This was made using two bilingual translators and was then compared to ensure accuracy and agreement.

3.4 Data Analysis Procedure

Based on the analytic purpose and philosophy underpinning the study, I approached the interview data as texts that provided me with the returnees' experiences, perceptions and feelings and applied thematic analysis as an analytic procedure. This is one of the most common approaches to analysing qualitative data. Braun & Clarke (2006, p. 79) define thematic analysis as 'a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data'. These patterns can be both implicit and explicit, in other words, they can refer either to the 'manifest' content of the data; i.e. something directly observable e.g. a specific term in the transcript, or to a more 'latent' level where the term is referred to indirectly and a high level of interpretation is required (Joffe & Yardley, 2004; Guest, et al., 2012). Moreover, themes can be derived from the data (i.e. inductively) and/or from the researcher's prior theoretical understanding of the phenomenon under study (i.e. a deductive approach) in which the questions in the interview guide are usually the basis for theme generation (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Ryan & Bernard, 2003). In order to thoroughly explore the returnees' experiences, an inductive approach⁵⁵ was utilised. Although it could be claimed that having an interview guide may intermingle the two approaches, I would argue that inductive analysis is a process of coding the data '*without* trying to let it fit into a preexisting coding frame' (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 83) (emphasis in original) which was the case here. This could be maintained by following certain techniques from Grounded Theory⁵⁶ (GT) approach e.g. open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Thus, the thematic analysis of the transcripts was informed by GT procedures.

⁵⁵ Some scholars use this approach synonymously with Grounded Theory (Bryman, 2016).

⁵⁶ GT is an approach to generate a theory or concepts out of data (Bryman, 2016).

The decision to adopt this approach was supported by the idea that the process of re-entry is, after all, a social process and little is known about it. Thus, this study starts the construction of analytic codes from the data and not from a preconceived hypothesis. According to Charmaz (2000, p. 522), GT involves ‘the study of experience from the standpoint of those who live it’ and this requires an interpretive analysis of that experience. GT is one of the interpretive methods that share the common philosophy of phenomenology i.e. to describe the world of the people under study (Stern, 1994) from their perspective. While I am not proposing to have a phenomenological study, this study does share some of its philosophy of understanding the lived experiences and thoroughly studying a small number of participants to find patterns and relationships of meaning (Creswell, 2009). By using GT, I seek to understand not only how participants respond to changing conditions upon their return but also to ‘show *specific* linkages between conditions, actions and consequences’ of their actions (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, p. 12) (emphasis in original).

Moreover, applying GT procedures adds systematicity to qualitative research (Hallberg, 2006) by making the strategies of analysis explicit which enhances reliability (Floersch, et al., 2010) (see Section 3.5 for further discussion on reliability).

Manual⁵⁷ line-by-line open coding was the first step in the analysis, after repeatedly listening to the audio recordings to guarantee full familiarity with the content and by dividing the data into units (Saldaña, 2013). A meaning unit is a phrase, a sentence, or series of sentences that conveys one idea. Accordingly, codes were assigned to sentences, paragraphs or sections (see Table 3-3 below) and each of these codes represented a theme or an idea about the data. They were then compared and revised, allowing for the creation of new codes where necessary. According to Mason (2002), data can be organised and categorised in two different ways; cross-sectional ‘code and retrieve’ methods, and non-cross-sectional analysis. The former is when the researcher develops categories and then applies them to the whole data set in order to search or retrieve parts of labelled data, whereas the latter involves looking at particular parts of the data separately and then categorising them. This latter approach was taken here, which may result in discovering themes that may not appear in all parts of the data (Spencer, et al., 2003).

The interview transcript was coded and categories were identified by asking the question: What does this unit or expression represent? Codes were distinguished by letters that were written on

⁵⁷ Brown, et al., (1990, p. 136) believe computerised word queries do not take into account ‘the existence of multiple synonyms’ and may lead to ‘partial retrieval of information’.

each hard copy of the transcript next to the relevant section. Texts with similar letters were then gathered under one heading or category.

The coding was made up of three levels: initial or open coding, focused or selective coding and theoretical coding (Charmaz, 2006). Some examples of *initial* coding are listed below:

Example of initial coding	Text
Avoiding social contact Fear of making mistakes	INTERVIEWER: <i>How did your children get along socially?</i> ⁵⁸ Nora: <i>My son used to be so sociable there [in the UK], but here [in KSA] I find him to be so quiet; not willing to communicate in case someone comments on his language.</i>
Lacking social conventions	INTERVIEWER: <i>How?</i> Nora: <i>He doesn't know how to answer people e.g. if someone asks him: "How are you doing?" He just smiles.</i>
Lacking the 'know how' in Arabic	<i>He doesn't know how to respond if he gets involved in conversations other than saying his full name.</i>
Socialising with children sharing the same experience	<i>I take him with me, when I meet up with my friends from [names a city in the UK] because their children are the same; they won't make fun of each other!</i>

Table 3-3: An Example of Initial Coding

Focused coding followed the initial coding, where the data were sorted into categories (see Figure 3-1).

Theoretical coding followed later in the analysis, as an attempt to explain possible relationships between these categories leading the analysis into suggesting a theoretical assumption and direction that could answer the research questions i.e. creating a framework for understanding the re-entry experience.

Richards & Richards (1994) emphasise the importance of retaining links to the original data and revisiting them frequently after having developed and refined the codes throughout the analysis process to avoid focusing on parts of the data, which may carry an element of risk as

⁵⁸ This is a translation of the original Arabic excerpt which was made using two bilingual translators and was then compared to ensure accuracy and agreement.

the researcher may fail to capture the whole picture. Thus, a concerted effort was made to preserve a connection between the data and the research questions throughout the analysis, in order to avoid any negative repercussions that might come from using an inductive approach and an open coding process. This was accomplished by following Dey's (1993) suggestion about fragmenting and connecting⁵⁹ activities during the analysis process, I started to consider how the analysis could relate to the research questions and whether my interpretation provided answers or not.

The analysis also used a 'constant comparative method', i.e. making comparisons during each stage of the analysis, in order to identify similarities, differences, and general patterns among codes (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Charmaz, 2006). Hallberg (2006, p. 141) views this procedure as the "core category" in GT. In addition, making comparisons helps in protecting the researcher against bias (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). This was carried out in four comparative steps, following Boeije's (2002) guidelines on how to make comparisons:

1. Comparison within a single interview (e.g. comparing the ideas of one participant).
2. Comparison between interviews within the same group (e.g. comparing the interviews of the four male or female participants)
3. Comparison of interviews from different groups (e.g. males vs. females).
4. Comparison of the same participant through time to show the process of readjustment for each participant, if it appears to happen at all⁶⁰(e.g. comparing one participant over three rounds of interviews).

After the coding process, themes were generated. It is worth mentioning that themes, according to the anthropologist, Morris Opler (1945), are closely related to expressions in the data. They are not the exact words, they are the exact meanings implied and inferred from words, behaviours and events (Opler, 1945; Spradley, 1979). They are developed when we can answer the question, "What is this expression an example of?" (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). Moreover, Saldaña (2013, p. 14) asserts that a theme is an 'outcome' of coding, while Braun & Clarke (2006) believe that a theme captures something important or interesting in relation to the overall research question. Some scholars use the terms *theme* and *category* interchangeably, however,

⁵⁹ While fragmenting is concerned with comparing all the fragments that are given the same code, to check whether new information has been added or if the same information has been repeated, connecting, on the other hand, aims to give an overall interpretation of the interview and its relevance to the research questions to maintain its significance.

⁶⁰ According to Saldaña (2003), the concept *from-through* in longitudinal studies outlines the process (which is at the heart of this study) while *from-to* suggests discrete starting and ending points. In my opinion, this is not applicable when examining individuals with different pace of lives.

DeSantis & Ugarriza (2000) find this to be confusing. In thematic analyses, themes are more general and abstract (ibid).

Based on these interpretations of what constitute a theme, four main themes were identified, addressing the *psychological* and *socio-cultural* aspects of the return and summarising the participants' experiences in KSA (see below). They were selected from the participants' accounts based on the impression of how significant they were to the participant, how extensively they talked about it and how passionate they were about a particular issue i.e. what kind of language they used. All themes were divided into subthemes with special attention to overlapping themes.

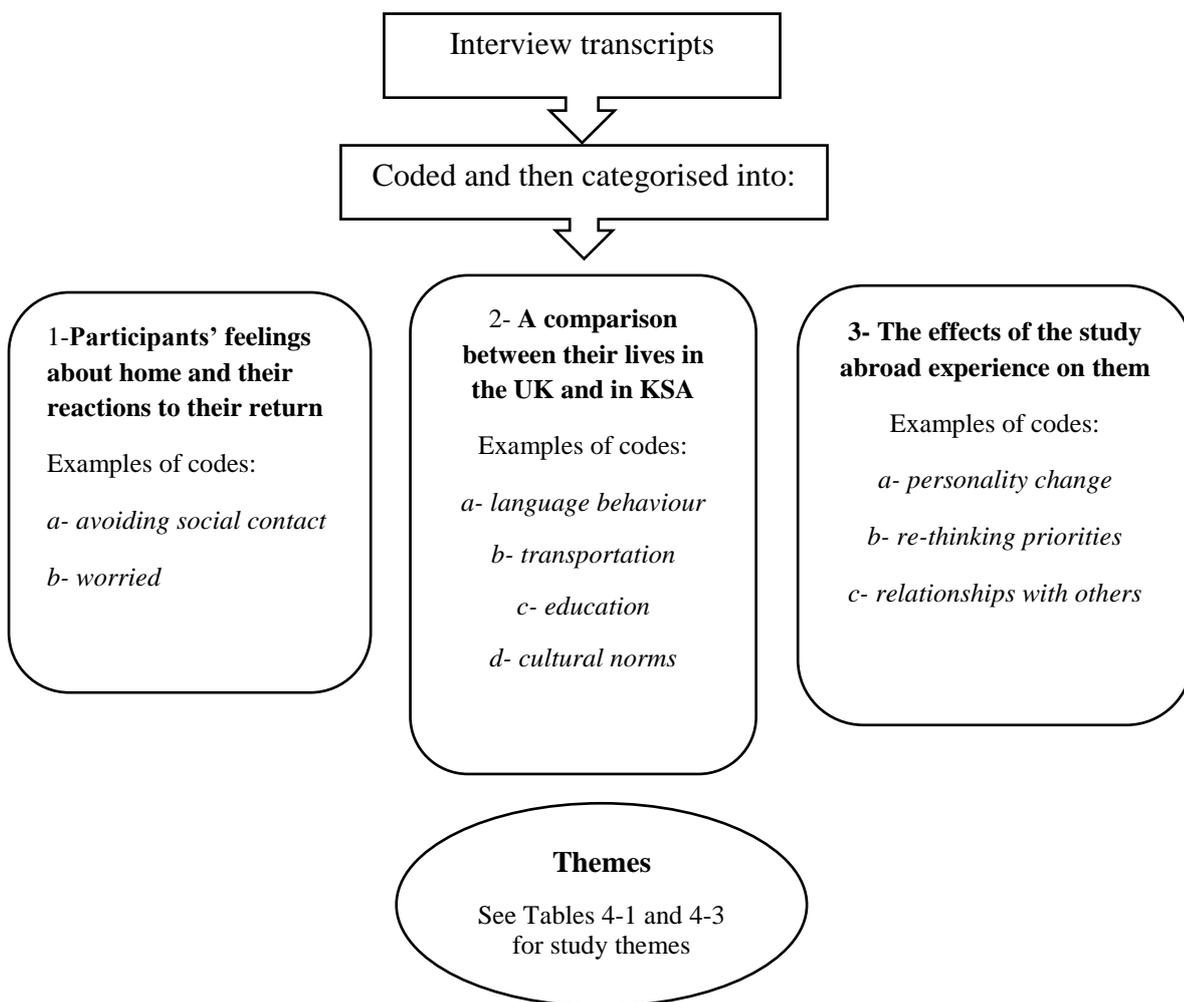


Figure 3-1: Procedure for Data Analysis

It is worth mentioning that ‘No one enters a site in a mindless fashion’ (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 302) and, consequently, my own views may have affected the interpretation of the data (see Section 3.6). Armstrong, et al. (1997, p. 605) assert that ‘An interview transcript might represent

‘raw’ data but the basic themes that are extracted have already been ‘contaminated’ by the researcher.’ However, using GT approach and remaining open to the data made the emergence of basic concepts possible and irrespective of any personal interest and this leads the researcher to be ‘more objective and less theoretically biased.’ (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 34). A detailed discussion of the study analysis and findings is presented in the next chapter.

3.5 Validity, Reliability and Generalisability in Qualitative Research

The quality (trustworthiness and authenticity⁶¹) of any research design is usually assessed under two main criteria i.e. validity and reliability. In qualitative research, terms like credibility and dependability have been recommended to replace validity and reliability respectively (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Lincoln & Guba (1985) claim that these terms are more suitable to describe the nature of qualitative research than the traditional rigid ones that are usually used to measure quantitative research. However, Long & Johnson (2000) argue that these seemingly different terminologies are, in fact, identical in meaning, hence, minimising the need to substitute one for the other for the sake of qualitative research. By following this stance, and in relation to this study, validity can be defined as how accurately the findings of the study represent participants’ realities of social phenomena (Schwandt, 2001) and whether these findings are authentic, trustworthy and related to the way participants construct their social world. Moreover, from an interpretivist’s perspective, validity refers to how well the research method explores what it intends to (Mason, 2002) and so ‘judging the *processes* and *outcomes*’ (emphasis in original) of constructivist inquiries (Guba & Lincoln, 2005, p. 207). In the light of these definitions, the attempt to judge the process of the research was initially fulfilled after conducting the pilot study (see Section 3.3.2) which proved to be successful in generating the required data to answer the research questions. The second step towards credibility was the purposive sampling in recruiting participants (see Section 3.3.3) which involved careful scrutiny to ensure that the sample chosen would provide the information sought. When it comes to reliability, and as referred to externally, it is the extent to which a study can be replicated using the same methods by other researchers who gain the same results (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982; Mason, 2002). In qualitative research, this is almost impossible to attain since each social phenomena is tied to its condition and context (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). People’s views and attitudes are not static, rather they change according to the situation i.e. what is believed to be true today may not be so tomorrow. Hence, the issue of external reliability needs to be reconceptualised to address qualitative studies (Carcary, 2009). According to Lewis & Ritchie (2003), reliability can be

⁶¹ Trustworthiness is the quality of an investigation and its findings whereas authenticity is the notion of generating a genuine understanding of people’s experiences (Schwandt, 2001).

enhanced by clearly documenting and explaining the research process i.e. transparency in data collection and analysis. This was achieved in this study by writing notes and reflecting on the process i.e. staying close to the data. However, on an internal level, and by applying the constructivist paradigm where there are multiple accounts of social reality, I would argue in favour of Rolfe's (2006, p. 305) position that 'we should not expect either expert researchers or respondents to arrive at the same themes and categories as the researcher'. Therefore, although inter-rater reliability⁶² was applied to the pilot study transcript by an interested researcher who cross-checked, compared the coding, and identified other aspects that may have been overlooked by the researcher, this was not carried out in the actual study.

In relation to the outcomes and the authenticity of findings, Guba & Lincoln (2005) mention fairness i.e. treating and presenting participants' different views and perspectives equally and with the avoidance of bias. However, as stated by Walsham (2006, p. 321) 'we are biased by our own background, knowledge and prejudices to see things in certain ways and not others' (e.g. selecting certain quotes for the reader rather than others). In spite of this implied tendency to focus on certain aspects, my position on prejudice is clear in that I have acknowledged my 'insider⁶³' stance and tried to be reflective and impartial throughout my research process (see Section 3.6). However, this issue may have arisen during the interpretation rather than the presentation phase. If data is considered to be a tangible product, then our interpretation is abstract and less controllable. As Walsham (2006, p. 325) continued, 'the researcher's best tool for analysis is his or her own mind'. Yet, by being reflexive, an attempt to preserve transparency and overcome any bias that may have interfered with the analysis was evident (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

Bryman (2016) considers the subsequent interviews in a longitudinal design to be a method of respondent validation in which the researcher obtains a confirmation from participants that he/she have understood their social reality, a technique described by Lincoln & Guba (1985) as the most crucial in creating validity since it shifts emphasis from the researcher to the participants.

In addition, the longitudinal nature of the study enhanced the researcher's understanding of the context, helped in building trust, rapport and reciprocity and allowed comparison of the findings over time, all of which contributed to the affirmation and credibility of data (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

⁶² Also known as peer debriefing (Long & Johnson, 2000).

⁶³ In that my personal experience informed my research.

While generalisability of findings in qualitative research is not an aim, researchers are encouraged to produce what Geertz calls ‘thick description’ or deep, rich accounts of the setting, the participants and the themes (1973 cited in Bryman, 2016, p. 384). In fact, Lincoln & Guba (1985) emphasise that this thick description and detailed understanding of an issue may form the basis for a better understanding of those issues in other similar settings i.e. enhance transferability.⁶⁴ Similarly, Sandelowski (1986), states that findings are to be confirmed when another researcher, given the same data, arrives at similar, but not contradictory conclusions. However, as MacDonald (2000) states, there are no certain, final interpretations because contexts constantly change.

Hammersely (1991) and Mason (2002) argue that quality of argument and use of evidence should remain the hallmark of qualitative research. Therefore, the intention was aimed at understanding rather than at generalising. Moreover, although using a small sample may be subject to criticism, it does not, by itself, affect the credibility of the study (Payne & Williams, 2005). Lincoln & Guba (1985) recommend the technique of prolonged engagement to establish credibility during data analysis. This refers to the sufficient time involved during data collection, learning about the culture and building trust for the purpose of developing significant appreciation of the subject under study. I believe that I have attained a level of prolonged engagement through my position as a researcher (in Section 3.6) and my attempts to build trust during interviews (3.3.4).

3.6 The Position of the Researcher

Being engaged in constructivist enquiry, it was essential to establish a reciprocal relationship with my participants. One facilitating factor in this reciprocity was that both the interviewer, also the researcher, and the interviewees share actual common backgrounds in terms of social identity (e.g. the overseas experience, occupation, nationality) as well as holding similar positions in terms of social status and power which diminishes any issue of hierarchy. This proved, throughout the interviews, to have a positive effect on the issues of openness, trust and a willingness to participate and share perceptions as participants were confident that I would understand their views. Rubin & Rubin (2012) believe that trust increases when we share common background, a mutual friend or a relevant experience with our participants. However, the extent to which I consider myself a member of the target group, sharing the same experience, and how this status impacted my research are the concerns of this section which comes under the heading ‘Reflexivity’. Reflexivity is ‘the process of reflecting critically on the self as a

⁶⁴ Also known as inferential generalisation (Lewis & Ritchie, 2003)

researcher' (Guba & Lincoln, 2005, p. 210). Being a Saudi citizen and a PGS positions me, to a significant extent, as an "insider" researcher in terms of sharing the same experience of studying abroad, as well as sharing a cultural background. This "insider" notion is explained by Gair (2012), as the degree to which a researcher is placed either within or outside a researched group because of his/her common experience or shared status. However, I cannot claim that I have fully experienced⁶⁵ the final return home as my participants have, because at the time I was conducting the study I was still abroad. In addition, being a researcher still positions me as an "outsider". The distinction between the two notions is fluid, as Dwyer & Buckle (2009) argue:

'There are complexities inherent in occupying the space between [insider and outsider] ... We may be closer to the insider position or closer to the outsider position, but because our perspective is shaped by our position as a researcher, we cannot fully occupy one or the other of those positions' (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009, p. 61).

This fluctuating stances means that my position is similar to that expressed by Deyhle as someone bringing insider voices and experiences to the outside (McKinley Brayboy & Deyhle 2000, cited in Gair, 2012) and that of constructivist grounded theorists who take a reflexive stance on modes of knowing and representing data, and locate oneself in these realities. As Charmaz (2005, p. 509) puts it 'we share in constructing what we define as data.'

Reinharz (1997, p. 3), argues that we not only '*bring* the self to the field ... [we also] *create* the self in the field' (emphasis in original).

As an insider researcher, being familiar with the people and system of Saudi Arabia and sharing the same culture, this has minimised the need to establish shared basic knowledge or common ground as I already have an "emic" understanding of it. However, reflecting on the interviews, this may have affected some aspects of the research process negatively as I may have unconsciously overlooked some details which could have been of interest to the research from an outsider perspective.

In addition, during the interviews, some participants took for granted that I was able to understand certain meanings and aspects of their lives without further explanation. For example, when I was talking with Nora about her social life in KSA (see Section 4.3.4), she said "*there is a lot of exaggeration you know*" expecting me to agree, but I intentionally asked her, "*in terms of what, can you please explain?*", trying to apply what De Cruz & Jones (2004) suggest that by starting to ask critical questions about what normally is assumed, the researcher could

⁶⁵ Although I have partially experienced some elements during my short visits.

begin to shift to an outsider status (e.g. to ask for elaboration to confirm understandings and avoid any misinterpretation). Alsaggaf (2015, p. 72), argues that ‘coming from a shared culture, as well as being of the same gender, is also significant where a mutual understanding of general cultural norms and traditions is extended to include the understanding of rules, boundaries, and expectations’. This is evident in Nora’s account when she was talking about her in-laws reaction to the situation of being abroad without a husband. Being a wife myself, I could understand what in-laws in KSA expect and how boundaries are created. However, in an attempt to avoid the issues that an insider might bring, some scholars suggest using “they”, “their” and “them” instead of “we”, “our” or “us” to refer to participants’ cultural and social norms and to avoid giving the impression of fully understanding their experiences (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). This was done in the analysis to avoid being part of the group and in an attempt to keep my personal involvement as removed as possible. These aspects and challenges needed to be acknowledged to reduce the risk of bias in my research.

3.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented a detailed explanation of the approach taken to address the research questions in this study. Data collection methodology and data analysis procedures were described and justified, with appropriate reference to their limitations, in the light of the philosophical assumptions underpinning this study. Issues surrounding validity, reliability and ethics were also discussed and my role as a researcher was highlighted. A detailed discussion of the study findings is presented in the following chapter.

Chapter 4 : Study Findings

4.1. Introduction

Having outlined the method of data analysis in Chapter 3, this chapter outlines the findings that emerged from the data. It presents participants' feelings about being back in KSA and takes into account the strategies they used to deal with the experience of returning home. Since the re-entry process in this study is explored longitudinally, chronological presentation of the findings was crucial. Thus, this chapter is organised into three main sections, each covering a specific phase of the re-integration process. The first section presents the participants' assumptions and expectations about their return. The focus then moves to exploring how the participants actually felt about being back home and their experiences of different aspects of life in KSA. How the participants dealt with this kind of transition, and how they felt about their overall readjustment, is the focus of the third section. This type of diachronic⁶⁶ data describes the timing of the occurrence of events and the effect they had on subsequent events, adding a historical and developmental dimension to the analysis (Polkinghorne, 1995).

4.2. Getting Started: Approaching the Data

By applying Thematic Analysis to the transcripts (Braun & Clarke, 2006) informed by Grounded Theory (GT) procedures (Charmaz, 2006) (see Section 3.4), I was able to systematically analyse the re-entry experiences of my participants. I read and re-read the transcripts several times while listening to the recordings to familiarise myself with the participants' reports of what they had experienced and to verify the accuracy of transcription. As part of the coding process, and in compliance with the standard practice in qualitative research (Bryman, 2016), this step was accompanied by the highlighting of certain lines that are important or interesting to the overall analysis and relevant to the research questions (see Appendix D). Illustrative quotes from the interviews with participants are presented in this chapter to exemplify the findings and themes generated for analysis. This also provides evidence for my interpretation of the raw data when adopting an inductive approach for the analysis, when researchers move from the specific to the general to explain a phenomenon (Charmaz, 2006). In addition, using participants' quotes reveals the variety and complexity of responses and highlights the idiosyncratic nature of re-entry. Themes were selected from the participants' accounts based on the impression of how significant they were to the participant, how extensively they talked about that theme, and how passionate they were about a particular issue, i.e. what kind of language they used. Thus, themes were chosen according to both the

⁶⁶ As opposed to synchronic which provides information about the present situation.

frequency with which they were identified and the level of intensity with which they were described.

As a researcher, I am aware that reporting the participants' experiences may not fully reflect their actual realities as the attempt here is to represent what they have identified to be their realities, and there will always be a gap between reality, experience and expressions (Bruner, 1986). I was, therefore, aware that it may not be possible to capture the full experience by means of the interview responses. However, remaining as truthful as possible to what had been mentioned in the interviews is what informed my analysis (see Section 3.2). It is worth mentioning that the flow of the interview was, in the main, determined by the participants' responses rather than the interview guide (see Appendix C) which was used primarily to ensure that I had covered the areas needed not to control the flow of the interview.

Yet, reporting the findings of the study was not as simple as was first anticipated. Drafting and redrafting the findings was an on-going process that showed the iterative process of qualitative research (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). These trials were essential in order to reach the depth needed to answer the research questions. Thus, relinquishing some interesting data was unfortunate, but necessary for the sake of coherence and density (see Appendix F for the amount of data used from each participant).

Moreover, following Smythe's (2012) technique, at times, by using different lenses to read and re-read some parts of the transcript proved to be fruitful in developing the layers of my analysis, e.g. a cultural lens in the first attempt and a gender or personal lens in the second.

4.3 Findings from Phase I: Prior to the Return to KSA

4.3.1 Counting down

While findings of this phase may not respond directly to the research questions, as most participants were still in the host country (UK), knowing their expectations, assumptions and reactions toward the return was crucial to an overall understanding of the re-entry experience. Peshkin (2001, p. 243) suggests that 'knowing what happened earlier [their expectations and assumptions] is critical for grasping the meaning of what currently is going on'. Thus, to avoid narrowness of representation, one should take into account the historical context to the extent that it fulfils the research purpose. This also satisfies the nature of longitudinal research.

Participants' feelings about home and the return varied. For example, thinking about the sociocultural sides affected Nora psychologically, this was due to her prior experience of a return during her PhD data collection in KSA, which gave her an expectation about the final return and had an effect on her overall wellbeing. My depiction of wellbeing stems from Ryff's

early work about the issue, i.e. wellbeing comprises elements such as autonomy, environmental mastery, positive relationships with others, a purpose in life, and a realisation of potential and self-acceptance (Ryff 1989a, cited in Dodge, et al., 2012). As a result, Nora expressed anxiety, distress, and had low expectations as shown in the extract below:

INTERVIEWER: *How was the return [to KSA], I mean can you tell me how did you feel about it?*

Nora: *to be honest, I was very worried!*

INTERVIEWER: *Why?*

Nora: *Because I had already experienced returning home about nine to ten months earlier, during my data collection phase [...] to be honest, it was not perfect!*

INTERVIEWER: *How? In what ways?*

Nora: *In every respect; let me explain... First, I was worried about my children's education, that it would not be up to the same standard as it was in the UK ... second, maybe because I had become so independent and organised there [in the UK]⁶⁷, when I returned to KSA I had to ... what shall I say ... I mean ... familial and social obligations were involved, ... and ... I don't know ... people here don't appreciate that my life was very different in the UK.*

INTERVIEWER: *How was it different? Can you explain?*

Nora: *[...] Life was organised the way I wanted [in the UK], I was the father, the mother, the housekeeper and the driver ... I was everything! (Nora T1, 8-28-43)⁶⁸*

When reflecting on this extract, Nora's feeling of worry was emphasised over any other feelings. Her concerns resulted from the knowledge gained from her previous return. As a result, her children's education stands out as a concern. The use of the words 'had to' and the hesitation that followed may also imply something about her control, or lack of it, in key aspects of life, i.e. familial and social obligations. In fact, this quote illustrates three main aspects of the return: logistics, change in self-concept, and sociocultural matters.

Interestingly, the way these three aspects were presented, ordered and discussed highlights some issues that may be specific to the context of Saudi culture (see Sections 1.5.4 and 1.5.5).

First, the placing of her children's education (i.e. a logistical issue) over any other issues may reflect her role and responsibility as a mother or it may highlight the huge differences between the two educational systems and the impact on the children upon the return which has a direct impact on the mother (i.e. crossover) (see Section 5.1). In KSA, although school choice can be a shared decision between parents, the actual monitoring of the children's progress falls mainly

⁶⁷ Square brackets are used to show my own words for further clarification or to show that some lines were omitted for analytical purposes.

⁶⁸ The letter (T) stands for Transcript, while the numbers 1, 2, 3 stand for the 1st, 2nd or 3rd Interview from which the extract is taken, followed by the line number.

on the mother's shoulder which may also reflect gender roles in private and public domains (see Section 1.5.4). Second, the use of the word '*maybe*' before highlighting the personal characteristics (e.g. *independent, organised*) can be interpreted in two ways. It could be used as a justification for finding familial and social obligations worrying, i.e. maybe because she became this person in the UK she finds this obligation worrying now in KSA, thus, trying to find excuses for the concerns about the return including the obligations. Alternatively, it may be used as a way to soften the sense of 'ego' by possessing these characteristics, i.e. referring to these acquired characteristics indirectly. Both inferences show a preference in Saudi culture for being indirect about certain things, either in presenting any concern or in showing anything specific related to self-image.

The hesitation before mentioning familial and social obligations highlights their importance in defining Saudi culture. The participant was reluctant to characterise her concern as a complaint and tried to refer to her newly acquired characteristics beforehand as a way to justify her intolerance towards certain issues which are deemed significant in KSA society. Moreover, her tendency to blame others for not appreciating the way she lived abroad may show an unwillingness to be held responsible for this intolerance. At the end of this extract, when Nora was explaining how her life abroad was different, she said '*I was everything!*' Although this '*everything*' may sound demanding, overwhelming and exhausting, the pride with which it was said suggested a feeling of independence and freedom. She enjoyed and revelled in taking responsibility for everything while she was abroad. This may have contributed to Nora's feeling of anxiety about the return.

Nora's low expectations about her final return were primarily related to the educational system and the nature of the social commitment in KSA, which were evident during her data collection phase. According to her, the educational system in KSA is not up to the UK standards and is highly competitive (see Section 5.3.2). This perception was elaborated on later in the interview. In addition, using Standard Arabic at school caused some difficulties for her children, especially the younger ones who had not been exposed to that variety for a lengthy period while being abroad, as the everyday Arabic used at home is the colloquial variety (see Section 1.5.3 for the differences between the two varieties). This view was also shared by another female participant, Huda, who expressed her feelings about the return and how she perceives 'fitting in':

'Maybe the thing that will affect them [her children] the most is school.... The preparatory work to find a suitable school was also a pain'. (Huda T1, 57-59)

According to her, the best schools had such long waiting lists that she had not found one suitable for her children even a year after their return.

Male participants, on the other hand, did not seem to be so concerned about their children's education, for two reasons. Khalid's children are still studying in the UK, while Omar and Ali's children are young and below school age. This may explain their more complacent attitude towards this issue.

When Nora was asked why social commitments were a concern, she explained that the unplanned nature of these commitments is what disturbed her most, especially since she had become a well-organised person while living abroad:

'I can't refuse to join social and familial commitments, or any 'azeema'⁶⁹ ... I can't say I don't want to go because of this and that ... or I can't go because I have work to do ... excuses of any kind aren't accepted ... they [social gatherings] are a must! And, Masha'Allah⁷⁰, [said ironically] they are on a daily basis! I am not exaggerating ... Someone has passed away⁷¹, another has had a baby! And you can't just say no! Saying 'no' might be interpreted as me being snobbish [especially after studying abroad]... I mean ... there are things that may not make sense ... but this is the reality of our society ... this is what happens.' (Nora T1, 57-63)

The quote sheds light on two underlying concepts, trying to 'fit in', i.e. accommodation, and the burden of social obligation. Both can be linked to the sociocultural aspect of the return.

The word '*can't*' was used four times, which may indicate the importance, as well as the burden, of these social obligations. Moreover, the participant's reaction to these obligations highlights her intention to conform to the norms of the society and blend in regardless of how logical they might be or whether she agreed or disagreed with them.

By contrast, Sara's positive psychological state during this phase impacted on her overall reaction towards the return and almost eliminated any concerns about sociocultural matters. She was full of joy and excitement. She wanted to return home and give her children the attention and time which they had been deprived of during her stressful studies for her PhD. She commented on this phase saying:

'I pay more attention to my children now ... I have time to pamper myself ... watch TV, read magazines, surf the internet ... I mean ... entertainment ... you know ... that I was deprived of [during her PhD studies]... I am exploiting and enjoying this convalescent phase of my life to the maximum before I start work'. (Sara T1, 56-58)

The metaphor that Sara uses, comparing this phase of her life, after completing her PhD, with the recovery phase patients go through following an illness emphasises her sense of happiness

⁶⁹ *Azeema*: a word used to describe all sorts of social gathering.

⁷⁰ *Masha'Allah*: an Arabic phrase meaning "God has willed".

⁷¹ Offering condolences to the deceased's family is a major part of the Muslim rituals and practices.

and relief after the stressful journey she experienced on the road to gaining her PhD: *'My PhD journey was very difficult ... with a lot of obstacles'* (Sara T1, 37). Earlier, she mentioned that her husband had been involved in a car accident and was confined to a wheel chair for almost a year in the UK. She also had two young children while doing her PhD which consequently meant even more time and effort had to be put in to accomplishing her goal. These different views and reactions towards the return could reflect the different circumstances which Nora and Sara found themselves in and may explain their different attitudes.

Ali, a male participant, displaying an attitude similar to that of Sara, stressed that the only place where one can attain full psychological stability is one's home country. His positive orientation towards the return helped him maintain a rather calm attitude, not just during this phase, but also through the whole period of this study. Ali added that returning home meant that he could compensate his parents for being away during the years of his study abroad. He said:

'My parents have been insisting for years that I work hard and finish my studies ... at the end, I have been the 'loser' for being away and being deprived for years from my opportunity to offer Albir⁷² to them ... they were more than keen to see me finish'.

(Ali T1, 30-32)

Ali mentioned in his interview that he lives with his parents in an extended family. This illustrates the degree of involvement on both sides and explains the participant's feelings as expressed in the interview. This feeling of guilt for being away from parents was also expressed by another male participant and is not uncommon:

'I feel guilty for being inattentive towards my mother while studying abroad. She is so eager for my return. Being away affected her deeply'. (Omar T1, 293-294)

Huda, the third female participant, expressed mixed feelings about the return. On the one hand, psychologically, she was excited that she would finally settle and have the chance to relax. On the other hand, she was not 'socio-culturally' ready as she put it:

'I need to return and feel at home ... I mean ... I've been in a mess all the time, moving between here and there. I was in [mentions another English speaking country] for my MA, then I returned to KSA ... two years later, I came here [to the UK]! It has always been like that ... that's it! I want to settle ... but at the same time, I sometimes feel that I am not quite ready for the things waiting for me there! [said with laughter]'.

(Huda T1, 8-14)

⁷² *Albir*: an Islamic concept for treating one's parents kindly and being rewarded 'Ajer' from Allah 'God'.

The feeling of relaxation and stability were things that Huda missed during her time abroad because after all it was a temporary, fast-paced stay for a specific purpose. She knew that she would not be living in the UK forever and that at some point she would return home. Huda was also thrilled that she would move to a new city in KSA, and she elaborated upon that excitement in the interview. The literature predicts that it is easier to readjust for people if they are returning to a country or a city that is different to the one they lived in before living abroad (Storti, 2001), as the person already expects things to be different. However, the verification of this anticipation, together with the feelings of stability and relaxation, will be explored in detail in the findings of the second phase when the participant had had a chance to live in the new city.

Later, while asking Huda to explain further what she meant by the “*things*”, she laughed and said:

‘I don’t know ... are they traditions or what? ... whatever ... you know what I mean ... here [in the UK] you live more independently ... no interference ... no obligations of any kind ... I mean ... no social obligations’. (Huda T1, 20-21)

The interpretation of this short extract is that social obligations are behind many concerns about the return. However, there was a discernible degree of hesitation before articulating that as a concern. This again reflects their centrality and importance in Saudi culture. The reluctance, apparent from the beginning of the interview, to identify social obligations as a major issue when contemplating a return home indicates their significance and a perception that they should not be questioned.

Social obligations were linked with traditions as indicated by Huda’s allusion to their origin in the form of a question. Her own immediate response was ‘*whatever*’, suggesting that she herself immediately dismisses any questioning and accepts that they remain an integral and important part of Saudi life that have to be adhered to.

The content of the extract and the accompanying laughter may indicate a degree of embarrassment either for raising it as an issue, or saying something that would be patently obvious to someone sharing the same background (see Section 3.6).

One of the aspects of living abroad that Huda and most participants enjoyed was the freedom they had in managing their daily life without any interference from family members or relatives. Comparing this aspect of life abroad with the situation that pertained at home raised participants’ feelings about home and the return with regards to sociocultural differences. Social commitments appear to be one reason for feelings of discomfort about the return and were cited as a concern, to varying degrees, by both Nora and Huda.

The fourth female participant, Farah, was more optimistic about the return, but not quite ready for it as evidenced by her remark:

'I have spent a long time here in the UK and I feel that ... I mean ... going back and re-adjusting to the Saudi society requires time'. (Farah T1, 13, 14)

Farah still had few months to spend in the UK before her final homecoming as she was correcting her PhD thesis, after passing her Viva⁷³, which can take up to six months. This possibly explains her relatively relaxed attitude during the interview. Moreover, she is single and had no responsibilities apart from herself compared to the others who were married and had children. However, when she clarified further what she meant by 're-adjusting' to Saudi society, her answer indicated more the shift in responsibilities from being a student to returning as a lecturer i.e. role-change, and from being the only person responsible for her decisions while abroad to once again involving other family members in decision-making, as would be the case when back home after her return to KSA.

4.3.2 Feelings about Doing a PhD

During this phase, and before the return to KSA, all male participants expressed a desire to benefit their country through the use of knowledge they had acquired during their PhD studies. Their feelings of indebtedness, privilege and enthusiasm was evident and dominated their responses:

'Having a PhD is a success Alhamdulillah⁷⁴ and something gratifying but, to be honest, it imposes a degree of responsibility'. (Ali T1, 13-14)

'I was blessed by the chance to complete my studies and it's time now to contribute to the development of my country'. (Khalid T1, 12-13)

These expressions of moral obligation and feelings of accountability and reciprocity were more obvious among male participants than female. This may reveal some gender and self-identification variations that will be discussed in the next chapter.

In describing the relationship with compatriots upon completing his PhD, Khalid said:

Khalid: *Let me tell you ... I mean ... people started to show more respect and were more polite as soon as I was awarded the PhD ... can you believe it ... even before I return home! This is our culture.*

INTERVIEWER: *Really! what made you feel that?*

⁷³ Latin for oral examination or thesis defence.

⁷⁴ Arabic phrase meaning "praise and appreciation be to God".

Khalid: *I mean ... the people I knew while studying became totally different after my degree ... friendlier and more welcoming!* (Khalid T1, 259-260)

This provides insight into the complexity of the returnees' role within KSA culture and the challenges that cultural expectations place on them, which goes beyond the complexity of a PhD holder.

Another aspect of the returnees' relationship with compatriots was the concept of 'being judged'. This was a concern for Omar as he felt that there was a sense of fear from feeling inferior among some of his friends and relatives. According to him, holding a PhD entails, and imposes, some social hierarchy in KSA:

'Some friends were worried that I might become arrogant and see myself as above them ... and 'ashoof nafsi''⁷⁵. (Omar T1, 36)

However, Omar used a number of strategies to eliminate this feeling and maintain social relations. He consciously recalled common interests upon his first meeting with friends and avoided using titles to prove that the PhD had not changed his attitude toward his relationships:

'when a friend of mine started calling me Dr Omar ... I knew it was a way to discover my reaction ... if I was pleased, in which case I believe he would have continued to use the title, but if I told him not to call me Dr... I am still Omar ... call me Omar ... he was happier with that.' (Omar T1, 42-43)

Titles are seen as barriers to close relationships and using them among peers in KSA is an indication of formality.

4.3.3 Relationship Dynamics Abroad

In terms of family relationships, all the married participants agreed that they had developed stronger relationships with their spouse and children while abroad. They attributed this to the fact that they had fewer social commitments, and therefore more time to spend with their immediate families:

'While abroad, you only have your family, your home and the university.'

(Khalid T1, 95)

Similarly, Sara agreed that the experience of being abroad for some time and living away from the extended family, relatives and friends had enhanced her relationship with her small family, resulting in a stronger family bond to the extent that they could not tolerate their extended family presence or, as she called it, "attack" upon the return:

⁷⁵ Arabic phrase used to describe arrogance and overinflated pride in oneself.

'We became so attached that we couldn't accept the [extended] family's sudden 'attack' and interference upon our return ... Everyone around us wanted to intrude.'

(Sara T1, 138-140)

In the same way, Nora expressed a stronger relationship with her husband:

Nora: *My husband and I got to know each other more while abroad ... we realised that whatever happens ... Alhamdulillah ... we would still be together.*

INTERVIEWER: *What do you mean by 'whatever happens'?*

Nora: *I mean ... he paid no attention to what people said about me being on my own there [in the UK] ... He promised that he would let me finish my studies ... and he kept his promise ... I will never forget his support and encouragement. (Nora T1, 180- 185)*

When elaborating on this issue, 'people' turned out to be her 'in-laws' and she pointed out that her relationship with them was challenging at times:

'There were tensions in our relationship ... I mean ... the idea that my husband is here'⁷⁶ [in KSA] and I am there [in the UK] ... I mean ... I was living alone ... they found the idea of me living by myself hard to accept'. (Nora T1, 176-178)

The whole concept of living apart was not accepted by the in-laws, whose attitude simply reflected the norms of the Saudi culture i.e. wife and children under the authority of the husband or father. This again relates to the collectivist nature of the Saudi culture in terms of social relations and obligations (see Sections 1.5.4 and 1.5.5).

Although scholarships are granted, after the guardian's permission and agreement to accompany his wife, sister or daughter, some need to return occasionally to attend to other obligations e.g. job and family. This may be faced by some overt or implied disapproval on the part of in-laws or other senior members of the family who may perceive this as a threat to the unity and harmony of the family.

Thinking about, and preparing for the return, raised a number of issues and concerns that were not just manifested in the above findings, but also led to a comparison between the host and home cultures.

4.3.4 Here and There: Host and Home Environments

When the interview evolved into discussions around the differences between life abroad and life back home, most participants agreed that they would miss the simplicity of life abroad. Although simplicity was expressed differently by some participants, it was something admired by most of them. Farah, for example, said:

⁷⁶ Nora's husband had to return to KSA in the middle of her studies due to a job commitment.

'Simplicity of life there [in the UK] ... in everything ... your visits ... the way you dress and eat ... and the way you interact with people ... I mean ... things are simple and without formality'. (Farah T1, 91-92)

Nora elaborated on this issue by saying:

Nora: *There in [mentions her city in the UK], when my friends and I decide to meet for breakfast after dropping our children to school, we all come dressed casually in jeans and trainers ... we don't have to wear makeup! ... here [in KSA], the situation is different, there is a lot of exaggeration you know*

INTERVIEWER: *in terms of what, can you please explain?*

Nora: *I mean ... you have to be dressed-up in a certain way, the Abayah,⁷⁷ the bag you hold and the makeup you wear, all of them need to be smart!*

INTERVIEWER: *and how do you feel about this?*

Nora: *It bothers me a lot of course! ... Exaggeration in everything ... and the point is that ... you don't want to feel odd ... you need to adapt to whatever culture you are in. (Nora T1, 123-132)*

Khalid expressed this simplicity from a different perspective, i.e. in relation to hierarchy in treating other ethnic groups:

'here [in the UK], at the work place for example, if a person [from another ethnic group] sits either next to/ or in front of them [British people], they don't care, it doesn't make a big difference to them ... as long as they finish what they are supposed to do. You don't see this in our culture, although it is one of the basic principles of Islam ... if someone [from another ethnic group] sits next to us [Saudis]; you know what I mean, how they [people from other ethnicity] are treated'. (Khalid T1, 225-227)

He spoke this statement *'you know what I mean'* as if he was saying, *"You know how inferior we [the majority of Saudis] look at them"*.

Khalid touched upon a sensitive issue that is widely seen in Saudi culture, although it is in a way or another starting to diminish, at least among highly educated people or those people who *fully* apply Islamic principles. I chose the word 'fully' because some 'pick and choose' or 'cherry-pick' Islamic teachings according to how appealing they are to them. In a culture that is tribal in nature, some people may not like the idea of sharing certain aspects of life, e.g. eating together or sharing the same desk, with someone considered an outsider. An outsider may be anyone not belonging to the same or another well-known tribe, including Saudis, let alone foreign workers, especially those from developing countries⁷⁸, who are looked upon as

⁷⁷ *Abayah*: is a traditional, usually black, robe-like dress worn by women in KSA when in public and covers the whole body except the head, hands and feet.

⁷⁸ For example India, Pakistan and the Philippines.

subordinates. The issue of simplicity here was expressed in terms of equality, i.e. no matter who you are or where you come from, you will be treated the same. However, this may not be an issue of cultural difference as much as it is of cultural familiarity. The way people treat in-group and out-group members, being overt or covert in their daily interactions and intentions, especially with foreigners is culturally-bound (see Section 1.5.4 and 1.5.5). To explain this further, Khalid may have interpreted British people's reaction to outsiders as being fair due to lacking the know-how of how British people really feel about foreigners and how much acceptance they demonstrate.

Another comparison raised in this interview was that of the management of financial matters. Omar found it easier to control and manage financial issues in the UK compared to that in KSA, despite the high cost of living. When elaborating on this issue, financial pressure turned out to be directly related to family and social obligations, e.g. unexpected gifts or providing financial support to one of the family members or friends. Omar, and other female participants earlier, emphasised that social obligation is not an option in KSA but a must:

'Simply put ... in KSA, your time is not yours ... it belongs to others ... who may plan and shape your day ... this is something in our culture ... For example, if you have arranged for something and you receive a call from your parents to do something else ... you have no choice but to accept what is required of you ... you can't say no'.

(Omar T1, 60-61)

The main aspect that is highlighted in this part of Omar's response was the concept of *Albir* which was explained earlier. This Islamic perception guides how a person should treat his/her parents and explains the necessity to please them regardless of any other obligations one may have. One of the female participants, Nora, mirrored Omar's view when talking about her plans upon return:

'I am not quite sure yet ... in KSA, it may be challenging to plan ahead as things may all of a sudden just happen'. **(Nora T1, 208-209)**

As with others, the reference is to the unpredictable nature of social commitments in KSA, and how this may interfere with an individual's plans, irrespective of how organised they may be. This could be closely related to the collective aspect of Saudi culture and may have an effect on the psychological well-being of the returnee (see Section 5.4.4).

Three female participants, Sara, Huda and Nora, mentioned that they missed the transportation systems they had enjoyed in the UK. Both Sara and Nora had their own cars and drove

themselves. This enhanced their feelings of independence. In KSA, women have recently⁷⁹ been given the permission to drive while, during the data collection phase, they needed to be accompanied by a male guardian or a driver if they wanted to commute (Pharaon, 2004; Long, 2005) (see Section 1.5.5). Consequently, these females gained a sense of freedom through not having to rely on, or wait for, a male guardian or hired driver, for their transportation:

'The nature of life is different there [in the UK], it gives us more space as women ... I mean ... I can do whatever I want without the restrictions I face here [in KSA] ... I just open the door and leave ... enjoy my time with my children ... whether by car or even on foot!' (Sara T1, 126-128)

'Here [in the UK] ... whenever you need something, you just go at once and get it ... I do not have to wait for a car or a driver ... that is a real pain there [in KSA] ... and I will miss this the most when I return'. (Huda T1, 23-24)

Restrictions on the mobility of females in KSA appear to be a challenge, especially for those females who have experienced another way of life in which it was much easier to accomplish their errands using a wide variety of available transportation. Nora depicted the issue of transportation in KSA as a series of steps:

'first, I have to find a driver; second, whether the driver knows how to drive [drives safely] is another issue! So, I feel tense every time I need to go a mishwar⁸⁰ ... The roads are too busy ... I mean ...it is hectic ... I need to think several times before I decide to go out ... I do not know if this is a personal or a general issue ... I spent the first 3 months after my return without a driver!' (Nora T1, 48-52)

Comparisons between the cultural norms in the UK and KSA were noticeable in participants' accounts. This was especially evident in terms of punctuality, which was admired by all participants.

Nasser touched upon this issue by saying:

'Maybe if you arrive on time in KSA, people will stare at you, wondering why you are early, being late is the norm'. (Nasser T2, 89-90)

As Nasser elaborated, being late may exhibit a matter of status, i.e. emphasising being the one for whom everyone else is waiting. Drawing on the collectivist nature once more and the rituals of social gathering in KSA, the host usually waits for everyone invited to arrive before serving food.⁸¹ Thus, coming late can be considered a way of showing importance by implying that the

⁷⁹ A royal decree by King Salman was issued in September 2017 to lift the ban on women driving and to ensure full implementation of the order by June 2018.

⁸⁰ The Arabic word used for a short journey.

⁸¹ By food I mean the main meal, whether lunch or dinner, not coffee, tea, sweets and savouries which are offered throughout the event.

person is too busy to arrive early. Nora realised that on her return to KSA she was far less tolerant than before, especially when it came to a lack of punctuality:

Nora: *You arrange to meet someone at 9:00, and you keep waiting until 10:30 but no one shows up!*

INTERVIEWER: *Mmm*

Nora: *An hour and a half late! That is too much ... Why this carelessness! ... it really annoys me ... I don't know ... I sometimes think I just need to let go and accept things as they are ... or maybe I have to change ... I don't know'. (Nora T1, 135-139)*

The structural and cultural variation between the two national cultures, as well as the time spent away from home, enhanced these individuals' awareness about the changes around them and within them. This is further illustrated below:

INTERVIEWER: *Is Dr Omar the same person he was before starting his studies?*

Omar: *Personally, I've undergone a lot of changes ... but Alhamdulillah ... I have developed intellectually ... my life has developed ... as well as my experience ... as a person gets older, he experiences more of life and I believe that with the time spent living abroad this experience doubles ... 6 years abroad means 12 years experience ... this is what I think ... so yes I've changed ... and hopefully for the best.*

INTERVIEWER: *Can you tell me more about this change?*

Omar: *I think I have become more mature ... more interested in teamwork and helping others ... I realised that ... in life ... Subhan Allah ⁸² ... nothing comes out of the blue or just happens overnight ... everything needs time and practice ... practice makes perfect! So I became more mature in seeking change ... any change in any domain ... I learned how to be patient in dealing with others ... my supervisor, examiners and friends ... patient through my own research ... I believe I have acquired social intelligence and I can deal with people accordingly ... My friends think I'm special, but I have to admit that this particular characteristic was polished here in the UK. (Omar T1, 213-246)*

This conversation sheds light on some important aspects of the experience of studying abroad, and the PhD process which appears to have refined and enriched the student's mental capacity, as well as his personality. In response to the same question, Khalid spoke of changes in his personality that led to changes in his worldview:

'In the West [UK], I found people happy with what they had and never asked for more, so I became more contented ... As I told you, being abroad gave me a chance for self-reconciliation ... it gave us a chance to understand ourselves ... to be honest, this chance wasn't available there [in KSA] ... You don't have time for yourself ... even if you are alone, you receive 24 phone calls! I am so pleased that my phone doesn't ring

⁸² Arabic phrase meaning 'Glory be to God'.

here [in the UK]. This gives us a chance to understand ourselves ... to question things ... I mean ... let me tell you how I've changed; I developed new habits, e.g. when I see things that I like or dislike, I write about them ... I didn't have this talent before! ... I can use my time wisely now; I became more active, helpful and reflective ... I feel that my personality has matured abroad'. (Khalid T1, 193-213)

Farah, who was the youngest in her family, also noticed a radical change in her personality. She became highly independent and a decision maker after being a very dependent person. It is worth mentioning that being dependent does not equate to being helpless, powerless or without control; rather it means being interdependent (Markus & Kitayama, 1991), a concept explained in Section 5.4.5. However, losing network support abroad boosted her autonomy and sharpened her personality:

'There is a psychological pressure in studying for a PhD abroad; besides the requirements of the degree, there are the difficulties of living in a foreign country ... It's this very process of surviving in a culture that is totally different from yours ... and becoming responsible for everything, from A to Z, ... that caused this change'. (Farah T1, 45-54)

Similarly, Sara agreed that it is the experience of living abroad, albeit temporarily, that caused any changes in her personality and triggered her independence, regardless of the PhD studies or the degree.

Huda also commented on this aspect by saying that the experience of studying abroad and dealing with people from different parts of the world, with different mind-sets and backgrounds, 'matured' her in such a way that she felt she had become more patient in dealing with others and more open to others' opinions:

'I used to become distressed easily when someone disagreed with me or when I couldn't convince people about certain issues ... Now I take it as it comes, because I have realised that I can't change the way people think ... Now I let go ... I don't focus on small issues ... there are other more important things to consider'.

(Huda T1, 81-86)

This change, which could be a matter of growth or a matter of circumstances, is reflected in the increased flexibility and rationality in Huda's personality. For example, she is more capable of controlling her temper now than before and she is more aware of her priorities (see Section 5.5.1).

In summary, the participants' comments at this phase were either anticipatory, and drew on their previous short visits to KSA, or limited to the initial experience of the return. For example, they could not comment on their professional lives since they had not yet resumed them.

Although female and male participants had different expectations and assumptions about the return, common feelings of relief and happiness were manifested in most of their comments. Overall, a fair amount of excitement was evident, which is a common sentiment at a major transition point. With the exception of Nora, the participants seemed optimistic and expressed positive feelings but with minor concerns about some logistical issues (e.g. children’s educational system and transportation) in addition to some sociocultural matters and obligations.

Below is a list of preliminary themes that emerged from this phase, but which were not used to guide subsequent interviews as much as they were retained as a frame of reference. As the study progresses, and to allow comparisons over time, McLeod & Yates (2006 cited in McLeod & Thomson, 2009) suggested a set of standardised topics to be raised in each interview round such as family, children, social and professional life, with the possibility of posing new questions as the context changes and new interests emerge. This flexibility enriched the data and permitted a deeper understanding of the re-entry experience. The first preliminary theme is an overarching one that encompasses three different areas i.e. structural, social and the self (self-concept).

Preliminary themes that have been extracted from Phase I:		
Expected challenges upon return to KSA		
<i>Structural and Logistical issues</i>	<i>Social issues</i>	<i>Self-impression</i>
➤ Challenges faced when dealing with logistics e.g. educational system, transportation, bureaucracy.	➤ Impact of social obligations on returnees. ➤ Awareness of the differences between host and home e.g. cultural norms.	➤ Impact of the experience of studying abroad on returnees. ➤ Awareness of personal change.
See Table 4-3 for Final themes that have emerged from Phase II and Phase III		

Table 4-1: Preliminary Study Themes

Following the main research question in this study, “How do Saudi PGSs find their return-home experience after studying abroad?”, subsequent parts present findings of the second phase which took place when all participants had been in KSA for between 1 and 5 months. The participants’ assumptions and feelings about the return are borne in mind when presenting what they experienced in reality.

4.4. Findings from Phase II: Between 1-5 Months after Returning to KSA

4.4.1 Fitting in and Facing Reality

This phase comprised two main areas related to structure and social norms with some reference to the individual, as someone returning from a study abroad, holding a PhD. All of this had an effect, in one way or another, on the psychological aspect of the return. While structure is related to the educational and professional system, social norms covered a wider range. The following section presents the findings relating to these issues.

4.4.1.1 Theme 1: Structural and Logistical Issues

This theme has two main dimensions. First, it involves the challenges common to all returnees from all over the world regardless of their country or culture. These could be faced when trying to deal with daily routines and activities. Second, it involves culture-bound issues related specifically to the Saudi culture, e.g. women driving and the specific challenges faced due to the nature of Saudi culture. All of these issues had an emotional impact on returnees to a greater or lesser extent.

Returning home to a new city was thought to be an advantage as it meant fewer existing acquaintances, less social commitment and more privacy. However, Huda felt depressed upon her arrival and replied to the question: *'How do you find life back home, in KSA?'*

By saying:

'To be honest ... I felt depressed as soon as I arrived home [in the new city] ... I remained quiet for almost a whole week ... I even lost my appetite! I felt constrained ... transportation is an issue ... I mean ... I am literally tied here! ... I used to go out [in the UK] every time I wanted ... but it is different now [she needs a driver] ... Hmm ... then school started of course'. (Huda T2, 6-13)

The feelings of depression she expresses could be a result of the sudden change she experienced and the loss of familiar facilities and opportunities she enjoyed and valued while abroad, in particular ease of transportation. Depression is not solely related to being in a new city, as transportation may remain an issue for females in any part of KSA. However, being in the same city with her family could have facilitated her transportation by either sharing a driver service or receiving support from male family members. Thus, being in a new city may have contributed to her feeling of isolation and constraint. The shift in her answer, changing the subject to schools while still describing her feelings upon her arrival, may also highlight the link between the two, depression and schools. The fact that she ended with *'of course'* suggests that schooling was an issue that she expected to be problematic. It can be surmised that these feelings of depression were not just a result of being in a new city with limited means of transportation and no driver, but also to the fact that *'school started'* with all its demands (see

Section 5.3.2). The KSA educational system was a recurring subject in almost all of the participants' accounts, especially those of females with school age children as one said:

'I had low expectations ... I knew that there will be a great deal of pressure on my children at school [in KSA]'. (Nora T2, 67-68)

Both Huda and Nora believe that one of the challenges and difficulties in KSA schools is the use of standard Arabic, which is not similar to the everyday Arabic used at home (see Section 1.5.3). As a result participants had to explain not only the lessons and homework to their children, but also the language, in terms of vocabulary, in which these lessons and homework are delivered (see Section 5.3.2):

'We are suffering from Arabic ... it's a language problem [referring to the use of 'Standard Arabic'] ... I need to explain the meaning of every word, [provide synonyms]... besides helping with the content of the lessons themselves'.

(Nora T2, 72-74)

'They [her children] don't understand ... except for basic words like went, came, and said'. (Huda T3- 14)

Moreover, both participants agreed that the school environment in KSA is extremely competitive and that homework is a burden, which contributed to the stress experienced by both children and parents:

'There is homework every day ... every day! ... And a test almost every week! The problem is that they [her children] aren't used to this...we have fight to get them do their homework'. (Huda T2, 59-61, 154)

'My daughter spends 4 hours a night doing her homework and even then may not finish it! So we spend the weekend studying or completing what has not been done... they [her children] don't have time'. (Nora T2, 70-72)

The time to which Nora refers is 'spare time' when one can enjoy activities other than those related to schoolwork. This is in contrast with the situation in the UK where her daughter had time for other activities as she said: 'she used to do ballet for example' (Nora T2, 72).

Huda mentioned in her interview that her son told her once that going to school 'is a waste of money' and that 'he would give her all his pocket money to get out of school' (Huda T2, 33-34). The expression of such sentiments illustrates the degree of pressure he felt he was under.

Due to the differences in the academic cultures (see Section 1.5.5), and the sudden change from one system to another, the child became so distressed and could not cope to the extent that he almost gave up studying altogether.

The extract below was a conversation between Nora and her son regarding this issue:

Nora: *Why don't you like going to school here [in KSA]?*

Son: *Because they speak Arabic ... I am not Saudi ... I am from [... mentions the city they lived in, in the UK].*

Nora: *But they speak English with you*

Son: *They don't speak [... the city's dialect] English!* (Nora T2, 84-86)

Nora's son, who was born in the UK, tried to explain why he did not like going to school in KSA, even though it is an international school and everyone spoke English. This linguistic awareness may reflect some identity issues as well, as he does not perceive himself a Saudi. Nora elaborated further:

'he keeps on saying I don't want this school ... this is not my world; my world is there in [a city in the UK] ... the boys here aren't my friends ... my friends are Alex and George ... I hear this every morning on the way to school'. (Nora T2, 223-225)

One can imagine how distressing this could be on a daily basis. Similarly, Sara struggled for more than two months trying to enrol her eldest daughter whose General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) qualifications did not fulfil Saudi university entrance requirements:

'It was a very stressful period...we should have asked about the university requirements [in KSA] earlier'. (Sara T2, 41)

It is obvious from Sara's response that she blames herself for not checking the requirements of the universities in KSA before returning. If she had done so she would have had more than enough time to prepare and to be aware of the consequences. Such preparedness would, in turn, have minimised any stress. Failure to secure her daughter's placement immediately upon the return may be a consequence of her busy life as a PhD student abroad and could explain the degree of excitement she felt in the early phase of the return.

It is evident from the above findings that when returnees' children experience psychological stress at school, this has a direct effect on the psychology of the returnees themselves and, consequently, crossover factors (Westman, 2001) can arise (see Section 5.1).

When talking about the changes upon the return, and the way returnees dealt with them, Nora said:

'No, no, they aren't changes ... In fact, they are difficulties! To me, they are difficulties in readjustment ... difficulties in accepting the current situation ... a friend of mine, who experienced the return earlier, told me that it would take about a year to settle and readjust ... but every personal experience is different'. (Nora T2, 197-200)

One of the difficulties identified by Nora, for example, was that of applying for a chauffeur. The lack of clear guidelines for this process and the bureaucratic procedure irritated her, especially since she did not want to be dependent on her mother's chauffeur. Her own comments sum up the idiosyncratic nature of the return and show how she perceived cultural norms:

'My mind-set has not yet adapted to the norms of KSA ...for example, I find it difficult to ask someone for a ride ... while everyone does it here [in KSA] ... maybe it's because I'm still psychologically attached to the UK ... I don't know ... Should I hang on to what I've learned about being independent or should I just give up ... forget about it, it's not such a big deal, and maybe I will change as time goes by'.

(Nora T2, 148-152)

Again, touching upon the issue of transportation in this response confirms its impact on Nora's overall adjustment up to that point. Her views also reveal some of the characteristics of her personality, notably a desire to maintain independence that, while evident in other participants, seems particularly relevant to Nora.

Professional life in KSA also posed many challenges to most of the participants (see Section 5.3.3). For example, Nora expressed her frustration towards the absence of an orientation programme and the lack of guidance for new staff members (one of whom she considered herself). Although she had been a member of staff for about three years before her study abroad, she still needed guidance upon her arrival in relation to the new system:

'I feel I still need to understand this system more ... from the first day I came ... no one provided me with any guidance ... I had to go and ask myself ... try to work things out on my own! I've heard about mentoring committees, but it took me three weeks to find who the members were... and after all they themselves weren't familiar with the system ... because they were foreigners! I needed someone to explain things to me, but I couldn't find what I needed'. **(Nora T2, 36-49)**

While Nora did not have high expectations about the situation at the university, as she had been told by her colleagues about the massive change in her department (i.e. in the overall system and curriculum) during her time abroad, the reality she faced upon return was disappointing. She realised that the system which had been operating for nearly five years by the time she returned, was unfair, lacking quality, and not tailored to the needs of the students, especially when it comes to teaching English as a foreign language (EFL):

'I am expected to finish a whole unit, including its vocabulary and grammar, in 3 hours! This is not what happens in real life! Especially when it comes to teaching a language... this new system was implemented to achieve academic accreditation but it is not applicable! And those who imposed it don't realise that ... because they aren't teachers'. **(Nora T2, 9-11)**

Nora believes that what hinders any attempts at improvements is the institutional structure found in Saudi public universities:

'I think it is because of male attitudes ... they [the male section] undermine female authority ... there is nothing we [as female staff] can do ... actually, the head of the female department is just a figurehead ... she does nothing ... we don't even know what the exams look like! There used to be a committee responsible for exams but not any more ... we don't know what sort of questions the students will have until the day of the exam'. (Nora T2, 7-9)

The feeling of helplessness may affect female returnees' performance and their psychological wellbeing especially that they are eager to implement the knowledge they have acquired abroad upon their return. A further related point was made by Sara:

'Our educational system [in KSA] is more theoretical than practical; I would like to compensate for this by teaching my students how to apply what they have learned in real life ... take part in presentations ... assess each other ... the things we learned there [in the UK] ... how to stand and talk confidently ... we weren't taught this way at our schools [in KSA] ... to be honest, we were taught to be recipients ... we weren't taught to be critical'. (Sara T2, 232-238)

Omar, on the other hand, was involved in administrative work. Interestingly, due to the scarcity of Saudi PhD holders in Omar's new department, he was assigned the responsibilities of a deputy head upon his arrival. These promotions are quite common for PhD holders in KSA upon their return. This new position, with its new responsibilities, was a significant challenge for Omar professionally. What made it particularly challenging was other people's high expectations of a fresh graduate from a UK university:

'They say it openly; you are a UK graduate, young and intelligent ... and will Insha'Allah⁸³ have the solutions to all the problems in this department'.

(Omar T2, 58-59)

These high expectations created obligations that had to be addressed properly in order to avoid disappointment. This also posed additional psychological pressure, since the department was newly formed, and its demands required considerable effort and patience to deal with. Believing in one's abilities may not always be enough to solve issues that have accumulated over years in the workplace, as Omar explained.

One of Omar's early achievements, after he started in this position, was the implementation of the 'dead-line' concept, which was almost completely absent among the student-admin daily communications. As an example: students used to provide false medical certificates for their

⁸³ Arabic expression meaning "if God wills".

continued absence throughout the term, to avoid being banned from the final examination and these excuses were accepted all the time. However, after new regulations were implemented, they had to provide the certificate within two weeks from the start date of their absence. In addition, a dead-line was also applied to any accreditation of prior learning.

Another challenge for the participants was the expectation that they would teach certain subjects of which they had no experience, because those subjects were neither their main specialty nor even their sub-specialty. This required a lot of preparation and a high level of performance and was potentially challenging to their self-confidence after spending few years focusing on one area of speciality during their PhD studies. Omar, having authority, is trying to overcome this by making a plan to specify the needs of the department, before granting any scholarship to staff members. This serves to ensure that all subjects are covered by adequate number of staff. Furthermore, Omar is trying to organise a polarisation committee to avoid staff shortages; at the same time aiming to solve this issue in the long run and avoid wasting time and money.

The bureaucracy in the workplace seemed to annoy most participants regardless of gender. This overcomplicated nature of the bureaucracy was manifested in the accreditation system of the PhD certificate. Before any Assistant Professor's position could be offered to those eligible by dint of their qualifications, the actual certificate had to be accredited. The delays in this procedure affected some financially, especially as they had to meet their living requirements upon their return. Moreover, having to follow-up and check the progress of the accreditation process was a cause of frustration and exhaustion:

Omar: *It is really frustrating and distressing to chase after something you deserve.*

INTERVIEWER: *Why is it taking so long?*

Omar: *Bureaucracy! ... I discovered that my file was in one office for three months ... the same office! ... When it should have been sent to another department to finalise the process of granting me the position I'm entitled to ... imagine if I hadn't asked about it, it would have remained there forever!*

INTERVIEWER: *So, have you now been granted an Assistant Professorship?*

Omar: *Not yet! It's been more than five months now since my return and I am still being paid as a teaching assistant ... this has affected me financially ...*

INTERVIEWER: *How?*

Omar: *During this period, I had a workshop in another city ... although the living expenses were covered by the university, the standard of everything was far below that of what an Assistant Professor usually receives. (Omar T2, 176-194)*

It is evident that this issue has caused Omar a degree of psychological distress and distracted him from implementing his initial plans. For example, instead of being engaged in academic work and thinking about publishing papers as he intended, he was busy chasing after details

to ensure that his accreditation goes through the proper channels. The spill-over effect is shown in Table 4-2 below:

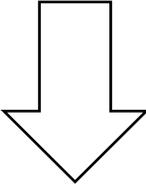
Domains	Participant
Sociocultural / Organisational Behaviour (e.g. bureaucracy at work)	
Socioeconomic (e.g. income)	
Psychological (e.g. distress)	

Table 4-2: Spill-over effect on returnee

4.4.1.2 Theme 2: Cultural Norms and Social Obligations

When it comes to social life, our society, according to most male returnees, gives weight to titles. Holding a PhD is prestigious and attractive, not only to individuals in the home country but also to local organisations. Omar provided an interesting example of the effect of social status on organisations:

‘Let me tell you what happens in real life ... for example ... when you go to a bank to open an account, they ask about your job ... and once they know you are a professor at a university, they start offering VIP services and gold or diamond membership ... you suddenly become a priority’. (Omar T2, 235-238)

This indicates that higher education is not just a qualification and a source of knowledge but also provides enhanced social status (Al-Mubarak, 2011). The perceived image of those with a PhD held by non-academics is revealed in Omar’s account of his treatment. This will be discussed further in the next chapter (Section 5.4.2).

Individuals’ willingness to fit in was also reflected in their choice and use of language as one female participant mentioned:

‘We were at the supermarket [in KSA] when my younger daughter excitedly asked: are these sweets halal? The older one whispered: stop yelling in English everyone is staring at you, they think we are showing off!’ (Sara T2, 189)

The older daughter’s reaction and her reluctance to use English in public reflects an awareness of language behaviour and how people in KSA may perceive this as a way of bragging about the language and which may impede her fitting in.

By contrast, Huda's daughter whose English language was superior to her classmates realised their tendency to approach her and sit next to her only in English lessons to take advantage of her high performance: *'they always tell her you are lucky you lived in the UK'* (Huda T2, 17).

This shows the value of the study abroad experience as seen by her classmates.

Seeking advice from PhD holders was another interesting point that Nasser highlighted. Some home country individuals, usually those less well educated, consider the returnees trustworthy in terms of experience and knowledge, they may spontaneously say:

'You are a Dr, no matter what your speciality is, and have spent years abroad ... you are better than us ... hey brother ... help us with this or that'. (Nasser T2, 265)

As Nasser reports, some Saudis may perceive the returnee *'better'*, having had the opportunity to study abroad. This again highlights the role of a PhD holder in a society such as KSA. According to Nasser, when people believe in you, you are obliged to try to help as much as you can. He considers this as a way to pay back his country, a way of showing his appreciation for the chance to study abroad and a means of becoming a better version of himself by offering advice and showing people the positive side of holding a PhD.

Financial issues were embedded within social norms in many ways. For example, our society, according to returnees, pays significant attention to appearance and this can, on occasion, be annoying to returnees as one said:

'I don't mind wearing sports clothes in public but there is pressure on you to dress smartly all the time. Personally, I don't care ... this is my life and the PhD won't restrict my freedom of choice'. (Khalid T2, 357-358)

Being exposed to a society such as that of the UK, where titles are of minimal importance, even on the university campus, and where a PhD degree is considered merely a license for research, not an indicator of prestige, as far as the returnees are concerned, makes it challenging to cope with the societal demands and expectations placed on them upon the return (see Section 5.4.2). This could also be related to being *'known'* versus being *'anonymous'* in any society. Hence, some people in the home country believe that the status acquired as a PhD holder implies the ability to maintain a luxurious lifestyle and, consequently, place the returnees under an even more intense spotlight:

'If you want to buy a car, for example ... society will not forgive you for buying any old model; they would say 'shame on you!' [said ironically] ... You are a professor now and need a luxury car.' (Khalid T2, 354)

The reconstruction of social relations also involved a degree of challenge. Returnees found it difficult to escape familial obligations,⁸⁴ especially during this early phase when they were more susceptible to being accused of arrogance following the award of a PhD and had to prove that the degree had not changed their attitudes towards their relatives:

'During the first two months after my arrival, I accepted all family invites⁸⁵ ... I was free and not yet assigned a timetable at work, so I wanted to please them [the family and relatives] as much as I could ... it wasn't easy though ... I had to note them [the invites] down! ... But it was the best way ... that if I became busy later on, and had to turn down their invitations ... no one could blame me [of being distant] I gave them plenty of time!'. (Khalid T2, 211-215)

Khalid used this strategy of accepting 'all family invites' as a way of dealing with these social obligations. On the one hand, he was still free and not engaged in any academic work. On the other hand, 'pleasing them' was the best way he could think of to 'fit in' and avoid being looked at as someone who had changed after his PhD studies. Again, his way of accommodating friends and family highlights the importance of social relations in KSA. Khalid expressed his concerns very cogently when he indicated that initially upon his return he felt constrained to accept any and all invites, even if they were not always convenient. There were so many that he had to consciously organise his daily diary around them which was a tactic both to manage himself but also to provide evidence of why he had to turn down certain invites later, if needed. He was clearly concerned that no one should "blame" him for his inability to attend and his comments are a powerful indicator of that. This issue will be further elaborated on in the next chapter.

Earlier in his interview, Khalid defined those in social networks as falling into one of two categories, those who initiate and those who maintain a distance. When talking about the first group he said:

'Titles always attract people ... and to be honest, the / د /⁸⁶ plays a major role ... I mean ... after the award of the PhD, people, even those close to me became more approachable and keen to establish ties ... it is obvious ... This may be a cultural issue; 'we might need him, they say!' [Expecting you to help with their children's entry to university one day] ... you might not be able to help in any way, but it is a

⁸⁴ This is related to the larger extended family e.g. cousins and relatives.

⁸⁵ These include informal gatherings as formal ones are taken for granted.

⁸⁶ Initial used for the title of a Dr in KSA, equivalent to the letter /D/.

cultural issue ... people have been raised this way ... so they immediately ask for your contact number! (Khalid T2, 139-144)

This passage indicates that reactions can be understood through the cultural practice of ‘*Wasta*’ (Arabic: واسطة *wāsiṭah*) i.e. reliance on network relationships or connections. A further explanation of this form of favouritism is provided in the discussion chapter (see Section 5.4.1).

On the other hand, some friends, according to Khalid, tried to avoid him and put barriers up as soon as he met them. This could either be, as he said, a psychological issue arising out of jealousy, because they could not accomplish what he had done, or perhaps because an anticipation that he might now feel and act in a superior way:

‘The other group is the one who couldn’t accomplish what you have done ... they look at you enviously ... and start drifting away ... I guess they expect you to show off after gaining a PhD ... I don’t know ... it might be a psychological issue ... I mean ... possibly seeing your success reminds them of their failures’.

(Khalid T2, 153-171)

Viewing the award of a PhD degree as a success may lead to an individual questioning one’s satisfaction about the award. This issue is explored in the third theme.

4.4.1.3 Theme 3: Self-impression

This theme reveals assumptions and beliefs about oneself following the experience of studying abroad and gaining the award of the PhD degree which were evident in the first phase and highlighted again during this phase.

Both Khalid and Omar questioned their performance and attitudes towards the PhD:

‘Sometimes, I question how satisfied I am ... with myself ... with my performance ... what has the PhD added? ... I mean ... do I really deserve this status? ... This isn’t the end ... I believe ... from my colleagues’ experiences, one needs to be productive and participate in conferences, symposiums and lectures, as this ... according to them ... gives a sense of enjoyment and adds to one’s motivation’. (Omar T2, 415-421)

Omar points to the active role expected of a PhD holder, and how it could enhance one’s sense of satisfaction after the return. Success at PhD level requires a high level of commitment in terms of time and energy and generally dominates a student’s life for the period of study, leaving a substantial vacuum when the study abruptly ends. This point was referred to by Khalid:

'After a while, following the award of the PhD, I had flashbacks of my arrival in the UK ... when I was at the start of my studies ... How I used to rush about ... determined to achieve the PhD ... but it is all over now! It is difficult to accept all this free time ... suddenly ... you have nothing to do ... like a runner who has reached the final! OK ... What's next?' (Khalid T3, 565-570)

These flashbacks that Khalid highlights emphasise the reflective nature of his personality identified earlier in the first interview (Phase I) under personality change. Nora shared this feeling:

'It is a very strange feeling by the way ... to have all this free time ... I mean ... even calling me Doctor feels strange!' (T1, 154-155)

These remarks give an insight into how people may feel and react to certain turning points in their lives. According to Khaw & Hardesty (2007), turning points are points when individuals move from one relatively stable stage to another. Moving from being a PhD student to a PhD holder, and from being anonymous in the UK to someone known in KSA, may raise some unexpected challenges and enhance awareness about one's concept of self:

'When I first arrived in the UK, I needed people's help ... Then I realised that if I needed help from others, others might need help from me ... I felt I owed them and that I should pay back for what I had been given'. (Omar T1, 219-220)

'I used to say 'yes' 'Insha'Allah'⁸⁷, and might put in 50% effort [into whatever he had been asked to do], if someone asked for my help [in the past, before the study abroad experience] ... Now, to be honest, I try my best and put in 100% effort to make sure that I help in any way ... I don't know why ... I feel that it's my duty somehow'.

(Khalid T2, 256-258)

Overall, the return to KSA during this phase seemed to be easier for male than for female participants. With the exception of Omar, who faced some logistical issues in the form of bureaucracy, the females' responsibilities regarding their children, as well as the restrictions in transportation, made this phase of the return relatively more challenging for them. Whether these issues remained crucial or not is the focus of the subsequent findings.

4.5. Findings from Phase III: Between 6-12 Months after Returning to KSA

4.5.1 Theme 4: Stages of Readjustment

4.5.1.1 Getting by

In relation to social life, Khalid mentioned earlier (in Phase II) the techniques that he used to ensure social relations. By the third phase the situation had taken on another dimension. Khalid

⁸⁷ Arabic expression meaning "if God wills"

became more serious and began to refuse to join in social activities, especially gatherings that were on a daily basis:

'I realised that I was giving too much at the expense of my time and health ... I had to put an end to these daily visits ... instead of staying up late every night, I could have spent this time reading an article ... so I became serious about it ... otherwise you lose out ... The problem is that day after day it becomes a habit!' (Khalid T3, 294, 311)

This 'habit', as Khalid explained, could turn a returnee's attention from important academic work, and this made him rethink his priorities.

Sara, on the other hand, was still busy settling into her new life:

'I can't meet with friends yet because I don't have a driver ... I can't afford to get another car now'. (Sara T3, 65)

This brief exchange shows a cause and effect relationship. It shows how essential it is for females to have a driver in KSA and the fact that not having a driver could prevent them from attending social gatherings, especially if male members, who could normally help with transportation, were busy. In addition, her financial situation meant that she could not meet the expense of another car. The first car is usually the husband's. Sara added further:

'I still don't feel like it [meeting with people] ... until I settle ... finish my home ... make sure my daughters are managing at school ... and my husband finds a job ... until I get a driver... then yes'. (Sara T3, 73)

It seems that logistical issues, including financial matters, are embedded within the social aspect of the return and could affect how this social aspect functions in Saudi society. These issues of transportation had a direct effect on Sara's social and personal life and could have been avoided with early preparation. This is suggested in the following section as a tip to ease the overall re-entry experience for newcomers.

With regard to professional life, by this stage, the majority of participants have had the chance to become fully engaged in academia. However, bureaucracy remained an issue (see Section 5.3.3).

Omar was appointed Head of Department, a position that he expected to be offered due to a shortage of staff, and was therefore psychologically prepared for it. Yet, this position placed some additional pressure in terms of 'Wasta':

'It's really embarrassing and causes a lot of pressure when someone expects you to help with their son or daughter's university application when they don't meet the requirements'. (Omar T3, 250-260)

However, Omar adopted a way to deal with these difficulties and related everything to the system to avoid being personally involved. He thinks that holding a certain position gave him the courage to politely refuse requests that may have had a negative effect on his overall integrity or his own wellbeing:

'When you hold a certain position in society, you unconsciously become more confident, direct and able to stop being overly, or inappropriately, courteous.'
(Omar T3, 245-246)

What remains a major challenge at this point, and for his position as the Head of Department in particular, is staff recruitment, whether it concerns Saudi citizens or non-Saudis:

'We aren't allowed to recruit teachers from certain countries such as Syria, Iraq or Libya ... it seems that political issues are so embedded, even in our educational system ... This limits our choices and the opportunities to provide the highest quality in the teaching profession'. (Omar T3, 194, 201)

This restriction in recruitment, according to Omar, caused another issue:

'Even the foreign teachers eventually became less productive as they know there is a high level of demand for their services and therefore there is no fear of losing their job, no matter how bad their performance is'. (Omar T3, 229, 230)

Staffing requirements have been outlined by Onsman (2011) as a rapidly increasing issue in KSA, and which have led to ignoring quality matters, especially in newer institutions like that of Omar.

Khalid, on the other hand, was appointed the Director of a Master (MA) degree program. One of the challenges he faced was finding supervisors for the MA students who were enrolled in the program:

'We have a problem ... in supervision ... Many professors avoid supervision and find it a burden'. (Khalid T3, 58)

When Khalid sought assistance regarding the supervision issue from outside the university, he was disappointed with the bureaucracy he encountered, which interfered with any attempt to solve this problem:

Khalid: *As a Program Director, you don't have total power ... You have to submit a proposal before introducing any suggestion, and it then needs to be approved ... this takes time ... again, bureaucracy is what keeps us back! Even though most staff members have been educated and exposed to new ideas abroad [UK and USA*

graduates]... *they aren't open minded, I don't know ... it is complicated! I wonder if it is a cultural factor that influences their thinking.* (T3, 68-75)

INTERVIEWER: *What do you mean by cultural factor?*

Khalid: *To be honest ... decisions are taken personally ... people in charge think that because you have just returned, you want to play the role of their mentor ... they don't say it ... but I can feel it ... and so they don't take your suggestions seriously!* (T3, 92-145)

This competitive atmosphere could hinder any attempt for improvement and may have a further negative impact on the psychological wellbeing of the returnees as mentioned earlier in Phase II when female lack of authority in the workplace caused some psychological effect (see Section 5.3.3).

In a similar vein, Sara sadly mentioned that her daughter started to lose her British English accent that she acquired while abroad as she tried to accommodate herself to the majority of the class who are less native like. She also mentioned that her daughter's attempts to point out any mispronounced word by the teacher becomes frowned on. This shows how the position of power is related to language display (Eastman & Stein, 1993) (see Section 1.5.5 for power and distance in the academic system in KSA).

Comparisons between KSA and the UK still crop up every now and again, especially when returnees face a disappointing situation. This was articulated by Khalid:

'What annoys me, or what makes me compare is that we can do better ... we have all the facilities, everything is better in KSA, the buildings, the equipment, but the final outcome is unsatisfactory'. (Khalid T3, 131-132)

The problem is, according to Khalid, in implementation:

'Everyone puts in the minimum effort; we haven't even made use of foreigners' expertise, for example ... we never ask for workshops to improve our performance'. (Khalid T3, 138, 140)

Another issue is the lack of quality in leadership positions and the apparent inability to place the most suitable person in the appropriate place:

'For example, why give a PhD holder, who is purely academic, an administrative position? ... Managing people or organisations needs qualities that an academic may lack ... On the other hand, assigning overqualified people to clerical work is a waste of energy. Anyone can do those jobs!' (Khalid T3, 99-105)

As illustrated above, these issues lead to disappointment and was the reason behind the frequent comparisons between the UK and KSA.

Financial issues were a concern for some of the participants during this phase. Sara and Huda complained a great deal about private school fees and the considerable sums they pay compared to the quality they receive in return. They had to put their children in international schools to be able to cope with the educational system in terms of language requirements. This type of school is private in KSA. In addition, Sara had to pay for the unplanned tuition her eldest daughter needed.⁸⁸ At the same time, her family income is still unstable as she has not been promoted while her husband is in the process of starting his own business. All of these factors affected the financial situation of the family. Sara had applied for government housing but due to the timing of her return all the houses were already allocated. Her application was placed on the waiting list. She was offered a flat but this was too small for her family. As a result, she decided to continue living in a rented house. This contributed negatively to her financial state:

'I think the main problem , after my daughters' schools, is more about being financially settled ... I still ask my daughters for patience when they say: you promised us a better life upon our return!'. (Sara T3, 52-78)

This again highlights that early preparation and patience are vital to the overall success of the re-entry experience.

4.5.1.2 Acceptance

All participants seemed more psychologically settled by this stage. They were more in control of their social and professional life. Omar highlighted the many factors that played a major role in his feelings of relief at returning home, including being proud of his achievement, starting work and earning a better income, all of which contributed to his overall well-being. Although he feels nostalgic for the UK every now and then, this feeling is not as intense as it used to be when he first returned to KSA:

*'I realised this when I met the newcomers ... those who have recently returned ... full of longing for the UK ... I told them I had felt the same when I first came home... but that time will ease this feeling ... because in the end ... I mean ... you have to accept the reality that you are here now in KSA ... this is your weather ... this is your car ... and this is your life ... that's it! ... The study abroad period was long enough to gain attachment to your life there ... but these years are over! ... You have a new phase of life now ... with its new responsibilities'.
(Omar T3, 145-154)*

⁸⁸ In order to be accepted at a university, the applicant needs two A level course passes from the British Council, following the GCSE certificate.

Interestingly, the weather in KSA has been identified as one of the first things noticed by returnees. It was mentioned by most of the male participants. This could reflect the different responsibilities of males and females in KSA, i.e. public and private domains and their effect on participants (see Section 1.5.4). Male interactions take place more often in the public rather than the private domain; as such, they are more likely to experience the effects of the weather. However, mentioning it was not a complaint so much as a reminder to oneself about the reality and the new phase of life with its new surroundings. This also reflects the participants' maturity in accepting the current situation and the new phase of life:

'It is all about your attitude, how you view KSA ... If you view it negatively, this will affect you, no one else will suffer except you ... You have to adapt yourself and look at things positively'. (Khalid T3, 589-592)

By contrast, female participants expressed their contentment which may also reflect gender role in a society like KSA, by saying:

'Although life in the UK was easier and more comfortable for me as a woman, in terms of fewer restrictions, I am much happier here in KSA ... next to my family ... I am more settled ... There was a sense of isolation [in the UK] ... You may experience financial or health issues with no one by your side ... It is a very comfortable feeling to be back in your home country ... of course I don't want to return to the UK or be part of that life again'. (Sara T2, 134-156)

Sara's views were similar to those of Huda:

'I don't wish to return to the type of life I used to live in the UK, being responsible for everything ... My mind is much calmer and tranquil now'. (Huda T2, 115-116)

Another way of accepting the reality was illustrated by Nora's attempts to create a relaxing atmosphere and to avoid any occasions of stress, particularly for herself and her youngest son who, she thinks, suffered the most upon the return. For example, she tried to close her eyes to minor issues at school and not place any further pressure on him, e.g. following the conventions of Arabic writing. She discussed this matter with his teacher. The overall readjustment process was much easier for her older children than her youngest as was evident in Nora's comment:

'To some extent ... it is better now than when we first arrived ... but he [her youngest son] still talks about his friends there [in the UK], he is the one who grieves the most ... the older ones have already settled, but he was born there [in the UK] ... He doesn't know another life!. (Nora T3, 65-66)

This statement highlights two issues, one of which is that time is crucial in overcoming any challenge, the other is the issue of belonging, in this case her son's attachment to the UK due to it being his birthplace.

Returnees tackled the question: “*What would you advise future returnees and what recommendations would you offer?*” by saying:

‘I would tell them not to expect a lot ... so they don’t get disappointed ... allow themselves time to readjust ... it’s normal ... don’t feel obliged to do things and take your time ... don’t do things that bother you ... don’t put too much pressure on yourself because it’s normal ... every returnee goes through this’. (Nora T3, 93-95)

When Nora was asked to explain what she meant by ‘*things*’ she said:

‘Being over-polite to people is not necessary ... because it does not really matter to them, sometimes you feel obliged to do something to please people ... but in the end they don’t appreciate it ... because people cannot understand what you are going through ... except those who have been through the same situation’.
(Nora T3, 99-100)

Nora was trying to help her children readjust and to achieve this goal she needed to eliminate any issues that contributed to her stress and may eventually have affected their readjustment:

‘My priority is to help my children readjust and to accomplish this, I need to free my mind from any stressors ... I need to avoid judgemental people, those who blame me in some way and, instead, surround myself with people who understand me ... people who don’t put me under pressure because that will affect my children’. (Nora T3, 102-103)

Thus, Nora tried to create a relaxing environment and avoid judgmental people and stressful situations. The phrases ‘*feel obliged*’, ‘*put too much pressure*’ and ‘*to please people*’ all imply some sort of obligations which, at this particular time, was a burden.

Most participants agreed that realistic or low expectations, time and patience are important in the readjustment process. From their perspectives, expecting the worst could help in accepting any situation upon return and avoid disappointment:

‘Alhamdulillah, one can easily overcome any challenge now, because after all ... nothing is more difficult than the pressure of a PhD!’ (Omar T3, 288-289)

Omar added:

‘My final advice ... I would say ... expect some financial issues ... they [future returnees] may face some difficulties ... they need to be patient and realistic in their demands’. (Omar T3, 264- 282)

When Omar further explained what he meant by being ‘*realistic in their demands*’, it turned out that what he meant was that social expectations place a great deal of pressure on returnees, especially because they have a PhD and should, according to cultural norms, now live to a certain high standard (see Section 5.4.2). He summed up this point with an Arabic proverb:

'before you stretch your legs, measure your mat' (**Omar T3, 282**) which equates to the English proverb, 'cut your coat according to your cloth'.

In addition, Nora recommended early preparation before the return because basic things like organising transportation takes a long time to resolve and may affect the returnee psychologically and socially (a spill-over effect, see Section 5.1):

'I suggest that once you know when your final return is ... that you start preparing for it in advance, a year ahead if you can because basic things like a house and a driver take a long time to sort out ... You must also prepare your children ... don't lie to them and tell them that life there [in KSA] is all roses ... tell them that school will be difficult, that they won't be able to go out the way they used to ... you have to talk to them and prepare them'. (**Nora T1, 217-219**)

Early preparation also includes managing expectations regarding children's schooling and transportation, which are the main issues for most female returnees:

'Returnees need to know exactly which academic level their children will have reached on their return ... and prepare for it, financially, in advance ... because this is what matters most ... their children's psychological wellbeing, as well as the family's financial state'. (**Sara T3, 54-55**)

Khalid insisted that future returnees have to remain positive, flexible and patient because some of the basic daily activities, such as the driving and parking systems, may upset them and this can be psychologically stressful:

'First of all ... give yourself time to enjoy your achievement ... a PhD is a great achievement, something to be proud of ... Enjoy the things you have in the moment ... rather than worry about the things you lack ... I think this is one of the gains from a PhD study ... how one can re-think some issues ... try not to criticise or complain a lot ... this will make any situation even worse ... be acceptable and adaptive ... because you can always find faults in things if you want to ... but try to be positive ... I recall how I managed to live in such a small house in the UK, compared to the spacious one I have here [in KSA]; now this spacious one seems somehow uncomfortable! [said with laughter]'. (**Khalid T3, 495- 526**)

It is clear from this assessment that the opportunities to re-evaluate priorities and concentrate on what is important are the major outcomes of the overseas experience. Below are the main themes that have emerged from the second and the third phases:

Final themes that have emerged from Phase II and Phase III			
<p><i>Structural and Logistical issues:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>Transportation</i> ➤ <i>Education</i> <p><i>The structure of public universities</i></p>	<p><i>Cultural Norms and Social Obligations:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>The pressure of 'Wasta'</i> ➤ <i>PhD status and its effects</i> ➤ <i>The notion of 'Albir'</i> ➤ <i>Individual vs collective self</i> ➤ <i>The notion of 'Face'</i> 	<p><i>Self-impression:</i></p> <p><i>A sense of transformation</i></p>	<p><i>Stages of Readjustment:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>Getting by acceptance</i>

Table 4-3: Final Study Themes

4.6. Chapter Summary

Taking into account the diachronic element of the return, this chapter presents findings about the experience of returning home based on eight Saudi PGSs. The approach taken to address the research questions in this study has been provided, together with the data analysis procedure. By using the 'constant comparative method' (see Section 3.4), certain themes were identified that encompass the perceived challenges and their impact on the personal, social and professional life of the returnees. Findings revolved around two main domains; the psychological and the sociocultural which impacted one on the other. While the temporal dimension dominated the thematic aspect in framing the structure of my analysis in order to maintain a longitudinal focus on the *process* of re-entry, thematic issues were almost consistent among participants throughout the study, with variation in the degree to which they were perceived or how intense they were at specific phases of the return. This indicates their significance. According to Patton (2002, p. 467), qualitative findings are judged by their 'substantive significance' which refers to the consistency of themes identified across and within study participants. For example, the issue of transportation, although logistical, was constantly repeated in each interview by females throughout the study. In addition, it was generally mentioned at the beginning of any conversation. Significance is also attained when findings deepen our understanding of existing knowledge about the subject (Floersch, et al., 2010). In the context of this study, many factors contributed to the way these individuals perceived their return and dealt with this transition. These include gender variation, cultural expectations, some Islamic and personal beliefs about oneself and others, as well as the country's regulations. It is worth mentioning that the iterative process involved in analysis made it challenging to draw a clear-cut line between the phases and the themes they raised. For example, the issue of punctuality was not raised by one of the participants until the second interview, but had to be placed under the first phase to make it more comprehensible for the reader. I do not think that this has altered the validity of the data as this issue was not something specific to a particular

phase in the re-entry process, but rather a fact about the cultural norms of KSA which remained the same in any phase. A thorough discussion of the study findings in relation to existing literature is presented in the next chapter.

Chapter 5 : Discussion

5.1 Introduction

The aim of this study was to reach an understanding of the re-entry experience for eight Saudi PGSs after studying between four to eight years in the UK, and the impact, in general, of studying abroad on them. The study employed a Grounded Theory approach (Charmaz, 2006) (see Section 3.4), with the aim of approaching the data without a preconceived hypothesis or any fixed assumptions since little is known about the impact of this experience, especially in the Saudi context (see Section 2.8.2). More specifically, an in-depth description was provided of how these individuals faced and dealt with different aspects of life back home, from the time they planned to leave the host country, in this case the UK, and throughout the first year of their return to KSA. This diachronic element was accomplished by means of three interview rounds at different phases (as shown in Section 3.3.4).

The study findings (in Chapter 4) revealed different aspects of the repatriation experience. Psychological and sociocultural aspects were inter-related, illustrating the complexity of the repatriation experience, and supporting the ‘spill-over’ and ‘cross-over’ issues, and their effects on returnees’ readjustment. Spill-over can be defined as the stress experienced in one aspect or domain of life, such as employment, that results in stress for the same individual in another domain, for example, home. Cross-over, on the other hand, is a process that occurs when psychological stress experienced by one person affects the stress levels of another closely related person (Westman, 2001). This *re-aculturative* stress (Berry, 2005), although manageable, was an inevitable part of the readjustment process for these individuals with varying degrees. In addition, cultural elements and norms, in terms of gender role, language use and social expectations were found to be the source of many of the challenges that resulted in stress (Chun, et al., 2006).

A distinction between psychological and sociocultural aspects was initially proposed and subsequently examined by Ward, et al. (1998). While psychological adjustment refers to ‘psychological well-being or emotional satisfaction’, sociocultural adjustment refers to an individual’s social competence in managing his/her daily life i.e. ‘the ability to fit in’ in the context of the new cultural environment (Ward, et al., 1998, p. 279). While the context in this study is not new, per se, the element of ‘change’ (see Section 2.2) is what contributes to the degree of stress involved in managing ‘renewed’ surroundings and, as a result, may cause specific challenges (Martin, 1984). The experience of living overseas, and its associated challenges, may have altered the individuals’ ways of thinking, their priorities, and relationships

as a matter of the acculturation process. In addition, the home environment itself and/or the returnees' perception of home may have also evolved during the individuals' time abroad and this, too, may cause challenges (Storti, 2001).

To further explain the data, this chapter is organised into four parts, each discussing one theme (see Sections 4.4 and 4.5) and its related subthemes. This approach enhanced the quality of the analysis, as trying to organise the chapter according to the research questions or according to phases, which would adhere to the longitudinal nature of the study, would create overlapping issues and render some topics redundant.

Individuals in this study reported facing various challenges upon their return ranging from logistics to social obligations and cultural expectations. Moreover, it is evident from the data that culture, as defined for the purpose of this thesis in Section 1.5.1, as well as gender, played a major role in any perceived challenge, including the representation of oneself or self-identification. Thus, bearing in mind the influence of culture in my analysis was crucial to an understanding of behaviour, as well as the perceptions of each individual. This also facilitated an understanding of the relationship between themes in this study and how participants perceived the experience of returning home. A detailed review of the findings from the study is presented below.

5.2 Summary of the Study Themes

In Phase I, participants' feelings about home and the return were not stable (see Section 4.3.1). A mixture of psychological (Section 4.3.2) and sociocultural (Section 4.3.3) challenges were expected. These expectations were based on the participants' previous short visits to KSA during their PhD studies which led to a constant comparison between the host and home cultures (Section 4.3.4). However, the actual re-entry experience is better explained in Phase II and III which comprised two main areas related to structure (Section 4.4.1.1) and social norms (4.4.1.2) with some reference to the individual, as someone returning from a study abroad, holding a PhD (Section 4.4.1.3). While themes were almost consistent among participants throughout the study, there was a variation in the degree to which they were perceived or how intense they were at specific phases of the return as seen in Section (4.5.1).

5.3 Theme 1: Structural and Logistical Issues

5.3.1 Transportation

As seen in Chapter 4, female participants reported that transportation in KSA is an issue that contributed negatively to their readjustment, especially given that while abroad they had

experienced freedom and independence in travelling. The significance of transportation in this study, although a logistical issue, appears more pronounced for females due to the restrictions⁸⁹ on their mobility and their inability to drive in KSA.

Saudi culture is a blend of tradition and religion to the extent that distinguishing between what is social and what is religious is blurred at times (Al Lily, 2011). Moreover, some people fail to differentiate between Islamic law and traditional norms of Arab culture that have long denied the right of females to drive. In so doing, those who perpetuate that attitude are adhering to a patriarchal ideology of society (discussed earlier in Section 1.5.4). This prohibition, contrary to common perceptions, stems from social and cultural norms rather than Islamic law. In fact, it is the misconceptions of tradition and religion that have led to women's marginalisation in certain social aspects of life in KSA (Damanhour, 2013). While the interpretation of Islamic law may have been manipulated to suit the needs of society at a given point in time, this is beyond the scope of this study.

This cultural barrier, in conjunction with the lack of other means of public transport, seems to be a challenge for most female participants and had an impact, not just on their social life but at the personal level as well. This was particularly so when individuals had developed certain characteristics while abroad, one of which is an increased sense of independence, which I will return to later in the discussion.

The literature indicates that returning to one's home culture after living abroad can require a process of re-acculturation (Martin, 1984) (see Section 2.2). However, this process, in relation to the particular issue of transportation, was not attained by some female participants until the completion of this study. Sara's remarks and her use of the word '*until*', indicating an on-going situation, and her additional comments, '*until I settle*' and '*until I get a driver*', re-enforce the point that she was not culturally re-acclimatised (see Section 4.5.1.1). Moreover, the confusing and inconsistent procedures involved in applying for a driver, probably related to inefficient bureaucratic methods, made the process even longer than expected and added to participants' annoyance. This unavoidable logistical and structural issue was one of the major challenges experienced by female participants.

⁸⁹ During the data collection phase, women were still banned from driving in KSA. However, a royal decree by King Salman was issued in September, 2017 lifting this ban and ensuring full implementation of the order by June, 2018.

5.3.2 Education

Female participants expressed concerns about their children's education upon the return (See section 4.4.1.1). Moreover, the use of words such as 'worried', 'affect', 'difficult' and 'problem', while talking about this issue, points to a negative perception of education. Upon elaboration, it became clear that the major challenge consisted of three elements. One is the use of Standard Arabic (SA) in formal education in schools which caused some challenging 'diglossic' situations (see Section 1.5.3). This highlights another cultural matter in addition to transportation, which is related to language use, since language is part of cultural reality and the two are connected in multiple and complex ways (Kramersch, 1998).

Kaye (2001) described the Arabic 'diglossic' situation as the world's most complicated, while Maamouri (1998) attributed the difficulty of learning SA to the fact that it is no one's native language and is rarely, if ever, spoken at home. Arab children, in general, usually acquire the colloquial variety of Arabic before they learn SA, which may create a gap and have a negative impact on their overall learning in schools (Maamouri, 1998; Ibrahim, 2009; Al-Sobh, et al., 2015).

The Standard variety of Arabic may be incomprehensible and quite challenging to these children who have had limited⁹⁰ exposure to it abroad, both in terms of speaking it and in the availability of resources using SA.⁹¹ It is the different vocabulary items, above all other aspects of the language, that creates this challenge and may hinder the learning process. For example, the verb /ðahaba/ (Arabic /ذهب/) meaning 'to go' vs. the everyday vernacular /raaħ/ may be mistaken for the noun /ðahab/ (Arabic /ذهب/) meaning 'gold jewellery' used in formal and informal Arabic. Moreover, case inflection, that is multiple endings for different grammatical cases as used in SA may also contribute to this challenge (see Kaye, 2001).

However, whether Standard and Colloquial varieties of Arabic can be viewed as two separate languages or whether they represent two forms of the same language is still a controversial issue (Eviatar & Ibrahim, 2000; Ibrahim & Aharon-Peretz, 2005). Maamouri (1998, p. 31) offered a solution by describing the Arabic diglossic situation:

'Arabic diglossia seems to place itself in the middle of a *diglossic continuum* because all the varieties of Arabic which are included in this continuum are mutually understandable independently of the nature or degree of linguistic distance which separates them.'

⁹⁰ Participants' children went to Arabic schools in the UK once a week, at weekends.

⁹¹ The Arabic curriculum abroad was reduced in comparison to that in use in KSA.

Another concern was related to the differences between the two academic systems in the UK and KSA (see Section 1.5.5). In KSA, a teacher-centred approach rather than a learner-centred approach is prevalent and there is a reliance on memorisation and tests. This makes the quantity of knowledge acquired more important than the quality and increases the amount of homework to the extent that it becomes an issue. This stressful effect may also extend to parents while trying to support their children as seen in Section 4.4.1.1.

The issue may not be the educational system itself as much as how it is practised in KSA which is influenced by the prevailing notions of success and how people in society perceive it. Success is measured by a university acceptance and the achievement of high academic qualifications, neither of which can be accomplished without high grades. This creates pressure on both students and parents. Furthermore, vocational careers are not highly regarded and are seen as an indication of low status, despite the fact that they often yield high incomes. This attitude reflects a cultural orientation towards certain professions and affects how education is delivered and perceived which is supported by findings from relevant literature, for example Şahin (1990).

In collectivist societies such as KSA (see Section 1.5.5), teachers are the main distributor of knowledge and students are usually passive recipients with little value placed on their individual insights (Razek & Coyner, 2011; Alsulami, 2016). In individualistic societies, however, students are responsible for their learning and the teacher acts as a guide rather than an expert (ibid). Consequently, the learning environment is 'friendlier' and that point was noted by most participants when comparing the two educational systems.

While in KSA, students are not generally taught or encouraged to openly criticise in academic contexts due to cultural norms which place a lot of respect for the teacher and emphasise the hierarchical nature of the student teacher relationship (see Section 1.5.5), everyone is a 'critical thinker' in one way or another. However, articulating criticism openly or disagreeing with the teacher in the Saudi context may not be the best option given that adherence to cultural norms is considered to be so important. Challenging authority is frowned upon and any breach of norms could result in negative consequences for the individual.

Being exposed to a different educational system abroad may have caused some returning students difficulty in terms of meeting the expectations of the KSA educational system. Participants concurred that the KSA school environment is extremely competitive, homework is a burden, and tests are too frequent. All of these factors combine to cause stress to both children and parents (see Section 4.4.1.1).

These factors had an impact on the children's academic performance, especially initially, and had a cross-over effect on female participants' levels of stress if they had children. This cross-over effect, which made up the third challenge, arose from two elements related to cultural expectations. First, the expectation in KSA is that family responsibilities, including childbearing and rearing, are the mothers' primary concern (Elamin & Omair, 2010), an expectation that added more pressure to females compared to males in this study. Despite the fact that many families have nannies who can help, mothers remain as the first point of reference with issues related to their children. Second, children's failure to meet high academic performance levels may cause a degree of embarrassment that could result in loss of face, interpreted as one's dignity, and is an issue that is explained in Section 5.4.5. The potential degree of loss of face is exacerbated by society's high expectations of PhD holders and their children. Bourdieu's (1986) concepts of social and cultural capital (see Section 5.4.2) are manifested in the form of parental educational qualification and academic degree. Coleman (1988) analysed family background, which normally has an effect on children's achievement in school, into three different components: financial capital, human capital and social capital. Human capital is measured in terms of the parents' education. According to Coleman, human capital provides the potential for a cognitive environment for the child that supports learning. Possessing this human capital added a burden to the participants in this study given that highly qualified parents are considered 'insiders' in the field of education (De Graaf, et al., 2000) and, consequently, their children are expected to demonstrate superior levels of performance.

5.3.3 The Structure of Public Universities in KSA: Hierarchy of Authority and Bureaucracy

In Chapter 4, Nora outlined her concerns about the tendency of the male section to undermine female authority and the fact that the female head of section operated as no more than an impotent figurehead. Nora's concerns capture the essence of the male-female relationship in higher education institutions in KSA which could be the result of the influence of cultural factors, including ideology in relation to gender. In KSA, leadership and decision-making are dominated by males. Female involvement is at the margins (Al-Medlej, 1997). Female professors have little power in decision-making although they and their male counterparts are paid equally (Le Renard, 2008, cf. Pharaon, 2004). These restrictions in the academic decision-making process usually leads to disappointment and frustration on the part of female professors who feel constrained in implementing any change or negotiating any potentially controversial decisions. Although female professors' position is at the very highest levels of the public sector, research indicates that women still 'operate under the umbrella of men, which impacts

negatively on the performance of women sections, and that the constant intervention by men restricts their freedom to make decisions' (Al-Halawani (2002), cited in Al-Ahmadi, 2011, p. 152). Studies revealed that returnees might develop negative attitudes towards their organisation when they perceived a lack of support (Nery-Kjerfve & McLean, 2012). These structural constraints and lack of support could be a result of the traditional attitude to gender that sees women as subordinates, with a lower status than men, and which leads to ignoring their concerns and hinders the empowerment of Saudi women.

In spite of the clear vision for the empowerment of women in KSA, as reflected in recent development plans, including the 'removal of barriers to participation in the development activities'⁹², issues regarding implementation still exist and this empowerment remains problematic (Quamar, 2016). One of the main barriers is effective communication between male and female sections. Lack of effective communication, again, stems from the traditional view of women. According to Al Lily (2011), Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in KSA, as identified in the *Times Higher Education (THE)*⁹³, are strictly segregated by gender (see Section 1.5.4) and any communication between them is kept to a minimum which inevitably increases the gap between them. Having said that, gender segregation should not be an excuse to justify the lack of proper communication between male and female sections. Jamjoom & Kelly (2013, p. 122) suggested the involvement of women in HE curriculum planning and implementation, and stressed the necessity of a 'direct line of communication across the whole institution for both male and female deans and heads of department' in gender-segregated universities.

The main issue, besides the lack of effective communication, is the disparity in power between men and women in KSA. This disparity is not explicitly stated in the law of the country, but rather rooted in social and governmental structures and practices (Doumato, 2010). This may affect the quality of education since females' attempts to voice any concerns regarding the existing educational system remain futile (Alhareth, et al., 2015).

It can be argued that the imposed passivity of women is related to the patriarchal nature of Saudi society rather than the teachings of Islam (Effendi (2003) cited in Al-Ahmadi, 2011; Damanhour, 2013). Such attitudes towards women are not confined to Arab societies and are common in many countries throughout the world (Omar & Davidson, 2001; Al-Ahmadi, 2011).

⁹² The 2nd strategic pillar of the 8th Development plan emphasised 'increased attention to women's affairs and development capabilities, and removal of barriers to participation in the development activities, in line with the Islamic values and teachings.' (Al-Ahmadi, 2011, p. 150)

⁹³ (THE) is a weekly magazine based in London, reporting specifically on news and issues related to higher education https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Times_Higher_Education.

For example, male dominance in academia is common in Asian and European countries (Knights & Richards, 2003; Jung, et al., 2013).

By drawing on Hofstede's cultural dimension theory (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005), KSA society can be classified as one with large power disparity in which power and authority tend to be distributed unequally, to some extent, and in varying degrees in family structures, organisations and between genders (1.5.5). The degree of conservatism or liberalism within these structures determines the extent to which less powerful members accept the level of inequality they experience (Cassell & Blake, 2012; Alwazzan & Rees, 2016).

It was evident from the findings that one female participant, a lecturer, was not happy about the idea of being told what to do by an administrator with no teaching experience (see Section 4.4.1.1). This attitude is contrary to Khatri's (2009) findings that employees, in large power distance cultures where the power gap between individuals is significant, generally prefer to take decisions from managers rather than participate in decision making themselves.

Moreover, the limited opportunity for participation in decision-making, in this case setting questions for an English language exam, could be face threatening to the participant (see Section 5.4.5) and potentially cause her embarrassment in front of her students. Nora's lack of involvement in setting the exam questions limits her chance of being well prepared, reduces her ability to prepare her students appropriately, and may cause her and her students disappointment regarding what to expect when there is a mismatch between those expectations and the reality of the exam paper.

By drawing on Bourdieu's (1986) concept of cultural capital, Reay (2004) argues that masculinity, as manifested in the form of power, can function within the field of academia. This may explain the disappointment of female participants in the workplace. Females' lack of authority in the workplace, based solely on their gender, could be linked to being allowed less cultural capital, a notion referred to by Bourdieu as 'symbolic violence' or 'the capacity to impose the means for comprehending and adapting to the social world by representing economic and political power in disguised, taken-for-granted forms' (Bourdieu 1998, cited in Reay, 2004, p. 37). Consequently, males tend to dominate in a culture because they are allowed more cultural capital⁹⁴. This could explain females' reluctance to initiate any change since suggestions are kept within the female sphere. Whether this has changed or not in light of the recent development plans, is worth further investigation.

⁹⁴ Although, in the eyes of KSA society, PhD holders, regardless of gender, are considered part of the elite

However, males themselves experienced power disparity in the form of bureaucratic authority. They believed that one important issue regarding their professional adjustment upon return was particularly related to bureaucracy. For example, the process for initiating and progressing new ideas took too long (see Chapter 4 Section 4.5.1.1).

Khalid's comments highlight the highly centralised nature of the system in KSA institutions of Higher Education and the fact that it is part of the culture's political and social structure ⁹⁵ (Al-Medlej, 1997). For example, decisions concerning HE must be approved by the Ministry of Education which makes it difficult and time-consuming to implement any change at all, gain approval for official papers, or have any privileges granted. The hierarchal nature of the system is a very real hindrance to development. The difficulty lies in a procedure that requires multiple signatures which, when coupled with the carelessness and dishonesty of some employees, makes the whole process extremely time consuming. A related factor is that there is no clear punishment for corruption or inefficiency and often the bureaucrats are more concerned with maintaining or developing their own personal connections (an issue that will be dealt with in subsequent sections) and was evident in the findings. Omar's complaint about the months that it took to confirm his appointment, a process that should have been automatic as it was an entitlement, is just one example of many instances of inefficiency creating very practical problems for those on the receiving end of the system (see Section 4.4.1.1). Not only were there practical implications, in terms of non-payment of the correct salary, but psychological distress was also evident in Omar's frustration at the need to chase after something to which he was entitled.

To sum up, having mentioned these structural and logistical issues, they were all presumably expected by participants before their return. However, these issues tended to lessen by time. This mirrors findings from the literature (Ward & Kennedy, 1999; Sercombe & Young, 2015). Ward & Kennedy's (1999) longitudinal study confirmed that sociocultural adaptation problems, including transportation, bureaucracy and academic work, are greatest during the early stages of transition and decrease significantly over time. It could be assumed that the decrease in the severity of these problems resulted from either issues being resolved or participants becoming used to the situation and accepting that they could not change it. This could explain the participants' advocacy of patience when they gave their recommendations for future returnees. Although many of the comments regarding KSA society may have negative connotations, these

⁹⁵ Centralised leadership is reflected politically in the monarchical system, where decisions are controlled by the King, and socially in the patriarchal/ patrilineal system, where Saudi fathers control most family matters (Al-Medlej, 1997).

comments did not necessarily imply any disrespect for KSA culture (as shown in the last subtheme, see Section 4.5.1.2) but rather revealed the effect of cross cultural experience on these individuals in developing a critical eye which can be seen as an outcome of personal growth (see Section 5.5.1).

5.4 Theme 2: Cultural Norms and Social Obligations

5.4.1 The Pressure of ‘Wasta’

Most male participants reported that the majority of people in KSA society with whom they come into contact consider PhD holders as people with influence and try to build a relationship with them, hoping that they will benefit one day. This relationship entails a very important concept in relation to PhD holders in a society with a tribal nature, such as that of KSA, where expectations of mutual support are high. This is even more pronounced when dealing with the concept of ‘Wasta’. *Wasta* (Arabic: واسطة *wāsiṭah*) comes from the Arabic root (w-s-T) meaning ‘middle’, hence, *wasta* is someone who acts as a mediator (Aldossari & Robertson, 2016). It is the process whereby individual goals are often achieved through personal connections with people in higher status positions (Hutchings & Weir, 2006). The role of *wasta* was, in the past, common in securing admission to university in KSA and this explains people’s reactions in Section 4.4.1.2. This linkage created a sort of social obligation or, as Spencer-Oatey (2002) calls it, a sense of sociality rights that added pressure to the returnee. Participants’ rejection of *wasta* does not suggest that their values have changed as much as it shows their growing awareness of how people misunderstand the concept of ‘rights’ under the umbrella of social relationships to the extent that the person in power feels ‘obliged’ to grant what is perceived by the petitioner to be a right when, in fact, it is not. It could also be that being in a position of authority brought the issue home to them as presumably, prior to the PhD award, people would not normally approach them for *wasta*.

According to Barnett, et al., (2013, p. 41), ‘Those who have *wasta* can jump the queue in acquiring public services while those who do not will struggle through the “normal” bureaucratic process’ just as was illustrated earlier in the account of Omar’s PhD certificate accreditation experience (see Section 4.4.1.1). However, the overseas experience has enhanced participants’ awareness and helped them develop a critical approach towards their own rights, whether in the UK or KSA. Being away from family and friends and successfully managing their own affairs in a different country without any network influence made them question some previously accepted cultural practices, such as *wasta*, that are incompatible with their beliefs and principles. Participants realised, by being exposed to the UK culture and systems abroad, that clear guidelines and their proper application is what combines to create a fair system that

has its own integrity. Moreover, they came to believe that personal determination, not connections, is what enables an individual to achieve his/her goals (see Section 5.5.1).

Kropf & Newbury-Smith (2016) argue that *wasta* is totally incorporated within the concept of social capital which, according to Bourdieu, is made up of social networks (Bourdieu 1985, cited in Reay, 2000). Thus, the power of cultural and social capital (Bourdieu, 1986) becomes relevant in this context since all participants in this study have significant cultural and social capital, that is knowledge and status respectively, in the form of a PhD degree from a foreign country (see Section 5.4.2 below). Possessing and enhancing cultural capital was not just rewarding but also useful in dealing with the negative consequences entailed in social capital and the sense of potential corruption inherent in *wasta*. Participants in this study believe that holding a certain social standing gave them the courage to refuse, politely, requests that may have had a negative effect on their personal integrity or sense of well-being (as shown in Omar's comments in 4.5.1.1).

Participants feel that they do not need to be excessively courteous in every situation or do things about which they feel uncomfortable simply out of a misplaced sense of obligation to others. This may well be seen by people in KSA as breaching the cultural norms of a society where everyone is automatically expected to help. Participants may also be stigmatised as being 'westernised' or negatively influenced by study abroad and, for example, be regarded as having embraced individualism. The rejection of other people's concepts of entitlement to help may be interpreted as 'rudeness' and a manifestation of 'change' as a result of being away for some time. This highlights the effect of social obligations on one's sense of freedom to behave in a preferred manner.

This interpretation is contrary to Aldossari & Robertson's (2016) findings in their study of Saudi employees who, in spite of perceiving *wasta* negatively, found it difficult to avoid its influence upon their return to their organisations after an international assignment.

Nowadays, due to modernisation, the influence of *wasta* has weakened, especially among the young and educated as they became more aware of their rights and responsibilities. His Majesty, King Salman, has legislated to create The Saudi National Anti-Corruption Commission (*Nazaha*) to deal with issues of this kind and ensure justice for all Saudi citizens. This development is in line with the Islamic call for justice and equality.

Regardless of the fact that corruption may be perceived differently by different people as Hofstede & Hofstede (2005, p. 62) put it 'What is called *corruption* is partly a matter of definition' (emphasis in original), the opportunity for raising any complaint beyond the limits

of one's immediate organisation was not possible in the past and such complaints often remained unaddressed if the person in charge was not of a mind to do so.

5.4.2 PhD Status and Its Effects

When reflecting on the findings, participants, especially males, mentioned the burden of cultural expectations regarding their lifestyle. As noted previously by Khalid when he was planning to buy a car (section 4.4.1.2), there was a perceived expectation that having an enhanced status obliged him, in society's eyes, to live up to certain standards of what someone in his new position would be expected to drive.

Cultural expectations assume that certain material standards of living will be maintained by Saudis in general, and PhD holders in particular, which may place financial burdens on those in attempting to meet those expectations. In his book, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (Veblen & Banta, 2007), Veblen offered an explanation for the consumption of luxury goods as a way to gain others' respect and recognition and so achieve greater social status, rather than a simple matter of satisfying one's own comfort, desires or needs. In other words, he saw conspicuous consumption as serving needs and having a value, other than the most obvious. Social status, according to Veblen, can only be accomplished by means of 'decent surroundings' and are the evidence of wealth and power (Veblen & Banta, 2007, p. 29).

This is applicable to KSA and could explain the social networks' reaction to those with high levels of academic qualifications. O'cass & McEwen (2004) argue that one of the strongest measures of social success and achievement is the acquisition of material goods, providing a visual demonstration of status. The term status was used by Weber, et al. (1991) to reflect the degree of social honour attached to a specific group of people, in this case, PhD holders. However, in KSA, success is not *only* measured by the acquisition of material goods, although this may be the case for some, but success is primarily measured by one's position or status which then requires that the trappings of the position are displayed by the possession of material goods.

I would argue, in contrast to Veblen, that Bourdieu's (1986) concept of cultural capital, emphasising non-financial resources (i.e. symbolic power), is more significant in securing positions of status and that conclusion is shared by most male participants in this study. According to Bourdieu, cultural capital can exist in three states: 'embodied', 'objectified' or 'institutionalised'. The embodied state is the type of knowledge, manners, or personality one has. The objectified state relates to material objects that indicate social class e.g. prestigious cars or clothing, while the institutionalised state refers to one's educational qualifications and

academic degrees (Bourdieu, 1986). Accordingly, everyone has cultural capital to some degree or another, whether tangible or intangible.

Cultural capital, as argued by Bourdieu, is relational and cannot be understood in isolation from the other forms of capital (e.g. economic⁹⁶, symbolic⁹⁷ and social⁹⁸) Bourdieu (1985, cited in Reay, 2000). Thus, there is a symbiotic relationship between the different forms of cultural capital. In addition to their interrelated nature, Bourdieu (1986) developed the point further and emphasised that one form can be transformed into the other; for example, earning a degree gives prestige which can be converted to actual economic capital in the form of a better job with a high salary.

Male participants rejected societal inducements to be noticed and gain prestige through the acquisition of luxury goods as seen in (4.4.1.2). These attitudes show a balanced view of the participants' consumption and reflect their rationality in managing financial issues, but may not necessarily relate to gender variation as much as to personality traits and their image of themselves. From their perspective, they have already acquired another form of prestige through cultural capital which seems to satisfy them.

For Bourdieu, all goods, whether material or symbolic, have an economic value if they are in short supply and sought after in particular social situations (Reay, 2000). This may explain why KSA society elevates PhD holders and considers them as part of an elite, making the acquisition of the qualification appealing in Saudi society. The prestige associated with the degree is manifested in many different ways in organisations, and among people in general as seen in Section (4.4.1.2) when Omar's illustration neatly summarised how society measures social capital through cultural capital.

Prestige can also be linked to the overt use of English language as Sara pointed earlier when her daughter expressed unwillingness to be perceived as '*showing off!*'. Her avoidance to explicitly use the English language reflects an awareness of how linguistic differences may impede returnees' social acceptance.

In relation to the context of this study, holding a PhD adds to both cultural and social capital because having a higher qualification gives a higher position, and the title of Doctor itself creates a different person, with a different status, in the eyes of society. Thus, a PhD involves respect and places the holder within the social hierarchy in KSA. Omar and Khalid's comments

⁹⁶ Related to wealth, whether inherited or not.

⁹⁷ Related to an individual's prestige and personal qualities, such as authority and attractiveness.

⁹⁸ Related to social networks.

in section (4.3.2) re-enforced this tendency. This reaction towards PhD holders could be related to the notion of *wasta* discussed earlier (see Section 5.4.1).

Moreover, status can be seen as ‘a form of power that consists of respect, consideration, and envy from others’ (Eastman, et al., 1999, p. 42). An illustration of this conclusion was provided by one participant when describing his relationship with a group of co-nationals who were friends before embarking on his PhD but seemed to withdraw upon his return (see Section 4.4.1.2).

As seen from the findings, there are social and financial effects on those holding a PhD. Earlier research on repatriation has indicated that a loss of social status upon the return leads to repatriation distress (Black, et al., 1992). The literature on the stress experienced by returnees involved the concept of being ‘a big fish in a small pond’ to returning as a ‘small fish in a big pond’ while the reverse seems to apply in this study. Individuals’ roles, as well as status, changed upon return from that of anonymous students while abroad, to PhD holders surrounded with some sort of emphasis upon their return, and which has led to some challenging situations. However, further studies are needed to elaborate on this issue.

5.4.3 The Notion of ‘Albir’

The analysis looked at gender variation in perceptions of cultural obligations and found that there is a religious dimension within social obligation called *Albir* (Arabic: البرّ) among male participants. *Albir* is an Islamic concept of treating one's parents kindly and being rewarded, ‘*Ajer*’, by ‘*Allah*’. This religious obligation was perceived more as an honourable privilege and this was the case among male participants in this study, as indicated in the previous chapter.

In large power distance societies⁹⁹ like KSA (see Section 1.5.5), children are a source of security for parents in their old age and they are expected to support them in any way, whether financially, emotionally or physically (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). Due to the dynamics of the Saudi family, and the Islamic as well as social rules that govern the parent-children relationship in a Saudi culture, Omar’s responsibility was beyond that of his immediate family as he was living in the same house with his mother in KSA. In some Saudi Arabian families, the presence of both or one of the parents is common and, therefore, the responsibility goes far beyond a wife and children. Omar stated in further interviews that he is ‘*the only man*’ (male guardian) in his house as his brothers live in other cities. This could explain why and how much he was attached to his mother and could explain the feeling of guilt he expressed while being abroad.

⁹⁹ Where there are accepted and expected unequal distribution of powers (Hofstede, et al., 2010).

This obligation is also related to the notion of guardianship. Being '*the only man*' in the house means that he is the only one responsible for family matters and this reflects his defined gender role. Omar's situation reveals the collectivist nature of the extended family in KSA (see Sections 1.5.4 and 1.5.5) and could explain the degree of excitement about the return. This finding supports the results reported by Kartoshkina (2015) on the positive and 'sweet' side of the re-entry experience; that is, returning people re-engaging with elements of their home culture that they had missed while being abroad (c.f. Butcher, 2002).

Omar, and some female participants, emphasised that social obligation is not an option in KSA but a must. Omar explained that he felt his time in KSA was not his to do with as he wished. It belonged, in his view, to others who could plan his day. He saw this as part and parcel of Saudi culture and cited the example of having to call off a pre-planned meeting when parents demanded that he undertake something on their behalf (section 4.3.4).

Some social obligations operate under this Islamic concept '*Albir*' which seems significant as it affected how participants viewed and responded to these obligations. However, other collectivist societies, regardless of religion, do have similar kinds of social obligation to parents, a prime example being the filial piety exhibited in China (Chow, 2009).

5.4.4 Individual vs. Collective Self

Findings from participants revealed different attitudes towards the self which were not gender based. It was evident that both genders strove to please others in their communities in their social interactions, no matter how emotionally draining this proved to be (see Sections 4.3.1 and 4.4.1.2 for Nora and Khalid's comments).

Trying to fit into society reflects acknowledgment of a 'collective self', even if this is not always seen as desirable. Triandis (1989) differentiated between three aspects of the self; *the private self*, an assessment of the self by the self e.g. I am independent; *the public self*, an assessment of the self by the generalised other e.g. people think I am independent; and *the collective self*, an assessment of the self by a specific reference group e.g. my family thinks I am independent (Triandis, 1989, p. 507). When operating under the collectivist aspect rather than individualist in KSA, 'the public self is an extension of the collective self' (Triandis, 1989, p. 514).

Participants were more likely to be influenced by the norms of KSA culture and behave in ways considered appropriate by members of that collective, whether family or tribe, upon their return. Norms are 'the unwritten and often unspoken rules for how we should behave' (Smith & Louis, 2009, p. 19). Thus, attending social gatherings was a cultural expectation and conforming to it was an essential priority. For example, Nora was more concerned about what people may say

about her, i.e. the collective self, if she did not meet her obligations and refused to join these gatherings for any reason. Triandis (1994) considered normative pressure to be a defining characteristic of collectivism and argued that the collective self is emphasised more in collectivistic cultures (Triandis, 1989). Participants' adherence to these cultural norms and their observance of the obligations reflects this argument.

Another interesting example was evident in Nora's opinion (Section 4.3.4) which demonstrates a duality in perspective. On the one hand, there is disappointment with some KSA cultural practices that became salient in recent years when conspicuous spending on appearance has become commonplace. In KSA, there is a tendency to value luxury, especially among younger generations (Al Dossry, 2012). On the other hand, her views show compliance with these cultural practices and a willingness to accommodate and fit in with them. Social pressure lies behind much irrational expenditure. Expenditure may also happen based on an ability to spend rather than any need or even desire for the items purchased and highlights social and economic status (ibid). Thus, people tend to utilise this ability even if they are not keen to do so because conforming to expectations avoids criticism which, in itself, shows yet another dimension related to collectivist nature (see Section 1.5.5).

The way people dress relates to their sense of social identity. Nora's need for adaptation or re-integration into Saudi culture dominated her feelings of frustration about certain aspects that were inconvenient to her. This gives weight to the impact of cultural expectations and the need to meet them as opposed to her anonymity while studying abroad and, therefore, being insensitive about these issues. Anonymity allowed more freedom and eliminated the burden experienced from being 'known' and 'judged' accordingly. This would be true for any person living somewhere other than 'home'. Hence, through the Saudi lenses, trying to be simple equates to not being smartly dressed and, in the eyes of the female returnee, may violate KSA norms. The points made above illustrate some structural issues of difference between KSA and the UK.

According to Giddens (1991, pp. 81-82), all choices, including what to wear and whom to meet, 'are decisions not only about how to act but who to be' and are 'influenced by group pressure [...] as well as by socioeconomic circumstances'. This reflects issues of self-identity, as evidenced by the fact that some participants did not want to deviate from societal norms. Females in this study seem to be more concerned about their image in the eyes of 'others'. In dealing with this concern, they are seeking social acceptance and adaptation, triggered by social pressure as mentioned by Giddens (1991). Similarly, Turner (1991, p. 34) asserts that this

'normative influence' is one in which one conforms to the expectations of others to gain positive feelings. However, this compliance is not necessarily an indication of real acceptance.

On the other hand, it is evident that participants were trying to find a balance between the internal determination to secure their personal rights and the external pressure created by social obligations, between their private and public selves (see Khalid's comments in Section 4.4.1.2). The participant's collective self, comprising his feelings of social obligation, dominated his private self and pleasing the family¹⁰⁰ was prioritised over doing what he really would have been more comfortable with, given a totally free choice. This tension between personal and social identity was very clear in the interviews, assuming social identity is to be viewed as 'a compromise between assimilation and differentiation from others' (Brewer, 1991, p. 477). In the end, this tension between maintaining existing social norms and introducing attitudinal changes regarding this issue of social gatherings was resolved in favour of the self as seen in Khalid's comments in Section (4.5.1.1).

This pressure could be a result of experiencing an 'identity double-swing process', involving both individualist and collectivist tendencies which illustrates the process of identity transformation (Zaharna, 1989; Ting-Toomey, 1999) (see Section 5.5.1). The remark illustrates Khalid's complex re-negotiation of certain cultural norms e.g. social gatherings. His comment that he '*had to put an end to these daily visits*', in an attempt to protect his 'new' identity, or self, and give himself a chance to be productive and active as a researcher is particularly revealing. Brewer's (1991, p. 477) conception about the differences between membership in a group and social identity in which membership 'may be voluntary or imposed, but social identities are chosen,' could explain Khalid's attitude. However, Brewer's idea was based on American psychology and reflects American culture which may not be applicable to the context of this study. Participants' social identities are, on occasion, more likely to be imposed by family, or social obligations, thus, leading individuals to operate under the collective self rather than the individual which necessitates relinquishing the "I" for the sake of "we" and, therefore, eliminates choice.

Analysing the effect of collective norms and intergroup perspectives on the participants in the study highlighted a very crucial aspect about them as a whole. They all seem to have changed some of their personal attitudes towards some cultural norms which they found to be irritating upon their return home. Their non-acceptance of frequent gatherings and unnecessary, or

¹⁰⁰ By family I mean extended family and relatives.

excessive, courtesy can be put down to their exposure to a different culture while studying abroad.

Regarding this issue, and in relation to social obligations, Nora offered advice for future returnees (in Section 4.5.1.2). The phrases, '*Don't do things that bother you*', '*don't put too much pressure on yourself*', '*Being over-polite to people is not necessary*', '*feel obliged*' and '*to please people*' all imply some sort of obligation which, initially, at the start of the return phase, was a burden because the returnees felt they had other priorities which took precedence (see Section 5.6.2).

Another aspect of the collective self is that of providing financial support to family members or friends. This social obligation, although providing security to the community, is sometimes unpredictable and may cause pressure in managing financial issues, as mentioned by one male participant earlier (see Section 4.3.4).

The collective self was also evident in involving family members in decisions upon return after being totally independent abroad (see Section 4.3.1). Female students in this study expressed a shift in their attitudes from one of reliance on their families or husbands to one of depending on one's self which occurred during the acculturation process. This change to their normal way of making decisions boosted their self-confidence and gave them a sense of freedom and empowerment. The term freedom, in the sense of being unrestricted, surfaced in all female interviews. Stowe (2003) suggests that the concept of *loss* and *change* are related (i.e. something has changed because something is missing). Thus, the change could be related to loss of the guardian's support for females. Upon re-entry to KSA, participants, especially females, felt they lost the personal autonomy and independence which they had enjoyed while abroad. This is congruent with other findings in the literature (e.g. Christofi & Thompson, 2007; Brown & Graham, 2009).

Interestingly, these aspects of the collective self may include some gender variation, for example, feeling obliged to provide financial support may reveal a sense of masculine power while feeling obliged to involve family members in decisions may indicate female modesty, both of which reflect the nature of KSA society.

5.4.5. The Notion of 'Face'

Participants' social interactions which operate under social obligations also revealed aspects related to the concept of 'face'. Face is central to concepts such as 'status', 'authority', 'prestige', 'dignity' and 'honour' (Ho, 1976). Goffman (2006, p. 299) defined face as 'the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself [...] during a particular contact';

that is, one's presentation of self in social encounters. According to Brown & Levinson (2006), this public self-image or 'face' consists of two elements, positive and negative. They describe negative face as one's claim to own rights, freedom of action and freedom from imposition while positive face they see as one's personal need for the appreciation and approval of others of his/her public image i.e. a person's need for independence and his/her need for involvement respectively (Scollon, et al., 2012).

The conflict between negative and positive face is evident in the responses as one participant mentioned earlier (see Khalid's comments in Section 4.4.1.2).

Two points of view are expressed in Khalid's quote, which was interpreted in the previous section from a different perspective. The first is the acceptance of all family invites which demonstrates his clear involvement and willingness to maintain positive face, thus, fostering the polite representation of oneself, despite the inner tension this might provoke. At the same time, acceptance of invites was used as a strategy to communicate negative face and claim freedom regarding social gatherings afterwards, if he needed to do so. The creation of negative face emerges as a way of escaping imposed cultural commitments which restricted the participant's personal freedom. Goffman (2006) proposed the term 'face-work' to refer to these sorts of actions which deal with norms beyond linguistic and para-linguistic politeness (Bargiela-Chiappini, 2003).

The courage to claim freedom or personal space may be an individualistic rather than collectivist characteristic and could have been acquired during the overseas experience due to the enforced necessity of being self-sufficient, and after being exposed to a culture of a more individualistic nature. Besides, being away from familial and social obligations while abroad made it difficult to accept its sudden re-appearance upon return, especially during the first few months when the person is more in need of personal space to reorganise his/her thoughts and life. This difficulty was highlighted earlier (see Khalid's comments in Section 4.5.1.1).

His conclusion that he had to put an end to these daily demands represented a considerable attitudinal change in someone brought up in the strongly conformist society of KSA.

This acquired characteristic could be explained by reference to Markus & Kitayama's (1991) theory of independent-interdependent 'self-construals' which build upon the distinction between individualism and collectivism. According to the authors, a person with high levels of independent self-construal¹⁰¹ tends to focus on:

¹⁰¹ Other similar labels include: individualist, autonomous and self-contained (Markus & Kitayama, 1991).

‘asserting one’s needs, as well as preserving one’s individuality, uniqueness and independence; personality tends to remain relatively consistent across different situations. For a person with a high interdependent self- construal, the boundaries of the self tend to be more fluid and to include significant others in a particular situation (e.g. family members, coworkers); the concept of the self tends to be less static and more situationally determined.’ (Voronov & Singer, 2002, pp. 469-470)

According to Markus & Kitayama (1991, p. 225) ‘the self is viewed as *interdependent* with the surrounding context, and it is the “other” or the “self-in-relation-to-other” that is focal in individual experience’. Moreover, ‘for those with interdependent construals of the self,¹⁰² both the expression and the experience of emotions and motives may be significantly shaped and governed by a consideration of the reactions of others’ (ibid).

Thus, people in collectivist societies tend to have higher interdependent and lower independent self-construals while the opposite tends to be prevalent in many Western European cultures (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). However, one should take into consideration individual differences and not assume that these characteristics represent the entire population of a specific culture.

In his social interactions, Omar emphasised his need for independence in relation to *wasta* (see Section 5.4.1) by referring to rules and regulations to justify his avoidance of any personal involvement in any favouritism act. On the other hand, he also expressed his need to maintain a positive face by using his given name in his interactions and rejecting the use of titles as a strategy to show his involvement since he considered titles potential barriers and indicators of formality (see Section 4.3.2).

By refusing to be called Doctor, Omar’s determination to ‘fit in’ was clearly evident. He felt that showing some humility was more acceptable to the majority of home nationals. In taking this step, Omar was acknowledging and prioritising the public/collective self over the individual (see Section 5.4.4). The concept of face, then, can be seen to overlap with the collective self. It has been suggested that both face and identity are related to the notion of ‘self-image’, including our individual, relational and collective understanding of the self (Spencer-Oatey, 2007).

Particular social actions and regular encounters were face-threatening to participants upon their return to KSA. For example, lack of control in the workplace, regarding the formulation of exam questions, was embarrassing as one participant expressed (see Section 5.3.3). This feeling of embarrassment is due to the fact that others are aware of the situation; in this case, Nora’s students who could assess her lack of control as ‘evidence of weakness, inferiority, low status’ (Goffman, 2005, p. 101) which brought her cultural capital into question. Considering the

¹⁰² Other connotations are: collective, connected and relational (Markus & Kitayama, 1991).

returnee someone with a high level of cultural capital (i.e. new knowledge and power from gaining a PhD degree abroad), she was put into a position where she lost face in the eyes of those she taught. Face is lost when ‘the individual either through his action or that of people closely related to him, fails to meet essential requirements placed upon him by virtue of the social position he occupies’ (Ho, 1976, p. 867). This may heighten feelings of discomfort regarding readjustment to the workplace.

Spencer-Oatey (2002) introduces the concept of sociality rights (i.e. obligations) and distinguishes them from issues of face, in that any violation of sociality rights may lead to irritation rather than a threat to, or actual loss of, face. In line with this explanation, participants realised that they were less tolerant having returned to KSA than before about matters such as lack of punctuality as mentioned by Nora in Section (4.3.4) when her feelings of irritation with this type of occurrence was evident. At the same time, she also asked herself whether she was making too much of this careless approach to being on time, and wondered whether she needed to rethink her own attitudes and just accept that in KSA, what irritated her so much was not considered an issue at all.

The literature on repatriation suggests that following extended periods in another country, returnees often question their previous understanding of mutual expectations and obligations (Sussman, 2001). One of these issues is that of punctuality. The expectation or requirements for punctuality clearly differ in the UK and KSA. Having become accustomed to certain ‘cultural norms’ in the UK, such as the fast-paced time nature of working and social life there compared to the somewhat more spontaneous and relaxed time frames that are the norm in KSA, returnees might find real difficulty in tolerating the idea of someone ‘*being late*’ upon their return. The uncertainty Nora expressed by her inner debate about whether she should change her new attitudes back to her previous ones supports Gaw’s (2000) findings that returnees struggle with how much to keep of their new identity when they return home. Nora found it hard to accept those practices that contributed to her feelings of annoyance. This may explain Smith’s (1998, p. 306) assumption that, ‘if living in another culture causes change, we can expect part of that change to be identity-altering’. This will be touched upon in the following section.

5.5 Theme 3: Self-impression

5.5.1 A Sense of Transformation

When participants were asked about how they perceived themselves after the overseas experience, they mentioned that they felt they were different (see Omar’s comments in Section 4.3.4). Omar ascribed the change in his personality to both time and the experience of living

and studying abroad. The characteristics he gained were the outcome of these experiences, which were triggered by being self-sufficient and individually focused while trying to complete his PhD. In addition, participants dealt with different mentalities and went through trial and error practices as they carried out various duties.

In a similar vein, another male participant, Khalid, elaborated on this in Section (4.3.4).

From his comments, there was a very clear emphasis on the chance to understand and discover oneself. This could be a result of being relatively anonymous in a place with fewer acquaintances and obligations compared to a culture with a collectivist nature, such as KSA. Thus, participants had more freedom to think, decide, and act without any social influences. Brubaker & Cooper (2000, p. 17) propose that 'self-understanding' is an alternative term to identity. In this respect, Khalid's sense of transformation, that is identity change, could be linked to an understanding of oneself. This point echoes Mezirow's (1990) notion of 'transformative learning' which emphasises the ability of adults to develop a higher level of self-understanding. In fact, Mezirow (1990, p. 17) believes that 'the most significant adult learning occurs in connection with life transitions.'

Male participants in this study stressed the idea of becoming more helpful. When elaborating on this development they suggested that while this trait existed before they went abroad, it definitely grew while away from home. As strangers, they sought assistance and, inevitably, they developed feelings of indebtedness to those who assisted them.

Participants' comments in Section (4.4.1.3) point to a thoughtful personality as a matter of the overseas experience. Their changed sense of self had implications on their orientation towards different aspects of their life. This was manifested in their priorities and attitudes towards people and situations as Huda highlighted earlier in Section (4.3.4).

The type of change that Huda expressed was documented in the literature (Stowe, 2003; Brown & Graham, 2009) and probably resulted from the overseas experience, although the possibility that it was simply the result of personal growth cannot be ruled out (see Section 2.6).

In general, when people grow, they become rich in experience and consequently change their attitudes and behaviours. However, the nature of study abroad itself can, to some extent, accelerate this process of change and growth as 'it is also possible that the intercultural sojourn leads to accelerated maturation of the young sojourner, although [...] this has not been documented empirically' (Martin, 1986, p. 14). Having to face an unfamiliar environment with limited social support, and sometimes encountering situations of mutual misunderstanding due

to contact with host nationals in a foreign language, can create a fertile context for change. This is shown in the participants' strategies to deal with situations by adopting a degree of acceptance and openness and focusing on what really mattered. Kim (2001) claims that openness is positively linked to cross-cultural adaptation, while Martin (1986, p. 14) further argues that 'these changes (personal growth, changes in attitudes, accelerated maturity) may affect changes in re-entry relationships' (see Section 2.7.5).

In fact, Kim (2001) believes that people do and must change some of their old ways to cope with their daily activities and achieve an improved quality of life in their new environment (Kim, 2001). Huda had to divest herself of old habits such as her short temper in order to successfully manage the challenges of the sojourn. The realisation that becoming 'upset' will not solve any issue made her change her 'meaning schemes'. This, according to Mezirow (1990, p. 4), 'happens only as a result of the dynamic interaction between habit and the event being interpreted. [and ...] is often mediated by reflection.' When meaning schemes or schemata are transformed through reflection, this results in 'perspective transformations' (Mezirow, 1990, p. 13) (see Table 5-1 below).

Mezirow defines perspective transformations as 'the process of becoming critically aware of how we perceive, understand, and feel about our world' (Mezirow, 1990, p. 14). This process could be an outcome of growth as Mezirow (1990, p. 13) points out, 'Adulthood is the time for reassessing the assumptions of our formative years that have often resulted in distorted views of reality', leading us to reconsider our own orientation towards our beliefs, feelings and actions. It could also be an outcome of the overseas experience, since the effort to understand a different culture could trigger perspective transformations (ibid).

In relation to Huda's observations, reflection enabled her to adjust her problem-solving habits and create new meaning schemes as shown below:

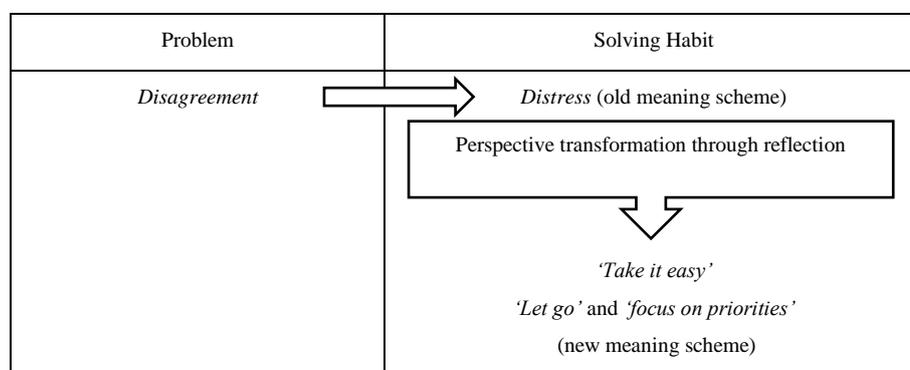


Table 5-1: Example of changed problem-solving habits based on Mezirow's (1990) perspective transformations

It has to be emphasised that critical reflection cannot occur within the immediate action process and requires some time (Mezirow, 1990). This point comes in line with the participants' comments about the significance of *'time'* in the process of change.

All of the above comments point to a 'changed self' as a result of the experience of studying abroad, which refined and enriched the students' mentalities, as well as their personalities. This finding supports the results reported by other studies (Stowe, 2003; Brown & Graham, 2009; Alandejani, 2013). Words like: *'developed'*, *'mature'*, *'learned'*, *'patient'*, *'acquired'*, *'understand'*, *'active'*, *'helpful'*, *'reflective'* and *'realised'* were all used by participants to describe how they felt they had changed.

My conceptualisation of identity in this part of the discussion is similar to that of Christofi & Thompson (2007, p. 60):

'Identity refers to changes that occur in one's personality as a consequence of time and exposure to a new culture. Individuals describe themselves in a new way because of various experiences that have shaped their (new) identity.'

Although this definition may be somewhat simplistic as it involves only one aspect of identity i.e. individual/personal, it does relate to the specific context of the study and is useful in understanding how participants describe themselves after their overseas experience. Nearly all the participants described the changes in themselves in positive ways. Thus, it can be concluded that the experience of being an international student has a 'transformative potential' and can be rewarding in the sense that it offers an opportunity for greater personal freedom, self-discovery, independence, confidence, and cultural awareness (Brown & Brown, 2009). A conclusion that is in line with Brown & Graham's (2009) findings that exposure to a new culture and distance from home promotes change among international postgraduate students.

Hall (1996, p. 4) proposed that identities are about the process of 'becoming rather than being: not 'who we are' or 'where we came from', so much as what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves.' This was evident in the participants' responses and how they perceived themselves before and after the sojourn. The constant use of the word *'now'* in their comments implies some change and indicates a present outcome which reflects this deduction.

Interestingly, participants agreed that the experience of studying abroad helped them understand their own identities and behaviour in their home culture better as they had to think about how to deal with people in the host country who thought and acted in a different way (see Khalid's comments in Section 4.3.4).

It is at this point when participants began to experience these differences that they started to think about, and reflect on, their own cultural behaviour which, up until then, had been 'invisible' or 'taken for granted' (Sussman, 2002a). Confronting this variation in attitudes and behaviours between the two national cultures made their own practices more pronounced in their own minds. Miller's idea about identity was mirrored in these views in that 'it is established across differences, and a knowledge of self emerges in relation to others' (2000, p. 72). Moreover, Kohonen, (2008) believes that it is through social contact and self-reflection that we come to construct our identities.

In order to understand the process of change that participants experienced, it is useful to think of the sojourn as involving stress-adaptation-growth dynamics (Kim & Ruben, 1988) as described by Kim (2006, p. 292):

'The interrelatedness of stress and adaptation describes the process of organizing and reorganizing oneself — the process that, in the context of interethnic interface, involves continual reinventing of an inner self beyond the boundaries of the original cultural identity. In this process, an identity is transformed, gradually and imperceptibly, from an "ascribed" to a newly "achieved" identity. As the "old" person breaks up, new knowledge, attitudes, and behavioral elements are assimilated into an enactment of *growth* — an emergent interethnic personhood at a higher level of integration.'

Interethnic identity can be seen as an extension of ethnic identity (i.e. national or cultural identity) which has resulted from identity adaptation and transformation (Kim, 2006). By applying this model (see Figure 2-3), the participants' re-entry process can be explained. Having successfully accomplished their PhD abroad, it is not unreasonable to conclude that they were successful in managing their stress and in their adaptation while overseas, regardless of how positive the adaptation was. Therefore, it can be assumed that to some extent they have reached the growth phase. The extract from Farah in Section (4.3.4) supports this inference and ascertains that the inevitable stress experienced while abroad was behind any change. According to Mezirow, (1990, p. 4), 'experience strengthens, extends, and refines our structures of meaning by reinforcing our expectations about how things are supposed to be.'

Participants experience new systems, academic and social, in which the effort involved in coping may affect them psychologically and sometimes physically. Becoming independent was positively related to the pressure of undertaking a PhD while surviving in a different culture. All of this was accompanied by additional responsibilities, many of which were beyond the individual comfort zone and required significant 'role-change' as Nora briefly put it in Section (4.3.1).

Females in this study had to behave in an ‘independent’ way that might normally be considered ‘masculine’ within the cultural norms of KSA, a prime example of which is driving a car. Giddens (1991, p. 143) calls these periods ‘fateful moments’ and describes them as ‘transition points which have major implications not just for the circumstances of an individual’s future conduct, but for self-identity’. He argues that ‘where consequential decisions are concerned, individuals are often stimulated to devote the time and energy necessary to generate increased mastery of the circumstances they confront’ (ibid, p. 143). Thus, the decision to undertake a PhD came with a number of new responsibilities that had to be managed successfully. Self-control abroad contributed to the reconstruction of the self, the development of an interethnic identity that, upon the return home, helped participants overcome any stressful situation and enabled them to manage the transition. For example, the ability to meet home nationals’ expectations of a Saudi returnee and, at the same time, retain a newly acquired self-concept (see Section 5.4.5) reflects a ‘glo-cal’ perspective (Hazelkorn, 2016); to be a global citizen and a local Saudi, which is a concept similar to Kim’s (2006) interethnic identity.

This illustrates how global and local perspectives of returnees in this study are intertwined and reveals the growth in Kim’s (2001) model, acknowledging the positive side of re-entry (i.e. realising their increased potentials) which was documented in the literature as positive growth (Adler, 1975; Uehara, 1986).

Adler’s (1975) perception of culture shock as a transitional experience, promoting aspects of self-development and personal growth, has some relevance to this study. However, the findings also confirm that the main values, such as that of being socially connected and living in harmony, are not likely to be abandoned in favour of new acquired values such as freedom and independence but rather, as Kim (2001) argues, are more likely to be modified in a balanced way.

5.6 Theme 4: Stages of Readjustment

5.6.1 *Getting by*

Certain issues become salient in an attempt to understand how participants managed the return, one of which was the nature of the overseas experience. From Nora’s experience, which her interviews confirmed, it seems that she had a very successful experience in the host country that she would not mind living the rest of her life there as she said (see Appendix E line 168).

As a result of her feelings, she faced specific issues upon returning to KSA. Her comments during the early return, when she was asked about the changes in her life and how she dealt with them (see Section 4.4.1.1), support this conclusion. Nora’s incompatibility with some

cultural norms and her uncertainty in how to deal with them was behind her feelings of discomfort.

This attitude tended to place Nora, during the early phase of the return, into the role of an ‘alienated’ returnee, a coping style identified by Adler (1981) (see Section 2.6) as one who reacts negatively to the home environment and culture and, limits his/her personal and social interaction with society and usually feels stuck between the two national cultures. Having mentioned that, the negativity was not explicitly expressed to the home nationals, but was obvious in her tone of voice and her comments during the interviews. This implicit attitude could be related to other factors mentioned earlier including the collective self (see Section 5.4.4). The quote also represents the dynamic nature of cultural identity (Sussman, 2000). In her model, Sussman identified four kinds of identity shifts as a result of ‘self-concept disturbance’ upon reentry, one of which applies to Nora, i.e. The subtractive identity, where repatriates feel ‘less comfortable with their home culture’s values and norms and less similar to their compatriots’ (Sussman 2000, p. 366) (see Section 2.5).

Nora also felt it had been a long time since her return to KSA when, in fact, it had only been about five months at the time of the interview. This suggests that her readjustment process at the beginning was uncomfortable. Nora’s willingness to share her experience with someone who could understand, in this case the researcher, illustrates the depth of her depression and her need to talk (see Appendix E).

There is some controversy in the literature concerning whether positive adjustment overseas leads to easier readjustment upon the return or whether the reverse is true. However, findings from this study do not resolve this debate as negative feelings were not permanent. Nora elaborated upon this point in her last interview when talking about her overall readjustment (see Section 4.5.1.2).

Nora’s assessment highlights two issues, one of which is that time is crucial in overcoming any challenge. Time, as most participants agreed, and as reflected in the literature (Ward, et al., 1998; Ward, et al., 2001; Brown & Holloway, 2008; Pitts, 2016), is a key factor in readjustment.

Her view concurs with Brown & Holloway’s (2008) findings that the adjustment process is unpredictable, dynamic and experienced differently by different returners.

Another issue is the notion of ‘belonging’, a concept developed in ‘migration-related research’ and which is related to the process of ‘identification’ (Krzyżanowski & Wodak, 2008). Nora related her son’s attachment to the UK to the fact that it is his birthplace, which had an effect

on his identity and how he perceived himself i.e. his perception of himself as an outsider and his exclusion of himself from the group of students in his class in KSA. In this regard, 'identity' is related to 'belonging' (Miller, 2000). Using the English language in class was not sufficient to facilitate his readjustment as he was still aware of the variety used.

It becomes important at this point to make clear the distinction between identity and identification. Brubaker & Cooper (2000, p. 14) claim that 'Identification of oneself and of others – is intrinsic to social life; "identity" in one sense is not.' Identifying with others, i.e. interaction, may not necessarily result in internal homogeneity as the concept of 'identity' involves 'self and other-identification' which is 'situational and contextual' (ibid). Consequently, while we may have distinct identities, we can still identify with each other.

Nora was the only participant who used the proper noun when referring to her city in the UK (see Appendix F), or the overseas experience in general, while other participants used the words 'there' or 'the UK'. Nora's explicit naming of her city of residence shows her attachment to the place she had left and contributes to an understanding of her relatively idiosyncratic attitudes upon her return.

As seen from the findings, adjustment problems were greatest at the beginning and decreased over time, questioning the validity of the honeymoon stage in the W-curve model (Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963) and suggesting that stages of re-entry are more sophisticated than the literature predicts (see Section 2.4.1). In fact, Cox (2006, p. 24) refers to this stage as being a 'structured chaos stage'.

5.6.2 Acceptance

Participants in this study exhibited degrees of acceptance to the challenges faced upon their return (see Omar's comments in Section 4.5.1.2).

Omar's conclusion reflects participants' maturity in accepting their current situation and a new phase in their lives. From a religious perspective, accepting difficult situations reflects one's sincere trust and faith in God, and a belief that any discomfort is temporary. Acceptance was identified by Ward & Kennedy (2001), in their exploratory study with British expatriates living in Singapore, as a passive coping strategy that had no impact on psychological adjustment. In contrast, such acceptance appeared to be useful in managing the return and contributed positively to the participants' psychological well-being as is evident in participants' responses at interviews. Research shows that religion can have a positive impact on psychological wellbeing and is associated with happiness (French & Joseph, 1999). This has some relevance to this study as the influence of Islam on Saudi people cannot be overlooked. This is manifested

in the participants' use of so many religious phrases while expressing themselves (e.g. *Insha'Allah, Alhamdulillah, Subhan Allah*). In KSA, Islam is viewed as a way of life and not just a religious ideology (see Section 1.5.4). Moreover, Islam encourages practicality and for one to accept and deal with the reality within one's reach (Jandt, 2013). In this sense, acceptance could be classified as a religious coping strategy.

Acceptance was also manifested in Nora's attempts to create a relaxing atmosphere and to avoid any stress triggers as was expressed in Section (4.5.1.2). Her extract provides an example of an avoidance coping strategy and echoes, to an extent, one of the two basic orientations in the coping literature toward stress, i.e. approach and avoidance (Roth & Cohen, 1986). Nora's avoidance strategy stemmed from her need to accommodate her children which she prioritised over any other need including the need to socialise. She mentioned 'normality' as a catalyst to acceptance.

Most participants concluded that being prepared and patient while remaining positive with low expectations all help in accepting any situation they encountered upon returning home.

Kim (2001) considers positivity one of the basic elements of adaptive personality. This bears some similarities with Alandejani's (2013) earlier findings on the readjustment of Saudi females.

Contrary to previous studies, for example, by Christofi & Thompson (2007), participants did not show any desire to return to the host country. Female participants' opinions voiced in Section (4.5.1.2) point to the burden of female responsibilities in an overseas study. This may also reflect the nature of the stay abroad and the different circumstances experienced by participants (see Section 4.3.1). Participants emphasised the collectivist nature of KSA society (in Section 1.5.5) through phrases such as, '*with no one by your side*' and the gender role through phrases such as '*being responsible for everything*'. All of this contributed to their feelings of being settled upon their return. Interestingly, all female participants had new children when they returned, which might suggest that the pressure of completing their studies may have led to putting off any plans to increase the size of their families. This could also indicate the start of a new phase of life with its new responsibilities.

An individual's level of contentment could also be related to his/her job security and financial situation and opportunities on return. It can be predicted that adjustment will be easier for groups undergoing more structured, professional experiences such as academics (Church, 1982).

The effect of positivity and flexibility on psychological and sociocultural adaptation should not be underestimated (Kim, 2001). In fact, flexibility, a positive attitude, and patience were also identified in MacDonald's (2000) findings and seem to be important to repatriation adjustment. Accepting the cultural reality of home and the ability to function in the home country through an acceptance of things, and dealing with issues accordingly, are points raised in other research on this topic, for example that of Pitts (2016).

The present study supports previous research and provides new insights into how individuals perceive, manage, and deal with the experience of returning home. Although findings from this research may not be sufficient to generate a comprehensive theory of readjustment, they reveal that two models of cross-cultural adaptation are most relevant. One is the Transition Model (Bennett, 1998) (Section 2.4.2) and the other is the Stress-Adaptation-Growth Model (Kim, 2001; Kim, 2005) (Section 2.4.3). Interpreting the data using a combination of both models adds to the literature on the re-entry of Post graduates by reaching a number of theoretical conclusions which are summarised below.

5.7 Revisiting the Research Questions

5.7.1 RQ1: How do Saudi PGSs find the experience of returning home after studying abroad?

In addressing the first research question, which is exploratory in nature, structural and logistical issues (see Sections 4.4.1.1 and 5.3) were found to be crucial, especially at the beginning of the return, and caused 'spill-over' and 'cross-over' effects. While female concerns about their children's academic adjustment (see Section 5.3.2) affected them psychologically (see Section 4.4.1.1), both males and females complained significantly about the hierarchy and bureaucracy in the workplace, and this consequently affected their psychological wellbeing (see Section 5.3.3). Another structural issue was transportation, which was a major obstacle for females and had an adverse effect on their social relations (see Section 5.3.1). The findings in Chapter 4 indicated the interrelated nature of logistics and social norms, and how the psychological and the sociocultural elements of the return were intertwined (see Section 4.3.1). This illuminated the complexity of the repatriation experience and supported the 'spill-over' and 'cross-over' issues, as well as their effects on returnees' readjustment. Spill-over can be defined as the stress experienced in one domain of life, such as transportation, that results in stress for the same individual in another domain, for example, meeting social obligations. Cross-over is a process that occurs when psychological stress experienced by one person, for example, a child, affects the stress levels of another closely related person, such as the child's mother (Westman, 2001).

When it comes to social life, returnees, regardless of gender, found it difficult to escape social obligations that could, at times, be draining (see Section 5.4.4). This was particularly pertinent during the early stages of the return when they were more susceptible to being accused of arrogance following the award of a PhD (see Section 5.4.2 for PhD status and its effects) and so had to prove that the degree had not changed their attitudes towards their relatives. The complexity of reconstructing social relations was also evident in the overlapping of some themes (e.g. ‘the collective self’ with ‘the notion of face’) (see Sections 5.4.4 and 5.4.5). Not unsurprisingly, there was a strong element of religious principles and social values in participants’ reactions towards the return, one of which is the concept of *Albir* (see Section 5.4.3). This highlights the role of culture since KSA is relatively homogeneous in terms of religion.

Re-acculturative stress (Berry, 2005), although manageable, was an unavoidable part of the readjustment process for individuals, to varying degrees, in this study. Females, especially those with children, were more susceptible than males. Moreover, females in this study experienced a shift in their attitudes from being dependent, to some extent, on their families or husbands, to relying on themselves during the acculturation process. This change to their normal way of life boosted their self-confidence and gave them a sense of unrestricted freedom and empowerment. Upon re-entry to KSA, females felt they lost the personal autonomy and independence which they had enjoyed while abroad, and which explains why this re-adjustment was so challenging. According to Bennett (1998, p. 219) ‘not being *able* to do what one has come to value doing is even more challenging’. His conclusion is consistent with other findings in the literature (e.g. Brabant, et al., 1990; Stringham, 1993; Sussman, 2000; Christofi & Thompson, 2007; Brown & Graham, 2009). Consequently, this study has contributed to the on-going debates concerning the role of gender in re-entry to a home society. However, females who viewed the experience of studying abroad as tough and experienced some difficulties were delighted about the return despite the challenges they faced (see Section 5.6.2). This highlights the personal nature of the experience of cultural adjustment (Adler, 1975).

Although one participant expressed negative perceptions about the early stage of the return (see Section 5.6.1), most participants characterised this period as intensive and demanding rather than negative. The intensity was manifested in their need to meet social obligations while dealing with logistical issues, including financial matters (see Section 4.5.1.1). By referring to Adler’s (1981) types of returnees (see Section 2.6), none of the participants can be characterised as having acted aggressively towards the home culture or exhibited a rebellious attitude, nor, indeed, did they regret the return (c.f. Christofi & Thompson, 2007). Rather, in terms of advice

to others, they insisted on the need for patience, early preparation, and on maintaining a positive attitude (see Section 5.6.2).

5.7.2 RQ2: In what ways does the experience of studying abroad appear to have 'influenced' these individuals, from their own perspectives?

When addressing the second research question, it would appear that the overseas experience has changed the participants' sense of self, which was clarified and highlighted in the participants' appreciative attitude towards their experience and its positive effect on their self-development (see Section 5.5). For example, there was evidence of enhanced awareness which helped them develop a critical approach towards their own rights, whether personal or legal. This encouraged them to claim freedom or personal space whenever they felt a need for it (see Section 5.4.5) and to reject some common cultural practices (e.g. the use of *wasta*) in their interactions (see Section 5.4.1), which was incompatible with their beliefs and principles. The participants' ability to fulfil home nationals' expectations of them upon the return and, at the same time, retain their newly acquired concept of self (see Section 5.5) reflects a 'glo-cal' perspective (Hazelkorn, 2016). This concept is discussed in detail in Section 5.5.1 and is similar to Kim's (2006) interethnic identity.

While the experience of studying abroad had implications on participants' orientation towards different aspects of life e.g. their priorities and relationships with others, participants concerns about their collective selves rather than their individual selves, as they tried to fit in the society, remain significant (see Section 5.4.4). Meeting cultural expectations and conforming to cultural norms and social obligations overwhelmed their desire to please their inner call for privacy, a characteristic that had been developed abroad and which would be considered a deviation from the norm in the eyes of the home nationals (see Section 1.5.5). Deviation from the norm is usually stigmatised in KSA and participants, by adhering to the norms, tried to avoid such criticism. Finding a balance between the private and public selves created a tension between personal and social identity. This further illustrates the process of identity transformation (Zaharna, 1989; Ting-Toomey, 1999) (see Section 5.5.1).

A further element is the need to consider the returnees in this study as constituting a 'culture within culture' (Jandt, 2013, p. 337) which, according to the author, is based on economic or social class, or geographic region. Following a study abroad in one geographic region, the UK, and having experienced broadly similar systems there, participants in this study acquired certain characteristics which distinguished them from the mainstream Saudi society. In addition, holding a PhD in itself placed them in a specific social class. The conclusion is that the overseas experience has enriched the participants' cultural and social capital (Bourdieu, 1986) which, in

turn, had an effect on the way they dealt with cultural expectations in KSA (see Sections 5.4.1 and 5.4.2). These shared features are useful in explaining the participants' responses towards the return and in classifying them as a culture within a culture. Gudykunst (2004, p. 43) defines these kinds of cultures as comprising 'groups within cultures whose members share many of the values of the cultures, but also have some values that differ from the larger cultures.' Values related to punctuality, privacy, or even the acquisition of material goods can be relevant to the participants in this study, as they distinguish them from the mainstream culture.

5.7.3 RQ3: What strategies do these individuals use to deal with their return-home experience, if they feel there is a need to do so?

In addressing the third research question, findings showed that the general characteristics shared by all participants in this study, regardless of gender, was their ability to normalise the challenges they faced and then devise strategies to cope with the demands of the return. This was evident throughout the research whenever participants mentioned their concerns (see Section 5.6.2). For example, on return to KSA, avoidance strategies were used differently by participants to manage social pressures and ensure a relaxed atmosphere, or to reconstruct relationships, by, for example, avoiding the use of titles which are construed as indicators of formality and, hence, as participants perceived it, would impede their process of "fitting in" (see Section 5.4.5). It can be argued that the choice of these strategies was, at times, influenced by cultural factors such as participants' willingness to maintain the collectivist characteristics of harmony and the avoidance of confrontation (Triandis, 1994; Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005), and by personal factors at other times, for example participants inclination to avoid being personally involved in the common practice of *wasta*, which could have a negative effect on their overall integrity. This was brought about by their attempt to present their newly developed sense of self in academia after holding a certain position (see Section 4.5.1.1) and, at other times, by universal factors related to human nature and their universal reaction to loss and change (Bennett, 1998) (see Section 2.4.2).

Participants addressed cultural norms and social obligations (see Section 5.4) by adhering to them at times and by questioning their priorities at other times (e.g. social gatherings in Section 5.4.4). This shows how they strived to achieve a balance between the social and the personal side of the return, which reflected their maturity, a factor in readjustment that is also touched upon in Gullahorn & Gullahorn's (1963) findings (see Section 2.7.3).

The dynamic role of culture in providing exceptional sets of coping strategies (e.g. acceptance in Section 5.6.2) in re-adaptation should not be minimised (Brabant, et al., 1990). The present study makes an important contribution to the literature on stress and coping by highlighting the

critical role of home in shaping and refining the participants' identities and in managing their transition. Although these findings reflect the particular context of KSA, comparing the findings with other studies in other areas could be useful. For example, it may help in developing re-entry preparation and training programs (e.g. Arthur, 2003) tailored towards the needs of similar groups and in understanding why needs differ from one group to another. Adding a Saudi perspective to the international research literature on re-entry will aid this process. Hopefully, this thesis will find a very prominent place in fields such as cross-cultural psychology, intercultural communication, and international human resource management.

5.8 Chapter Summary

The experience of re-entry to the home culture after a period of anything between 4-8 years abroad was found to be challenging overall, especially during the early phase of the return. Moreover, the process of acculturation and de-culturation of gender roles, that is one's ability to meet the gender expectations of the home country upon return, caused unexpected challenges, especially for females who experienced less freedom, lower status, and were exposed to more stressful situations particularly in relation to their children's education. Gender identity was more to the fore for females than any other form of identity, such as professional identity. This kind of identity (i.e. gender), according to Kohonen (2008) is often challenged in social relations with dominant groups. However, I would argue that the general characteristics shared by all participants in this study, regardless of gender, was their ability to normalise the challenges and then devise strategies to cope with them. Bennett's (1998) transition model (see Section 2.4.2) is a valuable tool for understanding why that should be so. As my analysis revealed, there was a clear attempt by all participants to maintain harmony and avoid confrontation with social group norms in their social relations and interactions, even if this sometimes was against their will (see Sections 5.4.4 & 5.4.5). This finding adds a new dimension to Kim's (2001) theory by identifying examples of the types of stress that returnees may experience upon their re-entry and how this contributes to developing their coping strategies to manage social relations and interactions which can be at times complex.

According to Kim (2005, p. 383), 'as long as there are pressures to conform, they are compelled to learn and make changes in their customary habits'. Acquiring new habits and suspending old ones are adaptive changes that involve stress and may lead to internal transformation (Kim, 2005). The analysis looked at how participants' sense of self changed after studying abroad, and how this 'new' sense of self affected their re-entry as they tried to readjust and avoid conflict. Findings of this study add to the limited literature on the positive aspects of re-entry by highlighting the participants' appreciative attitude towards their experience and its effect on

their self-development. Participants' re-entry experience in this study is grounded in their 'awareness'; awareness of the differences and awareness of the changes in the overall cultural system, whether structural, such as education and transportation, or social, in terms of perceived obligations.

Change also took place in cultural expectations and within themselves. The active role of self-awareness in a manageable, and managed, readjustment is evident. However, this is contrary to Pitts' (2016) findings, which revealed students' lack of self-awareness in relation to their personal change and which caused difficulties upon their return. Participants' awareness in this study could be attributed to their educational level, age and their individual levels of intelligence, and concurs with Gullahorn & Gullahorn's (1963) findings that older holders of scholarship, who are well established professionally, and have already been socialised into their primary culture, had fewer issues upon return than younger ones. It can be deduced that being more mature helps with readjustment and age remains a factor for securing a manageable re-entry experience.

It is worth mentioning that maintaining realistic expectations regarding the return did not help to eliminate any feeling of stress when actually confronted with certain situations having returned. This could be related to the element of change, either in oneself, people, or the environment, which, although to some extent was taken into consideration, seemed to be challenging when confronted in reality (see Section 2.2). A similar conclusion was reached by Rogers & Ward's (1993) who found no significant correlation between expectations before the return and the actual experience after re-entry. In fact, realistic expectations about the return do not facilitate psychological adjustment (Rogers & Ward, 1993). Participants agreed that one of the key facilitators for readjustment was early preparation and that point of view was endorsed by Stowe (2003, p. 128) who argued that 'preparation for an experience results in more realistic expectations'.

A review of the literature on readjustment confirms many of the study findings and points to a common experience among those who have lived abroad. For example, the first stage in readjustment was a mixture of emotions with excitement and anxiety to varying degrees. This is in line with Cox (2006) and Unjore's (2014) findings. In addition, the apparent lack of severe problems upon re-entry mirrors other findings in the literature such as Brabant, et al., (1990) and Gama & Pedersen (1977). Participants in this study demonstrated some level of acceptance of the situation upon their return, which indicates growth and maturity, and could be explained through the Transition Model (Bennett, 1998) (see Section 2.4.2).

Acceptance has a positive connotation in terms of flexibility as returnees were not passive recipients of the situation they found, but rather willing to try different strategies to cope with it. This acceptance, as argued in Section 5.6.2, could be attributed to participants' willingness to maintain harmony with the society, a collectivist characteristics (Triandis, 1994; Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005), as well as to preserve the strong family bond that is strongly embedded in Saudi culture. The quantitative study by Brabant, et al. (1990) yielded similar findings and pointed to the active role of culture in re-adaptation. The authors expected culture to provide a unique set of coping and re-adaptation mechanisms to be used by returnees. I would add that considering the participants in this study as constituting 'culture within culture' (Jandt, 2013), through their own orientation and acquired characteristics after a study abroad, is useful in explaining their reaction upon their return.

Acceptance could also be something universal, related to human nature (see Bennett, 1998). Cross-cultural adaptation, according to Anderson (1994, p. 293), 'represents in essence a common process of environmental adaptation, far from being culture specific' as shown in other studies (e.g. Pitts, 2016). Anthropologists have always acknowledged similarities between people from different cultures as 'part of a universal human heritage' (Monaghan & Just, 2000, p. 40).

The discussion clearly shows that a number of sub-themes overlap, including *wasta*, with bureaucracy, and the collective self with the notion of face, which illustrates the sophisticated nature of the study. Most of the themes and subthemes that have emerged from this study were addressed, at least at the individual level, in the literature. There were, for example, references to the significance of *structural and logistical issues* (e.g. Konzett-Smoliner, 2016), *cultural norms and obligations* (Pitts, 2016), *self-impression* (Arouca, 2013), and *acceptance* (Pitts, 2016). In line with findings by Jung, et al. (2013), this study suggests that the re-entry experience includes a combination of affective behavioural and cognitive domains (see Section 2.4.4) in a complementary, yet specific, way.

Chapter 6 : Conclusions

6.1 Introduction

Having presented and discussed the research findings in Chapters 4 and 5 respectively, this concluding chapter begins by providing a synopsis of the study followed by an overview of its contributions and implications. I then summarise the study limitations and offer some recommendations for further research. The chapter concludes with my overall reflections on the process of undertaking this research.

6.2 Synopsis of the Study

The underlying goal of this study was to describe and explain the repatriation experience of Saudi PGSs. As stated in Chapter 1 (see Section 1.3), this study was stimulated by the scarcity of repatriation research compared to expatriation, particularly in the Saudi context, despite the fact that it is very topical, and a reality increasingly faced by many individuals in the modern world today. The focus was on how returning individuals re-integrate into their home country after studying abroad, and whether the experience of studying abroad impacted on their perceptions of different aspects of their life at home, in terms of any changes they had introduced to their personal, social, and professional practices. If so, the next pertinent question to address was the extent to which they had modified their behaviour and practices. The study also highlights, and analyses strategies used by returnees when they felt they needed to re-adjust to life in their home country (see Sections 4.3.2, 5.4.1, 5.4.4).

Although it does not claim to be totally comprehensive, by using a qualitative longitudinal approach (as set out in Section 3.2), the study does provide empirical evidence, offer detailed descriptions, and deepens our understanding of the return home experience. It supports and confirms a number of theoretical findings and contributes in many ways to the existing body of literature in the field of cross-cultural adaptation (see Section 5.7). First, the study helps in understanding the nature of what is involved in the movement from one place to another and how people interpret this experience, particularly people who come from a very different national culture from the one they move to. Due to my own background, it has provided an emic understanding of, and invaluable insights into, how Saudi individuals navigate their re-entry process. As such, it advances the scarce empirical knowledge on re-adjustment in KSA.

Second, as need for further investigation on gender-related re-entry concerns has recently emerged (Martin & Harrell, 2004; Cox, 2006), the study presents dual, female and male, perspectives on the return and explores the different strategies used by each gender to readjust

(see Section 5.7). This approach overcomes the limitation of most re-entry studies, particularly in KSA (see Section 2.8.2). Moreover, since there is no single comprehensive theory of sojourner adjustment (Church, 1982; Stringham, 1993), and studies that contribute to the development of theory are few (Kidd, 2010; Pitts, 2016), this empirical study provides theoretical conclusions to the literature on readjustment and aids our understanding of re-entry (see Section 5.7).

6.3 Theoretical Contributions

This study provides theoretical contributions to the existing body of literature on re-entry and to the field of cross-cultural adaptation. Approaching the data without a preconceived hypothesis made this study distinct. The main findings can be understood by integrating two existing models of cross-cultural adaptation: the Transition Model (Bennett, 1998) (see Section 2.4.2) and the Stress-Adaptation-Growth Model (Kim, 2001; Kim, 2005) (see Section 2.4.3). Thus, adding a theoretical contribution by acknowledging the impact of these two theories on readjustment. In fact, almost all participants acknowledged their personal growth as an outcome of the overseas experience (see Section 5.5.1). This can be explained through the lens of Kim's (2008) model of Stress-Adaptation-Growth dynamic. The two models above act as complementary frameworks and make this phenomenon natural, and potentially universal, eliminating the negative aspects that were associated with this transition (see Section 2.4.1 about RCS).

The participants' re-entry experiences in this study are grounded in their awareness of the differences and changes in the overall cultural system, whether structural, such as education and transportation, or social, in terms of perceived obligations. Adler (1981) suggested that awareness of change is a requirement for a re-entry experience characterised by growth. As my analysis revealed, there was a clear attempt by all participants to maintain harmony with social group norms in their social relations and interactions (see Sections 5.4.4 and 5.4.5), even if this required compromising themselves. This finding adds a new dimension to Kim's (2001) theory by identifying examples of the types of stress that returnees may experience upon their re-entry and how this contributes to developing their coping strategies to manage social relations and interactions which can be, at times, complex. However, given the cultural context of this study (see Sections 1.5.4 and 1.5.5) this is not entirely unexpected. The study offers a cultural perspective to re-entry by highlighting the roles of culture and religion in shaping an individual's reactions towards the return (see Section 5.6.2). It also emphasises the role gender plays in meeting cultural expectations that were particularly challenging for females in this transition (see Section 5.3).

6.4 Methodological Contributions

As discussed earlier in Chapter 3, most studies on readjustment are quantitative and retrospective (e.g. Martin, 1986; Black, 1992; Gaw, 2000; Sussman, 2002b; Cox, 2004; Wolfe, 2005; Altweck & Marshall, 2015). Some studies are qualitative (e.g. Stringham, 1993; Christofi & Thompson, 2007; Alandejani, 2013; Arouca, 2013) and there are a very few longitudinal ones (e.g. Suutari & Brewster, 2003; Pitts, 2016). While longitudinal studies consider time to be crucial in the overall readjustment, Suutari & Brewster's (2003) study was quantitative in nature, whereas Pitts's (2016) qualitative study lacked the frequent interval of data collection found in this study (i.e. 12 months). Consequently, the present study contributes to the field of re-entry literature in a unique way. For example, it highlights the change in acculturation strategies used by these participants over a 12 month time period which, as far as I am aware, no study has done previously. The nature of the sample is also an asset in that it comprises both the character traits of students, as well as features of working staff members. Despite the fact that a relatively small number of participants may affect generalisability (see Section 6.5), in this particular study, the small number was an asset in that it permitted a long term involvement and accessibility to the details and complexities of their personal and social lives. This generated a deeper understanding and offered valuable information that can serve as a basis for further research on re-entry experiences.

6.5 Implications for the State

Findings of the study reveal several essential aspects that can be helpful to stake holders in higher education in accommodating Saudi returnees. While a host university Student Services may provide returnees with useful information to assist their re-entry in the same way they assisted their adjustment overseas, these services may assist with only general matters, as particular issues may well be culture-bound, especially those pertaining to religion. Thus, below are some more practical ways to support returnees.

6.5.1 The Saudi Cultural Bureaux Abroad

The Saudi Cultural Bureaux could collaborate with the educational sector in KSA to keep overseas students updated on any regulations and acceptance requirements related to their children's studies upon return. This includes the accreditation of all types of academic certification. Although this may be a personal issue, clear guidelines regarding this specific concern can help returnees build realistic expectations and support them with any logistical challenges they might face just as they were supported upon their arrival in the UK for their PG studies.

The Saudi Cultural Bureaux could also launch an online “overseas returnees’ union” for students to meet with other returnees and benefit from each other’s previous experiences. A list of the common challenges could be provided in a returnee handbook or on the official Saudi Cultural Bureau web page.

6.5.2 Higher Education Institutions

Higher Education Institutions in KSA should provide guidance for recently returned staff members and clarify any new regulations or changes introduced in their departments during their absence. It is not advisable to simply assume that previous familiarity with the context will be sufficient to facilitate their readjustment since re-adjustment encompasses structural challenges in the same way as it encompasses social and psychological ones.

Higher Education Institutions should also reconsider male-female ways of communication and decision making strategies for the sake of the students and for the psychological wellbeing of the female staff in particular. The marginalisation of the female staff could contribute negatively to their readjustment process, including their wellbeing, and could eliminate the returnees’ attempts to apply their newly acquired knowledge. This is an issue investigated earlier by Alandejani (2013) and had a degree of relevance in the literature. Moreover, the process of accrediting PhD certificates should be re-examined and streamlined to reduce any bureaucratic procedure that could affect the newly returned staff member either financially or psychologically.

6.6 Limitations of the Study

Despite its contributions and implications, this study has limitations which open up several possible directions for further research. First, data was limited by the narrowness of the demographic scope as the sample included only Saudi returnees. This ties the findings to the Saudi context and its specific culture. Yet, in a naturalistic inquiry, the generalisability of the findings could be related to transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) (see Section 3.5), in which providing the reader with rich descriptions about the researched area makes it possible to transfer it to other settings and contexts. Thus, while acknowledging the limitations of a small sample in generalising findings to other, or wider contexts, the relative homogeneity of the sample does provide very accurate data on which to analyse, and reach well founded conclusions about a very specific group and this, in itself, has advantages for the researcher.

Another limitation stems from the nature of the sample. All participants come from a social science background. Other people from other areas of study may have different views of the world which could have generated different data. In addition, those who volunteered in this

study could have followed an adjustment process different from those who did not choose to participate. This could mean that the sample is not as representative as it could be and might not represent the entire range of views that could be found in KSA. For example, the voices of unsuccessful individual returnees who did not accomplish their PhDs are missing from the data. Research on this group of individuals would provide the data for an additional study that could examine the impact of failure on returnees' ability to readjust. This is a particularly pertinent issue in a society where people are expected to share achievements, their good reputation, and where the behaviour, successes and failures, of an individual member affects the family as a whole (see Section 1.5.4). It may well be that the embarrassment caused by failure to successfully complete the PhD may exacerbate the process of re-entry.

In relation to my interpretations, which are discussed earlier in Chapter 3, the research process had to be transparent so that readers can determine the integrity of the research for themselves. Such methodological challenges are faced by most researchers and I have been diligent about reflecting on these issues throughout the course of the study. In addition, while translating the data was carried out by two bilingual translators and was then compared to ensure accuracy and agreement, there is a slight possibility that an element of the true voice of the participants may be lost in the translation from Arabic to English.

A further possible limitation is the researcher-participant gender relationship, which may have had an effect on the comfort level of the participants. Being a female interviewer may have affected the data from male participants in particular, given that both come from a gender-segregated culture. It is possible that using a male interviewer may have yielded more, or slightly different, information from male participants. However, the area of research was not so sensitive to the extent that it could have caused the participants to feel constrained. In fact, male participants showed as much interest in the research as did their female counterparts. As academic researchers themselves, studying within a non-gender segregated culture, it is more likely that any potential reservations that male participants might have had talking directly to a female interviewer would have been more than compensated for by the context of the interview.

Another possible area of concern might be that as an insider (see Section 3.6) I might have created a sense of apprehension about being judged by a fellow Saudi researcher. I believe that I built good relationships with the participants to the extent that they considered the interviews more as a source of relief than of judgment. This applied particularly to the females (see Section 5.6.1) and, if anything, the involvement in the research served as a means to fulfil their need to communicate about these issues that were of such importance to them.

6.7 Recommendations for Further Research

The study opens the door for several potential research pathways in the area of readjustment. One recommendation, in the light of recent development plans in KSA, is to examine a female's adjustment in relation to transportation following the lifting of the ban on driving. This empowering step from the Kingdom could facilitate female re-entry and increase their feeling of independence, especially in the context of driving which has always been seen as a male privilege and a purely masculine activity within the cultural norms of KSA. Masculinity has always been highly regarded within KSA society, affording males a higher social status than females. This inspirational step may be the forerunner of further changes that might impact on the findings of this study.

While findings from the present study related to the first 12 months of the return, future researchers may be encouraged to explore re-entry over a longer period, or even conduct comparative studies, perhaps comparing recently returned individuals with others who have been home for several years. While this aspect has been touched upon in a recent study by Pitts (2016), it would be interesting to see how her conclusions compare to Arab or Islamic countries.

Despite the fact that the analysis looked at how participants' sense of self changed after studying abroad, and how this 'new' sense of self affected their re-entry as they tried to readjust, that exploration was triggered by one of the study questions rather than being self-motivated by the participants. However, it is difficult to draw definite conclusions from these findings regarding the impact of studying abroad on the amount of change induced in these individuals. Although findings provide some evidence for a 'transformative experience' (Kim, 2001, p. 235) (see Section 5.5.1), through being exposed to different settings and interacting with people from different backgrounds, determining the exact sources of change in these individuals remains difficult to identify. Is the change a result of the overseas experience only? Or is it a matter of growth? Or, as I would assume, a combination of both? This would be a fruitful area for further research.

Another suggestion would be to interview a whole family of returnees. Including the voices of other family members would provide a more holistic approach and yield interesting insights as to how different members of the family perceive the return, share responsibilities, and contribute to each other's readjustment.

6.8 Concluding Remarks

The journey involved in completing this piece of work has impacted me in many different ways. In the first chapter (Section 1.2), I outlined the reasons that inspired me to conduct this study in

the first place. In this section, however, I will highlight the impact of this research on me as a PhD student and as a researcher. I now have established a better understanding of the area of research in general and qualitative research in particular. Both my identity as a female Saudi PGS, and the skills I have acquired during my study, have provided me with a lens through which I could look over and analyse the data. I have expanded my area of knowledge beyond that of the familiar, as I had to read studies in psychology and sociology, as well as other related areas such as business, management and travel. Before starting my research, I was not totally aware of my critical ability to question things because I come from a cultural background where being a critical person is not always appreciated in the same way as might be the case in the UK (see Section 1.5.5). Developing and practising a critical faculty was an asset. Besides developing my research abilities and criticality, I am now more appreciative of any research practice and willing to participate in any way that would facilitate and contribute to its success.

As a researcher who conducted this study while studying abroad, and a person who will be experiencing the return one day in the near future, this study has also impacted my ideas about re-entry. It has helped me visualise how the return may be, allowing me to generate realistic expectations and begin early preparations. In fact, although the experience of completing this study has sharpened my abilities as a researcher and as a potential returner, the present study has also shown me that there is still much to be explored and much to be achieved.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Information sheet for interviewees

The aim of this study is to explore the re-adjustment process of Saudi postgraduate students upon returning to their home country. Three interviews will be conducted to monitor the experience of being back home. The first one will take place prior to students' departure from the host country (UK) in an attempt to investigate their expectations and feelings about home and to build rapport. The second interview will take place between 1 – 5 months after their arrival in (KSA) to discover how they perceived different aspects of life there and whether this influenced their readjustment or not (e.g. daily routine, family relationship, professional life, language behavior, social activities and overall wellbeing). The last interview will take place when they have completed between 6 – 12 months there to allow them comment on what appears to have changed for them since the second interview i.e. to follow-up on emerging ideas. In addition, the interviews will touch upon some strategies participants may follow to re-adjust, if there is a need to do so, and they will be encouraged to provide recommendations for newcomers on how to deal with this kind of transition if necessary. Each interview will last between 30 to 90 minutes and will be audio recorded to allow for later transcribing. They will include some specific and general questions. Participation in this study is voluntary and the findings will be reported in the PhD thesis anonymously for academic purposes. If you have any further queries, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Many thanks,

Gadah Almuarik

PhD candidate

g.s.a.almuarik@ncl.ac.uk

Supervisors:

Peter Sercombe

peter.sercombe@ncl.ac.uk

Adam Brandt

adam.brandt@ncl.ac.uk

Appendix B

Interview Consent Form

I confirm that (please tick box as appropriate):

1.	I have been informed about the purpose of this study and I have understood the information given to me.	
2.	I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.	
3.	I understand I can withdraw at any time without giving reasons and that I will not be penalised for withdrawing nor will I be questioned on why I have withdrawn.	
4.	I understand that all responses will be treated in the strictest confidence and any personal details which would reveal my identity will not be published.	
5.	I understand that the results of this study will be used as part of a PhD-thesis at Newcastle University as well as for subsequent publications in academic journals and presentations at academic conferences.	
6.	I understand that other researchers will have access to this data only if they agree to preserve the total confidentiality of the data.	
7.	I, along with the researcher, agree to sign and date this informed consent form.	

Participant:

Name of participant Signature Date

Researcher:

Name of researcher Signature Date

Appendix C

Interview Guide

Pre-return:

Congratulations on completing your PhD!

1. a) How do you feel about it?
b) And about returning to your home country?
2. Could you describe your feelings? And the reasons behind them?
3. How does your family feel about going back home?
4. Do you expect them to fit in easily? Why?
5. How do you expect the welcoming of your family and friends to be? Why?
6. What benefits did you get from studying abroad? E.g. In what way has your life changed:
 - a) academically
 - b) socially
 - c) your worldview
 - d) your language behaviour
 - e) your attitudes towards others
 - f) your religious observance
8. What do you expect to miss about this country?
9. What are your expectations about your professional and social life when you return?
10. Any plans?
11. Is Dr (name) still the same person before coming to study? If not, in what way has he/she changed and why?
12. Any additional comments you would like to add?

Post-return:

1. Could you recall your experience when you first arrived in KSA?
2. What about your expectations?
3. Describe the dynamics of your social network?
4. Has the overseas experience changed you in a way? How could you tell?
5. Did people in KSA notice this change? What was their impression? What words did they use to describe you?
6. How do you view your re-entry compared to others with the same experience?
And compared to your own previous ones?
7. What recommendations would you give to PGSs who are about to return?

Appendix D

Transcript from the Pilot Study

<p>Interviewer: كيف كان شعورك عند العودة للمملكة العربية السعودية هل كنت مستعدة للعودة؟</p> <p>Participant: مستعدة لا ، الاستعداد لم افكر فيه بقدر ما كنت اريد ان اعود بعد عناء الدراسة وتعب الحياة في الخارج كيف كان استقبال الأهل والأصدقاء لك؟</p> <p>أفضل شيء كان استقبال الأهل ، العلاقات العائليه في مجتمعنا قوية ومرابطه ، أما الأصدقاء غير فالعلاقه قد يصيبها فتور اذا لم تكن متواصله بسبب البعد</p> <p>Interviewer: هل تمارسين حياتك الان كما كنت تمارسينها قبل سفرك؟</p> <p>Participant: حساسي في البدايه ضياع وعدم الانماج بالمجتمع</p> <p>Interviewer: ماهي التحديات التي واجهتها؟</p> <p>Participant: ابنتي تواجه صعوبات أكثر من الصعوبات التي اواجهها أنا</p> <p>Interviewer: من أي نوع؟</p> <p>Participant: كانت 3 سنوات حين سفرتا ولم تكن اللغة الأولى مكتملة فأصبحت اللغة الانجليزية طاجيه على اللغة العربية وشكلت حاجز لها في تكوين الصداقات عند العودة</p> <p>وطبعا نظام التعليم جدا مختلف عن بريطانيا نظام الواجبات والاختبارات بسبب لهم ضغط نفسي يمكن بقرهم من الدراسة</p> <p>Interviewer: نوع المدرسه؟</p> <p>Participant: مدرسه دوليه النظام والمنهج بريطاني ولكن طريقه التدريس سعودي لازم اختبارات اختبارات طول الترم يمكن اصعب شيء واجهته ، ان ابنتي تتعايش مع المجتمع ، أنا عندي فكره مسبقه عن كيفيه المجتمع فالتعايش معه لم يكن بتلك الصعويه</p> <p>Interviewer: بالنسبه للعمل؟</p> <p>مسؤوليات زادت هل كانت هناك خطط معينه؟</p> <p>Participant: كنت اتوي أن أكتب بعض الأوراق العلميه ولكن طبعا لا يوجد وقت بين التزامات الشغل والالتزامات العائليه والاجتماعيه</p> <p>Interviewer: ماذا عن نشاطاتك الاجتماعيه</p>	<p> Gadah Almuarik (PGR) Strong family relationship in K.S.A</p> <p> Gadah Almuarik (PGR) Feeling lost</p> <p> Gadah Almuarik (PGR) Daughter's challenges</p> <p> Gadah Almuarik (PGR) Language barrier</p> <p> Gadah Almuarik (PGR) Different educational system</p> <p> Gadah Almuarik (PGR) Familiarity with society makes it easier for h</p> <p> Gadah Almuarik (PGR) Social and familial commitments</p>
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:Participant

في البدايه (لمده 6 اشهر) كنت أعتز عن المناسبات الاجتماعيه بسبب عدم الاستقرار النفسي لكن احرص على العائله والواجبات معظم الناس تاخذ وقت بعد العوده الى ان تستقر نفسيا , تغيير المكان بعد ذاهه صعب فعند ذهابي للبعثه في البدايه واجهت صعوبات الى ان تعودت على نظام الحياه هناك واستقرت نفسيا.



Gadah Almuarik (PGR)
Not settled psychologically

:Interviewer

هل كنت سعيده في الخارج؟

:Participant

نعم , كنت سعيده ...



Gadah Almuarik (PGR)
Comparison bet. UK and K.S.A

واجهت صعوبات في البدايه نفس الصعوبات التي واجهتها هنا عندما عدت فبالرغم من عودتي لاهلي واصدقائي ولكن بالنسبه لي تغيير النظام , المكان , الحياه , المجتمع يؤثر على الاستقرار النفسي احتاج وقت لأبدأ حياه طبيعيه



Gadah Almuarik (PGR)
Change in system requires time

:Interviewer

هل عدت لنفس بيتك؟

:Participant

لا, لم أعد لبيتي , انا في بيت اهلي مؤقتا , لم اسفر الى الان, لكن كعائله لسنا مستقرين الى الان
التغيير بعد ذاهه , تغيير أي شيء يحتاج وقت حتى يتعاش الشخص معه.



Gadah Almuarik (PGR)
Not yet settled

:Interviewer

حتى حين نعود لمكان نعرفه مسبقا؟

:Participant

كل مجتمع له اجنابيه وسليبيه , سلبيات المجتمع الغربي هي: البعد عن الاصدقاء والعائله والامان التي نجيبها ولكن له اجنابيات خاصه للمراه , فيه حرية المراه , حرية التنقل , حرية الحياه , علائقك بأولادك مختلفه تكون أكثر قرب .
هذه الاشياء نفتقدنا عندما نعود لمجتمعنا لكثرة القيود على المراه وصعوبه التنقل



Gadah Almuarik (PGR)
Comparison bet. UK and K.S.A



Gadah Almuarik (PGR)
freedom

:Interviewer ..

ماهو أكثر شي التفتحه هنا؟

:Participant

الحرية , حرية الحركة ونظام الحياه , حياه مختلفه تماما حتى اصدقائي في الخارج من الان يفكرون كيف ستكون عودتهم لانهم يعرفون كيف هي الحياه هناك (صحة) الشخص يكون سعيد بعودته لأهله ولكن فيوجد المجتمع يجعله يمل.



Gadah Almuarik (PGR)
freedom



Gadah Almuarik (PGR)
social constraints

:Interviewer..

علائقك بالمجتمع وطريقه تفكيرك هل تغيرت؟

:Participant

كشخص أنا لم أغير , ولكن لطريقه تفكيري تغيرت . بطريقه تدريسي مثلا احاول ان لا اكون تقليديه ولا اكتفي بمجرد الإلقاء لاحظت تغير في العمل وتركيز على المبيعات. كوني أول مبيعاته تبعث للخارج عندما عدت احسست من حولي بعائلتي بطريقه انك لست افضل منكم وكانهم أصبحوا مهدين بوجودي بينهم



Gadah Almuarik (PGR)
change in way of thinking



Gadah Almuarik (PGR)
home nationals' reactions

:Interviewer

هل تتوقعين تغيرك واجه نفس الشيء حين عودتهم؟

:Participant

هذا شيء طبيعي وربما ستشعرين به انت حين حودتك. ليس لأنك حدثت لبلدك ولكن مجرد تغيير نظام معين يتطلب وقت فمالمالك
بحياة كاملة. أذكر أخوي من زمان لما رجع من دراسته اخذ وقت طويل انه يتواصل مع الناس ويرجع لحبائه الي كان عليها قبل
بفره. فهذا شيء طبيعي من وجهه نظري

:Interviewer

كم من الوقت اخذ منك ؟

:Participant

شهور 6

بعدها بدأت تتكلمين؟

معم ... ابوه بس مازلت الفتق حياكي هناك

:Interviewer

بعد مرور سنة , مازلت تتقدينيها؟

:Participant

نعم. معم حتى ابنتي تعتقد أصغاءها , والمدرسه وطريقه الدراسه والحياه وكل شيء. هي سعيدة هنا ولكن سعادتها لا تقاس بسعادتها
عندما كانت هناك.

:Interviewer

كيف تعاملت مع هذا الوضع؟

:Participant

أحاول اني اتعها انه هذه هي حياتنا وهذه هي بلندا , وكنا هناك لوقت معين ومهمه معينه والان عندنا

:Interviewer ..

هل الدكتور ه ... هي نفس الشخص قبل الدراسه في الخارج؟

:Participant

على المستوى الشخصي لم اغير ولكن على المستوى الفكري تغيرت كثير.

:Interviewer.

كيف؟

:Participant

اصبحت اكثر كفاءه على المستوى المهني.

على المستوى الشخصي, تعلمت الصبر... لان الحياه هناك فيها صعوبات كثيره وانت وحك مسؤوله عن كل شيء , اما هنا فالحياه
الي حد ما مرفهه بوجود الامل والخدم.

:Interviewer.

تصاح للطلاب المبتعثين؟

:Participant

أظن ان هذا مرحله طبيعيه ومرحله انتقاله والجميع يمر بها ولكن تعتمد ايضا على طبيعة الشخص. في ناس تحب التغيير, انا مثلا
من الناس لا احب التغيير وطبعا التكيف يختلف من شخص لشخص في ناس يتكيفوا بسرعه وفي ناس لا.



Gadah Almuarik (PGR)
normality



Gadah Almuarik (PGR)
comparison



Gadah Almuarik (PGR)
acceptance



Gadah Almuarik (PGR)
change in her sense of self



Gadah Almuarik (PGR)
comparison



Gadah Almuarik (PGR)
normality

:Interviewer.

هل تصدين العوده للخارج؟

:Participant

نعم...

ولكن ليس للتبذير طبعاً هذه بلدنا ولازم الواحد يتكيف. ولكن لو اتبحت لي الفرصه لأقضي بعض السنوات في الخارج لن اتردد. كل شيء مختلف هناك كل شيء. المواصلات متوفرة ونظام المرور مثلاً هذا الحياه فيها نوع من التوفيق إحصاه للمراه عشان تطلع من البيت لازم ترتيب معين وحتى لو توفر لها

:Interviewer.

ماهو الحل؟

:Participant

الحل انك لازم تتعاشي. حتى لو احدا ككفراة تغيرنا ماقتدري تغيري مجتمع بأكمله مالي شيء يتغير بمجتمعنا ، التغيير جدا بطيء

:Interviewer.

ايه اضافات

:Participant

شكراً لك



Gadah Almuarik (PGR)
transportation



Gadah Almuarik (PGR)
restrictions on females



Gadah Almuarik (PGR)
acceptance

Appendix E

Interview Transcript

- 1 **The interviewer:** How are you Dr Nora ... and
- 2 **Dr. Nora:** Hi Gadah, I am fine thank you, how are you?
- 3 **The interviewer:** very well thank you, just to remind you that our conversation will be recorded for
4 the sake of analysis, is that ok?
- 5 **Dr. Nora:** yes, sure
- 6 **The interviewer:** to start with, how long have you been in Saudi?
- 7 **Dr. Nora:** ... Mmm ... I returned in September
- 8 **The interviewer:** aha, and how was the return, I mean can you tell me how did you feel about it?
- 9 **Dr. Nora:** to be honest, I was very worried!
- 10 **The interviewer:** Why?
- 11 **Dr. Nora:** Because I had already experienced returning home about nine to ten months earlier,
12 during my data collection phase. I was with the kids and they went to school there
- 13 **The interviewer:** Was it a state school [in Saudi] ¹⁰³ or an international one?
- 14 **Dr. Nora:** international ... because my young children weren't good in Arabic, my daughter was
15 nearly a year and a half old when we went there [to the UK] while my son was born there [in the
16 UK] and of course the everyday spoken Arabic isn't the same at schools you know.
- 17 **The interviewer:** How was it to them?
- 18 **Dr. Nora:** they found difficulty in understanding Standard Arabic, it was a problem ... even though
19 international schools were supposed to be better for them in terms of Arabic language curriculum
- 20 **The interviewer:** you mean reduced curriculum ...
- 21 **Dr. Nora:** yes, so when we were about to return for good, I thought of putting them in state schools
22 since they will face difficulty in Arabic language anyway, but they refused, they wanted their old
23 school and old friends.
- 24 **The interviewer:** I see ...
- 25 **Dr. Nora:** My children were happy in the UK and they used to cry all the time when we came back.
- 26 **The interviewer:** so, you somehow have had an impression in these nine months about how things
27 would be later on. In a way you have tried let's say an 'initial return' ...
- 28 **Dr. Nora:** yes, but to be honest, it was not perfect!
- 29 **The interviewer:** How? In what ways?

¹⁰³ Square brackets are used to show my own words for further clarification.

30 **Dr. Nora:** In every respect; let me explain... First, I was worried about my children's education,
31 that it would not be up to the same standard as it was in the UK ... second, maybe because I had
32 become so independent and organised there [in the UK], when I returned to KSA I had to ... what
33 shall I say ... I mean ... familial and social obligations were involved, ... and ... I don't know ...
34 people here don't appreciate that my life was very different in the U.K.

35 **The interviewer:** How was it different? Can you explain?

36 **Dr. Nora:** Schools are very competitive here [in KSA] ... and causes pressure on the children, the
37 social life is also different. Here, I have a lot of restrictions as a woman

38 **The interviewer:** Restrictions in what sense?

39 **Dr. Nora:** in the sense that I was free there [in the UK], I stayed alone with the children when my
40 husband had to return.

41 **The interviewer:** mmm I see

42 **Dr. Nora:** I was alone and my life was organised the way I wanted [in the UK], I was the father, the
43 mother, the housekeeper and the driver ... I was everything!

44 **The interviewer:** Aha

45 **Dr. Nora:** I had my own car there and used to get anything I need myself ...

46 **The interviewer:** So, you've learned how to drive!

47 **Dr. Nora:** Yes, I needed it when my children moved to a faraway school ... in fact I wanted the
48 license for myself ... the situation is different here [in KSA] ... if I want to go anywhere ... first, I
49 have to find a driver; second, whether the driver knows how to drive [drives safely] is another issue!
50 So, I feel tense every time I need to go a mishwar¹⁰⁴ ... The roads are too busy ... I mean ...it is
51 hectic ... I need to think several times before I decide to go out ... I do not know if this is a personal
52 or a general issue ... I spent the first 3 months after my return without a driver!

53 **The interviewer:** At least you haven't started your job yet ... you weren't under pressure of being
54 on time to classes for example ... right?

55 **Dr. Nora:** that's another issue ... I mean people think I am free

56 **The interviewer:** What do you mean?

57 **Dr. Nora:** I mean ... I can't refuse to join social and familial commitments, or any 'azeema'¹⁰⁵ ... I
58 can't say I don't want to go because of this and that ... or I can't go because I have work to do ...
59 excuses of any kind aren't accepted ... they [social gatherings] are a must! And, Masha'Allah¹⁰⁶,
60 [said ironically] they are on a daily basis! I am not exaggerating ... Someone has passed away¹⁰⁷,
61 another has had a baby! And you can't just say no! Saying 'no' might be interpreted as me being
62 snobbish [especially after studying abroad]... I mean ... there are things that may not make sense
63 ... but this is the reality of our society ... this is what happens

64 **The interviewer:** ...

65 **Dr. Nora:** ...

¹⁰⁴ The Arabic word used for a short journey.

¹⁰⁵ *Azeema*: a word used to describe all sorts of social gathering.

¹⁰⁶ *Masha'Allah*: an Arabic phrase meaning "God has willed".

¹⁰⁷ Offering condolences to the deceased's family is a major part of the Muslim rituals and practices.

66 **The interviewer:** What about your expectations ...

67 **Dr. Nora:** I had low expectations ... I knew that there will be a great deal of pressure on my children
68 at school [in KSA]

69 **The interviewer:** in what way, can you tell me?

70 **Dr. Nora:** Mmm, my daughter [mentions her name] spends 4 hours a night doing her homework
71 and even then may not finish it! So we spend the weekend studying or completing what has not
72 been done... they [her children] don't have time ... she used to do ballet for example, but now we
73 are suffering from Arabic ... it's a language problem [referring to the use of 'Standard Arabic'] ...
74 I need to explain the meaning of every word, [provide synonyms]... besides helping with the
75 content of the lessons themselves

76 **The interviewer:** But didn't they use to go to Arabic schools in the UK during the weekends?

77 **Dr. Nora:** they used to, but the curriculum was different. It is much more intensive here.
78 For example, she has never done Arabic syntax before [vocalisation] ... also, In the UK, the school
79 environment is friendlier... it is different here, the teachers always tell her that they will complain
80 to me about her if she doesn't listen to them ... and my daughter believes and starts to cry ... this
81 is emotionally draining ...

82 **The interviewer:** What about your other children?

83 **Dr. Nora:** My son is still in 1st grade, but he suffers the most ... He isn't accepting the situation at
84 all... when I asked him '*Why don't you like going to school here [in KSA]?*' he said: '*because they*
85 *speak Arabic ... I am not Saudi, I am from [mentions the city they lived in, in the UK].*' And when
86 I said: '*But they speak English with you*' he replied: '*they don't speak [the city's dialect] English!*'
87

88 **The interviewer:** hhhh, God bless him, he can tell the difference ... it seems he is extremely aware
89 of the situation

90 **Dr. Nora:** indeed ... I understand that language is part of someone's identity and that when you
91 speak in a certain way, this gives an impression about you ... but it is much more complicated ... I
92 mean ... he does not perceive himself a Saudi and so he is not willing to communicate in Arabic!

93 **The interviewer:** mmmmm

94 **Dr. Nora:** it is better now though as we always encourage him to speak Arabic...

95 **The interviewer:** Did you use to speak to them in Arabic at home when you're there?

96 **Dr. Nora:** Yes, but it is not the same Arabic they use here [in school]

97 **The interviewer:** I mean ... some people use English at home ...

98 **Dr. Nora:** I used to speak to them in Arabic but they used to reply in English ... It's my fault ... I
99 never insisted that they use Arabic ... as I wasn't aware of the implications ... but now I tell them
100 to speak in Arabic and I even make sure they pronounce the words correctly.

101 **The interviewer:** what about the social life? How did your children get along socially?

102 **Dr. Nora:** My son used to be so sociable there [in the UK], but here [in KSA] I find him to be so
103 quiet; not willing to communicate in case someone comments on his language.

104 **The interviewer:** How?

105 **Dr. Nora:** He doesn't know how to answer people e.g. if someone asks him: "*How are you doing?*"
106 He just smiles ... He doesn't know how to respond if he gets involved in conversations other than
107 saying his full name ... I take him with me, when I meet up with my friends from [names a city in
108 the UK] because their children are the same; they won't make fun of each other!

109 **The interviewer:** so you still keep in touch

110 **Dr. Nora:** absolutely

111 **The interviewer:** how about your daughters?

112 **Dr. Nora:** they are quite happy, but they don't like the restrictions ... For example, my daughter
113 (name) loves to play football but she can't do it here.

114 **The interviewer:** you mean they missed the activities

115 **Dr. Nora:** yes, she missed the activities that she used to do there very much ... the other one missed
116 the shopping malls ... they feel restricted here as we still don't have a driver ... and ... life is
117 different here you know

118 **The interviewer:** how

119 **Dr. Nora:** in the UK, I used to drop them to schools and do the shopping then go to the university
120 to finish my work ... Usually by 6 pm, we are all back home and there is no need to go out for any
121 reason ...

122 **The interviewer:** I see

123 **Dr. Nora:** here I can't do that ... transportation is an issue ... besides ... There in [mentions her city
124 in the UK], when my friends and I decide to meet for breakfast after dropping our children to
125 school, we all come dressed casually in jeans and trainers ... we don't have to wear makeup! ...
126 here [in KSA], the situation is different, there is a lot of exaggeration you know

127 **The interviewer:** in terms of what, can you please explain?

128 **Dr. Nora:** I mean ... you have to be dressed-up in a certain way, the Abayah,¹⁰⁸ the bag you hold
129 and the makeup you wear, all of them need to be smart!

130 **The interviewer:** and how do you feel about this?

131 **Dr. Nora:** It bothers me a lot of course! ... Exaggeration in everything ... and the point is that ...
132 you don't want to feel odd ... you need to adapt to whatever culture you are in ...

133 I really miss the simplicity of life there ... There are a lot of showing off here ... I also miss the
134 way of life itself, for example, when you send an email, you receive a reply the same day... here,
135 you arrange to meet someone at 9:00, and you keep waiting until 10:30 but no one shows up!

136 **The interviewer:** Mmm

137 **Dr. Nora:** An hour and a half late! That is too much ... Why this carelessness! ... it really annoys
138 me ... I don't know ... I sometimes think I just need to let go and accept things as they are ... or
139 maybe I have to change ... I don't know

140 **The interviewer:** what do you mean by change?

¹⁰⁸ *Abayah*: is a traditional, usually black, robe-like dress worn by women in KSA when in public and covers the whole body except the head, hands and feet.

141 **Dr. Nora:** I mean I am a well organised person and these issues of carelessness annoy me

142 **The interviewer:** have you always been like this, or have you changed as a result of the experience
143 abroad?

144 **Dr. Nora:** I had to be like this abroad ... being a single mother with 3 children alone requires an
145 organised lifestyle so I became over organised ... and the lifestyle there helps you ... time is
146 respected ...

147 **The interviewer:** I see

148 **Dr. Nora:** My mind-set has not yet adapted to the norms of KSA ... for example, I find it difficult
149 to ask someone for a ride ... while everyone does it here [in KSA] ... maybe it's because I'm still
150 psychologically attached to the UK ... I don't know ... Should I hang on to what I've learned about
151 being independent or should I just give up ... forget about it, it's not such a big deal, and maybe I
152 will change as time goes by ...

153 **The interviewer:** God help you Dr ... What about your daily routine now?

154 **Dr. Nora:** I still have a lot of free time since I haven't started my work yet, but it is a very strange
155 feeling by the way ... to have all this free time ... I mean ... even calling me Doctor feels strange!

156 **The interviewer:** hhhh

157 **Dr. Nora:** I swear, It feels strange ... am I supposed to tell you not to call me Dr, or is it okay ... I
158 have no idea ... it is embarrassing ... maybe when I start my job, I will get used to it ... I don't
159 know, but not now

160 **The interviewer:** if you don't mind Dr, I will meet you again when you start your job ... in few
161 months' time.

162 **Dr. Nora:** of course I don't mind ... Hopefully I will be settled by then and have my own driver.

163 **The interviewer:** by the way Dr, I forgot to ask: Have you moved back to your old house or to a
164 new one?

165 **Dr. Nora:** to my old one, but we have bought a new house and we'll be moving soon hopefully ...
166 I still feel unsettled, with many unpacked luggage and a new house to be furnished ...

167 **The interviewer:** Does that mean you were not ready to come back?

168 **Dr. Nora:** in a way yes ... I loved [names her city in the UK] and I still love it! I don't know how
169 to put it ... I was happy there and, if it hadn't been for my husband's job, I wouldn't have returned
170 ... If I had the choice to live the rest of my life there [in the UK], I would not mind ...

171 **The interviewer:** What about your relationships, have you noticed any change in them upon your
172 return?

173 **Dr. Nora:** I would say yes, kind of ... some people felt that I have changed ... I mean my personality
174 ... and some never accepted this change...

175 **The interviewer:** How, can you explain please?

176 **Dr. Nora:** I mean this was obvious with my in-laws ... There were tensions in our relationship ... I
177 mean ... the idea that my husband is here¹⁰⁹ [in KSA] and I am there [in the UK] ... I mean ... I
178 was living alone ... they found the idea of me living by myself hard to accept ...

¹⁰⁹ Nora's husband had to return to KSA in the middle of her studies due to a job commitment.

179 **The interviewer:** what about your husband?

180 **Dr. Nora:** My husband and I got to know each other more while abroad ... we realised that whatever
181 happens ... Alhamdulillah ... we would still be together.

182 **The interviewer:** What do you mean by '*whatever happens*'?

183 **Dr. Nora:** I mean ... he paid no attention to what people said about me being on my own there [in
184 the UK] ... He promised that he would let me finish my studies ... and he kept his promise ... I
185 will never forget his support and encouragement ...

186 **The interviewer:** what about his relationship with the children? Was it affected by being away for
187 some time?

188 **Dr. Nora:** I don't think so, we used to talk every day ... they missed their dad so much when he
189 was away, but he was always with us ... if not physically, emotionally ... their relationship was
190 very strong ...

191 **The interviewer:** sorry Dr for taking your time ... anything to add?

192 **Dr. Nora:** no problem at all ... I am glad about this phone call ... because when I first returned, I
193 felt that there was a disconnection between me and society ... This made me feel unhappy ... I
194 couldn't find anyone to relate to ... I was so pleased to hear about your research ...

195 **The interviewer:** really! Glad to hear that ... Do you think previous returnees felt this way when
196 they tried to readjust to these changes?

197 **Dr. Nora:** No, no, they aren't changes ... In fact, they are difficulties! To me, they are difficulties
198 in readjustment ... difficulties in accepting the current situation ... a friend of mine, who
199 experienced the return earlier, told me that it would take about a year to settle and readjust ... but
200 every personal experience is different ...

201 **The interviewer:** in what ways

202 **Dr. Nora:** I mean some will have difficulties with their husbands, others with their jobs ... it depends

203 **The interviewer:** I see ... regarding your job ... will you return to the same department and have
204 you been in touch with them?

205 **Dr. Nora:** Yes, I will return to my department, but there have been a lot of changes since I left ... I
206 mean in terms of the system and curriculum

207 **The interviewer:** any future plans?

208 **Dr. Nora:** I really feel like I want to publish, but I am not quite sure yet ... in KSA, it may be
209 challenging to plan ahead as things may all of a sudden just happen

210 **The interviewer:** things like what?

211 **Dr. Nora:** I mean ... as I told you, life here is unpredictable, especially social life ...

212 **The interviewer:** I see ... any advice for future returnees?

213 **Dr. Nora:** I suggest that once they know when their final return is ... that they start preparing for it
214 in advance, a year ahead if they can because basic things like a house and a driver take a long time
215 to be sorted

216 **The interviewer:** you mean to arrange things in Saudi?

217 Dr. Nora: Yes ... you must also prepare your children ... don't lie to them and tell them that life
218 there [in KSA] is all roses ... tell them that school will be difficult, that they won't be able to go
219 out the way they used to ... you have to talk to them and prepare them ...

220 The interviewer: who found it more difficult to return? The children or yourself?

221 Dr. Nora: The youngest one and I, we both found it difficult to accept the current situation ...

222 The interviewer: in what way?

223 Dr. Nora: for example, he keeps on saying I don't want this school ... this is not my world; my
224 world is there [a city in the UK] ... the boys here aren't my friends ... my friends are Alex and
225 George ... I hear this every morning on the way to school!

226 The interviewer: What about you?

227 Dr. Nora: I can never stop comparing my life here to there ...

228 The interviewer: God help you Dr, we will definitely meet again in three months' time if God's
229 willing ...

230 Dr. Nora: of course, anytime ... Please don't hesitate to contact me if you need anything.

231 The interviewer: I might contact you either by phone or 'Whatsapp' if that's ok?

232 Dr. Nora: no problem

233 The interviewer: thank you so much Dr for your time and patience

234 Dr. Nora: my pleasure

235 The interviewer: good bye

236 Dr. Nora: bye

Appendix F

Amount of data from each participant

participants	Data extract
Ali	<p><i>'Having a PhD is a success Alhamdulillah¹¹⁰ and something gratifying but, to be honest, it imposes a degree of responsibility'. (T1, 13-14)</i></p> <p><i>'My parents have been insisting for years that I work hard and finish my studies ... at the end, I have been the 'loser' for being away and being deprived for years from my opportunity to offer Albir¹¹¹ to them ... they were more than keen to see me finish'. (T1, 30-32)</i></p>
Farah	<p><i>'I have spent a long time here in the UK and I feel that ... I mean ... going back and re-adjusting to the Saudi society requires time'. (T1, 13, 14)</i></p> <p><i>'There is a psychological pressure in studying for a PhD abroad; besides the requirements of the degree, there are the difficulties of living in a foreign country ... It's this very process of surviving in a culture that is totally different from yours ... and becoming responsible for everything, from A to Z, ... that caused this change'. (T1, 45-54)</i></p> <p><i>'Simplicity of life there [in the UK] ... in everything ... your visits ... the way you dress and eat ... and the way you interact with people ... I mean ... things are simple and without formality'. (T1, 91-92)</i></p>
Huda	<p><i>'I need to return and feel at home ... I mean ... I've been in a mess all the time, moving between here and there. I was in [mentions another English speaking country] for my MA, then I returned to KSA ... two years later, I came here [to the UK]! It has always been like that ... that's it! I want to settle ... but at the same time, I sometimes feel that I am not quite ready for the things waiting for me there! [said with laughter]'. (T1, 8-14)</i></p> <p><i>'I don't know ... are they traditions or what? ... whatever ... you know what I mean ... here [in the UK] you live more independently ... no interference ... no obligations of any kind ... I mean ... no social obligations'. (T1, 20-21)</i></p> <p><i>'Here [in the UK] ... whenever you need something, you just go at once and get it ... I do not have to wait for a car or a driver ... that is a real pain there [in KSA] ... and I will miss this the most when I return'. (T1, 23-24)</i></p>

¹¹⁰ Arabic phrase meaning "praise and appreciation be to God".

¹¹¹ *Albir*: an Islamic concept for treating ones parents kindly and being rewarded 'Ajer' from Allah 'God'.

	<p><i>'Maybe the thing that will affect them [her children] the most is school.... The preparatory work to find a suitable school was also a pain'. (T1, 57-59)</i></p> <p><i>'I used to become distressed easily when someone disagreed with me or when I couldn't convince people about certain issues ... Now I take it as it comes, because I have realised that I can't change the way people think ... Now I let go ... I don't focus on small issues ... there are other more important things to consider'. (T1, 81-86)</i></p> <p><i>'To be honest ... I felt depressed as soon as I arrived home [in the new city] ... I remained quiet for almost a whole week ... I even lost my appetite! I felt constrained ... transportation is an issue ... I mean ... I am literally tied here! ... I used to go out [in the UK] every time I wanted ... but it is different now [she needs a driver] ... Hmm ... then school started of course'. (T2, 6-13)</i></p> <p><i>'they [her daughter's classmates] always tell her you are lucky you lived in the UK' (T2, 17).</i></p> <p><i>'is a waste of money' and that 'he would give her all his pocket money to get out of school' (T2, 33-34).</i></p> <p><i>'There is homework every day ... every day! ... And a test almost every week! The problem is that they [her children] aren't used to this...we have fight to get them do their homework'. (T2, 59-61, 154)</i></p> <p><i>'I don't wish to return to the type of life I used to live in the UK, being responsible for everything ... My mind is much calmer and tranquil now'. (T2, 115-116)</i></p> <p><i>'They [her children] don't understand ... except for basic words like went, came, and said'. (T3- 14)</i></p>
Khalid	<p><i>'I was blessed by the chance to complete my studies and it's time now to contribute to the development of my country'. (T1, 12-13)</i></p> <p><i>'While abroad, you only have your family, your home and the university.'</i> (T1, 95)</p> <p><i>'In the West [UK], I found people happy with what they had and never asked for more, so I became more contented ... As I told you, being abroad gave me a chance for self-reconciliation'. (T1, 193)</i></p> <p><i>'Being abroad gave us a chance to understand ourselves ... to be honest, this chance wasn't available there [in KSA] ... You don't have time for yourself ... even if you are alone, you receive 24 phone calls! I am so pleased that my phone doesn't ring here [in the UK]. This gives us a chance to understand ourselves ... to question things ... I mean ... let me tell you how I've changed; I developed new habits, e.g. when I see things that I like or dislike, I write about them ... I didn't have this talent before!... I can use my time wisely now; I became more active, helpful and reflective ... I feel that my personality has matured abroad'. (T1, 194-213)</i></p> <p><i>'here [in the UK], at the work place for example, if a person [from another ethnic group] sits either next to/ or in front of them [British people], they don't care, it</i></p>

doesn't make a big difference to them ... as long as they finish what they are supposed to do. You don't see this in our culture, although it is one of the basic principles of Islam ... if someone [from another ethnic group] sits next to us [Saudis]; you know what I mean, how they [people from other ethnicity] are treated'. (T1, 225-227)

Khalid: Let me tell you ... I mean ... people started to show more respect and were more polite as soon as I was awarded the PhD ... can you believe it ... even before I return home! This is our culture.

INTERVIEWER: Really! what made you feel that?

Khalid: I mean ... the people I knew while studying became totally different after my degree ... friendlier and more welcoming! (T1, 259)

'Titles always attract people ... and to be honest, the / د /¹¹² plays a major role ... I mean ... after the award of the PhD, people, even those close to me became more approachable and keen to establish ties ... it is obvious ... This may be a cultural issue; 'we might need him, they say!' [Expecting you to help with their children's entry to university one day] ... you might not be able to help in any way, but it is a cultural issue ... people have been raised this way ... so they immediately ask for your contact number!' (T2, 139-144)

'The other group is the one who couldn't accomplish what you have done ... they look at you enviously ... and start drifting away ... I guess they expect you to show off after gaining a PhD ... I don't know ... it might be a psychological issue ... I mean ... possibly seeing your success reminds them of their failures'. (T2, 153-171)

'During the first two months after my arrival, I accepted all family invites¹¹³ ... I was free and not yet assigned a timetable at work, so I wanted to please them [the family and relatives] as much as I could ... it wasn't easy though ... I had to note them [the invites] down! ... But it was the best way ... that if I became busy later on, and had to turn down their invitations ... no one could blame me [of being distant] I gave them plenty of time!'. (T2, 211-215)

'I used to say 'yes' 'Insha'Allah'¹¹⁴, and might put in 50% effort [into whatever he had been asked to do], if someone asked for my help [in the past, before the study abroad experience] ... Now, to be honest, I try my best and put in 100% effort to make sure that I help in any way ... I don't know why ... I feel that it's my duty somehow'. (T2, 256-258)

'If you want to buy a car, for example ... society will not forgive you for buying any old model; they would say 'shame on you!' [said ironically] ... You are a professor now and need a luxury car.' (T2, 354)

'I don't mind wearing sports clothes in public but there is pressure on you to dress smartly all the time. Personally, I don't care ... this is my life and the PhD won't restrict my freedom of choice'. (T2, 357-358)

¹¹² Initial used for the title of a Dr in KSA, equivalent to the letter /D/.

¹¹³ These include informal gatherings as formal ones are taken for granted.

¹¹⁴ Arabic expression meaning "if God wills"

'We have a problem ... in supervision ... Many professors avoid supervision and find it a burden'. (T3, 58)

Khalid: *As a Program Director, you don't have total power ... You have to submit a proposal before introducing any suggestion, and it then needs to be approved ... this takes time ... again, bureaucracy is what keeps us back! Even though most staff members have been educated and exposed to new ideas abroad [UK and USA graduates]... they aren't open minded, I don't know ... it is complicated! I wonder if it is a cultural factor that influences their thinking. (T3, 68-75)*

INTERVIEWER: *What do you mean by cultural factor?*

Khalid: *To be honest ... decisions are taken personally ... people in charge think that because you have just returned, you want to play the role of their mentor ... they don't say it ... but I can feel it ... and so they don't take your suggestions seriously! (T3, 92-145)*

'For example, why give a PhD holder, who is purely academic, an administrative position? ... Managing people or organisations needs qualities that an academic may lack ... On the other hand, assigning overqualified people to clerical work is a waste of energy. Anyone can do those jobs!' (T3, 99-105)

'What annoys me, or what makes me compare is that we can do better ... we have all the facilities, everything is better in KSA, the buildings, the equipment, but the final outcome is unsatisfactory'. (T3, 131-132)

'Everyone puts in the minimum effort; we haven't even made use of foreigners' expertise, for example ... we never ask for workshops to improve our performance'. (T3, 138, 140)

'I realised that I was giving too much at the expense of my time and health ... I had to put an end to these daily visits ... instead of staying up late every night, I could have spent this time reading an article ... so I became serious about it ... otherwise you lose out ... The problem is that day after day it becomes a habit!' (T3, 294, 311)

'First of all ... give yourself time to enjoy your achievement ... a PhD is a great achievement, something to be proud of ... Enjoy the things you have in the moment ... rather than worry about the things you lack ... I think this is one of the gains from a PhD study ... how one can re-think some issues ... try not to criticise or complain a lot ... this will make any situation even worse ... be acceptable and adaptive ... because you can always find faults in things if you want to ... but try to be positive ... I recall how I managed to live in such a small house in the UK, compared to the spacious one I have here [in KSA]; now this spacious one seems somehow uncomfortable! [said with laughter]'. (T3, 495-526)

'After a while, following the award of the PhD, I had flashbacks of my arrival in the UK ... when I was at the start of my studies ... How I used to rush about ... determined to achieve the PhD ... but it is all over now! It is difficult to accept all this free time ... suddenly ... you have nothing to do ... like a runner who has reached the final! OK ... What's next?' (T3, 565-570)

'It is all about your attitude, how you view KSA ... If you view it negatively, this will affect you, no one else will suffer except you ... You have to adapt yourself and look at things positively'. (T3, 589-592)

Nasser	<p><i>'Maybe if you arrive on time in KSA, people will stare at you, wondering why you are early, being late is the norm'. (T2, 89-90)</i></p> <p><i>'You are a Dr, no matter what your speciality is, and have spent years abroad ... you are better than us ... hey brother ... help us with this or that'. (T2, 265)</i></p>
Nora	<p>INTERVIEWER: <i>How did you feel about returning to KSA?</i></p> <p>Nora: <i>I was very worried!</i></p> <p>INTERVIEWER: <i>Why?</i></p> <p>Nora: <i>Because I had already experienced returning home about nine to ten months earlier, during my data collection phase! To be honest, it was not perfect!</i></p> <p>INTERVIEWER: <i>How? In what ways?</i></p> <p>Nora: <i>In every respect; let me explain... First, I was worried about my children's education, that it would not be up to the same standard as it was in the UK ... second, maybe because I had become so independent and organised there [in the UK]¹¹⁵, when I returned to KSA I had to ... what shall I say ... I mean ... familial and social obligations were involved, ... and ... I don't know ... people here don't appreciate that my life was very different in the U.K.</i></p> <p>INTERVIEWER: <i>How was it different? Can you explain?</i></p> <p>Nora: <i>Life was organised the way I wanted [in the UK], I was the father, the mother, the housekeeper and the driver ... I was everything! (T1, 8-30-43)¹¹⁶</i></p> <p><i>'Here [in KSA] ... first, I have to find a driver; second, whether the driver knows how to drive [drives safely] is another issue! So, I feel tense every time I need to go a mishwar¹¹⁷ ... The roads are too busy ... I mean ...it is hectic ... I need to think several times before I decide to go out ... I do not know if this is a personal or a general issue ... I spent the first 3 months after my return without a driver!' (T1, 49-52)</i></p> <p><i>'I can't refuse to join social and familial commitments, or any 'azeema'¹¹⁸ ... I can't say I don't want to go because of this and that ... or I can't go because I have work to do ... excuses of any kind aren't accepted ... they [social gatherings] are a must! And, Masha'Allah¹¹⁹, [said ironically] they are on a daily basis! I am not exaggerating ... Someone has passed away¹²⁰, another has had a baby! And you can't just say no! Saying 'no' might be interpreted as me being snobbish [especially after studying abroad]... I mean ... there are things that may not make sense ... but this is the reality of our society ... this is what happens.' (T1, 57-63)</i></p> <p><i>'I had low expectations ... I knew that there was a great deal of pressure at school [in KSA]'. (Nora T1, 67)</i></p> <p><i>'She [her daughter] spends 4 hours a night doing her homework and even then may not finish it! So we spend the weekend studying or completing what has not been</i></p>

¹¹⁵ Square brackets are used to show my own words for further clarification.

¹¹⁶ The letter (T) stands for Transcript, while the numbers 1, 2, 3 stand for the 1st, 2nd or 3rd Interview from which the extract is taken, followed by the line number.

¹¹⁷ The Arabic word used for a short journey.

¹¹⁸ *Azeema*: a word used to describe all sorts of social gathering.

¹¹⁹ *Masha'Allah*: an Arabic phrase meaning "God has willed".

¹²⁰ Offering condolences to the deceased's family is a major part of the Muslim rituals and practices.

done... they [her children] don't have time' 'she used to do ballet for example'.
(Nora T1, 70-72)

'We are suffering from Arabic ... it's a language problem [referring to the use of 'Standard Arabic'] ... I need to explain the meaning of every word, [provide synonyms]... besides helping with the content of the lessons themselves'.

(Nora T1, 73-75)

Nora: Why don't you like going to school here [in KSA]?

Son: Because they speak Arabic ... I am not Saudi ... I am from [... mentions the city they lived in, in the UK].

Nora: But they speak English with you

Son: They don't speak [... the city's dialect] English! (T1, 84-86)

Nora: There in [mentions her city in the UK], when my friends and I decide to meet for breakfast after dropping our children to school, we all come dressed casually in jeans and trainers ... we don't have to wear makeup! ... here [in KSA], the situation is different, there is a lot of exaggeration you know

INTERVIEWER: in terms of what, can you please explain?

Nora: I mean ... you have to be dressed-up in a certain way, the Abayah,¹²¹ the bag you hold and the makeup you wear, all of them need to be smart!

INTERVIEWER: and how do you feel about this?

Nora: It bothers me a lot of course! ... Exaggeration in everything ... and the point is that ... you don't want to feel odd ... you need to adapt to whatever culture you are in. (T1, 123-132)

Nora: You arrange to meet someone at 9:00, and you keep waiting until 10:30 but no one shows up!

INTERVIEWER: Mmm

Nora: An hour and a half late! That is too much ... Why this carelessness! ... it really annoys me ... I don't know ... I sometimes think I just need to let go and accept things as they are ... or maybe I have to change ... I don't know'. (T1, 135-139)

'My mind-set has not yet adapted to the norms of KSA ...for example, I find it difficult to ask someone for a ride ... while everyone does it here [in KSA] ... maybe it's because I'm still psychologically attached to the UK ... I don't know ... Should I hang on to what I've learned about being independent or should I just give up ... forget about it, it's not such a big deal, and maybe I will change as time goes by'. (T1, 148-152)

'It is a very strange feeling by the way ... to have all this free time ... I mean ... even calling me Doctor feels strange!' (T1, 154-155)

¹²¹ Abayah: is a traditional, usually black, robe-like dress worn by women in KSA when in public and covers the whole body except the head, hands and feet.

'There were tensions in our relationship ... I mean ... the idea that my husband is here'¹²² [in KSA] and I am there [in the UK] ... I mean ... I was living alone ... they found the idea of me living by myself hard to accept'. (Nora T1, 176-178)

Nora: *My husband and I got to know each other more while abroad ... we realised that whatever happens ... Alhamdulillah ... we would still be together.*

INTERVIEWER: *What do you mean by 'whatever happens'?*

Nora: *I mean ... he paid no attention to what people said about me being on my own there [in the UK] ... He promised that he would let me finish my studies ... and he kept his promise ... I will never forget his support and encouragement. (T1, 180-185)*

'No, no, they aren't changes ... In fact, they are difficulties! To me, they are difficulties in readjustment ... difficulties in accepting the current situation ... a friend of mine, who experienced the return earlier, told me that it would take about a year to settle and readjust ... but every personal experience is different'. (T1, 197-200)

'I am not quite sure yet ... in KSA, it may be challenging to plan ahead as things may all of a sudden just happen'. (T1, 208-209)

'I suggest that once you know when your final return is ... that you start preparing for it in advance, a year ahead if you can because basic things like a house and a driver take a long time to sort out ... You must also prepare your children ... don't lie to them and tell them that life there [in KSA] is all roses ... tell them that school will be difficult, that they won't be able to go out the way they used to ... you have to talk to them and prepare them'. (T1, 217-219)

'I hear this every morning on the way to school, he keeps on saying I don't want this school ... this is not my world; my world is there in [... a city in the UK] ... the boys here aren't my friends ... my friends are Alex and George'. (T1, 223-225)

'I think it is because of male attitudes ... they [the male section] undermine female authority ... there is nothing we [as female staff] can do ... actually, the head of the female department is just a figurehead ... she does nothing ... we don't even know what the exams look like! There used to be a committee responsible for exams but not any more ... we don't know what sort of questions the students will have until the day of the exam'. (T2, 7-9)

'I am expected to finish a whole unit, including its vocabulary and grammar, in 3 hours! This is not what happens in real life! Especially when it comes to teaching

¹²² Nora's husband had to return to KSA in the middle of her studies due to a job commitment.

	<p><i>a language... this new system was implemented to achieve academic accreditation but it is not applicable! And those who imposed it don't realise that ... because they aren't teachers'. (T2, 9-11)</i></p> <p><i>'I feel I still need to understand this system more ... from the first day I came ... no one provided me with any guidance ... I had to go and ask myself ... try to work things out on my own! I've heard about mentoring committees, but it took me three weeks to find who the members were... and after all they themselves weren't familiar with the system ... because they were foreigners! I needed someone to explain things to me, but I couldn't find what I needed'. (T2, 36-49)</i></p> <p><i>'To some extent ... it is better now than when we first arrived ... but he [her youngest son] still talks about his friends there [in the UK], he is the one who grieves the most ... the older ones have already settled, but he was born there [in the UK] ... He doesn't know another life!. (T3, 65-66)</i></p> <p><i>'I would tell them not to expect a lot ... so they don't get disappointed ... allow themselves time to readjust ... it's normal ... don't feel obliged to do things and take your time ... don't do things that bother you ... don't put too much pressure on yourself because it's normal ... every returnee goes through this'. (Nora T3, 93-95)</i></p> <p><i>'Being over-polite to people is not necessary ... because it does not really matter to them, sometimes you feel obliged to do something to please people ... but in the end they don't appreciate it ... because people cannot understand what you are going through ... except those who have been through the same situation'. (T3, 99-100)</i></p> <p><i>'My priority is to help my children readjust and to accomplish this, I need to free my mind from any stressors ... I need to avoid judgemental people, those who blame me in some way and, instead, surround myself with people who understand me ... people who don't put me under pressure because that will affect my children'. (T3, 102-103)</i></p>
Omar	<p><i>'Some friends were worried that I might become arrogant and see myself as above them ... and 'ashoof nafsi''¹²³. (T1, 36)</i></p> <p><i>'when a friend of mine started calling me Dr Omar ... I knew it was a way to discover my reaction ... if I was pleased, in which case I believe he would have continued to use the title, but if I told him not to call me Dr... I am still Omar ... call me Omar ... he was happier with that.' (T1, 42-43)</i></p> <p><i>'Simply put ... in KSA, your time is not yours ... it belongs to others ... who may plan and shape your day ... this is something in our culture ... For example, if you have arranged for something and you receive a call from your parents to do something else ... you have no choice but to accept what is required of you ... you can't say no'. (Omar T1, 60-61)</i></p>

¹²³ Arabic phrase used to describe arrogance and overinflated pride in oneself.

INTERVIEWER: *Is Dr Omar the same person he was before starting his studies?*

Omar: *Personally, I've undergone a lot of changes ... but Alhamdulillah ... I have developed intellectually ... my life has developed ... as well as my experience ... as a person gets older, he experiences more of life and I believe that with the time spent living abroad this experience doubles ... 6 years abroad means 12 years experience ... this is what I think ... so yes I've changed ... and hopefully for the best.*

INTERVIEWER: *Can you tell me more about this change?*

Omar: *I think I have become more mature ... more interested in teamwork and helping others ... I realised that ... in life ... Subhan Allah ¹²⁴ ... nothing comes out of the blue or just happens overnight ... everything needs time and practice ... practice makes perfect! So I became more mature in seeking change ... any change in any domain ... I learned how to be patient in dealing with others ... my supervisor, examiners and friends ... patient through my own research ... I believe I have acquired social intelligence and I can deal with people accordingly ... My friends think I'm special, but I have to admit that this particular characteristic was polished here in the UK. (T1, 213-246)*

'When I first arrived in the UK, I needed people's help ... Then I realised that if I needed help from others, others might need help from me ... I felt I owed them and that I should pay back for what I had been given'. (Omar T1, 219-220)

'I feel guilty for being inattentive towards my mother while studying abroad. She is so eager for my return. Being away affected her deeply'. (Omar T1, 293-294)

'They say it openly; you are a UK graduate, young and intelligent ... and will Insha'Allah¹²⁵ have the solutions to all the problems in this department'. (T2, 58-59)

Omar: *It is really frustrating and distressing to chase after something you deserve.*

INTERVIEWER: *Why is it taking so long?*

Omar: *Bureaucracy! ... I discovered that my file was in one office for three months ... the same office! ... When it should have been sent to another department to finalise the process of granting me the position I'm entitled to ... imagine if I hadn't ask about it, it would have remained there forever!*

INTERVIEWER: *So, have you now been granted an Assistant Professorship?*

Omar: *Not yet! It's been more than five months now since my return and I am still being paid as a teaching assistant ... this has affected me financially ...*

INTERVIEWER: *How?*

Omar: *During this period, I had a workshop in another city ... although the living expenses were covered by the university, the standard of everything was far below that of what an Assistant Professor usually receives. (T2, 176-194)*

'Let me tell you what happens in real life ... for example ... when you go to a bank to open an account, they ask about your job ... and once they know you are a professor at a university, they start offering VIP services and gold or diamond membership ... you suddenly become a priority'. (T2, 235-238)

¹²⁴ Arabic phrase meaning 'Glory be to God'.

¹²⁵ Arabic expression meaning "if God wills".

	<p><i>'Sometimes, I question how satisfied I am ... with myself ... with my performance ... what has the PhD added? ... I mean ... do I really deserve this status? ... This isn't the end ... I believe ... from my colleagues' experience, one needs to be productive and participate in conferences, symposiums and lectures, as this ... according to them ... gives a sense of enjoyment and adds to one's motivation'. (Omar T2, 415-421)</i></p> <p><i>'I realised this when I met the newcomers ... those who have recently returned ... full of longing for the UK ... I told them I had felt the same when I first came home... but that time will ease this feeling ... because in the end ... I mean ... you have to accept the reality that you are here now in KSA ... this is your weather ... this is your car ... and this is your life ... that's it! ... The study abroad period was long enough to gain attachment to your life there ... but these years are over! ... You have a new phase of life now ... with its new responsibilities'. (T3, 145-154)</i></p> <p><i>'We aren't allowed to recruit teachers from certain countries such as Syria, Iraq or Libya ... it seems that political issues are so embedded, even in our educational system ... This limits our choices and the opportunities to provide the highest quality in the teaching profession'. (Omar T3, 194, 201)</i></p> <p><i>'Even the foreign teachers eventually became less productive as they know there is a high level of demand for their services and therefore there is no fear of losing their job, no matter how bad their performance is'. (T3, 229, 230)</i></p> <p><i>'When you hold a certain position in society, you unconsciously become more confident, direct and able to stop being overly, or inappropriately, courteous.' (Omar T3, 245-246)</i></p> <p><i>'It's really embarrassing and causes a lot of pressure when someone expects you to help with their son or daughter's university application when they don't meet the requirements'. (T3, 250-260)</i></p> <p><i>'My final advice ... I would say ... expect some financial issues ... they [future returnees] may face some difficulties ... they need to be patient and realistic in their demands'. (T3, 264- 282)</i></p> <p><i>'before you stretch your legs, measure your mat'. (Omar T3, 282)</i></p> <p><i>'Alhamdulillah, one can easily overcome any challenge now, because after all ... nothing is more difficult than the pressure of a PhD!' (Omar T3, 288-289)</i></p>
Sara	<i>'My PhD journey was very difficult ... with a lot of obstacles' (T1, 37)</i>

'I pay more attention to my children now ... I have time to pamper myself ... watch TV, read magazines, surf the internet ... I mean ... entertainment ... you know ... that I was deprived of [during her PhD studies]... I am exploiting and enjoying this convalescent phase of my life to the maximum before I start work'. (T1, 56-58)

'The nature of life is different there [in the UK], it gives us more space as women ... I mean ... I can do whatever I want without the restrictions I face here [in KSA] ... I just open the door and leave ... enjoy my time with my children ... whether by car or even on foot!' (Sara T1, 126-128)

'We became so attached that we couldn't accept the [extended] family's sudden 'attack' and interference upon our return ... Everyone around us wanted to intrude.' (Sara T1, 138-140)

'Our educational system [in KSA] is more theoretical than practical; I would like to compensate for this by teaching my students how to apply what they have learned in real life ... take part in presentations ... assess each other ... the things we learned there [in the UK] ... how to stand and talk confidently ... we weren't taught this way at our schools [in KSA] ... to be honest, we were taught to be recipients ... we weren't taught to be critical'. (T1, 232-238)

'It was a very stressful period...we should have asked about the university requirements [in KSA] earlier'. (T2, 41)

'Although life in the UK was easier and more comfortable for me as a woman, in terms of fewer restrictions, I am much happier here in KSA ... next to my family ... I am more settled ... There was a sense of isolation [in the UK] ... You may experience financial or health issues with no one by your side ... It is a very comfortable feeling to be back in your home country ... of course I don't want to return to the UK or be part of that life again'. (Sara T2, 134-156)

'We were at the supermarket [in KSA] when my younger daughter excitedly asked: are these sweets halal? The older one whispered: stop yelling in English everyone is staring at you, they think we are showing off!' (Sara T2, 189)

'I can't meet with friends yet because I don't have a driver ... I can't afford to get another car now'. (T3, 65)

'I still don't feel like it [meeting with people] ... until I settle ... finish my home ... make sure my daughters are managing at school ... and my husband finds a job ... until I get a driver... then yes'. (T3, 73)

'I think the main problem, after my daughters' schools, is more about being financially settled ... I still ask my daughters for patience when they say: you promised us a better life upon our return!'. (T3, 52-78)

'Returnees need to know exactly which academic level their children will have reached on their return ... and prepare for it, financially, in advance ... because this is what matters most ... their children's psychological wellbeing, as well as the family's financial state'. (Sara T3, 54-55)

