**Constructing Home and Identity Across Cultures:
The Culture Shock and Return Culture Shock Experience
of International Students**

by

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Abstract

This is an exploratory study of culture shock and return culture shock. When sojourners venture into a culture different from their own, they may experience culture shock. As they interact in their host culture, they adapt to the normative values and social expectations of this new environment and construct a social identity more compatible with it.

After months abroad, sojourners return to their country of origin thinking they would be returning 'home'. When they find 'home' strange and no longer the way that they remembered it they experience return culture shock. They have to be re-socialized into their country of origin and this process of re-socialization to their 'home' culture leaves returnees with a feeling of non-belonging that threatens their sense of self as members of a culture in which they were born and raised. As such, I argue that return culture shock is more debilitating than culture shock.

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Table of Contents

Chapter One: Introduction	1
What is Culture?	2
Culture and Meaning-Making	3
Symbols	3
The Importance of Meaning-Making	4
The Skill of Culture	5
Learning and Sharing Meaning	6
Culture, Identity and Institutions	6
Culture Shock	8
Stages and Signs of Culture Shock	9
Return Culture Shock	12
Stages and Signs of Return Culture Shock	14
Outline of the Dissertation	15
Chapter Two: Methodology	17
Research Approach	17
Methods of Interpretation	19
Data Gathering	20
Choosing a Sample	22
The Respondents	23
A Matter of Ethics	24
Credibility	25
Interviewing	26
Interview Approaches: Advantages and Disadvantages	28
Face-to-face Interviews	28
Individual Interviews	28
Focus Groups	29
Online Interviews	30
Electronic Mail Interviews	31
Instant Messaging Interviews	31
Interview Questions	32
My Role	34
Chapter Three: Communicating in the Host Country	36
Habits and Cross-Cultural Communication	36
"They Are So Friendly"	37
"English, English, English!"	38
"I Can't Read Them"	41
"What Did You Say?"	43
"Hey, How's It Going?"	44
"I Can't Express Myself"	45
"I Tried To Change My Accent"	46
"I Meet My Friends And Life Goes Back To Normal"	49
Adapting To The Host Country	52

Chapter Four: Communicating in the Country of Origin	54
Home For The Holidays	54
"They Are So Impolite!"	55
"What Did You Say?"	58
"Why Can't They Leave Me Alone?!"	61
"He Said I Was Like A White Person"	63
"I Feel Like I Lost Myself"	65
"I Didn't Expect It To Be So Difficult"	66
"You Don't Know Where You Belong"	70
The 'Suddenness' Of Return Culture Shock	71
Chapter Five: Culture Shock	73
Communication Habits: Language, Accent, and Cultural Idioms	73
Culture Shock: Adaptation Methods	75
Accent Mimicking	76
The Social Construction of Home	77
Furnishing With Physical Objects	78
The Primary Social Group	79
Routines and Habits	80
Self-Awareness	82
Place Attachment	86
The Social Construction of Identity	87
Chapter Six: Return Culture Shock	89
The Expectations of the Returnee	89
Overseas Communication Habits	90
The Social Construction of the Overseas Home	91
The Overseas Identity	92
Upon Their Return.....	92
Presentation of Self	93
Resisting Re-adaptation	95
Regions and Identity Crises	98
Finding Familiarity in the Strange	101
Chapter Seven: Conclusion	104
Return Culture Shock versus Culture Shock	104
Shock Adaptation and Re-Adaptation	106
Strangers and Indistinctive Identities	108
The Trials and Triumph of the Exiled Sojourner	109
The Importance of Studying Return Culture Shock	110
Inter-Cultural Transitions	111
Global Cosmopolitans?	113
Bibliography	115
Appendix A: Information Sheet For The Participant and Consent Form	119
Appendix B: Interview Schedule	121
Appendix C: Interview Schedule (for Permanent Residents)	123

List of Tables

Table 1: The Five Stages of Culture Shock	10
Table 2: The Stages of Re-Entry	15

List of Figures

Figure 1: Fives stage U-curve model developed by Peter Adler (1975)	10
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Chapter One: Introduction

*There was a girl from Malaysia
For her studies she came to Canada
"Hey, How's it going?" they asked her
"Huh? How's what going?" she flustered.*

The purpose of this study is to develop an understanding of the impact that culture shock and return culture shock have on self. It is an exploratory study based on open-ended, semi-structured interviews as well as on informal and small-group interviews with international students. I approached this study using grounded theory, which is "the discovery of theory from data" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967: 1). My methods of interpretation are informed by symbolic interaction, ethnomethodology, and reflexivity, all of which will be addressed in Chapter Two.

I chose this research project because I experienced culture shock as an international student in Canada, my host country; and I experienced return culture shock when I went back to Malaysia, my country of origin. I was new to Canada and culture shock was something I had expected. But the shock I experienced when I returned to Malaysia was completely unexpected. I felt like a stranger in the place I had grown up in and lived in for twenty years; I could not help looking upon Malaysia through 'Canada eyes'. Everything was so different, even communicating with my family and friends. I was told that I had become 'Westernised' or 'Canadianised'. This piqued my curiosity and I started asking other international students about their return experiences and found that our stories were comparable.

My primary focus in this study is on the way different cultural settings impose social expectations of behaviour that can affect a person's perception of self. In this chapter I will first briefly explain the concepts that will be used in this study.

What is Culture?

Culture is a blueprint for behaviour (Haralambos & Holborn, 1997: 3; Nolan, 1999: 4). It is an organizing force that stabilizes lives because it sets certain limits on individuals upon which they can depend (Moore, 1997: 74; Hall, 1959: 212-213). These limits however, are not invariable. They evolve as society evolves. As Jerry D. Moore puts it, "[t]here is a complex dialectic between individual and culture in every society. Individuals are shaped by and shape the culture they experience" (1997: 274). Although culture affects how individuals behave and interact, there is also an element of human agency and innovation.

By behaving and interacting in a certain way, individuals are constantly reinterpreting and reforming culture. Individuals do not just interact within a particular limit; they manipulate those limits and keep redefining them in the context of their day-to-day living. The process of manipulating limits however, is not a conscious act; as Edward T. Hall says, "...culture controls behaviour in deep and persisting ways, many of which are outside of awareness and therefore beyond conscious control of the individual" (1959: 48). Because we are born within a cultural milieu and are socialised to accept its normative values, we internalise those values and accept them as a part of self.

Culture and Meaning-Making

Jerome Bruner explains, "culture and individuality converge in the process of meaning-making" (1995: 28). There is interaction between the cultural presence in society and the agency of individuals producing objects which are then layered with meaning. This process of negotiation keeps culture alive, ever-evolving and ever-changing.

Meaning is important because human interaction is based on the creation and communication of meaning through the manipulation of symbolic objects. Individuals indicate an object, they extract it or objectify it and assign a meaning to it (Mead as cited in Blumer, 1969: 80). This process is analogous to naming and categorizing. It is what Serge Moscovici calls a 'nominalistic tendency' where that which was once unidentified and unfamiliar is given an identity in the consensual world and is consequently fitted into 'reality' (2001: 47). With the now identified and familiar object fitted in their 'reality' individuals can hence take a course of action or make decisions with some clarity of vision.

Symbols

The vehicles of meanings are symbolic objects. Objects, Herbert Blumer explains, can be anything tangible or intangible, as long as they can be indicated, pointed to or referred to. Blumer classifies objects into three categories: physical objects (tables, pictures), social objects (friend, parents); and abstract objects (moral principles, ideas) (1969: 10). These objects are given meaning in the process of interaction so that they become symbolic; and by conjecture, individuals interact in society based on the symbols around them. As Clifford Geertz pointed out, culture is made up of "socially established

structures of meaning' with which people communicate; it is inseparable from symbolic social discourse" (as cited in Moore, 1997: 243).

Symbols are given representative meaning by individuals engaged in the process of social interaction (Blumer, 1969). Just as cultures differ, ways of indicating or naming symbols differ. Therefore symbols can take on different values or become omnipresent in their interpretation or intent.

The Importance of Meaning-Making

Meaning-making is crucial to the way individuals interact. The way individuals respond to others and to different situations depend on what that situation and what the objects in that situation symbolize. Some symbols have universal meanings within a particular culture; other symbols have meanings that vary, depending on how individuals construct their social reality.

While meaning enables individuals to adjust to their cultural environment, meaning-making allows them to construct or reconstruct and either strip layers off or build layers onto their day-to-day reality. Meaning-making is like the art of origami which allows people to fold or unfold the paper (the object) where each fold, like a layer, has a purpose or a meaning to it because all the folds end up constructing (or deconstructing) a particular structure.

Meaning-making familiarizes the unfamiliar (Moscovici, 2001: 37). Once the unfamiliar has been familiarized, we use these constructed representations to project meaning onto any other unfamiliarity we encounter (Moscovici, 2001: 43). An example of projecting meaning is in trying to understand what 'God' means by comparing 'God' to a figure already known such as 'father'. In this sense then, through the use of symbolic

objects (or in Moscovici's terms, social representations), we are able to make clear or 'visible' what was once 'invisible' (Moscovici, 2001: 41).

The Skill of Culture

Pierre Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* is similar to Moscovici's idea of symbolic objects or social representations familiarizing the unfamiliar. *Habitus*, according to Bourdieu, is a set of acquired abilities that facilitates the individual's association between social structure and social practice (social action/behaviour). Situated in individuals as their "schemes of perception, thought and action", *habitus* ensures that they are able to reliably conduct themselves 'correctly' in their social structure/environment (Bourdieu, 1990: 54). *Habitus* is the skill of culture that designates what we should pay attention to and what we can ignore (Hall, 1967: 74). This ability to pay attention to the 'right' things is what intelligence is; and what we pay attention to, consciously or unconsciously, is what structures and gives meaning to our world (Hall, 1967: 76-77).

Habitus is a system that is able to perpetuate itself. As Bourdieu explains: "The *habitus* . . . structures new experiences in accordance with the structures produced by past experiences, which are modified by the new experiences within the limits defined by their power of selection" (1990: 60). These two ideas of social representation and *habitus* are important because they explain how individuals use pre-existing social constructions or representations to re-construct or re-represent what is unknown or unfamiliar to them. In other words, in terms of social interaction, individuals are able to apply their experiences from previous interactions to guide their future actions and behave or act successfully in any given situation.

Learning and Sharing Meaning

As *Homo sapiens* we rely on culture for survival. We have the capacity to create culture and evolve with it but it is not innate to us and has to be learnt (Marvin Harris as cited in Macionis & Gerber, 1999; Hall, 1967). Knowledge of culture is transmitted, perpetuated, and transformed mainly through communicating with others.

Apart from learning culture, we also have to share culture. Symbolic objects are rich with layers of meaning and are meaningful in so far as they are shared through public interaction. It is important, therefore, for there to be some consensus on the meaning of certain symbolic objects. For example, all drivers need to abide by the meaning of a red traffic light or traffic accidents would abound.

There has to be some predictability and stability in the social structure so that situations which arise within the course of day-to-day life can also be predictable and stable. Therefore, in order for meanings to be successful and to persist they must also be acceptable to and accepted by other individuals. As Bruner puts it: "[m]uch meaning-making depends upon developing increasingly elaborate notions about what is sharable with others" (1995: 21). Thus, a learned and shared culture is what enables individuals to interact and communicate effectively and reliably. It is when there is consensus on meaning that symbols become reliable means of communication within a culture, and they can become a means of identifying that culture.

Culture, Identity and Institutions

Just as a culture is defined by its symbolic objects so are individuals within that culture defined. The everyday 'reality' of a culture is made up of typificatory schemes which place people in identity categories. These identity categories are assigned through

social interactions and are reciprocal in nature. People, in interacting with each other, identify each other in typified ways, as in the typical neighbour, the typical student, the typical Canadian, and so on (Berger & Luckmann, 1984: 45). These typified identities are also symbolic objects that define cultural reality.

In order to gain an understanding of the socially constructed cultural reality and how it changes over time and space, one must first have an understanding of the conditions that enable the definers to do the defining. Berger and Luckmann explain that human activity, which makes up the social order, is habitualised. Individuals, for the most part, perform their activities continually "in the same manner and with the same economical effort" until their actions become habits (Berger & Luckmann, 1984: 70-71). Institutions are then built upon these habitualised actions (Berger & Luckmann, 1984: 72).¹

Institutions are temporally created and can only be adequately understood within the historical processes through which they are created (Berger & Luckmann, 1984: 72). Institutions are prescriptive in that they differentiate between conduct that is socially acceptable and conduct that is not; actions or roles that are appropriate for particular individuals at particular times and actions or roles that are not (Berger & Luckmann, 1984: 72-73). Institutions such as the family and the education system for example, are highly prescriptive and they serve to socialize people from birth to internalise the 'realities' or culture of the social structure. Institutions such as these objectify individuals and turn them into subjects by placing them in typified schemes. They employ what

¹ Institutions refer to established and organised parts of society which have widespread and structured value systems and rules of behaviour (Marshall, 1994: 250).

Michel Foucault calls dividing practices, a typificatory process that divides and categorizes individuals into 'good', 'bad', 'healthy', 'sick', and so on (1982: 208).

Dividing practices, or typifying, serve to turn individuals into subjects of their culture. They are tied to their typified cultural identities and, as they interact in society within their typified boundaries, they regenerate their own self-subjectification. As Ann Bishop aptly puts it, "we reproduce the social, economic, and political system that formed us, again and again, by playing out our internalised oppression against ourselves and each other" (1994: 35). Just as individuals objectify, so are they objectified; and it is only when they have learnt, internalised and accepted their objectification into cultural subjects that individuals are considered culturally successful in their society. Through typificatory schemes then, the foundation of individuals' reality is laid, and with that, their cultural identities (Berger & Luckmann, 1984: 149-151). Being culturally successful in one society however, does not ensure success in every society. Each society has its own social structure and culture; and within a society there are legions of sub-cultures (Hall, 1967: 14). Individuals who venture into other cultural territories may find that they are cultural deviants, and thus experience culture shock.

Culture Shock

The term 'culture shock' was first introduced by Kalvero Oberg in 1960 to describe feelings of anxiety resulting from immersion in a new culture. Culture shock is a reaction to the absence of security and predictability when one's own cultural lenses become clouded. It is experienced when individuals are uncertain about what is expected of them, or of what they can expect from people around them. Their primary culture may be so different from the new culture in which they are immersed that they may

experience feelings ranging from vague discomfort to profound disorientation (Pedersen, 1995: 1); this is when they realise that their own way of doing things is not universal. Because such realisations threaten individuals' perception of reality, they also threaten individuals' perception of self.

As C. Kluckhohn observes, individuals without consistent normative orientation "feel uncomfortably adrift in a capricious, chaotic world" (as cited in Schmid, 1992: 101). This discomfort however, is not immediately felt when one ventures into a new culture. There is, at first, the thrill of experiencing something new. It is only after some time that the discomfort sets in. The longer one stays in the new culture the more one feels removed from the initial thrill (Hall, 1959: 59). The differences become apparent and the sojourners' sense of being culturally deviant becomes stark. Their identity as 'normal' becomes questionable and a sense of personal uncertainty emerges leaving them vulnerable to accepting others' view of self as more valid and authentic.

Stages and Signs of Culture Shock

Sojourners usually undergo several levels or stages of culture shock. Peter Adler (1975) summarised the culture shock experience into five stages and Paul Pedersen (1995) used this five-stage U-curve model for his study of culture shock based on the "Semester at Sea" programme.² Pedersen's findings are summarised below in *Figure 1* and *Table 1*.

² The "Semester at Sea" programme gives students the opportunity to experience other cultures while expanding their knowledge and enriching their learning experience. For Pedersen's study, the students were asked to submit eight critical incidents or anecdotes describing behaviours and experiences at particular sites. On this voyage, the students were brought to Nassau, Bahamas; Caracas, Venezuela; San Salvador, Brazil; Cape Town, South Africa; Mombasa, Kenya; Madras, India; Penang, Malaysia; Hong Kong & Keelung, China; Kobe, Japan; and finally Seattle, Washington, United States of America (Pedersen, 1995: viii).

Figure 1: Fives stage U-curve model developed by Peter Adler (1975)

Source: Adapted from Pedersen, 1995

Table 1: The Five Stages of Culture Shock

(1) The Honeymoon Stage:	The students were intrigued by the novelty and excitement of being in their host culture as detached tourists. They enjoyed the thrill of new experiences. They still have their home-culture identity and values.
(2) The Disintegration Stage:	The students have difficulty with the differences in their host culture and become depressed and vulnerable; they blame themselves for every unpleasantness. Their home-culture identity and values no longer fit in, they no longer apply, and the new identity has not yet been formed. The students tend to avoid contact with people.
(3) The Reintegration Stage:	The students' depression and self-blame are channelled through as anger and hostility toward the host culture. The students' views of their host culture and home culture become polarized. The host culture is seen to be inadequate, or backward; the local people are described in more malicious ways and the country of origin is idealized.
(4) The Autonomy Stage:	The host culture is perceived as less hostile, more enjoyable. The students gain understanding of the rules of their host culture; they become more self-assured and skilful in adapting to that culture and they have more insight into themselves and others. They are more proactive, functional and independent; they see themselves as insiders/experts in some situations but are aware that they are outsiders/learners in other situations. They become more social with the local people.
(5) The Interdependence Stage:	A bicultural or multicultural identity is (ideally) conceived; there is a sense of belonging to both cultures simultaneously. The students accept that they are different from the host culture but no longer feel negatively affected by this. They have internalised parts of the new culture.

Source: Adapted from Pedersen, 1995

Pedersen stressed that everyone experiences culture shock at different intensities and even the same person may experience culture shock differently in the same situation at different times.³ He also pointed out that while it is possible for students to progress from one stage to the next, it is also possible for them to regress. I would say, from personal experience, that shock levels and adaptation levels are like the ebb and flow of the tide. This is perhaps why Adrian Furnham and Stephen Bochner (1986) rejected this U-curve model in favour of a less smooth transitional flow. They argued:

... the U-curve hypothesis is too vague and too generalized to be of much use in predicting or understanding sojourner adjustment. Furthermore, it is not so much a theory as a post hoc description that has focused too much on single-outcome variables rather than on the dynamics or process of adjustment" (Furnham & Bochner, 1986: 132).

Still, it is helpful to use the U-curve hypothesis as a loose guide or blueprint for the stages of culture shock. Rather than using it as a model of prediction, I offer the U-curve hypothesis here as an example for understanding that the impact of culture shock is a dynamic and ever-changing process affected by social interaction and that this process affects a person's perception of self.

An important thing to point out is that Pedersen's analysis is based on students who visit a variety of different cultures for relatively short periods of time knowing that they would return to their country of origin within a few months. The students in this study on the other hand, are enrolled in a three- to four-year university programme. The time spent in the host culture is important because it affects how students experience

³ Pedersen does not explain why this is so, but at this point I will assume it is because of personality and social skills (*habitus*) or lack thereof, gender, age and experience. Also, Pedersen does not address the transitional 'switch' which brings students from one stage to another. Furthermore, I think that it is possible for individuals to experience several stages at once depending on the context in which the 'shock' is experienced.

culture shock, how they adapt, as well as how they experience return culture shock when they return to their culture of origin.

Hall points out that it is important to note that the stages of culture shock may not totally apply to short visits by tourists.⁴ This is because many tourists only get to experience the polished, sanitary version of a particular culture. For the most part, since tourism started to thrive as an industry, suitable environments have been created for tourists that screen them from exposure to the reality of the local life and people and hence the full impact of the foreign culture (Hall, 1967: 49). Furthermore, tourists seldom remain in their host countries for long and they do not stay long enough to go beyond the 'Honeymoon Stage'. More importantly, they know they will return to their home culture in the near future.

Those who do experience culture shock experience it as a personal internal conflict and it is not always easy to identify it at first. But since sojourners do expect to encounter some form of culture shock when they venture abroad, culture shock is more easily identified than return culture shock and has less impact on one's sense of self.

Return Culture Shock

While there have been many in-depth studies done on culture shock, few have been done on return culture shock. Alfred Schutz (1971) wrote an essay about the homecomer from a social psychological point of view, as did Pedersen (1995) and Craig

⁴ Pedersen and Hall do not specify the amount of time individuals have to remain in a foreign culture in order to progress/regress from each stage. It really depends on how prepared, how skilful, how open the sojourner/tourist is to new cultures. But one important point to stress here is that being prepared to enter a new culture does not exempt you from culture shock. As Hall says, "Understanding the reality of covert culture and accepting it on a gut level comes neither quickly nor easily, and it must be lived rather than read or reasoned. . . . For no matter how well prepared one is intellectually for immersion in another culture, there is the inevitability of surprises" (1967: 50).

Storti (1997). Apart from these studies, there is a lack of sociological literature on this topic.

Return culture shock is sometimes called reverse culture shock though, I argue, this is a misnomer as they are quite distinct. Reverse culture shock⁵ implies that the phenomenon is just culture shock in reverse or culture shock experienced in the home exactly as if home were a new and foreign culture. This, however, is not the case.

When sojourners return to their country of origin, a place they consider home with all its comforts and familiarity, they do not expect to encounter culture shock (Storti, 1997: 54; Schutz, 1971: 106). They think that they are going home and assume that they can pick up exactly where they left off. They may be dubious or completely ignorant about return culture shock until they themselves experience it. They do not prepare themselves for the voyage 'home'⁶ and this lack of preparation together with the unexpectedness of return culture shock is what makes it more debilitating. Return culture shock can also be pernicious because it can awaken in returnees a sense of non-belonging: they did not belong in their host country and now, they find that they no longer belong in their country of origin.

It is likely that most sojourners do, to some extent, experience return culture shock. The intensity of the return culture shock experience would also depend on many conditions, among which would be the difference between the host culture and the home culture, the adaptability/skill of culture/*habitus* of the sojourners and whether re-entry is

⁵ The term 'reverse culture shock' is used in most internet websites. These websites were produced mainly by university organizations such as international students centres and counselling centres. Only three sites on the *Google* search engine use the term 'return culture shock'. Only one of these three sites uses the term 'return culture shock' consistently. The other two use it interchangeably with 'reverse culture shock'.

⁶ Many sojourners consider their country of origin 'home' though sociologically, 'home' is a contested concept.

voluntary or not. Age, gender, race, employability, length of stay in the host culture, and many other factors can also affect the intensity of return culture shock. Just like culture shock, return culture shock is an internal experience and every returnee will experience it differently, though some of the stimulants may be similar.

Stages and Signs of Return Culture Shock

Storti (1997) addressed the issue of re-entry and return culture shock⁷ and breaks down the experience into four stages which people commonly go through: Leave-Taking and Departure; The Honeymoon; Reverse Culture Shock; Readjustment. *Table 2* outlines each stage.⁸

Storti's four stages of re-entry are quite similar to Adler's five-stages of culture shock. Both shock experiences, after all, are typical of transition phases where there is the initial uprooting, then the disengagement period, followed by the unstable interim period, then the re-rooting, reintegration period (Storti, 1997: 54). Storti places the Honeymoon and Reverse Culture Shock stages in the interim period where returnees are not quite here nor there. They are betwixt and between, as Victor Turner would put it (1969: 95). They are in a liminal situation (van Gennep, 1960) where they may experience identity crises. Similar to Adler's conceptualisation, this model exemplifies the need to study return culture shock as a dynamic process having an impact on one's sense of self.

⁷ Storti uses the term 'reverse culture shock'.

⁸ The process of return culture shock does not end at the fourth stage. There is always reversion back to a prior stage in different encounters with different situations. Also, not every individual would undergo every stage nor experience each stage the same way.

Table 2: The Stages of Re-Entry

(1) Leave-Taking & Departure:	At this stage sojourners are preparing to return to their home culture. They may experience jittery mood swings between wanting to stay and wanting to leave. There is some excitement about returning home mixed with apprehension. Some may oppose the return because they have started to enjoy their lives in their host culture.
(2) The Honeymoon:	For the first few weeks after arriving home, the sojourners may find life to be almost perfect. They become the centre of attention as people welcome them back, they are guests wherever they go and they are somewhat of a minor celebrity. They get to do the things they missed while they were away. They are still adjusting and have not really settled yet; the realities and the responsibilities of being home have not yet been realized.
(3) Reverse Culture Shock:	Gradually the vacation-like unreality and novelty of the honeymoon stage dissipate. Returnees will begin to experience return culture shock. They are not yet used to being back, but people are used to them being back and are no longer as solicitous about them. Returnees start to become judgmental and feel like they are marginalized. Nothing pleases them. They begin to have doubts about their return and about themselves, and they feel overwhelmed with the enormity of effort they have to put into simple tasks – nothing is routine. They miss their host culture and their experiences abroad are idealised. They feel depressed and cut off contact with people.
(4) Readjustment:	The sojourners start to view their country of origin and their overseas experience in perspective. They start putting routine into their lives, they start unpacking and putting familiar objects in their place. They regain their self-confidence and self-esteem and become sociable once again.

Source: Adapted from Storti, 1997

Outline of the Dissertation

Since individuals are socialised in a culture through interactive communication, I will focus primarily on the communication habits of the sojourners and how these habits affect their sense of identity. In the next chapter I will outline my methodological approach to this study. In Chapter Three I will describe the respondents' encounter with culture shock, and in Chapter Four I will describe their encounter with return culture

shock. In Chapter Five and Chapter Six, I will discuss how culture shock and return culture shock are experienced and what their implications are for identity. In the final chapter I will compare culture shock and return culture shock and look at why it is important to expand our understanding of return culture shock as a social process affecting a person's perception of self.

Chapter Two: Methodology

This exploratory study of culture shock and return culture shock relies on the biographical experiences of the respondents of the study. By 'biographical' I mean the lived stories of the respondents in regards to their experience. By 'experience' I mean the way respondents meet, confront, pass through, and make sense of events in their lives; that is, "how the realities of a life present themselves to consciousness (Denzin, 1989: 33). This chapter summarizes the research methods used to draw out the respondents' experiences of culture shock and return culture shock.

Research Approach

Qualitative research methodology and data are effective in capturing the meanings, interpretations and processes of the social world. As opposed to quantitative research methodology that sets categories of study before data gathering, qualitative research methodology extracts categories from the data gathered during both the data collection and analysis processes. More importantly, qualitative research strives to "[capture] patterns of interrelationship between many categories rather than the sharply delineated relationship between a limited set of them" (McCracken, 1988: 16). Qualitative research generally calls for contextual understanding of social phenomena and it involves 'active reflexivity', that is, "critical self-scrutiny by the researcher" (Mason, 1996: 5).

Qualitative research is an umbrella under which there are a myriad of strategies and techniques of data gathering and analysis. Out of such diversity, I decided that a

grounded theory approach would greatly benefit me in my quest for learning about culture shock and return culture shock because it "encourages the initiation of research without any preconceived theoretical ideas about the topic being researched" (Layder, 1995: 19). This was precisely what I wanted to do when I started out on this research endeavour: I wanted to find out whether other international students had the same shock experiences as I did, and learn about how we experienced culture shock and return culture shock. The goal here is to find out what is happening in the social world in regards to culture shock and return culture shock, then develop theory and concepts from the data collected.

We must keep in mind however, that researchers do not go into the field as 'blank slates'. This knowledge gave me great cause for concern particularly because of my personal interest in this study (as will be discussed later in this chapter). We, as researchers, are tainted by our upbringing and personal worldview. Although some may view my personal interest negatively, this factor is not always an impediment. After all, most researchers enter into research projects with a particular sociological perspective and focus (Glaser & Strauss, 1967: 33). However, using a research approach like the grounded theory approach enables the researcher to allow substantive concepts and hypotheses to emerge from the data regardless of his or her personal interests. This then enables the researcher to be more objective and less theoretically biased (Glaser & Strauss, 1967: 34).

Methods of Interpretation

As mentioned in Chapter One, my methods of interpretation are informed by symbolic interaction, ethnomethodology, and reflexivity. I will explain what the first two methods are in this section and I will address reflexivity towards the end of this chapter when I discuss my role in this study.

Symbolic interaction refers to "the peculiar and distinctive character of interaction as it takes place between human beings. The peculiarity consists in the fact that human beings interpret or 'define' each other's actions instead of merely reacting to each other's actions" (Blumer, 1969: 78-79). The process of interpreting or defining others' actions is based on the meanings attached to those actions thereby making them symbolic actions. Thus, human interaction is "mediated by the use of symbols, by interpretation, or by ascertaining the meaning of one another's actions" (Blumer, 1969: 78-79). As such, the impact of return culture shock is mediated by the symbolic meaning placed on the sojourner's attitudes and behaviour and how the sojourner interprets those meanings for self.

Ethnomethodology is an approach that aims to "look at, and listen to, the social activities through which everyday actors produce the recognizable features of those social worlds" (Gubrium & Holstein, 1997: 7). Its objective is to illustrate how everyday reality is made visible through these actors' descriptions and accounts (Gubrium & Holstein, 1997: 44-45). Actors' descriptions and accounts are self-interpreted and they "construct, manage, and sustain the sense that their social worlds exist as factual and objectively 'there'" (Gubrium & Holstein, 1997: 7). By taking an ethnomethodological approach, I

will uncover the meaning-making system underlying the accounts used by the respondents to describe the impact of culture shock and return culture shock on self.

Data Gathering

Since I wanted to study the respondents' experience of return culture shock, the best data gathering methods to use were semi-structured and informal interviews (See Appendices B and C for the interview schedules). The purpose of these types of interviews is to get people to talk freely about their lived experiences. The questions were open-ended so that the interviewees could respond in any way they chose. In this way, as Derek Layder puts it, "the individual's own interpretations and meanings are allowed to surface in the interview data" (1995: 41). The interview data becomes richer and it "reflects and records the meanings and understandings (the 'subjective worlds') of the people being studied" (Layder, 1995: 41).

Equipped with these points in mind, I went into the interviews with a list of broad questions about the respondents' experiences in their host country and in their country of origin. I was flexible about the questions I asked, and when the interviewees mentioned a topic not appearing on my list of questions, I encouraged them to tell me more about it. This is another advantage of using semi-structured interviews: flexibility to raise questions according to whatever themes arise from the interview (Layder, 1995: 41).

Using semi-structured interviews also permits checking for the 'experimenter effect', that is, the influence the researcher would have on the responses of the interviewees. Since the questions were open-ended, the interviewees were not given a selection of responses to choose from, and their responses were not limited in any way.

Undoubtedly, this is not a foolproof check; the interviewees could have read my body language and other non-verbal signals from me. However, for the face-to-face interviews¹ I tried to remain as impartial as I could and tried to use body language to encourage them to speak and elaborate on their responses (nodding, eye contact, etc.) rather than directing them in providing a response more favourable to my own research assumptions.

The informal interviews took on the character of casual conversations with the respondents. Since some of them were personal acquaintances they knew that as an international student I had experiences similar to their own and were comfortable with sharing their experiences with me. More data emerged after the 'formal interview' because some of the respondents continued talking to me about their experiences. Aisha,² for example, continued to point out the differences between life in Canada and life in Malaysia after our interview session had ended. The interview took place in a coffee bar in a mall in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. After our formal interview session ended, I started piling our cups onto a tray. She said to me, "Hey, what are you doing? You don't have to do that here. If you clear tables here, people will say that you are from kampung [literally, 'village'; implied, 'backward', 'uneducated' or 'servile']".³

¹ The interviews were carried out in a variety of ways. I will describe these in more detail in the following pages.

² All names used in this study are pseudonyms.

³ I had just returned to Kuala Lumpur to visit my family and was not 'in tune' with the modern/materialist lifestyle in the new breed of shopping malls that are lavished with copious splendour and consumerism. This coffee bar was something of a 'high living/lifestyle' kind of bar that targeted yuppies for the most part and the typical yuppie would not want to be seen cleaning up after herself/himself in public. This, in a way, was my return experience more than Aisha's; but it sparked more conversation on the subject because having lived in Canada herself for a few years; she could appreciate seeing the mall, and Malaysia in general, through my eyes. It was as if she was reliving/ recalling her return experiences through me at that point. We continued talking about our return culture shock experiences as we walked to the food court and our conversation on this topic continued throughout our meal.

Chrysta and I also had an informal conversation after the formal interview had taken place. This was during my last visit to Kuala Lumpur. She asked me why I chose to stay in Canada instead of returning to Malaysia for permanent residence. I gave her my reasons and she said, "It took me two years to get used to living in Malaysia. The people are rude, the politics sucks and it always will, but you'll get used to it. You know, after the two years I started to see that this is really a great place to live".

As can be seen in the two examples above, 'formal' and 'informal' interviews are really conducive to gathering rich qualitative data that capture the lived experiences or biography of the respondents. In trying to capture the biography of the respondents I was not trying to construct a picture of 'what happened'; instead, I was simply recording the feelings and responses of the respondents towards events and situations they had encountered in their host country and in their country of origin. These semi-structured interviews and informal interview conversations allowed the respondents to define for themselves what they themselves considered to be 'real', significant events in their lives.

Choosing a Sample

The respondents were selected using non-probability sampling techniques like the convenience sampling (e.g. using personal contacts) and quota sampling procedures where potential respondents had to meet certain criteria in order to participate in this study (Jackson, 1999: 187). Since this is a study of culture shock and return culture shock, respondents had to have lived in their host countries for at least eight months and they had to have returned to their country of origin at least once for holidays (or for permanent residence). If they met these criteria, then an interview would be set up.

As an international student at the onset of this study, I had access to a number of potential respondents. Due to financial constraints, and for the sake of convenience and accessibility, thirteen respondents were personal contacts, and two were international students in the Ottawa area who had responded to an electronic mail sent out on my behalf by the International Student Advisory at Carleton University. Two international students who came forward to be interviewed had to be rejected because they did not fulfil the research-focus criteria.

The Respondents

I interviewed fifteen individuals who were either international students at the time of the interview or former international students who had returned to their country of origin for permanent residence. Of the fifteen respondents, five were male and ten were female, and they ranged from age twenty-one to twenty-seven. Their level of education was at the post-secondary and graduate levels. Their decision to study abroad was voluntary so they are considered a privileged group of individuals (as compared to refugees) and they have free mobility (no political barriers) between their country of origin and host country. Twelve respondents were from Malaysia, one was from Singapore, another was from Japan and another was from France. Ten of the twelve Malaysians were studying in Canada, as were the French and Japanese international students. The other two Malaysian students were studying in England and Japan; and the Singaporean was studying in New Zealand.

Although knowing what the cultural settings peculiar to the host countries and the countries of origin are is important, its importance is only secondary in this study.

Instead I am going to focus on the fact that cultural differences *do exist* in these settings; and these differences are key because they create a sense of personal uncertainty that trigger culture shock and return culture shock. By focusing on the fact that differences exist between the two countries I hope to strengthen my argument that the impact of culture shock and return culture shock are both universal social processes that can affect all individuals regardless of the country or culture which they come from or which they enter.

Note also that the sample is not representative in terms of gender, age, level of education, and race. I did not control for any of these factors because I do not intend to compare biosocial characteristics and their effects on the level of culture shock and return culture shock. Indeed, these attributes affect how people experience culture shock and return culture shock, but they are beyond the scope of this study. Perhaps in another more in-depth study I can do a comparative analysis of how gender, age, level of education and race affect the level of culture shock and return culture shock. But for now, the point of this exploratory research is to study how culture shock and return culture shock are experienced and what these experiences can tell us about human interaction and behaviour.

A Matter of Ethics

Before starting this study I went through an ethics committee review. Prior to the interview, all respondents were made aware of the nature of this study and even though risk to the respondents was minimal, if any at all, they were asked to sign a consent/ waiver form allowing me to interview them and use their responses in this study (See

Appendix A). I assured them that their identities would be kept confidential and that all names used in this dissertation would be pseudonyms. Respondents interviewed over the internet were made fully aware that any information given over the internet is not secure and that they responded at their own risk. I also obtained permission from the respondents with whom I had informal interviews/conversations to use our conversation as research data and they were all agreeable to it.

Credibility

Many of the respondents were very supportive of this research project and were eager to share their experiences with me. I had unlimited access to most of the respondents and could continue communicating with them if I needed to clarify their responses. But my friendship with some of the respondents worried me. I was concerned that they would tell me what they thought I wanted to hear, and might not even tell me everything or say anything they thought would hurt my research.

For example, Sean, who was 'interviewed' via electronic mail (second interview), was so eager to be helpful that before he sent his responses to me, he sent me an electronic mail asking me how much information I wanted, whether he should write me an essay, how many words/pages I wanted in his response. After sending his response, he wrote me a follow-up electronic mail asking whether the information he provided was enough and whether I needed more information from him. Here, I was concerned that the respondent was not sure whether he had given me the information I wanted and that he was worried about not giving me information that was helpful enough. However, since this was a follow-up interview (he had returned to his country of origin for permanent

residence), I checked this information with what he had divulged in his first interview (which took place four years ago while he was still an international student). The information he provided in both interviews was very similar and his overall experience seemed to echo that of the other respondents⁴ so I was assured that the information he gave me was not just created for my benefit.

Another respondent, Aisha, wanted to help me so much that she said she was willing to pretend to be someone else and make up an experience if I did not have enough people to interview. This worried me at first because I thought that anyone could make up stories about their experiences. But after thinking about it I realized that these experiences were symptomatic, that is, they can only be felt or sensed by someone who had gone through the process or experience. Furthermore, the fact that she said she could just 'make it up' out of thin air indicated that she had genuinely gone through the experience of return culture shock and therefore knew enough about it to be able to 'make it up'. This reinforced her credibility!

Interviewing

Interviews were conducted using several methods. Six interviews were conducted face-to-face at the individual level, two interviews were conducted in focus groups (one group consisted of three respondents and another group consisted of two respondents); other interviews were conducted over the internet either via electronic mail (five interviews) or via the instant messaging system (two interviews). This multi-method

⁴ Many similar themes arose in all the interviews. The respondents related their experience with the language and usage of cultural idioms in their host country, they compared the behaviour of natives from both the host country and country of origin, and they complained about restriction in their country of origin. I will discuss these themes and other themes in later chapters of this paper.

interviewing was done out of convenience for both the respondents and myself (I will discuss the advantages and disadvantages of these methods in the next section).

The interviews can be broken up into four sets based on chronological order. The first set of interviews took place in November 1998 where I interviewed six respondents for a paper I wrote as an undergraduate. The second and third sets of interviews took place between February 2001 and April 2001. The second set of interviews was with international students living here in Ottawa⁵ and the third set of interviews was with former international students who are now residing in their country of origin. The fourth set of interviews took place between July and November 2002. This last set of interviews was a follow-up of respondents' experiences after having returned to their country of origin for permanent settlement.

On the whole, out of the fifteen respondents interviewed, four were re-interviewed to capture their experiences of returning to their country of origin for permanent residence. The reason why I did follow-up interviews with these four respondents who had returned to their country of origin for permanent residence is not because I wanted to measure the level of shock, but because I wanted to know if there was a difference between the levels of shock on both occasions, and what implications it had on these individuals. I discuss this association in Chapter 4.

⁵ One respondent was visiting Ottawa at this time. He was already taking up permanent residence in Malaysia after having returned from his studies in Japan. The topic of living abroad came up over lunch so we had an informal interview and he agreed to let me use the information he shared with me as part of my study. As Aaron Cicourel aptly notes, "... every social encounter is potentially an interview situation ... " (1964, 73).

Interview Approaches: Advantages and Disadvantages

As spelt out above, the interview approach I used varied. Each approach naturally had certain advantages as well as disadvantages. In this section I will outline why I used the various interview approaches, as well as the advantages and disadvantages to using them.

Face-to-face Interviews

The face-to-face interviews were done at the individual level and in focus groups. The advantage of doing face-to-face interviews was that I was able to communicate with the respondents directly; that is, I was able to encourage them to speak or elaborate on a point on the spot. They were also able to ask me to clarify some questions for them. The disadvantage to this approach was that the respondents may not have felt comfortable revealing certain things to me face-to-face, or they may have only revealed what they thought I wanted to hear, or they may have, as previously mentioned, been influenced by my own physical response to them.

Individual Interviews

Individual interviews are advantageous because (a) the researcher does not have to assume constant control of the interview. The researcher can pose a question, then as the respondent responds to it, the researcher can ask the respondent to elaborate on her/his responses and also formulate more questions based on those responses; and (b) the respondent has more 'air time' (Morgan, 1997: 10-11). This allows the respondents to explain themselves more fully without having to compete with other respondents for 'air

time'. The respondents also feel safer about sharing their experiences because there were no other respondents present to dominate or direct the types of issues raised.

As mentioned above, my presence might have affected them in some way, but without the presence of another respondent they were able to talk about whatever they wanted and they could emphasise whatever issues they wanted to emphasise. In this way, I was able to obtain a lot of data from the respondents and capture what they considered to be important or meaningful about their experiences. I used individual interviews for respondents with whom I was less acquainted so that I could probe their responses without fear of interruption from other respondents.⁶

Focus Groups

Focus groups generally rely on interaction between group members around topics provided by the researcher who plays the role of moderator. This interaction is important because it can draw out insights that would not have been as easily attained in individual interviews (Morgan, 1997: 2). The interview sessions in the focus groups were informal and less structured than the individual interviews. Focus groups were beneficial to this study because the questions I asked generated discussion among the group members and one respondent's experience often evoked a memory of a similar experience in another respondent. They would become quite excited and exclaim "Yeah, me too ..." and they would then start comparing their experiences with each other.

⁶ The respondents in the focus group interviews, for example, were very outspoken about their experiences and they were comfortable enough with each other and with me to interject or interrupt another speaker when the other speaker brought up an issue they had left out.

The respondents would also ask other respondents whether they had a particular experience or not and the session became something of a dinner-table conversation among friends (those who participated in the group interviews were personal friends). This spontaneity of interaction produced an environment by which new topics arose and other topics were explored in greater depth.

However, there is a disadvantage to using focus groups as some group members were more dominant speakers than other group members and 'air time' became a concern. As moderator, I tried to ensure that every member of the focus group had the opportunity to contribute to a certain topic. Still, some of the group members were more reticent than others. Also, some group members might not have wanted to raise certain issues because they were concerned that the others might judge them. With this in mind, I made myself accessible to them (by phone or email) in case they wanted to privately provide me with more information about their experiences.⁷

Online Interviews

The online interviews were completed via electronic mail and via the instant messaging system. These interviews were conducted online because the respondents could not meet me in person (some respondents were in different countries). The advantage to doing online interviews was that I was able to capture every word the respondents had to say about their culture shock and return culture shock experiences.

⁷ None of the focus group participants contacted me about this except Sean who was interviewed a second time, this time via electronic mail (see section on credibility above).

Electronic Mail Interviews

These interviews took some time because the respondents and I had to email each other back and forth when they needed something clarified. Some respondents were unsure of how much information they should provide because I could not directly prompt them to elaborate on certain issues. I also could not capture the nuances in their voice or read their body language when they raised particular issues (to see whether they had more to add and were expecting me to prompt them). Furthermore, some respondents did not check electronic mail regularly and it would take several days before I received their responses. However, the electronic mail interviews did allow me to explore questions concerning return culture shock with people who had returned to their country of origin and were presently engaged in the experience.

Instant Messaging Interviews

The instant messaging interviews had an advantage over the electronic mail interviews in that I was able to communicate with the respondent directly, that is, in 'real time'. Just like with electronic mail interviews, I could not totally read the respondents' nuances. But with the instant messaging system, users are able to use emoticons such as 'smileys', 'frownies', and so on, to express their feelings.⁸

Overall, even though both online interview methods took up a lot of time initially (corresponding back and forth and also typing), they saved me time later on because I did

⁸ Emoticons are used to convey attitude or mood. 'Smileys' (☺) are graphic symbols that usually indicate friendliness or contentment. 'Frownies' (☹) are used to indicate displeasure. Many instant messaging services have ready-made emoticons covering a wider variety of facial expressions (e.g. grinning, winking, weeping, etc.). Sometimes actions are typed out in text bracketed by asterisks (e.g. *shrug* or *grin*). Some actions are represented by acronyms (e.g. LOL means 'laughing/laughs out loud').

not have to type up my notes. In addition, while I could not read the respondents' body language/facial expressions, they also could not read mine; and this, I hope, minimized the influence I had on their responses. Perhaps the respondents also felt less shy about revealing their experiences as they might have been with me in their physical presence. This sense of being less shy was indicated to me when one respondent wrote that she felt lonely in her host country. She also wrote that when she returned to her country of origin she felt estranged and this was the reason why she and her boyfriend who had remained in her country of origin broke up.

Interview Questions

I started interviews by explaining to respondents what my research topic was about. When they heard the terms 'culture shock' and 'return culture shock' all of them seem to intuitively know what they meant. I found this interesting because return culture shock is not as commonly talked about or expressed as culture shock. Yet, when I mentioned 'return culture shock', the respondents immediately knew what I was referring to. There were a few who asked me to confirm whether their understanding of return culture shock was in line with what I meant when I said 'return culture shock'. They had a perfect understanding of it;⁹ but I had to explain the concept to them at the onset of the interview to ensure that they understood what my research topic was (for ethical reasons as well as for validity issues) and I did this by juxtaposing it with 'culture shock'.¹⁰

⁹ They explained their understanding of the two concepts by giving examples, not by defining them conceptually.

¹⁰ Culture shock was explained as a reaction people had when they encountered a culture that they were unfamiliar with. Return culture shock was explained as the reaction people had when they returned to their country of origin after having lived abroad.

The interview questions I asked were mostly broad questions pertaining to their experiences when they first arrived at their host country and when they returned to their country of origin for vacation or permanent residence (See Appendices B and C). I asked them how they felt when they were living in their host countries, whom they associated with, what they liked and disliked about living in their host countries, what they liked and disliked about their return to their country of origin, and what their lifestyle was like in their host countries and in their country of origin. I asked these questions so I would be able to determine whether their adaptation to a different culture (that is, their host countries) would have an effect on their experience of return culture shock. I also wanted to know their own interpretation of what constitutes return culture shock so I left the questions about their return experience open and prompted them for more information as they responded.

Since this is an exploratory research project and my questions were open-ended, not all the questions I asked were standardized across interviews. This is because certain responses led to certain questions that did not apply to certain respondents. For example, Greg and Sharon did not have the same experiences of return culture shock. I asked Greg why he thought that his experiences differed from Sharon's and he replied, "I guess it's because I'm a guy and I'm also the eldest in the family so I am not as restricted as Sharon is. My parents give me more freedom. She's the only child and female and her parents are very conservative".¹¹

¹¹ Greg and Sharon were a couple during the time of the interview and their families were close friends.

Being flexible with questions and allowing respondents to tell their stories in their own terms is crucial for qualitative research. It makes for richer qualitative data because by giving respondents the opportunity to communicate their experiences on their own terms, the researcher will be able to better understand their subjective worlds.

My Role

As I mentioned in Chapter One, I chose this research project because I personally experienced culture shock and return culture shock. It would be a waste to not take my experiences into account. After all, I was deeply immersed in 'the field' and part of 'the field', so to speak, and I could truly exercise *verstehen* (Weber, 1949) as an approach to this study. I could empathise with the respondents because I was a member of their group; their experiences were my experiences.

This study is also a self-reflexive auto-biography. As Glaser and Strauss pertinently point out, "[s]ociologists also must be considered as part of the social structure; and a developing theory must therefore take them and their statements into account as a slice of data" (1967: 254). This gives the researcher the advantage of becoming an 'instrument' in data collection and analysis (McCracken, 1988: 18). What this means is that in order for the research project to be successful, the researcher has to fully situate herself or himself into the project; that is, as McCracken says, "... the investigator cannot fulfil qualitative research objectives without using a broad range of his or her own experience, imagination, and intellect in ways that are various and unpredictable" (1988: 18).

In order for researchers to achieve 'instrument' status McCracken proposes that researchers use 'imaginative reconstruction' which requires the researcher to accept the respondents' responses as absolute truth and ask herself or himself 'what the world looks like when I hold these to be true' (1988: 18). I can fully situate myself in the study and I do not have to imagine that what the respondents say is true because I know it is as true for them, in their own experiential reality, as it is true for me, in my own experiential reality.

Chapter Three: Communicating in the Host Country

The main challenge for sojourners is to be able to communicate effectively in their host country. Their success in their host country depends on how adept they are at communicating with people around them, especially with natives¹ of their host country. Being adept at effective communication involves learning the communication habits of the host culture as well as finding ways of adapting, though not necessarily integrating into that culture. The most significant and obvious communication habit is the use of language.

Language is, as Thomas K. Fitzgerald puts it, "a significant medium of communication [that is] often seen as one of the most powerful unifying factors in culture" (1996: 61). Language, however, is not the only significant system of symbolic objects that unifies individuals within a group, as I will illustrate later in this chapter. First, I will look at the communication experiences the respondents had in their host country and as a necessary starting point I will briefly elucidate the importance of habits in cross-cultural communication.

Habits and Cross-Cultural Communication

Habits are important elements in the communication process. Habits are repetitions of behaviours that are no longer consciously acted out. They are "a series of

¹ I use 'natives' as opposed to 'nationals' because I believe there is a distinction between the two terms. Natives are people born and raised in a specific place. Nationals on the other hand, are people who share citizenship status. Strangers that come to stay may be called nationals when they become citizens. This, however, does not mean that they are wholly integrated or that they feel that they fully belong to that country to consider themselves natives.

actions [that have] become automatic and seemingly divorced from conscious thought" (Wise, 2000: 302). Most habits are created through continuous communication with the world around us and are culturally learned.

When sojourners arrive in their host country, they bring with them habits from their primary culture in their country of origin. Their behaviour and ways of communicating, being determined by their primary culture and having been fully internalised, are their primary habits. Since most of their primary habits are likely to be different from that of their host culture, they are likely to experience an initial culture shock. Their behaviour is most likely to be out of place in their host culture, and the communication habits of natives may throw them off balance. In consequence, their assumptions about communicating will be challenged and they will have to adjust to many different aspects of communicating in their host culture. Some communication experiences, as the respondents of this study discovered, may be pleasant, some may not, and some may just be a matter of getting used to. Combined together, all of these experiences contribute to the process of culture shock as sojourners contemplate, adjust to, and interpret the meaning of such events for self.

"They Are So Friendly"

One of the more pleasant communication experiences the respondents encountered was the friendliness of the natives. Brent said that he liked the way sales personnel received customers in Canada. He said that they greeted customers with a smile and were always available to assist the customers. He said that people are more

polite in Canada in general compared to people in Malaysia. Jasmine also mentioned that people in Canada are more polite and friendly than in France:

Jasmine: People are more welcoming here and spontaneous. They will speak to you in the street or in the elevator they will say "Hello, how are you?" In France, if they don't know you, they will [raises palms in a distancing action]. This is not done in France. In France, it is more cold. Here it is informal. For foreigners, it is nice, even though it is at the superficial level, but at least there is contact so you are not so lonely.

Jasmine found that even though she was unused to greeting strangers, the informality in communicating in Canada was a source of comfort to her, a stranger to the country. In contrast, these types of interactions emphasized the customary rules existing in her country of origin and her sense of being isolated from others in her host country. As a result, she may have felt near to natives of her host country because of their friendliness, and she may have felt far away from them at the same time because their behaviour contrasted with natives of her country of origin (Simmel, 1964).

"English, English, English!"

The respondents found that they had to communicate in English more than they were used to since English was the lingua franca in their host country.² Stacy said that when she first arrived in Canada she struggled with the different English terms used in subjects such as History and Geography. In Malaysia, these subjects are taught in Malay so she knew the terms in Malay but not in English. June expressed her frustration at having to speak English all the time:

June: [I]f I want to stay in Canada I have to learn more, adapt more. Sometimes I'm so sick of English. I speak English everywhere! I

² Except for one respondent whose host country's first language is Japanese.

turn to the radio, English, I turn here, English, it's the accent, the intonation...It's not Malaysian English.³

For June, speaking English all the time meant that she had to be on her guard all the time. She had to watch what she said and how she said what she wanted to say. It also meant that June had to bend her way of thinking from Malaysian to Canadian. It is not that June did not want to speak formal English at all. She merely found that adopting this interactional style constrained her presentation of self.

Styles of speaking reflect the values of a culture and of the individual especially when styles differ within one language (Fitzgerald, 1996: 61). June expressed her frustration at having to speak formal English in Canada because it limited her expression of her Malaysian self. If she reverted to Malaysian English in Canada people would have difficulty understanding her. She had no choice but to adjust to speaking mostly formal Canadian English since it is the way natives and other inhabitants of Canada communicated.

Aisha, whose mother tongue is Malay, found that being surrounded by English speakers was a somewhat threatening experience, especially in the classroom setting.

Aisha: I feel like I couldn't speak good English and I always, uh whenever I attend school I . . . when I go to the uh university uh when the teach- when the professor asks something sometimes I have things to contribute but I realize that oh, maybe my English will be so bad and people will just laugh at me.

Aisha felt embarrassed about her English skills and found that it was easier for her to associate with her Malaysian friends who spoke Malay.

³ Even though formal English is taught as a second language in Malaysian schools, Malaysian English (sometimes called 'Manglish') is the preferred 'language' in informal conversation. It is English peppered with Malay, Chinese and sometimes Indian words and slang. The sentence structures, accent and intonation also differ from formal English.

Aisha: I think I would say that it is easier for me to communicate with Malaysian friends, especially in the sense of making jokes. I think when I speak in Malay with them, with my Malaysian friends, I find it is easier for me to make jokes in my own language instead of trying to make jokes in English and um . . so I guess maybe um, the people who speak English with me may find me different...like they don't see me as someone who [laughs] makes jokes or something like that. I don't know. Maybe they find me a bit serious. I don't know...I'm questioning myself.

The ability to communicate effectively with others has a strong influence on an individual's sense of self or, on the perception individuals may think others have of them (Goffman, 1959; Mead, 1967). Aisha said that she thought English speakers found her serious, where as her Malay friends may have found her more easy going and jokey. That she could have been perceived as either serious or jokey depending on the different lingual groups made her start to question her self. Was she a serious person or was she a jokey person? Which self could she better identify with, her serious self or her jokey self? This sense of uncertainty over self contributed to the culture shock experience that Aisha and other respondents described in this study.

Aisha was most comfortable with her Malaysian friends because they shared the same communication habits; they spoke the same language and she felt comfortable enough with the language, and with her friends to make jokes. Joking aside, Aisha's interaction with her Malaysian friends allowed all of them to maintain and reinforce their Malaysian communication habits, and hence, a stronger sense of self as competent human beings. Not only were Aisha and her friends able to comfortably predict each other's reactions to what they said, they were also using each other as well as their communication habits as familiar social and abstract objects which reminded them of their primary Malaysian culture. In this circle of familiar symbolic objects, they were

also able to escape the reality of being immersed in an Anglo culture that was foreign to them. This tactic of forming and maintaining contact with 'others' from their own culture mediated the impact of the culture shock that each experienced.

"I Can't Read Them"

June expressed the difficulty in negotiating the limit between formality and informality with English speakers in Canada.

June: It's so weird. They pick on people. They seem to accept that though, even though they are classmates. The jokes here, the way they talk to each other . . . that's the one thing I don't catch. They don't appreciate politeness. They say "What?" They like it when they are rude to each other. Just like in Malaysia when I speak Chinese to each other we are rude too. Maybe because this is not our first language we are not comfortable being rude to people in English.

Like Aisha, June thought that Canadians misperceived her as an incredibly polite or formal person. She believed they saw her as reticent and distancing herself because she did not 'pick on people' in Canada. English was not her first language and she was uncertain of how people would react to what she had to say. In other words, she was not familiar enough with English to be able to 'read' or 'feel out' people and she could not be sure of how to present herself in this language.

Communicating in English also left some respondents whose first language was not English feeling distanced from Anglophones. Jasmine, a student from France, decided to further her studies in Canada so that she could improve her English. She said that she felt closer to Francophones and more comfortable with them than she did with Anglophones. This is because she was more familiar with the way Francophones communicated.

Jasmine: English puts a distance obviously because it is obvious we are not from the same culture. But if I'm with French people then it's like being with my own people.

Jasmine's experience supports Aisha's and June's experience. Language differences create barriers between people. Yet, language is a significant identifier of self and one's sense of belonging. Thus, when asked whether she felt she adapted well into Canadian society, Jasmine replied that she did but only to the practical aspect of Canadian life such as finding practical things she needed (groceries, bank, etc.). She said that she still had problems grasping what some of her professors and friends meant because of the language barrier.

Jasmine: I still have problem understanding the way of thinking of the professors and my friends here. For example, they have priorities that are difficult to understand. The language makes it difficult to feel their mood. In France I can feel what people think.

Jasmine found other people's accent foreign; it made it difficult for her to read them. She could not confidently read the meanings behind their intonation and phrases. For this reason, Jasmine felt she could not quite identify with the Anglophones yet. A knowledgeable person who had experienced the distinction of being a sojourner in both French and English Canadian cultures, Jasmine raised the issue of language as a problem for her in Canada several times during the interview and she acknowledged that it posed a barrier in effective communication. She exemplifies the extent to which familiarity with language (i.e. French) and lack of familiarity (i.e. English) may impact on a sojourner's presentation of self and his/her sense of comfort within his/her host culture.

"What Did You Say?"

For some of the respondents, it was not just English that was a problem, it was the distinction between cultural idioms used in their host country and ones used in similar contexts in their country of origin.

Amy: I had some difficulties. I don't speak English very often [in Malaysia] and when I come here [Canada] I speak English and my pronunciation . . . a word like mathematics, for "minus" they use "subtract". I don't know. It's just that I can't adapt to words, some words . . . I can't understand, I had difficulty understanding the instructor.

Even those who were accustomed to speaking English in their country of origin experienced confusion and some measure of embarrassment when they got to their host country. For example, I speak English in Malaysia (though mostly Malaysian English) yet when I asked my roommate in Canada whether I could 'borrow a torchlight' she gave me a very confused stare. We finally worked out that I needed a 'flashlight', the North American equivalent to the more British 'torchlight'.⁴ Upon arrival to the host country, language and the different phrases or cultural idioms used were certainly issues to grapple with. Thus, even those sojourners who are fluent in the host language, and believe themselves to be well prepared for the transition to their host country cannot avoid the personal uncertainty that emerges from differences in cultural habits or cross-cultural communication.

⁴ Malaysia was a British colony until 1957. The English language, now taught as a second language in Malaysian schools, follows the English standards of England.

"Hey, How's It Going?"

The way people in the host country greeted each other was also something the respondents had to adjust to. During the first few months of their stay in their host country June, Amy, and Aisha were taken off guard when someone asked them "Hey, how's it going?"

June: I don't know how to answer this question. What should I say? Back home we just say "Hi", or in Chinese we call them by their title, "Aunty" or "Grand-Aunty" then ask, "Have you eaten?"

Amy: I don't know what to say. Huh, what is going? I don't know. I think "Hello, how are you?" is better.

Aisha: We don't ask each other how we are. We just say "Hi" and we carry on with our conversation.

The cultural idioms of greeting used in their host country were beyond what the respondents were used to. June was used to just saying hello and asking whether the other had eaten and she probably assumed that this form of greeting was used, or at least passable in Canada. Amy thought that the greeting assumed something was going on and she did not know what 'it' referred to. She did not know how to respond to this question because she took 'it' to mean something specific unaware that 'it' was a general 'it' and did not refer to anything in particular. Aisha on the other hand, felt that a 'Hi' would suffice in greeting. This ritual with her friends was kept short; so when people in her host country prolonged the greeting ritual and asked her how she was, she did not know how to respond. Thus, even the simple interaction of greeting could evoke personal uncertainty and self-doubt.

"I Can't Express Myself"

For some respondents, the language barrier was so strong that they felt excluded from social participation in their host country. When I asked Amy whether she felt that she had adapted to life in Canada she said that she had difficulties adapting in the classroom setting.

Amy: I think I still have [trouble adapting] because I feel that with a lot of Canadians, I can't express my ideas to make them understand. Some of them don't really listen to what you say in a group. I feel like I contribute less to our group project even though I want to contribute. I feel like they want me to work alone. It's very hard for me to be with them . . . to understand. I work with a lot of Canadian groups. Not all situations are the same of course, but when it comes to writing the reports, a Canadian will write it, they don't want me to write it.

Amy found that because English speakers were not patient or tolerant enough with her English language skills they ignored her or devalued her work/contribution to the group. They did not want to or they could not identify with her because of the perceived language barrier existing between them.

For Mika, a student from Japan who, like Jasmine came to Canada specifically to improve her English skills, said that English speakers' reactions to her English made her feel uncomfortable.

Mika: I speak only English and Japanese. When I speak in English I become really shy because I don't feel comfortable, especially, when I talk to my Canadian friends, and they ask me what I just said to them, I feel so embarrassed, and feel so shy. I tried to get them to understand, but sometimes it is very difficult to do that. On the other hand, in Japanese, I feel so safe and comfortable when I talk to my Japanese friends here.

Language proved to be a communication barrier for Mika as well. Speaking English made her feel shy and perhaps a little self-conscious so Anglophones might have

perceived her as shy and self-conscious even though that might not have really been who she was – her use and insecurity of the English language affected other's perception of her. Mika's insecurity with English might have also affected how she felt others perceived her as well as how she perceived herself. Mika's description is similar to what Aisha said about not being able to tell jokes in English and questioning whether she was a jokey or serious person. Perhaps it is because both Mika and Aisha, like June, felt they were not proficient enough with English and all its cultural idioms and quirks that they felt unsure of how to present themselves in that language. As a result, they felt shy and self-conscious and preferred to withdraw from the larger Anglophonic society into the familiarity of their own homo-lingual groups where they could express themselves fully.

"I Tried To Change My Accent"

The respondents felt marginalized in their host country because of their lack of mastery of their host country's language. Another way they stood out was in the way they vocalised the language.

Having an accent different from the native habitués of the host culture puts up an 'us versus them' barrier. The accent is a distinguishing feature between natives and strangers as Jasmine astutely pointed out.

Jasmine: I speak English and French. When I speak English, there is a distance obviously. Because I have an accent, it is obvious I am not from the same culture.

Jasmine's accent accentuated her foreignness and her foreignness posed a source of discomfort for natives.

Natives also experience culture shock when they encounter strangers, even when the encounter occurs in their own culture. This is because they may not know much about strangers and what to expect from them. They do not know whether strangers will understand their meaning, they do not know where the lines of formality and informality lie for strangers, and they do not know whether what they say will be well-received by strangers. A different accent is one of the first things people note when speaking with someone and a difference in accent gives away the fact that the speaker of the minority accent is not native.

Usually, people who have experienced being strangers themselves through travels outside of their primary culture tend to be more accepting of, and comfortable with strangers. June noted this and said that she found that Canadians with international experience were more tolerant of her communication habits.

June: If you work with someone, a Canadian with international experience, they are more tolerant. If it's someone that just came from high school they are more intolerant in terms of accent. . . . In this situation I find you have to be more assertive, you have to speak like them to gain your status.

Speaking the way natives do is a way of identifying with them or showing them that they can identify with you and that you can identify with them. It gives them some assurance that their interaction with you, played out according to their rules, will be somewhat more predictable and more comfortable. It also shows a willingness to be like them. After all, imitation is the best form of flattery. Accent mimicking shaves off some layers of the 'us versus them' barrier. However, not every stranger has the cultural skill to speak exactly the way a native does. There will always be a hint of a foreign accent.

Sam whose first language is English, learnt Japanese when he arrived in Japan to further his studies. He said that he spoke Japanese fluently and that the Japanese were quite receptive of him because he had taken the effort to learn their language. He lived in Japan for five years and throughout those five years he felt excluded from Japanese society in spite of speaking the language and practising their culture.

Sam: They [the Japanese] were cordial to you, but if you were not of the Japanese race, they did not fully embrace you as their own. Koreans and Chinese who were born there and speak Japanese like the Japanese people do are still ostracized. They have to carry identity cards around with them. Even they were considered foreigners.

Sam was conscious that his accent might have been a contributing factor in Japanese people's inability to fully accept him into their culture.

Sam: I speak Japanese quite fluently. But they could tell I was a foreigner by my accent mostly and they treated me cordially like a foreigner. If I did something wrong, I was excused from the *faux pas*.

Sam had made an active effort to integrate into Japanese society. However, because of his perceived foreignness he could only adapt to Japanese society. His foreign accent still maintained that 'us versus them' divide.

Sean, who spoke English fluently, also felt excluded from his host country. Sean lived in England for ten years before coming to Canada and had a strong British accent mixed with a slight Malaysian accent. After four years in Canada he developed a bit of a Canadian accent⁵ and found people giving him funny looks when he spoke. He had a mix of three accents and people could not make out where he was from. This might have made them uncomfortable around this stranger because they could not react to him by

⁵ The dominant accent used by locally-born and -raised Canadians/natives habitués of Canada.

applying the usual stereotypes – he was not a typical student nor was he a typical stranger.

While it is not impossible to learn, unlearn and re-learn communication habits, the process is often difficult and stressful. Aisha's conscious effort to change her accent to accommodate people in her host culture is indicative of her desire to adapt to her cultural environment. However, as she explained, she reached a stage where she no longer cared that her accent was different.

Aisha: I would say um when I first came here maybe the first years when I was here I tried to be like people in Canada, I tried to change my way of speaking in terms of accent. I tried to, I mean, I remember when I was back home [Malaysia] I had a different accent. I think I had an English accent because we were taught in the English system, the British system. So when I was back home I had this different accent. When I came here [Ottawa] I don't know why I had to change my accent so people could understand me better. And then suddenly I realized that this is so hard! I mean why am I changing my accent just to make people understand me more? So, you know, so, so maybe I just quit. I didn't bother to change my accent any more. I just, I mean I just go with the flow. Like I feel like if it's easier for me to say the words I'll just say the words in whatever accent that I can, even in a Malay accent, doesn't matter. The thing is that I think right now I'm just accommodating myself instead of accommodating other people [laughs].

Aisha found switching accents too much of a strain because accents, another communication habit, are not on-off switches. Habits take time to cultivate and to eradicate. She came to accept her identity as a sojourner and the social designations it implied.

"I Meet My Friends And Life Goes Back To Normal"

Many respondents found it difficult at first to adapt to their host country. Sometimes it was the language barrier and most of the time it was the 'us versus them'

barrier. As a result, most of the respondents reported that in their host countries, they spent most of their time with friends who have similar attributes as they do. This would provide a safe haven of acceptance for them. After all, people, especially if they feel somewhat marginalized, do form a sense of solidarity and alikeness by being isolated together (Fitzgerald, 1996: 91).

In Aisha's case, the solidifying group attribute was the Malay language. For Brent and Chad, it was the Chinese language (Cantonese). Most of their friends were from Malaysia or Hong Kong where Cantonese is spoken. When I asked Brent whether he thought he had adapted well into Canadian society he replied:

Brent: No, not in the past few years. Now, I'm trying to do it better. I used to stick to my Malaysian friends so I don't know the difference between Malaysian culture and Canadian culture. Now I have Canadian roommates.

Brent acknowledges that he did not really adapt well into Canadian society because he had always been surrounded by a familiar group of people who spoke his language and had the same cultural values as he did. He was well insulated from Canadian culture. Now he is trying to associate with Canadians more. It is interesting that he associates adapting to Canadian society with being around Canadians. This means he has to speak more English. So perhaps he felt that speaking English would help him, indirectly, adapt better to life in Canada.

As for Chad, he chose to attend Carleton University because a group of his friends were going to attend Carleton. He too, like Brent and Aisha, kept himself well insulated

in his familiar symbolic⁶ language bubble. He says, "In the airplane, I feel like I want to quit my studies and stay home. Then when I arrive at Ottawa, I meet friends, go out, and life goes back to normal". His group of friends in Ottawa were social others that made life in Canada more familiar for him and they represented his 'home away from home'.

Other respondents found that other attributes such as 'foreignness' was the source of cohesion needed to form friendships. Chrysta's experience is one such example. She said that her circle of friends consisted of other international students. They boarded together and thus saw each other everyday and went out for movies and night-clubbing together. She found that this arrangement suited them because the English students kept to themselves and were not receptive towards international students.

Like Chrysta, Jasmine spent most of her social time with her roommates who were international students. Some of them worked together so they saw each other frequently everyday. They went for movies and coffee together, they did sports together and had many social gatherings in their house. She said that her best friend in Ottawa was from Bulgaria, her boyfriend was from Turkey, her other friends were from Iran, and her most Canadian friend was half Canadian and Mauritian and had lived in Mauritius for fifteen years. Despite their different cultural backgrounds, their common experience of being strangers in a host country of dissimilar others solidified them as a unified group.

Mika also spent most of her social time with other international students whom she saw almost everyday at the university. She said that most of her friends were from Nicaragua, China, Thailand, Hong Kong, and South Korea. Some of the typical activities

⁶ Being in a homo-lingual group is not only practical (being able to communicate with others freely); it also reinforces individuals' identity and construction of home.

they did together were drinking, playing sports, watching movies and going shopping.

Mika found that she had difficulty making friends with Canadians: "It is very difficult to make some good friends with Canadian people since they are conservative in my opinion".

Since Jasmine's and Mika's friends were from different lingual backgrounds, English would have been the lingua franca for their group of friends. They both said that they had come to Canada to improve their English and they both mentioned that they had difficulty expressing themselves in English, especially to their Canadian friends. It could be that they found it easier to associate with other non-English speakers since they were all foreigners together in a strange world and this probably made them comfortable enough to say what they wanted to say regardless of whether their sentences were grammatically correct. Errors of speech would not be as socially embarrassing and inaccurate presentation of self would be less noticeable or less harshly judged as they would by natives of the host country who had internalised its customary habits and formed rules of social behaviour.

Adapting To The Host Country

All these different communication experiences the respondents encountered were part of their culture shock experience. These experiences shocked them because they were different from what the respondents were used to and what they had expected. They had to learn new ways of communicating and they had to adopt these new ways of communicating as habits. To protect self, many disengaged from awkward social

interactions or formed friendships with others who would accept their social failings more easily.

Adopting language and all its communicative aspects (accent, idioms, etc.) as habit is certainly not an easy achievement. Yet, in trying to adapt to a host country, and being immersed in a particular language pocket, certain words, phrases and accents are learned or unconsciously adopted, and certain social behaviours become unconscious habits. These new habits contribute to the process of return culture shock experienced by sojourners when they return to their country of origin, as I will illustrate in the next chapter.

Chapter Four: Communicating in the Country of Origin

After having experienced the challenges of adapting to a new culture abroad, most sojourners face the inevitable return to their country of origin. Now the challenge is to re-adapt to their country of origin. However, sojourners do not expect that this will be a challenge. They expect that life at 'home'¹ will carry on as usual and they can pick up where they left off. They expect continuity in experience. As a result, they are caught off-guard when the place they thought of as 'home', as a familiar place of comfort and safety, is no longer familiar, comfortable, or safe. There is no longer a sense of continuity and their initial surprise at this revelation can be emotionally staggering for sojourners if they are not prepared for it. This chapter recounts the return culture shock experiences described by the respondents in this study.

Home For The Holidays

When the respondents returned to their country of origin the majority found that what had once been familiar to them was now strange, and what was now strange, was unpleasant. Most of the respondents confided that there were many aspects of their return to their country of origin that they did not enjoy. Even what seemed like picayune details of life irked them. When I asked Greg how he felt about being back in Malaysia, he responded: "In one word, frustration – everything from the weather to the way people

¹ Sojourners often refer to their country of origin as home. The respondents in this study also referred to their country of origin as home. To them, 'home' is where their family resides. All, except one of the respondents in this study did not have family members living in their host country with them and they did not consider their host country home. Five respondents said that they considered their host country 'a place where they came to study', never home.

were got on my nerves".

'The way people were', as Greg put it, was something the returnees sometimes found intolerable. They considered 'the way people were' to be impolite or unacceptable. But the people around them were not the only deviants. The respondents, as they interacted with people in their country of origin, found that they themselves were deviant. After all, being successful in one culture may mean being deviant in another (Moore, 1997: 67). The respondents had been successful in adapting to their host culture.² They found, however, that these changes in self meant that they no longer 'fit in' as social members of their country of origin.

"They Are So Impolite!"

Communication habits differ across cultures. Although most people know this fact on an intellectual level, they take their own culture for granted and do not actually understand the realities of cultural differences until they are removed from their own culture and their communication habits are challenged by a different culture. The respondents, having had the opportunity to experience different ways of communicating in their host culture, came to realise the reality of these differences. And now that they had experienced another culture they were able to make comparisons between cultures. As Greg pointed out: "Before you came here [Canada], it [Malaysian culture] wasn't as prominent because you had nothing to compare with". So when the respondents returned to their country of origin, they made a lot of comparisons. For example, Brent made a

² Many of them had said that they considered themselves successful at adapting to their host country.

comparison between people in the Malaysian service sector and people in the Canadian service sector:

Brent: The people here [in Canada] are more polite compared to Malaysians. When you go to buy groceries people smiles [sic]. Maybe it is the weather. There [Malaysia] is too hot so people are always like this [makes a grimacing face], don't you find? Malaysia is too hot so maybe they are grumpy and they are not smiling.

Brent seemed puzzled by this difference and tried to find an explanation for it. Thus, he used the weather as a possible reason why people in the Malaysian service sector are less amicable.

Brent was not the only person who noticed this difference in the friendliness of the service. Chad also shared this experience: "In general, the people are not so friendly, no one says hello to me like here in the Ottawa stores people will greet you".

When I asked Aisha how she felt about her visit to Malaysia the first topic she raised was the idea that she 'suddenly' felt that people in Malaysia were less polite than people in Canada:

Aisha: Um . . . I guess I was excited before I went back. Um . . . I thought everything would be the same back home um . . . but [laughs] when I arrived in Malaysia uh . . . I don't know . . . uh, suddenly I feel that people in Malaysia is not as polite as people over here. They don't really smile at you. They . . . I don't know . . . suddenly I feel that people in Malaysia are not as polite as people over here. . . . You know I find the people in Malaysia, as I said you know, they are not as polite and sometimes, um, I don't know . . . they just . . . they don't really greet you that much. Like if you went to an office, they don't really say oh how are you or things like that, they just ask you what you want. Yeah, I find it different for me.

When she returned to her country of origin, Aisha found that people did not greet each other the way she was used to being greeted in Canada. This is interesting because when she first arrived in Canada she had been unsure of how she should respond to "Hey,

how's it going?". Aisha said that in Malaysia she did not ask people how they were, and neither did other people ask how she was. They just carried on with their conversation. But after having lived in Canada and taking on certain communication habits of this host country, linking meaning to those habits and coming to identify with those habits, she found it strange that people in Malaysia, people who were supposed to have commonalities with her, did not communicate as she did. Now, it was 'different' for her. She considered them impolite and hence deviant from what she now considered the norm of greeting.

Sharon was also indignant about this issue of impoliteness. She sounded disgusted and became excited when she told me about this experience:

Sharon: A dress was on sale and there was one dress that had something on it. I told the sales girl about it and she was so rude! She said that if I want it take it; if not just leave it there. I mean, what sort of service is that!

Here, Sharon strongly felt that the way she was treated was unjust and uncalled for. She was expecting the same level of service as she got when she was in Canada. Having internalised the norms of Canadian service, and because the sales girl did not act as Sharon expected, Sharon reacted with indignation and considered the sales girl's actions, instead of her own communication assumptions, to be unacceptable.

Some respondents were reprimanded by others in their country of origin for their cultural deviance. Amy represents a strong example of this type of event.

Amy: I just got home, that time was Christmas, my aunt had a Christmas party and I saw my uncle and I said hi and I didn't call his

name and my brother scolded me because I didn't call³ my uncle. He thought I was disrespecting him, but I wasn't conscious yet about all these customs. Here [Canada] we don't have relatives, we only have friends. We don't have a chance to approach a senior . . . only when you want to approach your prof. Then you go back to your roots of respect. Respect is a manner, everyone should have that. It's just ordinary, but there are a lot of things I don't get used to when I go home [Malaysia].

When Amy was adapting to and living in Canada she became so used to interacting with just her peers and to addressing them casually. When she went back to Malaysia she was still in the habit of communicating the 'Canadian way'. She had not yet re-adjusted to the norm of addressing people in Malaysia, and perhaps it never occurred to her that this was something that she had to re-adjust to until her brother reprimanded her for her deviant behaviour.⁴

"What Did You Say?"

When the respondents returned to their country of origin people teased them about their communication habits – their accent and the way they greeted people. The difference in accent and usage of cultural idioms, most apparent in the act of greeting, are in a sense deviant too, and family and friends are always sure to remind the returnee of their social errors. June was talking about how she found her relationship with her

³ Hierarchy and status are important in the Malaysian Chinese family. 'Call' here is used as an equivalent to 'pay respects' to an elder by addressing them according to their title. In Malaysia all elders are called 'Aunty' or 'Uncle' or 'Grand-Aunty' or 'Grand-Uncle' even if they are not relatives. If they are relatives they have different titles (in Chinese) depending on whether they are paternal or maternal relatives, whether they are older or younger than your parents, and on how much older they are than your parents.

⁴ Amy's brother, being older than she is, had the 'right' to scold her and according to Chinese-Malaysian customs, she was being impolite and disrespectful to her uncle. When I return to Malaysia it always feels strange at first calling someone 'Aunty' or 'Uncle' especially if they are not related to me. But this is the norm in Malaysia and I adjust to it easily by calling every elder I encounter by the generic 'Aunty' or 'Uncle'. However, when I come back to Canada I have to catch myself on this habit and shift back to calling elders by their first names.

brother had changed for the better after her overseas experience. She said that after learning how to communicate with her elders as peers in Canada, she was now able to talk freely with her brother even though he was the oldest in the family. But he teases June about her accent: "He picks on me though, because my accent is different. He teases me 'What, I'm sorry, I can't understand what you're saying'".

Like June, I was teased about my accent. My family and friends would sometimes imitate the way I enunciated certain words. They told me that I speak like a Canadian and they asked me whether I could still speak Malaysian English. Mika also found that her communication habits had changed and when she returned to Japan she felt embarrassed because she stood out in the way she spoke. She had also forgotten some Japanese expressions.

Mika: But I have forgotten a lot of Japanese terms since I came to Canada. When I went back to Japan, my friends told me that my Japanese was something strange. I was embarrassed, too.

When I returned to Malaysia I automatically greeted my cousin with "Hey, how's it going!", oblivious to the fact that I was no longer in Canada, and he did not let that one go. After that incident I was more wary about how I greeted people.

Stacy, who said that she had adapted very well to Canada, had this to say about her return experience:

Stacy: I went back to Malaysia six years after I have planted my footstep in Canada. . . . I had difficulty conversing in Malay to some of my friends. Every conversation was carried out in English or in Chinese (to my Chinese friends). My friends would tell me that I have changed over the years with my looks and accent. Somehow I felt threatened by my visit because I kinda grew up in Toronto and I have forgotten so much about Malaysia. . . . I felt alienated whenever I go out . . . I'm so foreign there now . . . gosh, I can't believe I forgot so much. People look at me like I don't belong there. I might go back

this coming summer . . . hope I don't get traumatised again.

Stacy may have felt 'threatened' and 'traumatised' because she had lived in Canada for so long and had not visited Malaysia for six years, and a lot happens in six years. While she was 'forgetting so much about Malaysia' she had been fortifying her Canada identity. When she brought this Canadian identity back to Malaysia she stood out among her friends. She could no longer be certain about self in her home context, a place where she had been raised, knew the 'rules' and had always been secure. Being the 'odd one out' she felt vulnerable, threatened and traumatised.

These changes in accents and usage of cultural idioms reflect the returnees' newly constructed identity. Yet, having these changes in their communication habits pointed out and being told that they were transgressing the normative rituals of their culture made the returnees feel self-conscious, threatened, and perhaps a little defensive. For example, Greg and Sharon criticized Malaysians for not being able to pronounce 'Toronto' or 'Ottawa'; and June reported being offended by the customs officer at the airport when she first went back to Malaysia.

June: People there so funny . . . because I haven't been speaking Malay for a long time, I stuttered. The customs officer was very sarcastic. "You can't speak Malay anymore?" I could speak Malay but it would take some time for me to get it back.

After hearing about June's experience I now make it a point to speak Malay to the customs officer whenever I return to Malaysia. I also find that I tend to put on a strong Canadian accent whenever I get into taxis that are driven by Chinese because I had the displeasure of being scolded by a Chinese taxi driver for being Chinese and not being able to speak Chinese. My excuse was I had been living overseas for many years. These

types of actions mediate my social awkwardness thereby allowing me to make a more acceptable presentation of self.

"Why Can't They Leave Me Alone?!"

In their host country, the respondents had to learn how to fend for themselves. In doing so they became more independent (as illustrated in the previous chapter). However, when they bring this new independent self back to their country of origin, conflicts arise.

While in Canada, Sharon developed an enjoyment for being on her own and doing things on her own. She said that when she returned to Malaysia she felt "encroached upon for every small thing. You feel they are impinging on you". She found her mother overbearing because her mother insisted on the two of them shopping together. To add to Sharon's frustration, her mother also planned her weekends for her: "I have to hang out with my cousins every weekend and I'm like, 'Why?!'". She also said that her mother told her to change her clothes because she did not approve of her daughter's too revealing 'spaghetti strapped' blouse.⁵ Sharon felt restrained because she had taken on the Canadian cultural habit of living on her own and planning her own day. Her sense of self as an independent adult was now threatened by her mother's perception that she needed to be taken care of and protected.

⁵ The respondents' experiences with parental authority can also be experienced by anyone who has returned after being away for some time, even if they were only away in a neighbouring city. This is because individuals constantly construct home and identity wherever they happen to be; and wherever they happen to be would always have its own sub-cultural pocket (it could be the university culture, the dorm culture, or even a city culture) and there will always be some measure of shock upon return. The respondents probably felt encroached upon by their parents because they were no longer used to having their independence challenged – there was no room for such challenges in their construction of their independent Canadian identity. Therefore, having their independent Canadian identity challenged and finding that this identity could (or had to) falter under such (parental) pressure very likely gave them a nasty shock.

Sean felt that his independence was 'encroached upon' because his mother told him how to behave: "My mother would say to me 'Sean, smile, your dad is here'. Like what the f**k is that?!". Amy also felt the 'power' her parents exerted over her when she returned:

Amy: Your father is like so powerful and if you want to say something you have to think twice before you say anything. If you want to bring a friend home you have to know about your friend's background so you can tell your parents about your friend. Here you can just invite a friend over to your apartment.

The practice of comparing two different cultures and their accompanying identities takes place. This comparison is something the respondents could not avoid doing. For example, Chrysta also made a comparison between her life in England and her life in Malaysia. She said that in England she had to explore and discover things for herself and she enjoyed this. In Malaysia she was more restricted.

Restriction was also an issue with Melissa. She felt more independent and mature in Ottawa away from her parents. When I asked Jasmine how she felt about being back in France she said that among other things, she missed her 'liberty':

Jasmine: I miss my friends from here [Ottawa], I miss my home, my liberty. There [France] I had my family on my back. They cared for me and I had to explain about where I'm going.

While in their host country the respondents lived as independent individuals. In their country of origin, they had to be part of a family unit. But being part of a family unit was less significant for adjustment than being part of a kinship hierarchy that impinged on their new and much cherished independent identities.

"He Said I Was Like A White Person"

Some respondents were told by natives that they had become 'Westernised', 'Canadianised', or 'White'. Their behaviour had changed to the extent that the people they left behind found them strange, not only because they were unfamiliar with 'Western' or Canadian culture, but also because this cultural behaviour was unfamiliar for that particular person they thought they once knew so well. The culture and the cultural identity that the respondents had internalised and formed created a culture shock experience for their family and friends. Some reacted to this mild form of culture shock by pointing out to the respondents that they had changed:

June: You know what my brother actually said? My brother, he was observing me. When we went to San Francisco, I walked around doing stuff. He doesn't see that often in Malaysia, women are like that [in Canada]. You know, very active. . . . We had to look around for stuff and information. He said I was like "ang mo lang".⁶ Then I went back home I noticed that people are more shy, especially women, they are more reserved. They slouch more, most of the time . . . soft-spoken and stuff like that.

By learning to be independent and self-sufficient June became more confident in herself and more assertive. She defined herself more as an individual and based her dominant identity on the role she came to identify as her own and not on the gender roles others expected her to play. The majority of the female respondents in this study noticed this change in self after they returned to their country of origin and found that they could no longer identify with the less assertive women there, as was the case with June.

⁶ 'Ang Mo Lang' is the Hokkien equivalent for White person. Hokkien is a Chinese dialect.

While some family and friends may have pointed out the changes they observed and make light of them by teasing, others totally ignored the pink elephant in the room.

As Daisy said, people expect you to be the same as before you left.

Daisy: It gets hard when you got all this exciting stuff you have to share but your friends and family will only listen to you that much and then they lose interest. . . . People expect you to be the same as before you left.

People lost interest and sometimes ignored the stories returnees described. Others overlooked the changes in self because they had not encountered the same experiences as the returnee. The returnee's experience is not as exciting for them because it is not part of their own daily reality or part of their own identity. Although they are at first curious about the returnee, they expect a certain amount of continuity in their social interaction patterns. Hence, they expect the returnee to conform and behave as he/she has been taught to behave from infancy. This expectation is difficult and sometimes frustrating for the returnee who has now been exposed to, and influenced by, another culture. For example, Amy found frustration in her return experience because her family did not recognise her as an independent and assertive individual and expected her communication habits to automatically revert back to what they were prior to her initial departure from Malaysia.

Amy: My family know I've been overseas, but they treat you like before you left for Canada. When you go overseas you learn new things. . . . First week [back in Malaysia] was exciting because you do the things you really want to do...things we can't really do here. You want to know more. The second week comes to be . . . you try to adjust to the mood, the people there . . . 'cos also I don't have anything to do, a job or anything, I only observe what other people do. Then I feel like I'm impatient with what other people do, and they slow me down. I observe and question "Why?". I still feel like they treat me like before. One thing I realize is that they cannot accept what I have

brought back. That I changed, they cannot accept it. Even though they do things they don't like...they still tell me I shouldn't do that. But you change, but you insist on doing it, but they will start to reject what you do. I also realize that my brother also understand my situation when I go back. He said to me that fundamentally, you are back home now. If you want to express something, respect them, then only they will listen to you.

Amy found that she had to conform to the cultural rules of her country of origin because if she did not do so she would encounter or create more conflict than she desired. "Respect them" was likely a euphemism for "do things their way". It was difficult for her to do this because it meant that she had to carry on as if she never had her overseas experience; she had to deny her Canada identity and this was frustrating for her. June also had this experience and found that she had to practice self-censorship:

June: The first time I went home after three years in Canada I asked so many "whys". Why like this, why like that . . . The context . . . The way people are with adults. Here [Canada] we call adults by name and we can talk to them like friends. But at home [Malaysia], even though we chat with the adults, there are certain things we can't talk about, we have to be more conservative, just listening without expressing our opinion.

Later on, in an informal conversation with June, I asked how her recent trip to Malaysia was. She replied that it was good to see family and friends again; but there were still some things that bothered her just as before: "You know how it is, you just keep quiet. You don't want to rock the boat".

"I Feel Like I Lost Myself"

Not having one's individuality or identity recognised and having to self-censor communication habits that have become part of a self-concept can sometimes have harmful effects on one's sense of self. It can lead to accepting and enacting a former self

that may not be embraced. This dialogue between Amy, June and I shows how destructive regression to a former self can be:

Amy: I'm afraid when you go back to Malaysia you go back to the original you, you don't do anything.

Barbara: The thing is return culture shock sometimes happens for the first two days and that's it or it can happen for the whole holiday. For me, when I went back home at first I was all gung-ho, and confident, I was different, then slowly I slipped back, you know, and changed back into my Malaysian submissive self. I get so mad with myself. Like I'm a weak person. When I came back here [Ottawa], I was lost because I was still the quiet person and then I had to gain back my assertive person.

June: Yeah, me too.

Amy: Me too.

June: The first few days I was confident too then after awhile it dissipated and I hate myself so much for that, what the hell is wrong with me? I feel like I lost myself. I think it's the rhythm. Here in Canada we have our own rhythm and it is our self-confidence.

That's what dictates what we are supposed to do . . . because here is more individualistic right? But back home it is more collective, you can't do things any way you want. You think you want to do it and it's you only, but the society has a louder voice over you. So you lost your rhythm and you lost yourself.

While "losing themselves" was something the respondents found distressing, this process was inevitable as long as they remained in their culture of origin. Just as they had to adapt to the social expectations of their host country, whether of their own volition or not, they had to re-adapt to the social expectations of their country of origin. As June said above, "society has a louder voice over you". Resurrecting a former self was better than having no social recognition, that is, no self at all.

"I Didn't Expect It To Be So Difficult"

While the respondents were going through their culture shock experience in their host country they idealised their country of origin. By doing this they set themselves up

for disaster. When they returned to their country of origin and found that so much had changed and how unpleasant it was, they experienced the shock of discovering that their country of origin and their 'glorious return'⁷ were not all that they had imagined or expected it to be. So, to compensate for the lack of fulfilment or comfort in their return experience they started idealising their host country and the experiences they had there. They also started longing to return to their host country, mainly because they had idealised their lives there, and also because their host country carried so much symbolic meaning about their much yearned for identity – they wanted to hold on to that identity they had developed for themselves there, an identity that they had developed based on their own merits and life experience. To deny those experiences was to deny self.

Return experiences were particularly harsh for the respondents who had returned to their country of origin permanently. In an informal conversation during one of my visits to Malaysia, Melissa who had already graduated and returned to Malaysia for permanent residence, asked me how I felt about being back in Malaysia. I told her that I was enjoying myself and that I liked it in Malaysia and was even thinking of returning for permanent residence after graduating from my undergraduate programme. She told me that I felt this way because I was able to go back to Canada and I did not know what it was like to have to return to Malaysia and live there permanently. She said that if I were to return to Malaysia for permanent residence I would hate it too. At the time of this conversation Melissa had been back in Malaysia for just a few months. However, after a

⁷ I say 'glorious return' here because there is a certain status attached to those who venture abroad to pursue their studies. Also, the returnees would feel different, and therefore special, because they had experienced something others who never left 'home' did not.

year she said that she had come to terms with living in Malaysia. She enrolled in a medical college and is now studying medicine in Ireland.⁸

Other permanent returnees also had difficulty re-adjusting to life in their country of origin. At the time of my second interview with Greg he had been living in Malaysia for almost two years after having graduated from university. When I asked him about his permanent return experience he responded:

Greg: I've come to accept things as they are now though. Services were not as efficient and professional as they were in Canada so gradually a lot of frustration began to set in, especially during the job search period. But right now, it's all good (but that's just right now, this very second). Also, I don't know if it was the whole university experience or being in Canada (probably a nice gel of both), but I changed a lot and saw things in a different light.

Sean, who had recently come back to Ottawa for a visit, sent me an email prior to his arrival saying that he could not wait to return to Ottawa and it was like 'balik kampung'⁹ for him. He still viewed Canada as a place where he belonged.

Aisha, a permanent returnee when I had my second interview with her, told me that she found it difficult to re-adjust to Malaysia at first:

Aisha: Um, it was very hard for me [laughs]. It was very hard because you know somehow that you have no uh . . . other choice because you're not going back to Canada.

At that time Aisha had been living in Malaysia for almost two years after having graduated from university and she was working in a local firm. She expressed

⁸ Perhaps she never really came to terms with living in Malaysia and she only thought she did. Perhaps she convinced herself that she had come to terms with living in Malaysia because at the back of her mind she knew that she would be leaving it again to pursue her studies in medicine. Or perhaps as time passed, she had encountered experiences and identity changes that she could absorb as part of self that made her feel more comfortable with her 'return home' identity.

⁹ 'Balik kampung' is Malay for, literally, 'return to the village'. Implied: return to the place of origin, refuge, solace, sanctuary, a place to 'get away from it all'.

that she still missed Canada to a certain extent. She missed the efficiency of the transportation system in Ottawa, the recreational paths in the city, and her Canadian friends. When I asked her whether she thought of what her life would be like in Malaysia before she returned to Malaysia, she responded:

Aisha: I was thinking that it would be uh difficult . . . because I enjoy Canada too much. I enjoy the independence. I enjoy umm the convenience of going wherever I want to go. Every . . . I find that . . . I'm so used to the places there [Canada] like the shops, how to get things, where to get things. Here [Malaysia] I find that it is very hard for me to . . . "Oh, where can I get this" you know? I have to ask around. But um it's the same when I first arrived in Canada anyway. But just different . . .

Barbara: Did you prepare yourself for your return?

Aisha: Um . . . I don't think I did. That question, that previous question that you asked me . . . Difficult uh I did think it could be difficult for me to get around, but then somehow I thought it would be much easier because it's my country, but then when I reached here [Malaysia], I realized that it's difficult because things change.

Aisha did not expect that it would so difficult for her to re-adjust to Malaysia because Malaysia was her country. But she attributes this difficulty to the fact that things had changed rather than it was she who had changed. Greg also stated that a lot of things had changed and that he now had a different perspective on life. The new perspective that came from having a different experience in another country and developing a different sense of self than they had when they left their country of origin may leave returnees feeling as if they are stuck in a liminal stage (Turner, 1969). For example, Chrysta said that it took her about two years to come to terms with her return to Malaysia. But eventually, as Greg alludes, they ease back into their life in their country of origin though with a sense of self as 'different' from the rest.

"You Don't Know Where You Belong"

The 'vacationers' also missed their host country, but since vacationers knew they were going back to their host country they may not have experienced return culture shock as intensely as permanent returnees. Still, going back and forth between two countries and having to culturally adjust and re-adjust has its repercussions. To quote:

June: Even though I went home [Malaysia], I felt more confident, I felt good. But here [Canada], I still don't click in the society...I'm in between. It's very difficult. Now you can't really fit in your own culture and you can't really fit in in Canadian culture.

Jasmine: . . . being away, put me at a distance from friends [in France]. You have a different life. They were not, or didn't seem happy to see me. I didn't see them regularly because we couldn't go back to the rhythm as before. I'm not part of them any more. Good friends are still there but I did not see them everyday. I missed Ottawa. I can't be happy. You belong to both Canada and France so you don't know where you belong.

Daisy: . . . up and go, up and go, up and go, a bit of me gets left behind somewhere.

Mika: Because I have lived in Japan so long, I am really comfortable in Japan. I feel real home in Japan. But on the other hand, I have also lived here [Canada] for four years, and I have missed [out on] so many things from Japan, too. For example, political news, fashions, popular things, and etc. Although I go home, I still feel like I am kind of a foreigner to them. Because I don't have so many common things to my friends as I used to do, I don't know what to talk about with them. If I stay much longer in Japan, I will get used to it, but I stay only two months, and come back to Canada. By the time I get used to new Japanese things, I have to leave my country. So, I found it very difficult to keep the real friendship with my friends. That was the reason why my Japanese boyfriend and I broke up with.

These 'vacationers' found that they could no longer identify with their friends in their country of origin because of their lengthy separation. At the same time, they could not identify with people in their host country because they were not native to that country.

They seemed to be stuck in a liminal stage. Furthermore, since they kept venturing from country to country, culture to culture they did not have the opportunity to ease back in one culture and learn to re-identify with their friends and other natives as the permanent returnees eventually did. Being constantly in transition can certainly play havoc with one's sense of social belonging and, hence, one's perception of self.

The 'Suddenness' Of Return Culture Shock

If sojourners were returning to their country of origin, why would they experience return culture shock? The weather bothered them – it was too hot, too humid. They bemoaned the political injustice in their country of origin; that the cleanliness of the city and the social skills and hygiene of the people were not up to par; the food was too oily; the toilets were too wet and smelly; the traffic was horrendous, and people drove on the other side of the road and car;¹⁰ the public transportation system was too unreliable; and the list goes on. This list of things that disconcerted the returnees had not changed while they were away. It was hot and humid in Malaysia before they left for their host country and it is still hot and humid; people in France still drive the way they drive, and they drive on the left side of the street. Some respondents realised this fact and said so in the interview. As Chrysta and June pointed out:

Chrysta: Aiya, so many things lah¹¹ . . . You know good old Malaysia. Of course nothing has changed, but it's all a matter of settling back into the flow of things here and probably a lot of accepting of the way things work.

¹⁰ In Malaysia and France people drive on the left side of the street and the cars are right-hand drives (the steering wheel and console are on the right side of the car).

¹¹ "Aiya" is an interjection used in Malaysia and is equivalent to the English exclamation "Oh". "Lah" is a Malaysian expression equivalent (more or less) to the Canadian "Eh".

June: I found that my first two trips [back to Malaysia] I was arrogant. I was not tolerant enough. I had difficult situations with my parents and society. When you go to restaurants or supermarkets or banks, the teller doesn't really pay attention to you. I found that annoying, disrespectful, but then this is the way it goes. It has been like that before I left and it is still like that.

So if the returnees realised that most of social life and surroundings in their country of origin never really changed, then why did they 'suddenly' feel as if things had changed?

To investigate this question, it is important to examine how the respondents adapted to their host country. I address this process in the next chapter.

Chapter Five: Culture Shock

Like all habits, communication habits become part of the self and can change according to different situations, though some habits are less malleable than others. Language is an example of a habit that is difficult to adjust situationally. This particular habit, language, affects how we communicate as well as with whom we communicate. In cross-cultural communication even the same language can seem different because of particular idioms or slang used that are distinctive to that culture. In such cases, even those who consider that particular language their primary language can become bewildered. In this chapter I look at how the clash of cross-cultural communication habits such as language, its vocalisation (accent) and its cultural idioms became the underlying cause for culture shock.

Communication Habits: Language, Accent, and Cultural Idioms

Language is a key system of symbolic abstract objects that acts as a medium through which individuals identify with each other. It not only fosters communication between individuals within a group, it also bonds individuals in the group together to form a unified generalized other. In speaking a language, we "take on a world, a culture" (Fanon, 1982: 38).

When the respondents arrived in their host country they were able to communicate in their host country's lingua franca with different levels of proficiency. But, as they were to find out, even being proficient at the language was not enough to prevent mistakes in communication. It was not just the spoken language that tripped

them up; it was also the accent and inflections as well as the different idioms specific to their host culture that gave their communication experience a twist.

The communication habits of the natives of their host culture were something the respondents were not able to anticipate and they were therefore unsure whether the way they communicated was correct or acceptable. Some respondents, especially those who were not as proficient in the dominant language of their host country, were uncertain of how to express themselves and how to present themselves. This insecurity was heightened by the fact that English was not the first language of most of the respondents.

The respondents also found speaking that one dominant language all the time in their host country frustrating. They were as yet unfamiliar with the subtleties of communicating in that language. They were perhaps aware that the different usage of inflections and accents or idioms conveyed different meanings, but were yet unable to pinpoint exactly how these were used and what exactly they meant. They could not, as June put it, comfortably 'pick on people' nor, as Jasmine said, 'feel what people think'. They were unsure of the limits of behaviour and they were unsure of how openly they could present themselves to natives. They were, in other words, left out of the loop.

In addition, the differences in style of that dominant language and the cultural usage of idioms suppressed the expression of their selves and their cultural and individual values (Fitzgerald, 1996: 61). Aisha, for example, suppressed her jokey self from English speakers because she was not confident enough with English to make jokes. Other respondents also felt repressed because they had to speak their host country's dominant language all the time. June missed speaking Malaysian English, Jasmine missed speaking French, and Mika missed speaking Japanese. Yet, they had no choice

but to speak the language of their host country and learn and use its cultural idioms in order to ease communication with natives and make their lives in their host society functionally easier.

Being strangers in their host culture meant that they could more easily note the communication habits distinct to natives because these communication habits had not been internalised by them to the point of being natural. Also, as strangers they had a basis for comparison now that they had experienced more than one culture. Through their skill of culture or *habitus* they could determine which aspects of their own communication habits they could change so that these habits either mirrored those of the natives or came as close to mirroring them as possible. Through frequent interaction with natives and through the process of self-indication, the respondents were able to interpret the communication habits of the natives and note the tacit social demand required of them to conform to certain habits (e.g. learning how to respond to 'Hey, how's it going?'). With 'proper' communication skills the respondents were able to take on the typified roles they were furnished with (e.g. students) and they were better able to identify with other members of their host society.

Culture Shock: Adaptation Methods

Other than learning and using the language and idioms of their host country, the respondents adapted to their host society by employing tactics such as accent mimicking and forming social in-groups. These adaptation methods of speaking the language, mimicking the accent and forming groups, were not always enacted by their own volition, nor were they always consciously acted on. Our actions or roles, as Berger and

Luckmann (1984) suggest, are institutionally prescribed through dividing practices which place us in typified schemes. As members of a society we are objectified by others and the schemes or roles in which we are placed become bases for the construction of our reality and thus, our cultural identity (Bishop, 1994: 35; Berger & Luckmann, 1984: 149-151).

Accent Mimicking

The accent and inflections used in a given culture are important. Knowing the language and being fluent in it is not enough for someone to be accepted as part of that culture. For example, Jasmine noted that people's accents indicated their insider/outsider status; Sam found that his accent accentuated his outsider status, his foreignness; and June learned to speak like the natives in order to 'gain her status'.

Accent mimicking is sometimes a necessity: it helps one make oneself more easily understood. It also shows natives that 'strangers' are willing to be like them, to identify with them. By identifying with the native habitués of their host culture the respondents see themselves 'reflected' in the native habitués of their host culture. The respondents see themselves as part of that culture instead of being just marginally appended to it. Yet, they also realised that they are not fully part of that culture. They are settled in that culture, and they develop an identity compatible with this culture. This identity however, is not the same as the native's identity. This is an identity that is functional and it is only a 'settled stranger' identity.¹ By taking on this new identity, they

¹ These processes, of course, do not happen on a conscious level, yet they do happen and the sojourners then become more settled in their host country. It would be interesting to investigate how, and at what point, if at all, migrants start identifying themselves as native habitués of their new culture. This, however, is beyond the scope of this study.

may not be fully embraced by natives, but neither are they (overtly) rejected.

The Social Construction of Home

In this essay I differentiate between *home* and *the home*, that is, home and house, or home and *domus* (Wise, 2000: 300). Home is a socially constructed notion; it is an idea constructed and marked by symbolic objects. Domus is one physical object of many symbolic objects that mark or make up a socially constructed home.

Anselm Strauss explains that by identifying objects we are able to better organize our actions. We act in reference to the objects we identify (Strauss, 1969: 45). We identify those symbolic objects by giving them meaning. With meaning comes familiarity and comfort. So, the concept of 'home' can be realised in any symbolic object we identify. As Wise articulates, home can be "in a whistle, in the presence of a significant other, in objects" (2000: 299). Home can also be "the presence, habits, and effects of spouses, children, parents and companions. One can be at home simply in the presence of a significant other. [Home] is the creation of a space of comfort (a never-ending process)" (Wise, 2000: 299-300).

For many of the respondents, their host country became their 'second home'. They found home in their newly constructed identities, and in their primary social group. Home, for them, also consisted of their routines, as well as their sense of self-awareness. The most obvious markers of home, however, were the physical objects the respondents became attached to. Therefore, I will first address home in physical objects.

Furnishing With Physical Objects

The most obvious markers of home were the domus and the geographical locations the respondents frequented. The respondents, as international students either stayed in the university residence, or they rented rooms or apartments off-campus. Since they had to attend classes on a regular basis, their classroom space also became a home territory marker. Other physical objects that they owned and used also became home markers. They realized how important these objects were to them when they returned to their country of origin in the tradition of the axiom "absence makes the heart grow fonder".²

Barbara: What were your experiences when you came back to Ottawa after visiting France? How did you feel about being back in Ottawa?

Jasmine: Everything is the same as before I left. I feel good about being back in my apartment.

Barbara: How did you feel about having to come back to Ottawa to continue your studies?

Mika: I also missed Ottawa because Ottawa is my second home right now. I missed the lab, and my apartment, and my computer, too. So, I was eager to come back to Ottawa.

Greg: I miss my room you know? So nice, I had all my CDs and my boom box, I had my own phone line, my own workspace and everything exactly where I want them.

These physical objects not only provided the respondents with convenience and familiarity, they also became markers of who they were. In naming these markers (e.g. *my apartment*, *my CDs*, etc.) and giving them meaning (e.g. 'mine'; 'exactly as I left it')

² I must say that there is some truth to this axiom. When people are removed from a situation or place in which they had succeeded in building home they start idealizing that home as in Pedersen's (1995) Reintegration Stage and Storti's (1997) Reverse Culture Shock stage. However, as the distance is prolonged, depending on the individual and on the strength of her or his ties to that particular home, the 'fondness' to that home developed initially may dissipate and be directed towards another construction of home.

the respondents were able to use these objects as markers of their identity and role in their host culture. Frequenting 'their' classrooms or just being on 'their' university campus served as an indication and enforcement of their role as students. Naming and claiming 'ownership' of these objects also gave them a sense of power and control over their immediate 'reality' thereby adding to their definition of self as independent beings.

The Primary Social Group

Lyn Lofland explains in her work on strangers in urban settings that one way to get around impersonality in large groups is to "minimize encounters with the personally-unknown" and to maximize encounters with the "personally known". One way to achieve this is to create home territories (Lofland, 1973: 119).

Home territories are not necessarily linked to place. It can be a home territory-in-motion, depending on the mobility of the home markers. As Lofland again points out, in order to adapt to their semi-hostile, impersonal environment urbanites ingeniously 'travel in packs' so that they can privatise public spaces as they go along (1973: 137). The 'travelling pack' is the home in motion for the members of the pack.

When the respondents first arrived in their host country they did not know anyone there. As they met more people in their host country, they made more friends and formed their own 'travelling pack'. But the interesting thing here is that these friendships were with people who were also strangers like them, "adrift in a world of organized others" (Sarup, 1994: 102). As Chrysta reported, natives were not very receptive towards foreigners.

The groups the respondents formed had strong ties in that they had their own cultural blend. For some groups, it was a similarity in language. For others, it was having a different status from the natives. Each group would have their own favourite activities such as playing mah-jong or basketball, going out for movies, having potluck dinners, or going out drinking. Within their own small community they were well-insulated strangers in a world of strangers that was foreign but, most important, did not fully accept them.

As long as they belonged to a group they could take comfort in reciprocal protection and self-confirmation. They could protect their sense of self within the group because the group was a home territory-in-motion that moved from locale to locale. They did not need to concern themselves too much with non-members because the group provided all the necessary support they needed (Lofland, 1973: 138). Wherever they went, the group's mobility transformed different locales into 'home territories'. Being in a public place with a group allowed members to feel at ease in that space. That space was transformed into 'home'. Each member of the group constituted a symbolic object or marker which the others used to enclose themselves within an environment of social familiarity and a sense of personal acceptance.

Routines and Habits

When Greg first arrived in Canada, he considered Canada "a place for me to further my studies". His perception of Canada changed as he became more familiar with his new environment. He said that he had considered Canada home while he was living here and now that he has returned to Malaysia permanently, he still thinks of Canada as

his second home. He said that the thing he missed most about Canada was his routine. In the morning he would get ready to go to campus for classes, then after classes he would return back to his room and just "kick back" with his CD collection. On weekends, he would meet up with his primary social group for a few games of pool or a fun night out. Greg's daily routine and his regular routine of meeting with his primary group of friends were, for him, safe and comforting because he knew what to expect; he could anticipate what came next. For him, those basic routines were home.

Routine does not consist merely of regular actions such as waking up, having breakfast and then jumping into the shower. Routine also consists of regular interaction within a social and physical environment. The respondents had different classes to attend, they walked along particular routes on campus at particular times of the day at particular days of the week to get from class to class. In the course of their regular comings and goings, they naturally encountered other students who did the same thing, moving along the hallways to get to their own classes. These students, strange at first, became familiar as the weeks went by. They became a part of the setting, a part of the route from point A to point B. They became markers of familiarity for the respondents and eventually, comfortable home territories-in-motion.

Having established a routine, the public space of the university campus was, for the respondents, transformed into a semi-private space because they now knew that on the way to Geography class they would encounter students X and Y, or in Geography class they would encounter person Z sitting in the front of the class whom they did not know personally but recognized and exchanged a smile or nod with sometimes.

The respondents also came to learn the different routes around their environment (e.g. the campus, the city). They discovered the shortest and most convenient routes for their routines and the more they frequented that particular route the more comfortable they became with their environment, and they started taking in more details about that particular route. As a matter of course, as they became more comfortable with that route, they began to take their environment for granted until something in that environment was changed (e.g. the classroom tables are rearranged, lockers along the hallway were removed, etc.) then, depending on how much the environment had been changed, the respondents had to reconfigure their concept of the route and that routine. Although Greg had likely created a new routine for himself in Malaysia, his memory of his university routine in Canada provides him with a sense of comfort leading him to consider Canada as a second 'home'.

Self-Awareness

The culture shock that the respondents experienced in their host country led to a sense of self-awareness and the development of a new sense of self and the creation of new identities. Culture shock has too often been misconstrued as an entirely negative experience. Granted, the initial experience of culture shock dislodges sojourners from their comfort zone. This process will, at first, have a largely adverse impact on sojourners. Thus, when they reach the Disintegration Stage described by Pedersen (1995) they may become depressed and they may feel vulnerable; their self-confidence may reach an all time low. However, following Pedersen's model of the five stages of culture shock, sojourners eventually move on to the Reintegration Stage. At this stage, their

depression and self-blame is slowly replaced by anger and hostility aimed toward their host culture. This is the stage where sojourners begin to realize that the frustrations and anxiety they experienced in their host culture are not entirely their fault. This stage stimulates a new awareness of self. At the same time, the sojourners start channelling their anger and hostility toward their host culture and begin to idealise their home culture by making comparisons between the two cultures (which will have serious consequences as I will explain in the next chapter).

As sojourners continue interacting within their host culture they start forming routines. They start finding markers of familiarity and of home. They become less hostile toward their host culture and start becoming more open and accepting of their host culture. They become more culturally skilful and they are able to start reading their host culture as a map for behaviour. They see themselves as insiders or experts in dealing with some situations in their host culture. At the same time, they are aware that they are still outsiders or foreigners. This process emerged for the respondents in this study. Although they became comfortable in their host culture, they remained in their primary social group of co-foreigners. This newly found degree of comfort did, however, make many of the respondents feel more independent and more assertive.

Aisha: When I came here I discovered a lot of things. I discovered how to use this and that and I've become more independent.

Chad: I cook for myself. I'm more independent here.

Barbara: Is that a good thing?

Chad: Yes, that is a good thing.

Barbara: What did you like about living in the U.K.?

Chrysta: Being a student away from home and finding things out for yourself.

Barbara: What did you like about living in Canada?

Melissa: I felt more independent and more mature, able to handle lots of stuffs by myself

Knowing where to get certain things and knowing that they are able to survive on their own away from their parents enabled the respondents to feel more self-assured. They became more proactive and more skilful at remodelling and transforming their identity situationally to fit the social expectations of their new cultural environment. They developed a sense of pride in themselves because they could be self-sufficient without their parents. They also became more aware of who they were as individuals and how much of self was due to cultural conditioning. As Jasmine observed:

Jasmine: Here [Ottawa], I learn about myself more. When immersed in another culture you learn a lot about yourself and others. It is kinda challenging but now I want to travel more. My perception about my country changed. I can see the good part and the bad part.

Jasmine was able to learn more about herself after she saw herself reflected in the eyes of others who enacted a different cultural context. Once she got to know her host culture a little better and had a basis for comparison, she was able to identify the strengths and weaknesses of her own culture. As Hall says:

The reason man does not experience his true cultural self is that until he experiences another self as valid, he has little basis for validating his own self. A way to experience another group is to understand and accept the way their minds work. . . . A by-product of such acceptance is a glimpse of the strengths and weaknesses of one's own system (1967: 187).

The experience of living in another culture led Jasmine and the other respondents to question both current and past perceptions of self. When placed in situations that are problematic, that is, in situations in which they are not familiar, individuals start evaluating themselves to see how and where they fit into the situation. Not only do they

have to identify others in that situation, they also have to concurrently identify who they are in that situation (Strauss, 1969: 47). By being able to identify themselves in different situations individuals are able to behave situationally. They become self-aware. Having gained a new sense of self-awareness, Jasmine and the other respondents developed situational identities that were more adaptive to the different cultural and social environments experienced within their host country.

By constructing home with physical objects, forming strong social ties with co-foreigners, establishing routines, and developing a new self-awareness, the respondents were able to identify with their host culture and its demands. They were able to take on the perspective of the generalized other that composed their new social and physical environment.³ They became part of that cultural setting. Eventually, they formed attachments to that place, created a role/identity within that place and came to view that place as a 'second home'.

In sum, the respondents became more open to new forms of reality (Fitzgerald, 1996: 187). Thus, the experience of culture shock is actually a prelude to the development of adaptive behaviour, the creation of adaptive selves which is the crux of cross-cultural experiences. Self-awareness then, a result of the "stress-adaptation-growth" (Fitzgerald, 1996: 187) process, became an abstract marker of home for the respondents. Being self-aware enabled the respondents to successfully create those cognitions that could inform their behaviour in different situations – both within, and outside of, their 'host' and 'home' countries.

³ Different environments would require different behaviour.

Place Attachment

Environmental psychologists Setha Low and Irwin Altman identify *place* as "space that has been given meaning through personal, group, or cultural processes", and *place attachment* as "the bonding of people to places" (as cited in Milligan, 1998: 6; emphasis in original). Since culture is meaning-making, and meaning emerges from and is strengthened by habits, cultures are in a sense ways of territorializing (Wise, 2000: 300). As explained above, the respondents territorialized their space several ways, and they familiarized themselves and made themselves comfortable in that space. Through their interaction with that space and the people within that space, they gave that space meaning. They made it a place – a place where certain things happen, or are expected to happen.

In using different adaptation methods, the respondents eventually constructed home. Depending on their experience with that particular environment, they internalised their routines and formed a strong place attachment or place detachment to their social and physical environment. Even if an experience was negative, it will be marked in the respondents' memory and affect their sense of self because it is a habit that the respondents played out every week for at least three months.⁴ Often, it is the negative experiences that make the strongest imprint on our memories, especially if they required us to change or bend our habits and come to a new level of self-awareness.⁵ In creating home the respondents formed attachment to place and in forming an attachment to place,

⁴ A term being four months, but that includes examination periods during the fourth month.

⁵ For example, Greg was taking a course he really enjoyed. His only grievance was that he disliked the course instructor because he felt that the instructor was condescending. Yet his experience with that course and with that instructor made a strong impression on him. Years after that experience he was still able to recall with pride his 'survival skills' in that course.

they also created and reinforced home, and thus their sense of self as functional beings within a 'strange' land.

The Social Construction of Identity

Gillian Rose explains identity as "how we make sense of ourselves" (1995: 88). Scholars from different disciplines have argued that how we make sense of ourselves is linked to the meaning given to a particular place where upon the place becomes a central definitive of identity (Rose, 1995: 88). Identity is connected to a particular place in the feeling of belonging to that place, in the meaning given to that place. This place is "a place in which you feel comfortable, or at home, because part of how you define yourself is symbolized by certain qualities of that place" (Rose, 1995: 89).

In adapting to and internalising the communication habits of their host culture, sojourners often push into the background some of their communication habits from their primary culture. Their overseas experience becomes one heavily involved in locational socialization, that is, the process by which one "continually learns about the meaning of different locations, about what is expected to go on where and who is expected to be doing it" (Lofland, 1973: 69). The key mechanism through which this process takes place is communication. Sojourners fit in into their host culture by interacting with natives. Adopting communication habits of natives through social interaction with them makes sojourners feel less strange and less threatened. But being socialised in one culture location and internalising its values and norms can strongly affect sojourners' sense of identity. To what place do they belong and how do they make sense of self within this new host country?

As part of the adaptation process sojourners learn the communication habits of their host culture. They construct a new overseas identity to accommodate this new set of communication habits by skilfully using symbolic objects marked with meaning. These symbolic objects are then used to create an overseas home. As such, they reinforce the sojourner's new overseas identity. The more the respondents interact in their host country, the more their overseas identity starts becoming their dominant identity. Their former identity from their country of origin gets pushed further into the background. The further back their former identity is pushed, the more successful they become at adapting to their host culture.

But being successful in adapting to their host country may mean being more susceptible to return culture shock upon re-entry into their primary culture. The respondents can attest to this as illustrated in Chapter Four. They found that they were no longer as culturally adept as they expected to be in their country of origin. Their communication habits no longer matched those in their country of origin. Their perception of their socio-cultural surroundings and their self-concept no longer seemed compatible with their country of origin. The continuity they were expecting when they returned to their country of origin seemed 'suddenly' disrupted and they felt disoriented, flustered, and irritated as if their 'rhythm of life' was broken. Aisha said that she did not expect her return experience to be that difficult because she was returning to her own country; yet it was difficult. In the next chapter I attempt to explain what led to return culture shock and why it is the respondents felt as if their (once perceived) home 'suddenly' crumbled down before their eyes.

Chapter Six: Return Culture Shock

When sojourners venture to other countries they do so as strangers. They expect that they will be joining a culture group with which they have few or no familiar ties. This is a culture group they have not and may never call their own. They know that the ways of this culture group will be unfamiliar to them and that in order to adapt to that group they will encounter many hurdles and they might have to learn new communication and interaction patterns.

Seasoned sojourners will come to expect some level of culture shock in their host culture. As Schutz pointed out, in a different culture, their 'flow of habit' will be interrupted and this will result in the consciousness of social practice (1974: 24). Sojourners will feel as if they stand out, and so they will, until they find a way of fitting into the grooves of that culture.

Often, through the skills of culture or *habitus*, sojourners pick up cues from natives on proper or expected behaviour. Most of the respondents in this study were successful in this regard. They braved the challenges of their host culture and survived. They adapted to their new world. But, the attitude of the stranger venturing into different cultural worlds differs from that of the returnee (Schutz, 1971: 106). This chapter explores that difference.

The Expectations of the Returnee

When sojourners return to their country of origin, they expect to return as 'homecomers'. They expect to return to a cosy place of refuge. They expect to return

home. In Schutz's words, "[t]he homecomer . . . expects to return to an environment of which he always had and – so he thinks – still has intimate knowledge and which he has just to take for granted in order to find his bearings within it" (1971: 106-107).

Sojourners expect continuity and they assume they can pick up where they left off. Their expectations and assumptions about their return and life at 'home' however, prove wrong. As illustrated in Chapter Four, when sojourners return to their country of origin, often their expectations are not met and their assumptions about return are challenged. They become subject to return culture shock.

Naturally, some experiences were shocking because they were new to the respondents; after all, they had all been away from their country of origin for at least eight months. New physical structures had been built, new family members were born, and so on. But, as Chrysta and June pointed out, there were some aspects of life in their country of origin which had not changed. So why did the respondents 'suddenly' feel bothered by those aspects?

Overseas Communication Habits

The communication patterns learned in the host country were so practiced that they became habits for the respondents. When they returned to their country of origin, they brought back with them these 'new' communication habits. For example, they spoke with an accent and were teased about it; they greeted people with 'Hey, how's it going?' and were also teased about it; they forgot to call their relatives by their title and were scolded for it; they lost their skill in their country of origin's primary language and were scorned for it. Once again, they experience a process by which their 'flow of habit' was

interrupted. Thus, they became conscious of their behaviour and that of the natives of their country of origin.

The way the respondents communicated seemed foreign to their relatives and friends in their country of origin; and the way their relatives and friends communicated seemed foreign and even 'deviant' to them. All of these events broke the sense of continuity in self that the respondents had expected upon their return.

The Social Construction of the Overseas Home

In order to adapt to their host country, the respondents had constructed a home which was more compatible with their host culture. They had made certain compromises (e.g. speaking more English in Canada) and had taken on some attributes of the culture in which they were immersed while preserving older cultural habits (e.g. interaction with homo-lingual friends) (Wise, 2000: 306). This home construction was so subtly formed that the respondents were not aware that any construction had taken place. They only noticed that in time they became more comfortable in their host country. However, most of them never consciously considered their host country home. They only considered it a place to further their studies or improve their English. To them, home was where their family resided, where they 'came from'. What they did not realise was that home is not an 'originary place' (Wise, 2000: 297). Home is not the "the place we 'come from'; it is a place we are" (Wise, 2000: 297).

Where "we are" instigates the development of an identity compatible with the social and cultural milieu or environment in which we carry out our daily lives. From that overseas identity, home is constructed and the newly constructed overseas home

further develops and maintains the overseas identity. In consequence, the sojourners failed to consider how much they had changed and how those changes might be accepted by others in their home country.

The Overseas Identity

The construction of the overseas identity, like the construction of the overseas home, was subtle and not consciously formed. The overseas identity became an abstract object that marked the overseas home and the overseas home became an abstract object that marked the overseas identity. Both constructions became foundations upon which the other was based. There were, of course, other markers of these overseas home and identity (e.g. domus, friends, routine, etc.) but none were as significant as the combination of these two social processes.

This newly formed identity together with their new home made the respondents feel as if they had become acceptable members of their host culture. They were well settled and felt they knew their new territory quite well. They were able to find their way around town and they were able to communicate well with natives. They had learned how to be independent and assertive. These two attributes became key markers of their overseas identity. They were confident in their abilities and proud of themselves for 'making it' in a foreign land.

Upon Their Return

When the respondents returned to their country of origin, they carried their overseas identity and their overseas home with them. They experienced return culture shock because these social constructions were not compatible with the culture in their

country of origin. This 'new' identity and sense of place were also no longer compatible with their memories of their former home and the identity expected in their country of origin. The moment they left their 'place of origin', pieces of their 'original' home had started to fragment. What they had taken with them to their host country were memorabilia of their 'original' home. They had taken their clothes, their photographs, and other effects that were mere furnishings of their previous home. All that was left of their 'place of origin' were memories and nostalgia. So when they returned to that 'place of origin', they could not find the home that had been imprinted in their memory and which that had idealised while they were away. All they found was the domus, a physical marker of their former home. Realisation of this fact was, in itself, a major shock factor for them.

The respondents also found that their overseas identity gave them new cultural lenses through which to look at the world around them. They knew that some things were still the same as before their initial departure, but yet, they were different. They found that they could no longer identify with natives of their country of origin, and they no longer felt native there either. They were more assertive and more independent and were told that they had changed. Some were even accused of racial deviance, that is, 'becoming White', because of their behaviour.

Presentation of Self

The respondents' overseas identity made them feel as if they were strangers in what they considered their own culture. It was as if they really had 'become White'. In the dramaturgical sense, they had. By adapting to the social norms of their host country,

the respondents had made the adopted attributes of their host culture part of their front region performance, the front region being the place where main and often crucial performances are given (Goffman, 1959: 107). The respondents' front region performance gave off the impression of moral and cultural propriety – they appeared less threatening to natives by taking on their typified roles as international students and by conforming to the social behaviour of their host culture. This is an important part of the adaptation process because it serves to establish good relations with natives with whom they will have to interact with for more than a year.

The respondents' front stage performance eventually became so practiced that their performances were habitualised. They began to identify so strongly with the native habitués of their host culture that like them, they became 'Westernised'. As such, they relegated the older cultural habits from their place of origin to the back region, the back region being a more relaxed arena where behaviour may sometimes contradict front stage performances (Goffman, 1959: 112). Hence, when presenting self to others, they presented self as 'Westernised' foreigners.

When they returned to their country of origin, their 'Westernised' front stage performance was out of place. Since not many returnees were aware that they had developed a 'Westernised' front stage performance, they were confused as to why everything about 'home' 'suddenly' seemed strange, why people at home seemed to treat them as foreigners, and why they felt like foreigners. Eventually, as they continued to interact in their country of origin, they started to re-adjust to its cultural norms and rules of behaviour. The habits that were relegated to the back region started making their way forward towards the front region replacing the communication habits developed overseas.

Resisting Re-adaptation

Sometimes returnees resist re-adjusting to their culture of origin. June, Amy and I talked about how we valued our independence and assertiveness and did not want to lose hold of these characteristics. But as June said, society does have a 'louder voice over you'¹ and 'you lose your rhythm' and 'you lose yourself'. This process can lead to feelings of self-contempt and a sense of loss. But the respondents eventually learned how to deal with this problem by concealing their 'alter'-identity. Thus, in a recent informal interview, June² told me that even though she had returned to Malaysia several times and return culture shock no longer surprised her, she still found that she was bothered by many things in her country of origin. She still found the people rude and she still found their attitudes abrasive. But this time, on this trip, she told me, she decided to keep quiet and let things be. She said that it is better not to "rock the boat" so that her trip would be more enjoyable both for herself and for her family.

Other respondents who were not as seasoned as June were quick to criticise their country of origin. They made comparisons between their country of origin and their host country and they idealised their host country. This too, is a way of resisting re-adapting to the country of origin and maintaining an overseas identity that differentiates the returnees from the other 'deviants'. Because they could no longer identify with people they were once familiar with, they distanced themselves by making these comparisons.

¹ Society's voice could be louder here because it is the culture of origin in which family resides; and it is a culture that is more restrictive than the host culture. It could also be that June and the others were still unsure about who they saw themselves to be and were more strongly influenced by how others saw them. They had not, in essence, fully constructed an identity based on their own merits and therefore succumbed to their socially ascribed identity (e.g. submissive female).

² June is currently residing in Canada.

Another way of resisting re-adaptation and holding on to one's overseas identity is to tell stories of experiences abroad. Telling stories is a way of re-living that overseas experience/reality and perhaps an attempt at getting others to embrace that reality so that it can become, to some extent, established as part of the returnee's 'home' reality. But as Daisy previously pointed out, this strategy can exacerbate negative feelings of 'home' when no one shows interest in what the returnee has to say.

Not having experiences or stories embraced by chosen listeners can lead to feelings of rejection – rejection of the overseas identity and all the communication habits attached. This sense of rejection appears as part of the stages that Storti described where the returnee gets beyond the honeymoon stage and moves into return culture shock - people lose interest in what returnees have to tell them. They never experienced the same experiences as the returnee and so it is not as exciting for them as it is for the returnee. As such, the returnee's overseas identity is invalidated by significant others and he/she must decide whether it is worth maintaining and presenting in his/her country of origin.

From others' perspective, all of the things that the returnee experienced are not part of their day-to-day reality or part of their own identity construction. The contradiction here is that the excitement people feel about the sojourner's return implies that they are eager to see how the sojourner has changed and perhaps what the sojourner has brought back from overseas. But after a few weeks this excitement dissipates and others begin to expect that the sojourner will follow the social norms and behaviours valued by them. Fulfilling this expectation can be difficult for the returnee who has now

been exposed to and influenced by another culture.³

The way returnees conduct themselves is also another way of resisting re-adaptation while coping with return culture shock and maintaining their overseas identity. In my second interview with Aisha she told me that she was taking a course with an insurance company in Kuala Lumpur. She said that even though the class is in English she is trying to participate more because she has seen this behaviour in Canada and admires it.

Aisha: [S]o like when I, when I uh .. for example if I attended a seminar or right now I'm doing this Graduate development programme at uh the AIA. I don't know why, but I somehow I feel like I just want to be more active in the class. When people ask something I just just say it. I just, you know, I just raise up my hand and say something. . . . Yeah, now, yeah I guess now I'm just trying to be more . . . like a Canadian student, you know?

Barbara: Assertive?

Aisha: Assertive and also more yeah lah like, Canadian students, most of them are quite active you know? Like they say something, they don't care whether it's right or it's wrong or whether people laugh at them. And then I guess I just want to be that kind of person.

Aisha wanted to capture the confident presentation of self that she noticed students in Canada exhibited. She wanted to be active in the classroom like them and be like the typical Canadian student, not like the typical Malaysian student, quiet and subdued. In this way, Aisha is reinforcing and maintaining the Canada/overseas identity constructed during her stay in Canada.

³ It is interesting to note that time, not just culture, is a factor in terms of expectations of continuity. But with the addition of culture it becomes more difficult for the returnee. I also realise that those who are left behind while the sojourner travels also experience a kind of 'return' culture shock. They may feel awkward at first when interacting with this returnee who once was familiar but who now has different and strange mannerisms, accent, and perhaps a different status as well (e.g. a village boy who leaves for the city and becomes successful).

Another method Aisha employed to maintain her 'Canada' identity was in saying 'thank you':

Aisha: Because you know 7 years being, living in Canada and you got so used to it, you know you got used to people saying 'thank you' in whatever they were doing. So you just feel you, I don't know. It's quite hard for you to adjust to. I sometimes I would say 'thank you' [laughs] to someone [in Malaysia] and I don't know whether they actually appreciate it or not; but I guess I'm used to the . . . the Canadian, I don't know, culture is it?

Aisha's habitualised action of saying 'thank you' was, according to her, hard to let go but it could also be that on a subconscious level, she says 'thank you' to differentiate herself from other more typical Malaysian students. As John Wengle explains, people will seize upon anything to maintain a symbolic continuity with what they consider home or a preferred identity (1988: 12). Thus, for example, I once brought back my compact disc collection of Canadian artistes to 'show off' my new 'home' (markers of it) to my family and friends and I was always thrilled to receive electronic mail from friends in Canada – which assured me that yes, I really did go overseas and I really did develop a more independent and assertive identity. Lately, some of the permanent returnees in Malaysia have been meeting once every month or so for dinner just to 'keep in contact'. These 'cultural artefacts' of life abroad are symbolic markers used to reinforce returnees' grip on their overseas identity.

Regions and Identity Crises

When sojourners return to their country of origin, their overseas identity gets pushed to the back region making way for their 'home' identity to dominate their presentation of self to others. The internal conflict experienced over which identity will

gain a more satisfactory/acceptable presentation can create an identity crisis. Returnees want to hold on to their overseas habits yet they have to suppress them and reclaim their 'original' habits as primary habits. As their overseas habits are suppressed and relinquished so is their grip on their overseas home and their overseas identity weakened. To complicate the process further, just as they begin to re-adjust to life in their country of origin it is time for them to return to their host country. When they return to their host country the respondents have to switch performances and habits again to re-adjust to the social expectations of their new cultural environment.

This switching back and forth of performances and communication habits from country to country can play havoc on the respondents' sense of confidence in self. They never really have enough time to fully adjust and re-identify with the natives of whichever place they happen to be. As Mika pointed out, when she gets used to life in Japan, it is time for her to return to Canada. This moving back and forth from country to country makes it difficult for respondents who wish to maintain a strong relationship with friends in their country of origin. And it is also difficult for them, as strangers, to form strong relationships with natives in their host country. Regardless of the propriety of their public performance and their presentation of self the fact that they once left their country of origin makes them strangers there. If they have left before, they can leave again.

The respondents are also considered strangers in their host country for more obvious reasons – they are not native to their host country. Often people do not place heavy emotional investments on strangers. After all, if they can leave one place for another, they can leave again. Strangers, as Simmel puts it, are perceived to have "not

quite overcome the freedom of coming and going" (1964: 402). This perception makes it difficult for sojourners and returnees as strangers to form strong and lasting relationships.

Sojourners/Returnees may also see themselves as 'potential wanderers' and estrange or distance themselves from others by resisting the formation of close relationships. Even friendships with co-foreigners may only be friendships of convenience and may not last beyond the university experience or any general experience they may have in common. This may leave sojourners/returnees feeling incessantly uprooted, as if they did not belong anywhere. They just could not spend enough time in one place to feel fully integrated there. This, of course, will have an impact on self because they cannot fully identify with natives, just as natives cannot, or can no longer fully identify with them.

Perhaps if sojourners/returnees stayed in one country for a longer period they would have time to form stronger relationships with natives and secure for themselves an identity that will not be as susceptible to external social forces so that they do not 'lose themselves' so easily. But the respondents, being international students, do miss their family and they have to return to their country of origin for visits;⁴ and if they have not already graduated, they still have to return to their host country to continue their studies. So, the sojourners/returnees do 'lose themselves' and as Daisy said a bit of them gets left behind somewhere as they oscillate from country to country.

⁴ All the respondents said that the reason why they returned to their country of origin for holidays is to visit family. Also, as international students they are not allowed to gain employment in their host country (except on campus) so they prefer to return to their country of origin for the holidays. As Jasmine said, "I came here [Canada] to study so time is precious, but I don't waste it. Holidays is at home [France], here is to work [study]. I don't want to do nothing. If I do nothing I rather be home".

Finding Familiarity in the Strange

Return culture shock affected the returnees in many different ways. Some returnees felt more threatened than others and some returnees were able to deal with return culture shock with more aplomb than others. The returnees realized that nothing much had changed about their country of origin, yet re-adjusting was difficult. Some acknowledged that having to re-adjust to their country of origin was a similar process to having to adjust to their host country. Still, something about return culture shock made it difficult for them. On the one hand, it was easy to re-adjust because they had returned to their 'original' culture and home and they had known it well before they left. But, on the other hand, knowing that they had to 're-learn' social practices in their country of origin that were once innate made it all the harder. Even those respondents who had returned to their country of origin for holidays and had experienced return culture shock previously still found that their later return trips to their country of origin were difficult. They thought that they would need some re-adjustment, but they did not expect that it would be as difficult each time they went back.

After having re-adjusted to their country of origin, sojourners have to return to their host country to finish their studies. Returning to their host country also requires a process of re-adjustment. This process was more difficult because sojourners were not as knowledgeable of their host country's culture as they were of their country of origin's culture. They could only rely on their comparatively limited interaction with natives of their host culture. Sometimes they would trip up on their performance, perhaps because of their limited skill with their host country's language. They would become embarrassed or frustrated. Many took the option of retreating to their back region homo-lingual

groups. At least they had this comfort in their host country. In their country of origin they have no such support group, no co-strangers to comfort them. Often, there would be attempts at reunions in the country of origin, especially among the permanent returnees, but most returnees preferred spending time with their family and childhood friends as opposed to their 'overseas' friends.⁵

For permanent returnees, return culture shock can be more harsh because they know that they no longer have a reason to go back to their host country. They have to settle down in their country of origin and find a job to help support their family. In such cases, because they remain in one place long enough, they eventually re-adjust to and re-integrate in their country of origin. The need to hold on to their overseas identity and overseas home eventually dissolves. Sometimes this may take up to two years as Chrysta reported.

For the short-term returnees returning 'home' and experiencing return culture shock may make them feel as if they are stuck in a liminal stage, as if they are neither here nor there. They start to lose their grip on their sense of and confidence in self. As they become more accustomed to travelling back and forth from country to country they may, as June did, become more skilful at dealing with having their equilibrium thrown out of balance. They may even find ways of amalgamating their overseas identity and home with their 'original' identity and home. Perhaps some of the respondents were already starting to do this, that is, they were beginning to retain part of their overseas

⁵ Perhaps friendships formed abroad are only friendships of convenience (e.g. in the absence of family members, and also to find comfort in a group with similar attributes). Once individuals are removed from the cultural context in which the friendship was made, the friendship may no longer have such a strong pull. The overseas friendship may also no longer be part of the individual's 'home' reality.

identity and merging it with their 'primary' identity (e.g. Aisha who still says 'thank you' in Malaysia). Perhaps in this way they can free self from their ethnic and national chains and form a hybrid identity which they can feel comfortable with and confident of presenting wherever they happen to be; and from that hybrid identity start finding familiarity in the strange.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion

Since this study is an exploratory study of culture shock and return culture shock grounded theory was the best approach to take. The open-ended interview questions were helpful in that they allowed respondents to elaborate on any points they felt were significant to them. I found that letting respondents speak freely as if we were having a casual conversation put respondents at ease and the interview became a cathartic experience for some of them. In this way I was able to capture the impact of their culture shock and return culture shock experiences as well as learn how what parts of self they chose to present in their interaction with others. This analysis allowed me to learn how they actively constructed and maintained their favoured identity and what challenges they faced in this endeavour in their daily interaction with natives in their host country and their country of origin.

In "Chapter One: Introduction" I posited that return culture shock is more debilitating than culture shock. The experiences of the respondents of this study have attested to this claim. In this final chapter I will look at the difference between return culture shock and culture shock and what it is that makes return culture shock a critical concept requiring further study and understanding.

Return Culture Shock versus Culture Shock

There are similarities between the stages of shock that sojourners and returnees encounter. There is at first the initial wonder and excitement of being somewhere new, or returning to the country of origin after being somewhere new. At this stage, sojourners

or returnees are at the centre of attention. This stage represents what Pedersen (1995) and Storti (1997) call the honeymoon stage. After the initial excitement fades away and natives are no longer as interested in the sojourners or returnees, the sojourners or returnees start to realise the facts of their situation: they are no longer on familiar territory. This realisation is not always an immense shock for sojourners, after all they expected they would be visiting or living in a different culture. For returnees, this realisation that they are no longer on familiar territory can be greatly shocking because they expect to be returning home. For this reason, I argue that return culture shock is more debilitating than culture shock.

When sojourners are in their host country they may feel as if they do not really fit in, even though they have functionally adapted to their host country. They adapt, but they do not necessarily integrate into their host culture. To comfort self, they think of their country of origin as home, a place where they fit in, where they belong. They idealise their country of origin to distance themselves from the discomfort and unfamiliarity of their host country. When they return to discover that their country of origin has become an unfamiliar space, their last strands of 'home comfort' melt away. This place that they once thought of as home, a place of comfort, no longer exists the way they remembered or imagined it. Not only are their expectations unmet and their assumptions on interactive behaviour challenged, they are rudely forced into an awareness that they no longer belong anywhere. This awareness, combined with having experienced another culture, sometimes intimately, may lead to a disenchantment with their country of origin.

Return culture shock therefore, may leave returnees feeling as if they no longer have roots in any country. They become aware that they are now strangers in a place they had once considered home. This is because their perception of home, as an 'originary' place is rudely shattered and they are thrown into a state of disorientation, at least until they can construct a new home and develop a better understanding of home; that home is not where they come from, but where they are. As a concept, 'home' is really a part of self.

Shock Adaptation and Re-Adaptation

There are similarities in the way sojourners/returnees cope with culture shock and return culture shock. They may at first react defensively to the sense of shock by criticizing the culture in which they are immersed and idealising their other culture. As they interact with natives they will slowly adapt and become skilful performers in each cultural setting. The difference in the way sojourners/returnees cope with culture shock and return culture shock on the other hand, lies in their attitude towards adaptation – sojourners are more ready to adapt and learn the ways of their new culture than are returnees who may at first resist re-adaptation to their country of origin.

Often returnees resist re-adaptation because they want to hold on to their overseas identity and overseas home. Their interaction with family members and close friends seem like strange and somewhat awkward performances that they are no longer practiced in. They are expected to slip back into their old typified roles, roles which natives are

more familiar with (e.g. the meek female, the subservient child, etc.).¹ Often, these roles are unacceptable to the returnees who have been changed by their overseas experience.

Family members and friends returnees return to, those who think they know the returnee well or intimately, can experience 'return' culture shock, but not in the same way. Stacy's friends, for example, said she had changed, Aisha's teacher commented on her changed accent, Mika's friends treated her as if she were a stranger and her boyfriend broke up with her, and June's brother commented that she had become like a White person. But this return culture shock is different for the reception group² than for the returning group. The reception group never left 'home' and never had their home nor their flow of habit disrupted. Their only source of shock is the changed cultural performance of the returnees. They may therefore react to this shock by behaving as if the returnees never left, as if the returnees never changed from their overseas experience. This behaviour may leave returnees feeling so frustrated that they employ tactics to distance themselves from the reception group and the place they once considered home.

Returnees' distancing tactics often fail because their efforts cannot overcome the 'louder voice' that their society has over them. They try to hold on to the overseas home and overseas identity that are constructed on the basis of their personal merits. In their culture of origin, however, identity and home are based more on ascription, gender and position in their family. Although they try to hold on to markers that remind them of their overseas identity and overseas home, the potency of these objects cannot last

¹ While the shock natives experience from their encounters with sojourners and returnees is not the focus of this essay, it is still important to point out that they too are affected by their inter-cultural encounters. Their experience is important because they also affect how sojourners experience and deal with culture shock and how returnees experience and deal with return culture shock. It would be very interesting indeed to interview the reception group and study their experience with returnees or with strangers.

because others in their country of origin do not share the same meanings. In consequence, returnees find themselves in the middle of an identity crisis. They were strangers overseas and now they are strangers in their own 'home' (Mika); they are 'in between' cultures (June) and they find that whenever they move from culture to culture a part of them 'gets left behind' (Daisy). They cannot return to the same rhythm as before and do not know where they belong (Jasmine).

Strangers and Indistinctive Identities

When sojourners adopt the communication habits of their host culture and develop an identity and a home compatible with that culture, they become hybrids: an amalgamation of their primary culture and their host culture. They are not fully part of their host culture and they are no longer fully part of their (now former) primary culture. Their communication habits estrange them and their identity becomes ambiguous. When they were in their host country, they were considered strangers because they were foreign students and they spoke with a different accent. But when they returned to their country of origin, their hybridity made them strangers too. They spoke in a different accent and their public performances were different, untypical, tainted by another culture. They were no longer the typical Malaysian, the typical Singaporean, the typical Japanese, nor the typical French.

This sense of estrangement was exacerbated by moving back and forth from one country to the other. As Mika pointed out, just when returnees re-adjusted to their country of origin, it was time for them to return to their host country; and vice versa. The

² The reception group in this context refers to natives the returnees left behind in the country of origin.

sojourners were thus near and far at the same time (Simmel, 1950: 407). They were in the group, but were no longer *of it*. Their bond to that space, aside from familial bonds, was now a superficial one based on nostalgia. They were now creatures of habit that had become imprinted by two cultures (Wise, 2000: 306). An international student captures this sense of hybridity in her explanation of her experience. She said, ". . . it was as if she had left a yellow world and gone to a blue world, and when she returned to her yellow world, she was green" (Unknown author, <http://www.wisc.edu/stdyabroad/reent3.html>).

I take this green as an example of identity and argue that the green changes shades depending on where the sojourner is. When the sojourner is in the yellow world, the shade of green may become lighter and when the sojourner is in the blue world, the shade of green may become darker, more turquoise. Each time sojourners venture from one country to the next the colour schemes become exfoliated. Their layers of identity and reality fall apart or, if the sojourners are culturally skilful, get set aside temporarily (as in June's case). But chameleon-like they become strangers stranded betwixt and between cultures in a limbo of indistinctive identities. And it is only when they have settled in one location for a long period of time will they come closer to having a set colour. This is possible for those who have graduated and returned to their country of origin for permanent residence, not so for those who still have to return to their host country to complete their studies.

The Trials and Triumph of the Exiled Sojourner

The trials of the respondents of this study is that where they 'come from' becomes unclear. Where one 'comes from' greatly determines personhood (Filifer, 1999: 15). In

moving back and forth from host country to country of origin, the respondents are no longer sure of where they 'come from'. Intellectually, they know that they 'came from' their country of origin; but this place no longer determines their personhood. Their sense of belonging now becomes one of non-belonging and as a result they experience identity crises.

The different dictates of the different cultures in which the respondents find themselves immersed have pulled them apart, forcing them to have a foot in both countries. As a result, they are transformed into cultural exiles. But in spite of all these trials, their triumph is that they gain different cultural lenses through which to look at the world. As Edward Said wrote, "the essential privilege of exile is to have, not just one set of eyes but half a dozen, each of them corresponding to the places you have been. . . ." (as cited in Minh-ha, 1994: 9). In their trials they have also discovered the selves they want to be and they are able to construct an identity through their own merits.³

The Importance of Studying Return Culture Shock

In today's globalised economy, travelling has become an incredibly ubiquitous activity. People are travelling overseas or to different domestic cities for business trips, for recreation or for education. In South East Asia, where most of the respondents of this study come from, education is a blooming industry and having a university degree is becoming a requirement for gaining employment. Many students venture abroad to further their studies in North America or Europe so they may gain a 'Western' experience.

³ They do construct an identity through their own merits but depending on their experience they may still lose this identity as illustrated before. Yet, this is the identity they want to maintain and they do struggle, to keep it. It would be interesting to see whether this struggle is one reason why many international students decide to migrate to their host countries.

Culture shock becomes a common catch phrase in this era of travel and it has captured the attention of many scholars. Return culture shock on the other hand, lacks the attention it deserves.

Returning to one's place of origin always requires adjustment on the part of the returnee, and to a certain extent, on the part of the reception group, regardless of whether the travel was international or domestic. It is my hope that this study will help both travellers and those who were left behind understand the impact of this phenomenon on individuals and how the participation of both parties must occur if we are to ease the transition required of inter-cultural encounters.⁴

Inter-Cultural Transitions

This study, on the whole, attempts to throw light on the transition that sojourners and returnees go through as they venture from culture to culture. It examines how inter-cultural communication affects participants in highly personal ways. From the testimony of the respondents of this study, our knowledge of group behaviour and habitual behaviour are enforced and from this we learn about how identity and home are constructed in response to a disturbance in the cultural equilibrium of sojourners' and returnees' cultural surroundings. This finding is also applicable to studies of immigrant integration. Just as the respondents in this study formed social groups with individuals from their own culture or individuals who were foreign like them, immigrants form communities to support each other in their new world. Some may migrate internally (secondary migration) within a country in order to be closer to people from their own

culture. Knowledge of these social processes assists them in managing the impact of those processes on self.

Inter-cultural transitions can also apply to those who have left the workforce for a certain period and who are returning to it. There is the culture of leisure or in the case of those who take parental leave, the culture of parenthood, and also the culture of the work place. Inter-cultural transition can also occur for individuals venturing from social group to social group – for example, a reunion of school friends who have been apart for many years.

The findings of this study can apply in most situations in which individuals are entering 'somewhere', or returning 'somewhere'. 'Somewhere' does not necessarily have to be spatially defined. 'Somewhere' can be within a group of other individuals. Wherever or whatever that 'somewhere' is, there is always the expectation of change if the 'somewhere' is new, and an expectation of continuity if that 'somewhere' was once a familiar territory. Perhaps after reading this study the sojourners and returnees will be better able to understand how their identity is constructed by their cultural environment and their interaction with natives; and they will better understand that with inter-cultural transitions, it is the *change* that matters, not so much the physical/geographical distance. Being social creatures means that we are continually interacting in a culture of construction that is always in flux.

This work tells us that self is a process which is constantly in flux. Self is made up of several identities. There are core identities and there are lesser elements of identity

⁴ The reunion of returnees and the reception group, natives of their country of origin, is an inter-cultural encounter because the returnees bring with them cultural elements of their host country.

which can be easily exfoliated depending on the situation. In this sense, we are flexible and I think this would reflect our skill of culture or *habitus*. When one identity is challenged we can craft ourselves in order to fit in, to ingratiate ourselves and appear suitable to that culture by rearranging these elements that make up our presentation of self. We can drop some of the lesser elements of identity or let them fade into the background and adopt new ones that are more compatible with the culture in which we are immersed. When we return from anywhere, we always remember what identity or behaviour is called for and we stage it.

Global Cosmopolitans?

Cultures vary from society to society, each having their own logic and consistency (Nolan, 1999: 4). The distinctiveness of each culture (or sub-culture) is what gives each society or setting its own character. Some cultures are more rigid, others more fluid. But no matter how much cultures change (or do not change), they are linked to a people with a distinctive sense of cultural identity and sometimes with a distinctive cultural space. This spatial model of culture, while still applicable in many aspects of cultural studies, may no longer be universal in today's ever-changing world.

The identity that emerged for the respondents in this study, from the experience of non-belonging made them cultural exiles. They have no fixed place to call home so their home is mostly a home-in-motion. Their 'original' home cannot be recaptured, yet it cannot be totally removed from the sense of home that they have reconstructed (Minh-ha, 1994: 15). They are hybrids. The question is, can this hybridity be the basis of a new culture, a culture that is configured not according to distinctive identities and a distinctive

place but rather on indistinctiveness? I think that this is possible, and this new breed of culture hybrids may then become global cosmopolitans, culturally skilful and incongruous beings within a congruous world; and perhaps as people become more seasoned travellers, ethnicity or nationality will no longer have such a strong effect on cultural identity and the social construction of self.

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APPENDIX A

Information Sheet For The Participant

First name:

Interview Number:

Date:

Start/Finish Time:

My name is Barbara Loh. I am a Master of Arts student in sociology at Carleton University. I am doing research on international students' experiences of returning to their homeland, for at least a month, after having lived and studied abroad for more than a year. The data collected from these interviews will be used as a basis for writing up my research essay for a course I am currently registered in. There is the possibility that I may be using this research essay as preliminary research for my M.A. dissertation, therefore, I may also use these data collected from interviews for my M.A. dissertation.

If you are uncomfortable answering any of the questions asked, please let me know and we can move on to other questions. You, as the respondent, may withdraw from the interview at any time and you can request that the data obtained from you be destroyed and not used for my research essay.

In signing the attached consent form, you are indicating that you understand what you are being asked to do in this interview and that you understand that I will guarantee that your identity will be kept confidential in my essay and/or dissertation. The interview will take approximately 30 minutes to an hour.

If you have any further queries or concerns after the interview, you can contact me at (613) 233-0883 or via email at barbara_loh@yahoo.com. You can also reach my supervisor for this course, Professor Florence Kellner, at (613) 520-2600 extension 2598.

Thank you.

Barbara Loh

Informed Consent Form

I hereby give my informed consent to be interviewed by Barbara Loh. I understand the nature of my involvement, and I have been assured that my answers will be kept strictly confidential. At no point during future analysis will I be identified by name. I further understand that data collected from the interview will be stored on a floppy disc in a secure location by Barbara Loh. These discs and other notes pertaining to this interview will be destroyed after the data has been used in the study for which it was intended. The discs will be destroyed using a hammer and the notes will be shredded. Any quotations from this interview will appear without anything which identifies who I am. I also understand that if the interview takes place over the internet (either via email or the instant messaging system), information transmitted over the internet is not secure.

I am also aware that I have the right to refuse to answer any questions and that I may withdraw at any time. If I do decide to withdraw from the interview, I can request that the data obtained from me be destroyed. I agree that the researcher may also terminate this interview with me at any time.

Finally, I understand that there is no risk to me, my friends or my relatives stemming from my involvement in this study. If I have any concerns about this study I will be able to freely contact Barbara Loh at (613) 233-0883 or via email at barbara_loh@yahoo.com, or her supervisor for this course, Professor Florence Kellner, at 520-2600 extension 2598.

Name:

Signature:

Date

APPENDIX B

Interview Schedule

Ottawa Focus

1. Which country are you from?
2. How long have you been in [host country]?
3. How old were you when you came to [host country]?
4. Why did you come to [host country]?
5. What academic programme are you in? What academic year are you currently in?
How many more years do you have?
6. Why did you choose to go to Carleton University/Ottawa University?
7. What were your initial experiences in Ottawa?
8. Do you like it here in Ottawa? What do you like about Ottawa? Is there anything you don't like about Ottawa? What don't you like in Ottawa?
9. How do you usually commute? (main source of transportation)
10. Have you ever been employed here in Ottawa? If yes, why have you sought employment? If no, why have you not sought employment?
11. Who is supporting you here in Ottawa?
12. Have you visited other cities in Canada or the U.S. while residing in Ottawa?
If yes, which city did you visit and why. Did you enjoy your visit(s)? Why?
If no, why have you not travelled?
13. Do you have many close friends in Ottawa?
14. What languages did you converse in? Were you comfortable with the language used?
Why?
15. How often do you see your close friends?
16. What are some typical activities you do with your friends here in Ottawa?
17. Are any of your friends from a different culture than yours?

Homeland Focus

18. What language do you use in your homeland?
19. How often do you go back to your homeland?
20. Why did you go back to your homeland?
21. How long do you stay in your homeland each time you go back?
22. When you are in your homeland, do you spend more time with your family and relatives or with your friends? Why is this the case?
23. What are typical activities you do with your family/relatives?
24. What are typical activities you do with your friends?
25. What were your experiences in your homeland? How did you feel about being back home?
26. How did you feel about having to come back to Ottawa to continue your studies?

Back in Ottawa Focus

27. What were your experiences when you came back to Ottawa after visiting your homeland? How did you feel about being back in Ottawa?

General Questions

28. Would you say that you have adapted well into Canadian society? If yes, why? If no, why not?
29. On a scale of 1 to 10, how attached were you to your homeland before coming to Ottawa? 10 being "very attached" and 1 being "not at all attached". Please give reasons.
30. On a scale of 1 to 10, how attached are you now to your homeland? 10 being "very attached" and 1 being "not at all attached". Please give reasons.
31. On a scale of 1 to 10, how attached are you to Ottawa? 10 being "very attached" and 1 being "not at all attached". Please give reasons.
32. After completing your studies here in Ottawa, do you plan on returning to your homeland permanently?
If yes, why and how do you feel about this?
If no, why and how do you feel about this?

APPENDIX C

Interview Schedule (for Permanent Residents)

Host Country Focus

1. Which country are you from?
2. Are you living in your homeland now?
3. Which country and university did you further your studies in?
4. How long had you been studying abroad in your host country?
5. How old were you when you first went abroad to further your studies?
6. Why did you decide on that country and that university?
7. What academic programme were you in?
8. What were your initial experiences in your host country?
9. Did you like it there? What did you like about living in your host country, and what did you dislike about living in your host country?
10. What was your main source of transportation in your host country?
11. Were you ever employed in your host country? If yes, why did you seek employment? If no, why did you not seek employment?
12. Who supported you while you were living in your host country?
13. Did you ever visit any other cities in your host country/region while residing in your host country?
14. If yes, which city did you visit and why. Did you enjoy your visit(s)? Why?
15. If no, why have you not travelled?
16. Did you have many friends in your host country?
17. What languages did you converse it? Were you comfortable with the language used? Why?
18. How often did you see your friends?

19. What were some typical activities you did with your friends in your host country?
20. Were any of your friends from a different culture than yours?

Homeland Visit Focus

21. What language do you use in your homeland?
22. During holidays, did you go back to your homeland? How often did you visit your homeland while still at university?
23. Why did you go back to your homeland?
24. How long did you stay in your homeland each time you go back?
25. When you were in your homeland, did you spend more time with your family and relatives or with your friends? Why was this the case?
26. What were typical activities you did with your family/relatives?
27. What were typical activities you did with your friends?
28. What were your experiences in your homeland then? How did you feel about being back home?
29. How did you feel about having to go back to your host country to continue your studies?

Back in Host Country Focus

30. What were your experiences when you went back to your host country after visiting your homeland? How did you feel about being back in your host country?

Permanently in Homeland Focus

31. How old were you when you returned to your homeland permanently?
32. What made you decide to return to your homeland permanently?
33. Did you spend more time with your family/relatives or with your friends? Why was this the case?
34. What were the typical activities you did with your family/relatives and friends after having returned for good to your homeland?

- 35. What were your experiences? How did you feel about being back home for good?
- 36. Are you currently employed? If yes, what field are you in now? If no, are you looking for work? In what field?
- 37. Are you currently supporting yourself? Do you have any dependents?

General Questions

- 38. Would you say that you had adapted well into your host country? Yes, why? No, why not?
- 39. On a scale of 1 to 10, how attached were you to your homeland before going to your host country? 10 being "very attached" and 1 being "not at all attached". Please give reasons.
- 40. On a scale of 1 to 10, how attached were you to your homeland while living in your host country? 10 being "very attached" and 1 being "not at all attached". Please give reasons.
- 41. On a scale of 1 to 10, how attached are you now to your homeland? 10 being "very attached" and 1 being "not at all attached". Please give reasons.
- 42. On a scale of 1 to 10, how attached were you to your former host country while living there? 10 being "very attached" and 1 being "not at all attached". Please give reasons.
- 43. On a scale of 1 to 10, how attached are you now to your former host country? 10 being "very attached" and 1 being "not at all attached". Please give reasons.