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A STUDY ON HOW A SOJOURNER'S IDENTITY IS AFFECTED WHEN NOT  
SURROUNDED BY FAMILY OR CUSTOMARY CULTURAL TRADITIONS

By

Nicola Maree Gardiner

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In Memory of My Parents

Max and Margaret Gardiner

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## Foreword

Every voyage can be said to involve a re-siting of boundaries. The traveling self is here both the self that moves physically from one place to another, following “public routes and beaten tracks” within a mapped movement, and the self that embarks on an undetermined journeying practice, having constantly to negotiate between home and abroad, native culture and adopted culture, or more creatively speaking, between a here, a there, and an elsewhere.

Trinh Ti Minh-ha, *Travelers' Tales*, 1994, p.9

I first came to Dubai, in the United Arab Emirates, nearly 14 years ago as an employee of Emirates Airlines. At first, I believed I would complete my three-year contract and return home to New Zealand. Instead, I met my partner, Bruce. I chose to remain in Dubai as we started a life journey together. During this time, I began my University studies, at first part-time and then, leaving my employment, full-time. Along the way, there was a temporary relocation, namely to Singapore for a year, which involved traveling between Dubai (our home), Singapore (Bruce's work apartment) and New Zealand (for university Post Graduate courses). The excitement of this year's constant sojourning and subsequent learning opportunities was short-lived when I was personally devastated by the sudden and severe illness of my mother and her subsequent death, which occurred not long after the loss of my father. After a break from my studies for six months, I now embark upon this project of learning and discovery.

Living in the Middle East has, I believe, significantly changed me personally and developmentally, yet, paradoxically, I remain the same. This contradiction can best be explained by the plurality of 'roles' I occupy as a New Zealander living as an expatriate in Dubai. Arguably, any changes are due to the abundance of new and varied multi-cultural influences upon my identity, predominantly contextually, culturally and inter- relationally cued, which were principally welcomed yet at times seemed 'imposed'. My 'sameness' results from the flexibility and stability of my identity or self, and continued interaction with friends and family at 'home' in New Zealand and fellow expatriates residing in Dubai.

It is thus inevitable that my words and thoughts, and indeed even my choice of research topic and avenue, are somewhat affected by my own developing identity.

PART ONE  
THE STUDY

Chapter I

Introduction

The most basic questions about identity call for a more general reexamination of the relation between personal experience and public meanings – subjective choices and evaluations, on the one hand, and objective social location, on the other.

(Satya Mohanty, 2004, p. 392)

An “identity” emerges as a conceptual tool for explaining the world and experiences, and is often taken for granted or used ubiquitously with no clear definition or analysis (Gibson, 1994; Wiley, 1994; and Zaretsky, 1994; cited in Stryker, Owens & White, 2000). Indeed, “these authors ... hold a cultural conception of identity – they are concerned with ideas, beliefs, practices, [and] characterizing entire peoples” (Stryker, et al., 2000, p. 22). Arguably, identity can be located in social terms, category-based concepts, in the roles a person occupies, or, in collective terms, wherein identities are debatably shaped by commonalities and thus located in the “core of individuals *and* the core of communal culture” (Stryker et al., 2000, p. 23, original italics). Therefore, social identities and how they have arisen, how ‘we’ live, how ‘we’ are “transformed or might be transformed and how they should be transformed” are ideas of emerging importance (Alcoff & Mendieta, 2003, p.1).

Social psychology has typically anchored its focus in exploring identity by examining social identities from major frameworks such as Identity Theory, Social Identity Theory, and Self Categorization Theory. Investigation into identity and sojourners<sup>1</sup>, people who have relocated to foreign countries (but not of immigrant status), typically fell within the

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<sup>1</sup> Those who live in a foreign country temporarily and on a volunteer basis (see the section titled Sojourners, page 18, for further discussion).

psychological or sociological realms, of particular interest were issues directed at examining personality traits such as extraversion, neuroticism (Ward, Leong & Low, 2004) or socio-cultural knowledge or social difficulty and how this affects adjustment rather than identity (Ward & Kennedy, 1993). Thus, previous studies on sojourners generally explored how aforementioned psychological or socio-cultural entities impact sojourners' ability to effectively adapt, particularly by addressing issues related to culture shock (Oberg, 1960, cited in Ward & Kennedy, 1993), psychological adjustment and sociocultural competence during cross-cultural transitions (Ward & Kennedy, 1994), strong cultural identity with host culture (Feinstein & Ward, 1990, cited in Ward & Kennedy, 1993), or personalities' dimensions and adjustment (Ward, et al, 2004). Arguably, previous researchers have veiled sojourner's identity investigation by concerning themselves with adjustment, culture shock, cross-cultural adaptation, psychological well-being, stress and coping or social skills, and how these affect productivity and successful cross-cultural relocation (Ward & Kennedy, 1993, p. 222), while ignoring other social identity issues.

Identity from a social perspective is first documented as beginning with the symbolic integrationists' perspectives of Charles H Cooley and George H Mead around the early 1900s, in reaction to the Cartesian separation of individual and society. Indeed, Cooley posited that "[a] separate individual is an abstraction unknown to experience, and so likewise is society when regarded as something apart from individuals ... 'Society' and 'individuals' do not denote separable phenomena, but are simply collective and distributive aspects of the same thing" (Cooley, 1964, cited in Carbaugh, 1996, p.5). Thus, according to Cooley, society certainly impacts one's personal thoughts and ideas. Mead also refuted Descartes by focusing on the integration of the self and natural environment (Clayton & Opotow, 2003). Thus, both Cooley and Mead situated the self by introducing the notion of self as more than a biopsychological agent but rather as an entity invested in an intersection of social and symbolic interaction.

With the above for focus, the following section will first review some of the pertinent literature and research investigating identity, and explain how these views have influenced my perspectives on the concept of 'identity' by examining the process of the

formation of an identity. The content will then move to the view of a national identity or the concept of nationality, and then direct attention to the identity of people living temporarily in a foreign country, sojourners. This subject will form the basis of my central investigation into how the identity of sojourners is affected when not living or continually surrounded by what they identify as their own traditions or customs.

Prominent but parallel theories in the concept of identity are a) Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1978; Hogg & Abrams, 1988) and b) Identity Theory (Stryker, 1980; Burke 1991; Burke & Tully 1977). Despite their differences, both argue that identities are based ultimately on the “self as reflexive in that it can take itself as an object and can categorize, classify, or name itself in particular ways in relation to other social categories or classifications” (Stets & Burke, 2000, p.224). Social identity theory and identity theory explain identity as rooted in discourse and communication practice in which “discourse allows for an analysis of ‘when’ and ‘how’ identities are invoked and constructed in conversation” (Carbaugh, 1996, cited in Stets & Burke, 2000). Additionally, both are in agreement that identity is predicated on a “multifaceted self that mediates between social structure and individual behavior” (Hogg, Terry & White, 1995, p. 255). Additionally, both theories embrace social constructionist views, which state that identities are socially constructed, not biologically determined. However, despite constructionist roots, these two perspectives have differences in how identity becomes salient. Specifically, identity theory is “principally a microsociological theory ... [that] sets out to explain individuals’ role-related behaviors, while social identity theory is a social psychological theory that sets out to explain group processes and intergroup relations” (Hogg, et al., 1995, p. 255)<sup>2</sup>.

Throughout the literature, the terms identity and subjectivity are frequently used interchangeably. Woodward (1997) distinguishes between the two in the following way:

Subjectivity includes our sense of self. It involves the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions, which constitute our sense, of who we are and the feelings, which are brought to different positions within, culture.... Yet we experience our subjectivity in a social context where language and culture give meaning to our experience of ourselves and where we adopt an identity.

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<sup>2</sup> For elaboration see section Social Constructionist Epistemology (Pages 25-27).

Discourses, whatever sets of meaning they construct, can only be effective if they recruit subjects. Subjects are thus subjected to the discourse and must themselves take it up as individuals who so position themselves. The positions which we take up and identify with constitute our identities. (p. 39; emphasis in original)

This sentiment is repeated by Hall (1996), who contends that identity is the meeting point between the discourses and practices that call us to be subjects of particular discourses and the processes that produce subjectivities that construct us as subjects that can be spoken. A further echo of this definition comes from Alcoff and Mendieta (2004, p.3), who state “identity is not in the main an individual affair... [i]ndividuals make their own identity, but not under conditions of their own choosing”. Plainly, you cannot separate the interaction of discourse and identity or vice versa, since arguably one does not exist without the other. Therefore, in order to fully explore questions on or related to self and identity, entities such as cultural and linguistic bodies that border and infiltrate identity must be addressed.

As such, identity is a combination of subjective positions and sociocultural situations in which discourse is produced, exchanged, sustained, and operated through a representational system which suggests that it is ‘us’ that give meaning to identity within a cultural frame of reference and ‘shared values’ of a particular group, which are, in turn, influenced by particular historical circumstances and geographical space (Hall, 1997). Indeed, identity is not about people telling us what their identity is nor them interpreting what they think their identity is but rather identity is revealed in what people say and do, that is, it is “something used in everyday talk: something part and parcel of the routines of everyday life, brought off in the fine detail of everyday interaction” (Antaki & Widdicombe, 1998, p.1). Thus, contrary to the idea posited by humanistic traditions that identity is somehow fixed and/or essential, a person’s identity can in fact be regarded as relational, whereby individuals can display a changing host of identities under a multitude of categories. Hall (1996) points out that, currently, identities are becoming increasingly fragmented and fractured as a result of voluntary and forced migration, travel and globalization, thus rejecting the notion that identity is solely biological. Rather, the suggestion is that identity is subject to changes and transformations according to historical time, institutional site and various other contexts.

Similarly, ethnic, national or cultural identities are subject to change according to geopolitical and historical necessities and realities, thus contesting the claim of unchanging, transhistorical, cultural belongingness. Billig (1995) states that political discourse also impacts identity:

[p]oliticans not only live in the eye of the country, but they represent the nation to itself. In addressing the imagined national audience, they dress it in rhetorical finery and, then, these speakers-as-outfitters hold a mirror so the nation can admire itself (p.98).

According to Collier (1998) “cultural identities are historical, contextual and relational constructions ... [they] emerge in everyday discourse and in social practices, rituals, norms and myths that are handed down to new members” (p.131). Thus, everyday speech and cultural and historical meanings are crucial for reaching an understanding of human interactions and identities, for they provide representations that exist outside of nature. Also, Hall (1996) suggests that although they invoke an origin in a historical past, “identities are about using the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being: not ‘who we are’ or ‘where we came from’ so much as what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves” (p.4). Therefore, who ‘we are’ is learned and constructed through external resources, such as language and social conventions, which influence how we view and communicate in the real world. Connor (1966, cited in Oommen, 1997) agrees, stating that cultural identity is also “increased [by] transportation and communication [which] add to the cultural awareness of nations and individuals, thereby reinforcing their cultural identity” (p.10).

This emphasis on cultural practices is important, for culture permeates all society, and, according to Woodward (1997, cited in Hall, 1997), “culture gives us a sense of our own identity, of who we are and with whom we ‘belong’ ... [so that] meaning is constantly being produced and exchanged in every personal and social interaction in which we take part” (p.3). These social interactions and enactments influence identity and, through association and use of symbols and codes, create cultural identity of belongingness or

shared values. Thus, “cultural spaces influence how we think about ourselves and others” (Martin & Nakayama, 2003, p.247).

Identity from a communication theory perspective is both an individual and social event that is formed and enacted in social interaction and conditions of interaction, which, in their turn, influence identity enactments (Hecht, Collier & Ribeau, 1993). Through television and increasingly through the internet, ‘we’ share simultaneous experiences with millions of others, which communicates identity and sends messages and ‘helps’ in negotiating how we feel or think about ourselves, how we act and how we express our identity (Reicher & Hopkins, 2001, p.15). Thus, both “our private and personal domains” are affected by influences that are of more than our own choosing (Reicher & Hopkins, 2001). Clearly, “[t]he relationship between culture and communication is complex [because] culture influences communication, and vice versa” (Martin & Nakayama, 2003, p.86). For example, those from more individualist societies have a tendency to value individualism while those from collectivist societies usually favour more group-oriented activities. Also, communication theorists note that individualism-collectivism societies influence cross-cultural communication styles so that some cultures experience direct communications while others rely on more reserved forms of communication (Ward, Leong & Low, 2004).

Identity formation can also be impacted by means of social categorization into groups, such as minorities and majorities, which impacts issues such as identity salience. For example, when minority-majority identity relational groups were manipulated in an experiment, it was found that the collective self was “significantly stronger for minority members, but only when the social categorization was meaningful ... [o]therwise minority and majority members did not differ from each other” (Simon, Aufderheide & Kampmeier, 1997, cited in Brewer & Hewstone, 2004, p.281). Furthermore, minorities seemingly have more in-group identity homogeneity while majorities have more out-group homogeneity, which in turn affects one’s identity to the group (Simon et al, 1997, cited in Brewer & Hewstone, 2004). Thus, a minority/majority group phenomenon is significant because it arguably directly affects how we define ourselves, process social information, make social comparisons, and label self, our feelings and emotions.

Finally, “[w]hether we are speaking of the individual or the macro-structural forces that contribute to identity formation,” Freud insisted “that the process does not follow apparent self-interest, since the self is not transparent to itself nor are identities the mere outward manifestations of inner selves” (Alcoff & Mendieta, 2003, p.5). Mead later argued the notion that instead of a self ‘having’ a perspective, the self is ‘in’ a perspective: and that perspective proceeds the individual, that is, “social consciousness is organized from the outside in” thus, identity can be viewed as something that is not fixed; there is no one “true” identity that can be found, so it follows that identity is constituted within representations and discourses (Alcoff & Mendieta, 2003, p.5). Since discourses construct identities for us and just as “it is impossible to determine the meaning of an object outside its context of use ... a stone thrown in a fight is a different thing (‘a projectile’) from a stone displayed in a museum (‘a piece of sculpture’)” so too is it impossible to position ourselves outside of contextual discourse (Hall, 1997, p.45). Cultural meaning often depends on larger units of analysis: narratives, statements, groups of images, whole discourses that operate across a variety of texts, areas of knowledge about a subject, which have acquired widespread authority (Hall, 1997, p.42). Thus, we become the subject of these discourses and we speak from them. In the construction process, signifying practices such as symbols, codes, images, clothing, gestures, performances as well as political, economic and social forces, shape what it means to be a member of a particular group. These constructed positions become prototypes for living, behaving and thinking (Halualani, 2000). At the same time, we are constrained by them, as the availability of discourses and the possibilities of the symbolic representations at that particular time and location restrict and set out limitations for us.

### Nationality

Seemingly, there is agreement that one’s nationality is never forgotten: “a man (sic) must have a nationality as he must have a nose and two ears” (Gellner, 1983, cited in Billig, 1995, p.37). Indeed, nations, nationalism and national identity are all around us (Reicher and Hopkins, 2001, p. vii). However, it is important to distinguish between and, as

Oommen (1997) states, “re-examine” the terms nationality, citizenship and ethnicity, all of which seem to get so often blurred especially since these terms are frequently used interchangeably, thus, it may be more meaningful to situate them in a relational and interactional context. Therefore, according to Oommen (1997)

In multi-national and poly-ethnic states a variety of combinations emerges and exists. But persons or a collectivity cannot be nationals and ethnics at the same time in the same locale, in that these are mutually exclusive identities. The case of citizenship is different. One can either be a citizen and a national, a citizen and an ethnic, or an ethnic and a non-citizen in such societies. What I am suggesting is that three identities are of different types and the possibilities of different permutations and combinations exists depending upon the property of the situation and the attributes of the individuals. [Furthermore] re-examination of these concepts is the importance of another dimension of what I have called the property of the situation. Categorization of social phenomena is purposive; one categorization may not be suited for all purposes (p.6).

Additionally, while categorisation of social phenomena can be purposeful, it may also be problematic and lead to serious limitations or wrongful generalisations or stereotypes.

Thus, according to Oommen, “ethnicity, nationality and citizenship are all identities, but the bases of them differ” (p.38). Broadly and simply speaking, ethnicity, as generally thought of in sociology and social psychology, refers to a group of people who are usually seen as being “culturally rather than physically distinctive” (Haralambos & Holborn, 1995, P.674). According to Giddens (1997), ethnicity is “*wholly learned*”, and what sets ethnic groups apart is generally language, dress, history and religion, whereby differing ethnic groups view themselves as culturally distinct from other ethnic groups (p. 210, original italics). Additionally, ethnic identity can be viewed as a set of ideas that typically includes self-identification, knowledge about one’s ethnic culture, and feelings about belonging to a particular ethnic group, which involves a sense of shared origin and history (Martin & Nakayama 2003). Therefore, I suggest that when considering entities such as ethnicity, nationality and citizenship, we must include rather than exclude the context they are in, just as it is important to recognize surrounding issues when investigating identity.

Technically, the concept of citizenship, refers to an individual belonging to a population living within the geographically-defined borders of a country, and having certain political rights provided by the governmental system, with certain obligations as a price for these rights (Giddens, 1997). Almost everyone in the world today belongs to or has an affinity with a definite national political order, with the exception of political refugees (Giddens, 1997). Thus, citizenship is generally an easily determined concept for most.

Nationality, however, is a term that has been largely unexamined in sociological discourse, according to Giddens (1985, cited in Billig 1995). As in the case of Haralambos and Holborn (1995), nationality gets entangled and embroiled into a discussion of race, ethnicity, migrations, and discussion of The Nationality Acts of 1914 and 1948, and immigration. Nationality is seemingly a taken-for-granted concept and merely lost in the section headed 'Race, Ethnicity and Nationality'. Thus, seemingly, the concept of nationality in many respects has been forgotten or is such a term that explains itself in an unproblematic and straightforward way.

According to Billig (1995), nationality is banal and feeble, and it remains dormant until called upon, yet at the same time "people in the contemporary world do not forget their nationality" (p.7). This notion of why people do not forget their nationality seems particularly germane to the sojourner<sup>3</sup>, for even if the sojourn is lengthy or indeed if born in the foreign land where one's parents are temporally residing, the sojourner is never separated from his or her nationality. Billig further states that a national identity involves all the little taken for granted items and "forgotten reminders" that surround one's life in one's own national country that then join together to be embodied into the habits and social life of an individual's identity. For instance, it is through the use of language, the way of processing discourse, that the individual gains a sense of nationality. Moreover, according to Billig (1995), having a "national identity also involves being situated physically, legally, socially, as well as emotionally: typically, it means being situated within a homeland which itself is situated within the world of nations" (p. 8). If this is so, why does having the label of a certain nationality, whether living in or out of one's

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<sup>3</sup> See next section for definition of sojourners

national country, have such a strong reference on one's identity? Seemingly, there is an emotional attachment to the territorial entity that is one's homeland, ancestral or adopted, that carries a tremendous, rarely eclipsed sense of security in having a national identity (Oommen, 1997). Thus, it is important to address the issue of how identity of the sojourner is affected when living without constant cultural references or reminders of who and what they are supposed to be.

### Sojourners

Expatriates<sup>4</sup> are individuals who move to a foreign country voluntarily on a temporary or limited basis and for clear, generally economic or lifestyle, purposes; yet they are distinct from tourists or immigrants (Shaffer & Bhaskar-Shrinivas, 2004). Tourists and immigrants travel to foreign countries for entirely different purposes, the former spending a short amount of time, most notably for leisure, while the latter intend their move to be permanent<sup>5</sup>. Specifically, according to Ward and Kennedy (1994), sojourners are "individuals who travel voluntarily to a new culture, usually for specific objectives such as educational and occupational opportunities, who view their residence in the new culture as fixed and finite, and who usually have expectations of returning to their country of origin" (p331).

With the growing spread of economic and corporate globalization, there are now many different 'types' of sojourners<sup>6</sup>, and thus increased reasons for relocating. Relocating employees can generally be classified in several ways. Parent country nationals (PNCs) are those "employees whose national origins are the same as that of [the] country in which the MNC is headquartered, such as an American expatriate manager from Federal Express deployed to Hong Kong" (Harrison, et al, 2004, p.203). Inpatriates are foreign

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<sup>4</sup> While this is the term most commonly used by sojourners and their hosts, the word 'sojourners' is most frequently used in academic literature.

<sup>5</sup> For those moving to the UAE, permanency is not an option. Sojourners to the UAE rarely view this territory as their new homeland in which they will ultimately settle and thus are always to be considered 'outsiders' by 'insiders' (Oommen, 1997).

<sup>6</sup> This study will involve several 'types' of sojourners, thus may confound comparisons to other sojourner situations.

nationals who live and work in the parent country. Third country national (TCN) employees are those whose national origin and country of assignment are outside the parent country of the MNC. Self-initiated foreign workers are those who are “personally motivated to live and work abroad, these individuals may even resign from their current jobs and self-sponsor their overseas move ... [o]ften, there may not be a pre-arranged job set up in the host country” (Harrison et al, 2004, p.204). Another category is the spouses (and immediate family members) who previously received little attention, but are now seen as important due to the direct impact they have on the employee’s well-being and longevity as an overseas staff member. Additionally, spouses and dependants who also relocate with the employee may or may not seek employment in the host nation.

Sojourners are a crucial link in cross-cultural research, providing effective information on intercultural communication. Also, sojourners are of interest because they are different from domestic employees in terms of (mal)adjustment, stressors and associated strains (Harrison, Shaffer & Bhaskar-Shrinivas, 2004). International relocations not only involve work transitions but also changes in entire support systems, social networks, and economic, political, cultural and religious terrain, which is often unfamiliar to the expatriate (Harrison, et al, 2004). Additionally, there is much to be gained in understanding the effects and influences of the sojourner on his/ her hosts (Brein and David, 1971). Thus, by specifically researching sojourners, we can gain better access to the process of understanding cultural encounters, cross-cultural communications and transitions, and issues of adaptation, adjustment, maintenance or management of identity, as well as of identity patterns.

### Sojourner Adjustment

An assumption is often made that successful adjustment to another country’s culture requires the sojourner to have effective interpersonal relations with the host (Brein & David, 1971). Brein and David (1971) state that a “necessary prerequisite to establishing effective social relationships... is the development of understanding between the host and visitor ... [requiring] effective exchange of information, ... communication, on both

verbal and nonverbal levels of behaviour [which is] ... crucial to the development of such understanding” (p.216). Despite such conditions being somewhat optimized however, often, the one place that the sojourner finds complete acceptance is in the company of other sojourners of similar nationality. This mini-group can then “concentrate on ... [their] similarities, not their differences because their differences [from their host] are ... [their] similarities [amongst each other]” (Martin & Nakayama, 2003, p.268). Moreover, significantly, sojourners’ characteristics are no longer ‘themselves’; they are their hyphen, their identities frequently classified as New Zealander, American or European.

According to Martin and Nakayama (2003), there are four primary methods by which sojourners can come to adapt and relate to their chosen environment: (1) assimilate, (2) remain separate, (3) integrate or (4) become marginalized. However, arguably, the length of the sojourn also regulates these, as too does the context. Some cultural contexts are more easily adapted to than others. For example, “Muslim societies tend to be fairly closed to outsiders ... [I]n these societies, the distinction between ingroup (family and close friends) and outgroup (everyone else) is very strong” (Martin & Nakayama, 2003, p. 288). Whereas in other countries, sojourners are generally received more openly, like in the United States of America. Thus, in some societies, there is less frequency in significant association with host nationals, which means a reduction in the quality of that interaction with members of the host culture.

Given this knowledge and characteristic of sojourners, adjustment of the sojourner is “neither simple nor straightforward” (Ward & Rana-Deuba, 2000 p. 293). Developing a relationship between identity and context involves many issues such as learning to adapt, assimilate or transition within new and foreign contextual and intercultural relationships. This interactionable process has the potential result of the sojourner becoming an intercultural identity or developing multi-cultural identities (Martin & Nakayama, 2003). According to Adler (1975, cited in Martin & Nakayama, 2003), “the multicultural individual is significantly different from the person who is more culturally restricted” (p. 291). The multicultural identity is “neither part of nor apart from the host culture; rather, this person acts situationally” (Martin & Nakayama, 2003, p. 291). Problems arise within these individuals, since they are somewhat betwixed-and-between regarding who or what

their affiliations are or are supposed to be, for without their own basic cultural groundings or identities being installed and reinforced, they become unsure of their identities. Moreover, according to Leong and Ward (2000), sojourners can experience identity difficulties or identity conflict due to the need to adapt to new cultural circumstances which

demand the individual to incorporate a new component of identity, which is in conflict with an existing one. The experience of many sojourners ... is thought to be prototypical of the latter (Baumeister, 1996). Individuals who make cross-cultural transitions are generally expected to conform to the normative values, attitudes and behaviors of their host countries. If these prescribed commitments are inconsistent or incompatible with those of their cultures of origin, conflict may ensue. (p.765).

Also, the prediction of intercultural identity conflict calls into question issues related to “tolerance of ambiguity, attributional complexity, host and co-national identification, quality and quantity of host and co-national contact, perceived discrimination, cultural distance and length of residence abroad”, with findings suggesting that lower levels of identity conflict occur in those individuals with greater tolerance and less contact with the host while “increased quantity of contact with host nationals was associated with greater identity conflict” (Leong & Ward, 2000, p. 763).

On the other hand, contact with host nationals is not always viewed as the important variable in understanding sojourner adjustment. According to Sewell and Davidson’s research (1961), factors such as background, socioeconomic status and previous contact is important, although this study had limits as it involved only students entering America. In a study with New Zealand sojourners, Ward and Kennedy (1994) revealed that those who strongly identified with co-nationals experienced less depression while on overseas assignment, and those who strongly identified with host nationals experienced less social difficulty in their new surroundings.

So, in order to cope with identity conflict or multiple identities, Gloria Anzaldua (1999) states that we need to maintain flexibility and fluidity so that all our identities can interact with each other. However, this may be easier said than achieved. Society and social interaction invariably means that, under certain situations or cultural contexts, individuals

are required to demonstrate only specific facets of their identity while (subconsciously or consciously) suppressing others; if suppression continues long-term, intrapersonal identity conflicts will surely arise, eventually causing identity crises. Such crises further make the “maintenance of original cultural identity difficult” (Berry, 1984; 1994, cited in Leong & Ward, 2000, p. 766).

Sojourners face many other challenges in relocating to new cultural contexts. Culture shock, a term first introduced by anthropologist Oberg (1960), is an “occupational disease of people who have been suddenly transplanted abroad” whereby individuals feel disorientated living in new and unfamiliar environmental surroundings and the only way to overcome this unfamiliarity is for the individual to learn to adapt to the new cultural situation and make friends (Ward, Okura, Kennedy & Kojima, 1998, p. 278). Although most ‘suffer’ from culture shock when relocating to a new environment, it can be reduced if there is little need to integrate with host nationals, as is often the case for military personnel (Martin & Nakayama, 2003). However, interestingly, De Verthelyi (1995) questioned the problem of culture shock on spouses of international graduate students traveling to America. In this study, it was interesting to note the negative effects of culture shock on spouses’ identity. The author notes that the one with the least amount of contact with the host nation had the most problems in adjusting to the new culture and indeed felt he or she had lost personal identity due to feeling unvalued.

Cross-cultural transition has been described by the theory of the U-Curve. This theory by Norwegian sociologist Sverre Lysgaard (1995) on a study on Scandinavian Fulbright Scholars studying in the United States describes a curvilinear relationship between adjustment and time sequence, which is referred to as the U-curve occurrence. Lysgaard stated that sojourners transition through predictable phases of adjustment, in particular patterns, when entering a new cultural environment. The first phase is initial excitement and apprehension with the relocation and host culture, then shock, depression and disorientation, finally followed by a sense of adaption. Primarily, Lysgaard noted that:

Adjustment as a process over time seems to follow a U-shaped curve: adjustment is felt to be easy and successful to begin with; then follows a “crisis” in which one

feels less well-adjusted, somewhat lonely and unhappy; finally one begins to feel better adjusted again, becoming more integrated into the foreign community.  
(Lysgaard, 1955, cited in Ward, et al, 1998, p. 278)

However, despite its popularity, the U-curve theory is not without its critics. According to Furnham & Bochner (1986, cited in Ward et al, 1998), empirical support is limited due to the majority of studies on the U-curve having been cross-sectional rather than longitudinal and because there is controversy over the operational definition of sojourner adjustment and measures (Church, 1982, cited in Ward et al, 1998). The approach that seems most reasonable is the notion that the U-curve is a good representation for short-term sojourners, while “a more accurate model represents long-term adaptation as a series of U-curves” (Martin & Nakayama, 2003, p. 285). This process of adaptation has been furthered to involve the sojourners’ inevitable return “home” to their original cultural context, referred to as re-entry shock (W-curve) (Martin & Nakayama, 2003). This phenomenon is often unexpected and soon the sojourner realises that they are different from when they left and must again learn to gradually adapt.

The purpose of my dissertation is to probe further the arena of social psychology and identity, and scrutinize social and semantic boundaries and their influence on identity. Exclusively, I will research how context and conversation impact on or contribute to sojourners’ management or construction of identity (irrespective of whether this ‘manipulation’ of identity may be conscious or unconscious) when family or customary cultural traditions do not surround the sojourner as well as how they are influenced by a multitude of customs when living in the cosmopolitan yet Islamic city of Dubai. Specifically, my intent is to part with previous research focusing on sojourners and adjustment and instead “locate identity within the social [while at the same time giving] attention to the occasioning of identity in everyday talk”, by combining social constructionist epistemology with conversational analytical approaches (Abell & Stokoe, 2001, p. 417). Precisely, this thesis embraces the question of how sojourners identities are influenced by living in a different culture.

With what has preceded for focus, there are some basic premises that need to be made explicit. Firstly, arguably, expatriates' identities are entwined with their nationality at a multitude of levels and yet at the same time not bound by them (Bauman, 1992, cited in Reicher & Hopkins, 2001). Whether sojourners are conscious and "self-aware ... mak[ing] conscious choices about their interactions with others" or whether one's nationalism operates at an unconscious level, its underpinnings, such as norms and values, arguably have an impact on social discourse directions (Sparrow, 2000, p.174). Furthermore, identities are highly variable when interacting with new social, political religious and economic situations and these contextual changes further impact one's identity (Bennett, 1993, cited in Sparrow, 2000, p.176). The assumption is that identities are reconstructed or reshaped within one's own parameters and variables depending on "social realities [and] one's capacity to self-define and negotiate identity", thus directly impacting the identity of the sojourners via social interaction and everyday speech (Sparrow, 2000, p. 181).

Secondly, it is importance to consider the contextual and discursive matters and "*how... talk is interactionally accomplished in context*" (Buttny, 1993, p.9, original italics). Of specific importance, then, is the uniqueness of Dubai, the context in which this research operates<sup>7</sup>. The need is to be attentive to various contexts and be aware of individual places and how their richness, diversity and limitations play an important role on meanings (Hall, 1997). Context is vital in accessing identities, gaining understanding and interpreting individuals' knowledge. Failing to recognize contextual influences could lead to false generalizations, such as believing that these results could be general to other places, which is not likely under different circumstances or situations.

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<sup>7</sup> See the section 'The Environment – Dubai, The United Arab Emirates' (Pages 44-46 )