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## **A Child With Two Motherlands: Child Sojourners and Cultural Identity**

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# A Child With Two Motherlands:

## Child Sojourners and Cultural Identity



Master Project

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## ABSTRACT

The main focus of the research for my Master's Project has been children who sojourn in a different culture for several years. When studying social phenomena, social scientists often focus on adults, representing their perceptions and attitudes towards these phenomena. Children are assumed to follow the parents as silent absorbents of the parents' views, decisions and attitudes. I, however, have foregrounded the perspectives and voices of children themselves. In this research, I have explored the following:

- how children view their cultural identity/ies;
- how they practice agency in choosing one;
- how identity/ies change over time; and
- what influences such changes

In exploring these questions with sojourner children, the possibility for an individual to develop bicultural identity emerged. This evokes further questions, such as: Does a sense of biculturality mean that children who become familiar with the norms, rules, and social cues of two or more cultures may successfully operate in those cultures without losing their sense of self, or core, initial cultural identity? Or is the situation quite different, and children become rootless pilgrims marginalized in both cultures?

I explored these questions through a qualitative research study during which I conducted twelve in-depth interviews with twelve children between ages of 7 and 18 who came to the U.S. from four different countries (Afghanistan, Indonesia, Iran and one Western African country) more than three years ago and will most likely return back to their home countries in the near future.

My findings suggest that children are able to alter their behaviors to fit the demands of both cultures quite successfully. However, they may undergo a somewhat stressful inward and outward process of adjustment to a new cultural environment. During this process, they may change their perceptions and understanding of cultural structures and its demands. However, the children were able to demonstrate the power and agency to make their own choices and hold fast to deeply-held beliefs and values. The choices they made could also be influenced by children's family members, media, education, age at immigration, and whether or not the family practiced their homeland culture (traditions, beliefs, language) in the U.S. on a daily basis.

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## I INTRODUCTION

Regardless of age, personality, nationality, ethnicity, or socio-economic status, people around the world ponder the same questions: Who am I? Where I am from? Why I am here? Where do I belong? The universality of these questions has led many researchers, philosophers, and theorists to ask: Why are these questions of such importance to us? What is it that we want to know about ourselves that makes this life more meaningful for us? Why do we want to know our roots and places to belong? What if I was someone was born in one country, grew up in its culture and then moved to another country? In the world that is extending for some and shrinking for the others, when the borders of countries becoming less transparent and cultures less distinct, we need to understand what happens to one's identity and what kind of transformation it undergoes. Is there any chance for us to successfully operate in more than one culture? Can we extend our cultural barriers? These questions are becoming more and more salient in sociological and anthropological research. It is a vast and for the most part still unplowed field for research. It is still unclear, and yet appears more salient on a forefront in theories and practices of identity studies, if we can truly belong to the world without losing our roots, sense of cultural and ethnic belonging and our core self. Is our quest for "self" and search for our "roots" more a journey of "coming-to-terms-with-our 'roots'"? (Hall & Du Gay, 1996).

People socialized into a certain culture will seek conformity with that one, for the most part, and yet, there is a tendency in every human to make oneself distinct from others and articulate one's uniqueness. How do we choose how to represent ourselves? How do we reflect

on people's perceptions and opinions about us? If we change our perception of self and others, what constitute those changes?

Very often, moving to another country can spur radical changes in people's perceptions of self, their culture of origin and that of others. Adults often make decisions to move from one place to a new one, from one country to another; to choose one life style over another, or one culture over another. They could be motivated by multiple reasons: escape from war and racial/ethnic discrimination; educational or career opportunities; better quality of life or reunification with the other part of the family. Because social scientists study adults more frequently than they study children, we know relatively little about how children perceive those choices, and what kinds of changes and adjustments they have to go through because of their parents' decisions. How do they feel about who they are, and who their parents told them they are? How do they view those around them? How do they view their culture, their roots, their ancestors, and their place to belong? In one phrase, how do they view their identity and can they alter it to fit the demands of the different cultural contexts?

The main focus of this study was to explore the perception of identities in a foreign context of children between ages of 7 and 18, whose parents are currently attending graduate school in the U.S. The study explored multiple external and internal factors that influence identity formation, how these factors are interpreted by children, and whether they can alternate their behaviors and perceptions to the demands of the new culture. The research questions included:

1. How do the children of international students perceive themselves in a foreign context (U.S.)?
2. Do they identify more with their home country culture or with the U.S. culture? Do they identify with some combination of both, or neither?

3. How do they describe these identifications?
4. How identity is expressed, or made explicit in their daily life?
5. Do they believe their identity has changed (or is changing) over time? If so, what, in children's words, has constituted to those changes?
6. How much of their original cultural identity they have preserved, what has changed and how do they maintain or alter those two?
7. Can children alter their cultural identities to fit the demand of a social context?

To begin to answer these questions, I conducted twelve formal interviews and three participant observations of parent-child interactions. The data collected from the interviews were transcribed and coded based on the recurrence of common themes and categories across the interviews with the children. I have drawn on the five models of second-culture acquisition proposed by LaFromboise, et al. (1993) and from the relevant literature about children's cultural identity formation as the theoretical framework and the way to interpret the data.

## **II. IMMIGRANTS, SOJOURNERS AND TRANSNATIONALS**

Before discussing the research sample, I summarize the research and theorizing about immigrants, sojourners, and transnationals with a specific focus on children and their routes to new lands. Although my research sample differs significantly from immigrants in many aspects, there are lessons that can be learned from the literature about immigrants; those lessons may be useful when thinking about sojourners and transnationals, at whom I take a closer look later in this chapter.

There are multiple factors that force or motivate people to move from one country to another. These could be economic, career building or educational reasons, family unification or war escape. We can unify all those reasons into the idea that adults move from one country to another in pursuit of a better life, better standards of living or a better future, especially for their children. If a family has decided to immigrate, they usually move permanently. They will be called immigrants. Immigrants are often referred as people born outside of the host country (in our case, USA) and who have become permanent residents in it. In the same way, we would describe *immigrant children*. However, *children of immigrants* could be either U.S.-born or foreign-born (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001). In spite of the country of birth, these children are raised and educated as full members of the host society.

However, not everyone stays in the host country. For some people, immigration is temporary. We need to differentiate a few types of migrants: those who are constantly “shuttling” between two countries, and those who stay for a finite (long or short) period of time in another country. Immigrants who travel back and forth from their countries of origin and new countries are called *binationals*. As they have been described by Carola Suarez-Orozco (2001), binationals neither move from their home country permanently, nor move to the host country permanently. They “shuttle” between “here” and “there”. For example, Tajik labor migrants go to work in Russia for a period of time from three months to a year. They usually work as construction workers for very little pay and often live in unacceptable conditions. But they know that the little money they earn in Russia will be enough to provide for their nuclear, and often extended, family back in Tajikistan. But they do go back “home” eventually.

Other types of migrants may stay for an extended period of time in the host country and return home without returning to the host country; or they can make short visits to their home

country during their stay in the host. These migrants are called *sojourners*. For example, in some research literature (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001), authors describe sojourners as those who move back and forth often following seasonal patterns and rarely taking their families with them. However, many sojourners do not fall in this category. Often they stay longer and have their families with them. As the latest research shows, this becomes a pattern that defines the lives of many immigrants recently. Thus, these immigrants becoming participants in the economic, political, and cultural arenas in both countries—in the newly adopted land and the country of origin (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001, p. 30).

In this discussion about sojourners, we can emphasize a particular category who also fall under this definition. Zuniga and Hamann (2009) call sojourners those students who were schooled in one country and then moved internationally to a new one, but with the expectation of coming back to the country of origin. They also call them *transnationals*. There is a significant difference between immigrants and the challenges they face integrating into a new country and transnational students. Sojourner, or transnational, students face the challenges to be linguistically competent and learn the new society's norm, just as do immigrant children. But in addition to that, they face the challenge of returning back to their home country where often they have to relearn language and cultural norms (Zuniga & Hamann, 2009). Hamann (1999, 2001) states that the most remarkable characteristic of sojourner students is "their susceptibility to dislocation and plural sense of belonging or partial belonging" (as cited in Zuniga & Hamann, 2009, p. 330).

The trajectory of migration of *sojourners* and binationals or *transnationals* certainly affects the lives of their children. However, there is little research examining how specifically these life changes affect the children. Although, data about children's experiences are limited,

the factors that may determine their experience could be: the reasons for parents' "transnational shuttling"; family socio-economic status; parental education; legal status; and how far from the country of origin did moved. One significant factor that strongly influences children's experiences and the development of identities and behaviors is the type of social and cultural environment they live in their host country and how that society views immigrants (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001). Many researchers argue that personal and "social experience remain essential components, even the foundation, of people's sense of who they are and where they belong" Scourfield et. al. 2006, p.15). Nevertheless, Smith (1994) argues that sojourners are constantly negotiating "here" and "there" (Smith, 1994 as cited in Zuniga & Hamann, 2009), because it is a large challenge for children and parents to define which country is hosting and which one is of origin. In this case, terms "destination" and "origin" become interchangeable and equally misleading (Zuniga & Hamann, 2009, p. 331).

In this section I have offered various definitions of terms such as *immigrant children*, *sojourners*, *binationals*, and *transnationals* and described the main characteristics that define these types of immigrants. In the next section, I discuss children's identity formation: how it is shaped, what factors contribute to it, and how being transnational affects children's perceptions of themselves and their cultural identity.

### **III. THEORETICAL DISCUSSION ON CULTURAL IDENTITIES**

The notion of identity, in general, is highly contested in the fields of sociology, anthropology, psychology, education, and other fields of the social sciences and applied fields. It has been recognized that a person's identification with nation begins to take root at childhood (Scourfield et al. 2006, p. 1).

Drawing from American pragmatism (Mead, 1934), identity is conceptualized as action as well as situation in which social actors encounter and develop ways of solving problems in life. According to Mead, human identity is "not exclusively a social product, but contains the innovative part of the human mind that is ready to negotiate, make changes, and create new solutions to problems in life" (1934, as cited in Chen, 2009, p. 3). It presupposes a social process where one's self is derived by "taking the attitudes of the others toward oneself when interacting with the other" (1934, as cited in Chen, 2009, p. 3). Therefore, Mead "placed human identity in a social relation and theorized the development of self through incorporating structure and agency" (1934, as cited in Chen, 2009, p. 4). Since our identity is not constructed in a social vacuum, we need others to understand who we are. Without the other, there is no self. (Chen, 2009).

Hall (1996) makes a similar argument. For him, identity involves "recognition of some common origin or shared characteristic with another person or group, or with an ideal" (as cited in Scourfield et. al., 2006, p. 6). He says that "identities are constructed through, not outside of difference and that it is only through the relation to the Other ... the positive term of any term—and thus its 'identity'—can be constructed". For him, "identities are more about questions of 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" (Hall & Du Gay, 1996, p. 4).

If identities are constructed through difference, if they are not static, if they are about the use of the available historical, linguistic, and cultural resources, and about how we represent ourselves, then, perhaps, it is when children move into a new country, they realize more who they are, how they are represented and should represent themselves than when they were in their home country. Therefore, cultural identity, which is of the most importance in my study, should be viewed as “situated and adaptive but, also deeply embedded in feeling-thinking bodies, in language and in social worlds” (Mody, 2005, p. 14). Culture is clearly central to any discussion of children and broader collective identifications such as place or nation. In this, “nations are graspable to the individuals primarily through the publicly circulating languages, practices and images that constitute discourses” (Scourfield et. al. 2006, p. 9).

The authors of the research on children’s identity and places (Scourfield et. al. 2006) are asking the questions: To which extent children do or do not relate to the various representations of the nation? Is the nation for them a set of identifiable cultural attributes or something less tangible? Those nation representation could be, for example in the U.S., flag and the pledge of allegiance, McDonalds, hamburgers, wide smile, MTV, Superman or Mickey Mouse and Disneyland. The authors argued that such cultural markers, although in many cases clichéd and seemingly trivial, are important in the sense that they help to define the identity of the nation in the public eye. They also suggest some degree of correlation between cultural identity and geographical space. Although, they note, it is difficult to find agreement on what exactly are the cultural values and symbols that make up either a nation’s or a place’s cultural identity (Scourfield et. al. 2006) . However, Mathews (2000) argues, even though the world may be open in a cultural sence, it is not so open in socially. He suggests that our cultural choices must fit within our social worlds, which are more limited. According to him, out social worlds (inner and

outward) “act as a sensor and gatekeeper, selecting from the range of possible cultural ideas one might appropriate only those that seem plausible and acceptable within it. One’s social world particularly constrains one’s choices in terms of such factors as class, gender and age” (Mathews, 2000, p. 34). Children, as Piaget observed (1965), often see the world through their own perspectives rather than imagining how others see it. For them, place identification is understood in terms of the self and its relationship with significant others (Scourfield et. al, 2006, p. 18).

Children are not passive observers and absorbers of culture, although culture shapes a substantial proportion of their understanding of the self. I would argue that children are active players in the cultural realm. As Walkerdine has said (1984), “they are actively investing emotionally in subject positions, not simply being defined by them” (as cited in Scourfield et. al. 2006, p. 26). How do children shape their understanding of the culture they live in, its constraints and limitations, and how do they shape their national identities? Often they have to “exercise their agency in negotiating the culturally loaded and unequal terrain of diverse heritage and in the mainstreaming of an identity that is at least potentially unacceptable to their peers” (Scourfield et. al., 2006, p.49). We can see children’s agency most clearly, perhaps, when there are more choices available to them, like, for example, for minority-ethnics and children of minority-ethnics or with parents of mixed nationalities. For them, the process of identification might be more difficult than for their mono-cultural peers, but more active at the same time. “Those children have to work out to position themselves in relationship to dominant discourses that for others are relatively unproblematic because they are taken for granted” (Scourfield et. al. 2006, p. 52).

In case of the transnational, or sojourner, students, the children’s own transnationality can become an asset because they gain proficiency in more than one language and become

familiar with the cultural norms of two or more cultures. This may well enable them to more successfully operate in more than one cultural context. These children have to learn to be competent in this new cultural context. This is necessary for them in order to successfully operate in the new culture. However, what becomes of their original cultural identity?

Recently, psychologists have shown that “individuals can possess dual cultural identities and engage in active cultural frame switching, in which they move between different cultural meaning systems in response to situational cues” (Benet-Martinez et al., 2002, p. 493). Thus, they will have much broader opportunities than their monocultural peers. As Moll (1993) has noted, transnationalism for students “refers to the capacity to build, understand, maintain, and reinforce a network of useful contacts and ‘funds of knowledge’” (as cited in Zuniga & Hamann, 2009, p. 332). In Zuniga and Hamann’s (2009) study of Mexican students returning from the U.S., one of the research participants who studied and lived only in Mexico commented that returning students - the *sojourner students* - had learned more advanced things in the U.S. schools. And yet another 124 mononational students refer to transnationals as being smarter (Zuniga & Hamann, 2009, p. 344). However, for others, the transnational experience may become a drawback because, upon return to their home countries, students may be behind their monocultural peers in academic proficiency (especially linguistic skills) and in the ways they respond to cultural norms and cues. McCormell’s (1988) study of Japanese students who return to Japan after some years living and studying in the U.S. found that parents’ efforts of preserving language and culture at home were not enough. Japanese teachers stated that those students “lacked some of the proper behaviors to be fully considered Japanese students” (as cited in Zuniga & Hamann, 2009, p. 342).

The idea of an individual being enculturated in two cultures and being able to move in and out of two distinct cultures leads to the concept of biculturalism (Hsu, 2009). LaFromboise, et al. (1993) summarized five models of second-culture acquisition: alternation, assimilation, acculturation, multicultural, and fusion models. The first model is *alternation*. Based on the alternation model, a bicultural individual not only knows and understands two different cultures, but is also capable of altering behavior to fit the demand of a particular social and cultural context, a phenomenon similar to code-switching in bilingualism (Saville-Troike, 1981 as cited in Hsu, 2009, p. 9). Based on the *assimilation* model, a person gradually integrates into the mainstream culture while weakening his or her original ethnic identity (Hsu, 2009). The *acculturation model* is very similar to the assimilation model; the major difference is in terms of how the members of the minority group are perceived by the dominant society. That is, in the assimilation model, individuals of the minority culture will ultimately become “full members” of the mainstream culture, whereas in the acculturation model, members of the minority culture will always be seen as merely “competent participants” in the mainstream culture (LaFromboise et al., 1993, p. 397). The fourth and fifth bicultural models are more hypothetical or ideal rather than reflecting reality. The *multicultural* model promotes cultural diversity in which an individual may develop a positive identity with both the ethnic culture and the mainstream culture through engaging in institutional sharing with members of other cultural groups. The *fusion* model also promotes cultural pluralism. According to this model, all cultures blend together to form new culture (LaFromboise et al., 1993, p. 399).

The primary emphasis of my study is on the alternation model. The authors claim “that an individual is able to gain competence within two cultures without losing his or her cultural identity or having to choose one culture over the other” (LaFromboise, et al., 1993, p. 315).

I have drawn on the alternation model as well as multiple studies and related research to analyze the interviews and observations of the children. I wanted to see if my assumptions about the alternation model would hold true and be consistent with children's perceptions and statements about their cultural identities. Specifically, I wanted to learn if they can alter their behaviors to fit the demands of a particular social and cultural context without losing the sense of their original cultural identity. More detailed descriptions of the methodological approach I have used in this study is presented in the following chapter.

## IV. METHODOLOGY

In order to understand how children perceive their own bicultural experience, I conducted interviews and participant observations with children of international students.

### 1. PARTICIPANTS AND SAMPLING STRATEGIES

Research population selection criteria: 1. Children of international students 2. Older than 7 years old 3. Living in the U.S. more than 3 years 4. Still living with their parents
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Table 1. Participant selection criteria

I did not specifically plan to conduct the study with children of doctoral students. But because one of the criteria I chose for participant selection was three years of residency in the U.S., it emerged that most international students stay for that length of time if they are studying for their Master's degree or completing a doctoral program. Below is a table where I identify the

children participating in the study by country of origin, age, year of arrival to the states, current grade in school, and gender. Note that the children have been given pseudonyms (discussed further below.)

<b>Child's name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Arrived to U.S.</b>	<b>Grade</b>
<b>Ruth</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>Africa</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>12 gr</b>
<b>Paulina</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>Africa</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>8 gr</b>
<b>Grace</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>Africa</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>4 gr</b>
<b>Sandra</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>Africa</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>2 gr</b>
<b>Sami</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>Palestine</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>12 gr</b>
<b>Omar</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>Palestine</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>11 gr</b>
<b>Zain</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>Palestine</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>4 gr</b>
<b>Fatima</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>Afghanistan</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>6 gr</b>
<b>Yaqoob</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>Afghanistan</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>5 gr</b>
<b>Daisy</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>Indonesia</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>5 gr</b>
<b>Hamid</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>Afghanistan</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>6 gr</b>

Table 2 Participant Sample

My research sample included twelve children ages seven to eighteen whose parents were international students. The five families participating in this study came to the U.S. from one of the West African countries, Afghanistan, Indonesia, and Palestine. In each family, one of the parents is conducting doctoral studies at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. Every family has lived here for more than three years. This fact was taken into consideration when choosing the families for this project since the time factor/duration of stay was important. I chose to work

with the families of my classmates because it eased the process of obtaining permission to interview children since the parents know me quite well, and we have long established relationships of trust. On the other hand, there are ethical considerations as I present the data and findings. Specifically, since these people are my friends, I had to be cautious in how I presented the data so it would not offend or embarrass the parents in any way. But at the same time I had to be true to my findings and present a real picture of the situation.

I had met nine out of the twelve children a few times prior to the interviews, and they knew me at least a little. The other three children I met for the first time when I came to have interviews with them. I believe these prior relationships greatly benefited my research. Children had some level of trust in me and seemed open to answer my questions and discuss their lives. I chose the age range from 7 to 18 years old based on the nature of my research topic. I chose not to work with younger children because children of younger ages would have more difficulties in understanding and expressing their thoughts about the notion of identity. My top age limit is justified by the fact that, at this age, they still live with their parents and depend on them, thus, could still be considered as children. There was also a factor of convenience: The families I selected happened to have children of this age range. Moreover, all children participating in this study were attending the regional public schools. (More specific information about children's age and some characteristics of them and their families can be found later in the "Children and Families Profile" section.)

## 2. DATA COLLECTION METHODS

<b>Child's name</b>	<b>Interview</b>	<b>Participant observation</b>
---------------------	------------------	--------------------------------

	<b>Ruth</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>
	<b>Paulina</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>
<input type="text"/>	<b>Grace</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>
	<b>Sandra</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>
	<b>Sami</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>
<input type="text"/>	<b>Omar</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>
	<b>Zain</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>
<input type="text"/>	<b>Fatima</b>	<b>X</b>	
	<b>Yaqoob</b>	<b>X</b>	
<input type="text"/>	<b>Daisy</b>	<b>X</b>	
<input type="text"/>	<b>Sina</b>	<b>X</b>	

Table 3 Data collection methods

### *INTERVIEWS*

I conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews with all of the children, with three participant observations. The children selected had to be able to understand and explain what identity means for them, how they distinguish their identity from others or with what culture they primarily identify themselves. The number of interviews and participant observations was determined by the length of time available to complete this project and the number of parents (international students) whose children had reached the ages of 7-18 years and were still living with their parents.

Parents and children were asked well in advance to participate in the interviews. The topic of the research and the goal of interviews were explained initially to the parents who, in turn, informed their children. In a very simple way, appropriate for their level of English language fluency, children were given a thorough explanation of the research topic, its goals, methods, and their participation in it. Children agreed to an Oral Assent form and parents signed Informed Consent forms. Both children and parents were given an explanation of the interview procedure, the children's rights to withdraw from participation, about confidentiality and privacy, and protection from a potential risk of disclosure. I believe that the potential harm of this research does not exceed minimum levels. All interviews were recorded and transcribed anonymously and, after data analysis was complete, all transcriptions were destroyed. Participants' names were not mentioned in the interviews nor are real names used in any research documents. As noted above, I have used pseudonyms that the children chose for themselves. No one had access to the interview materials except me and my research project supervisor and academic advisers. To the best of my knowledge, the children were not asked any questions that might have led to psychological distress or discomfort.

#### Interview tools

Altogether, I conducted twelve semi-structured interviews with children ages 7 to 18 years. Besides the thirteen prepared questions, I also asked various prompting questions and tried to follow each child's narrative without much interrupting. Each interview lasted from 30 minutes to an hour. I slightly modified questions for each interview to make them more specific and focused. I also sent out Parent Informed Consent forms and Children's Oral Assent forms to the three of the five families prior to the interviews. The parents could read about my research topic before they would agree for their children to participate in this research. I was aware that

discussions between parents and children prior to the interviews might affect how the children responded to my questions. Nevertheless, I determined that knowing what the study and the interviews were going to be about would reduce any possible distress on the part of the parents if the topic were unknown and would make them more open to permitting their children to participate in the study.

### *NATURALISTIC OBSERVATIONS*

Naturalistic observations are one of the best methods to use if we want to understand how children develop. One of the main principles of this method is that children grow and develop in social worlds and in relationships with others. In those worlds, they develop their communication skills, “sense of self, their adjustment and powers of coping with stress and change” (as quoted on Dunn, 1993, in Green & Hogan, p.87). If we want to understand how children develop those abilities, we need to observe them interacting, talking, behaving, and reacting within their close relationships and most familiar environments. I had three participant observations of three families’ parent-child interactions at homes and outside of them. I have used those observations as a supplementary to my main source of information—interviews.

### 3. ANALYSIS

Data from the interviews were coded and analyzed. Analysis was based on the recurrence of the common themes and categories across the interviews with the children. I drew on the multiple sources of my theoretical framework as the lenses to view and analyze the data and support the conclusions. I used LaFromboise et al.’s (2001) five models of second culture acquisition; the work of various authors on sojourner and immigrant students and their

experiences, as well as multiple case studies of different immigrant and transnational communities across the U.S. and other countries.

In this section, I presented the methodologies that were used in this study; the research sample selection criteria; and the methods of data collection and analysis. Before turning to the findings, in the following section, I provide some of my personal background information that illustrates what has drawn me into this research and how my personal experience being bicultural and transnational has affected my life.

## **V. PERSONAL BIBLIOGRAPHY**

When I have started this project, I thought about the reasons and motives that were drawing toward and guiding me in it. If you love working with children, if you have your heart going out to them, if you can feel what they feel and be as they are or try to see the world through their eyes, then probably you will understand. I believe that we all still have a child living inside of us. We are curious about things, how they work, and why; we are eager to discover something new; at times, we are tempted to do what is irrational; and we love to dream.

As we grow and mature and are moving from childhood to adulthood, we have to learn how to endure, live through the pain, accept facts of life, and rationalize many things because we know now “this is how the life is”. Through life experiences, we eventually learn how to let things, places, and people go, as we travel through life. But what about children? What they are going through as we drag them with us in our life travels? We justify many of our decisions with the phrase: “for the best of the children”. But do we really think it is for their best? Do we ever consult with them when we make a major life decisions?

I have reflected on my own life. Starting from childhood and until the present time, I have lived at the juncture of cultures and countries, ethnos and epochs, and through the rise and fall of the socio-economic regimes. I grew up in a Russian family in the capital (Dushanbe) of one of the former Soviet Union Republics—Tajikistan. As I was growing up, I do not recall any frustration about who I was and whether I was different from my Tajik friends and classmates. I am pretty sure that they felt the same way. We never had any discussions about nationality, ethnicity or class differences. Perhaps, it was because we all were brought up with the thought that we were a part of a large multicultural family – the former Soviet Union - where everybody was considered equal. We were bound with the same ideas, dreams, and aspiration; with very similar future life trajectories; the same education and very similar life styles, since everyone had had equal opportunities in life. We all spoke the same language, at least at school. Many of my Tajik friends spoke Russian with their parents, as well. In the villages, the situation with language was different. Tajik was the language of the family for many, although, everyone knew Russian, since it was the medium of instruction at school. I learned Tajik at school and had good grades in it, but I have never spoken a word outside of the classroom. Even now, I have only a limited knowledge of it, enough only to make a good bargain at the local market when I surprise a Tajik merchant with my ability to communicate in Tajik.

Times changed for all of us when the Soviet Union collapsed in 1990 and every republic became independent, although it was confusing for all of us to understand from whom or from what we became ‘independent’. Many Russian and intellectual Tajik families fled the country to Russian itself or abroad. Tajikistan had to rebuild its national identity, culture, language, history and economy. We went through multiple errors and trials on the way to figuring out what we are as a country, who we are as a nation, and how can we blend multiple ethnic groups, various

nationalities, languages, and religions together again. I went along with my country every step of the way. My family had nowhere to go. We stayed. But we felt that we moved to a different country, so drastically different became our country from the one we once knew. We had to learn how to be more Tajik (I however, still need to learn the language) and adapt to the changing regime, country goals, political situation, and how to overcome new economic challenges.

I am Russian and was always viewed as a Russian. I have never drawn a line between me and other citizens of my country based on nationality. This line, however, became visible for me when Tajikistan became an independent state and Tajik nationality was emphasized. The political situation affected people's perceptions of each other, and they began to differentiate one from the other. As we adapted, I started to hear more comments from my Tajik friends and neighbors about me, my life or dress style, and my character. They commented on my living alone in an apartment (Tajik girls would rarely do that): "You can do it because you are Russian" or "You can say that so boldly because you are Russian" or "You can wear this because you are Russian" and so on. The ironic fact is, when I visited friends and relatives in the Ukraine or Russia, many of the residents did not view me as Russian. I imagine this was because I have many Tajik traits in the way I behave, dress, think, communicate, or host guests. So, I have had to learn to live with the irony of this situation and find myself hanging in the "identity" air—not sure to which one I truly belong or of with which to identify myself the most..

When I mastered the English language and started to work in the American International School, some people started to view me more as an American. This may have been because, perhaps, I adopted some of the traits that gave me a 'foreigner look'. Everyone was surprised if they saw me wearing a Tajik dress or when I tried to communicate in Tajik. I was confusing for many people who did not know me well. How did I respond to these circumstances? I had to

learn how to live with them, to enjoy the uniqueness of my position, to juggle my identities, and to get the most from the advantages they gave me.

Currently, I am studying in the United States as a Master's degree candidate. Although I worked with Americans for the 7 years before coming to the US and thought I was quite familiar with the cultural norms and expectations, the transitional period for me was challenging at times. Partially, it had to do with new technological tools such as electronic banking, a different mobile system, the University website, some lodging problems, and academic challenges due to the linguistic limitations and unfamiliarity with the subjects that we studied. Being naturally friendly and outgoing helped me to overcome some academic challenges and what I perceived as the personal distance of people around me. At times, I felt that I want to break the "personal space" rule and "invade" that space. I had to ask and clarify issues if I was confused or offended about something. I think my personal traits help me immensely in overcoming cultural barriers I had to face. Besides, I think one of the most important sources of strength and encouragement for me was my faith and the prayers and the church community I have found here. I wonder if maybe this universal identity – my religious faith - that is not attached to any country or culture in particular and yet can fit to any, gave me a chance to be myself everywhere. Change, adapt, learn but yet remain the same at my very core of self which is to be Christian. I am just speculating about this interpretation, but I found that it helps to explain my flexibility. However, another important source of ability to adapt to multiple contexts was, perhaps, my life as Russian in the Soviet, and later independent, Tajikistan. I had to learn how to fit into the culture I am living in and get along with the people and the mainstream norms and expectations without compromising my beliefs and values.

Analyzing and reflecting on the multiple factors influencing my personality and identity formation, I was drawn to study other people's experiences, specifically how their experiences in a foreign context affect their identity formation. Because I have undergone various personal transformations and changes in my perceptions of others and myself in the midst of the changes in the cultural and political environment, I was curious about how this process of adaptation happens in other people's lives, specifically in children's lives. Do children see themselves differently than adults? Is it harder or easier for them to adapt to a new environment? Where do they want to belong?

At times, I would ask myself, Who I am? Where do I belong? But I have never dwelled on that thought long enough to give myself a clear answer. Perhaps conducting this research will help me to define more precisely who I am and how I relate to others. I remain curious about whether others define me or do I define others, or is some complex mix.

## **VI. ETHICAL ISSUES AND VALIDITY**

Even though there is unlikely to be any harm to the participants, there were several potential ethical dilemmas I faced conducting this research. The first connected with my personal biography. It was a great source in supporting my research and helping me to understand and analyze the data, but at the same time it was a potential source of bias. As I have mentioned, I am of Russian descent but was born and lived in the Central Asian country of Tajikistan. Perhaps my own search for the answers could guide my research with children. This guidance could be a supporting tool or an impediment and a source of bias or both.

I designed the interview questions so that they would help me to discover which of two cultures (country of origin or the U.S.) a child identifies him/herself with the most. I had to be careful in wording the research and interview questions so as not to juxtapose the cultures thereby creating a situation where a child felt s/he needed to choose one over the other. It was a challenge to me to constantly reflect on my own experience in light of my reactions to children's answers and views. I had to remember that others may view 'sojourner' experiences very differently due to age, worldviews or simply personal traits. I also had to remember that what had happened to me does not necessary have to happen to children; how I saw and internalized changes could differ significantly from the perceptions of the children.

Another ethical dilemma I had to deal with was that I have my own opinions and perceptions of what is better for an individual who is placed in a foreign context. I agree with LaFromboise et al. (1993) that a person can be competent in two cultures without losing his or her cultural identity or having to choose between those two. Thus, I tried to be mindful of my biases and not to provoke children to answer the questions in a certain way and to satisfy my beliefs. I had to be careful not to lead participants in answering the questions in the way that I felt would support my ideas of the possibility of being bicultural. This issue of potential bias appeared during a conversation with my peer student 'critical friend'. He pointed out that I am conducting this research with an already presumed idea of the ideal conditions for bicultural individuals and use this framework as lenses to look at and interpret my results. I had to continuously address the issues by asking my colleagues, friends, and academic advisers to critically review my work.

Yet another ethical issue I had to consider in the research was protecting the confidentiality of the children's answers. From my point of view, I did not ask children any

questions that might result in disclosing some sensitive or negative family information. Nevertheless, I had to be cautious and have chosen not to reveal any even slightly negative information that children have entrusted to me directly with the parents or in the data presentation and analysis.

In addition to providing pseudonyms which the children themselves chose, I have masked the country of origin of those children from an African country. Specifically, wherever I refer to children as “African”, or they speak of themselves as “Africans”, this is a substitute for the name of their country of origin. In the interviews, I referred to the specific country in Africa. I have masked the country in order to protect participants’ identity and to provide confidentiality to the families. However, Afghan, Palestinian and Indonesian families did not expressed much concern about revealing their country of origin and even gave me a permission to use children’s real names. Nevertheless, I have made a decision to protect children’s and family’s identities and used pseudonyms instead.

## **VII. CHILDREN AND FAMILIES PROFILES**

I now introduce the families and children who participated in this research. My hope is that those short and, perhaps, very subjective descriptions help to vividly describe these children, their personalities, and character traits to provide a deeper background for understanding what they may be feeling, thinking, and experiencing as they navigate the intersections of two cultures.

### **AFRICAN FAMILY**

I conducted interview with four children from this family. The family first arrived to USA from one of the Anglophone countries in Africa four years ago, in August of 2008, when mother came to do her graduate study. After graduation with a Master’s degree, the mother was

accepted into a doctoral program at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. Two of the children finished their pre-primary and primary education in their home country where English was the medium of instruction. All of them are in good academic standing and do not have major difficulties at school in their home country or in the U.S.

The family has very strong ties between each other. Although some disagreements may arise between the sisters, most of the time they are fond of and caring for each other. Special attention is given to the youngest daughter who is a little princess in the household.

The mother is the head the household. The children are very respectful to her and obedient most of the time. In spite of her busyness, she tries her best to spend time with her children, taking them to shopping malls, beauty salons, “surprise” dinners at restaurants, exhibits, and sightseeing. She looks forward to quiet family nights at home with all her daughters. One of the most important family events is Sunday services at the local church which the family has attended regularly since they took up residence in the Amherst area. All the children attend the regional public schools.

Overall, in the house, there is a peaceful and calm atmosphere with the sense of family bonds and loving care between the members. It was a pleasure to talk to the girls and hear the way they think.

**a. Ruth (all of the names indicated in my research are pseudonyms)**

Ruth is the oldest daughter of the family at age 16. For the past three years, she has attended the regional public school. This year, she will graduate and, at the time of the study, was applying to college. Ruth had completed her primary and secondary education in her home country. She is very intelligent, smart, confident, and articulate. She has a very strong personality expressed in her opinions, desires, and plans for the future. In spite of her young age, Ruth sees clearly where she is going and what she wants to do. She is calm, gentle, and respectful, but likes to have fun and hang out with friends. Although Ruth is pursuing college education in the U.S., she sees her future connected by the invisible bonds with her home country and with what it means to her. She identifies herself as one who belongs to her home country. She describes this connection as a part of who she is and what has formed her as a person.

### **b. Paulina**

Paulina is a bright and lively girl who had just turned 11 at the time of the study. She started kindergarten in the U.S. and is now in grade 4. She is a very reflective but also a very open and expressive person. Sometimes she struggles to find her place in the family since she is not the youngest and, at the same time, is not as old as her two older sisters. Although admitting that school for her sometimes is a challenge, Paulina has good academic standing. She thinks in numbers and dates and is very specific and precise when talking about facts and events. I could imagine that her little head is full of different thoughts that are not so common for a child of her age. She struggles to understand and internalize many complex issues and ideas. A little bit impatient, she likes to jump from topic to topic and prefers to talk about the things that interest her rather than to answer interview questions thoroughly and in depth. Paulina is a very sensitive girl. But although easily offended and upset, she is quick to forgive and let go of the offence. She is like a little butterfly that hurries to another flower where the nectar is still fresh.

### **c. Grace**

Grace has a calm, soft, and friendly personality. She would prefer to be quiet than talk. She had just turned 13 at the time of the study. Her primary education was completed in her home country, and she had started her 4<sup>th</sup> grade in the U.S. Now she is in the grade 8. Grace is a good student and does not have any academic problems. She likes the school and has her best friends there. She, like her older sister, likes modern music and teen shows. She can equally enjoy a book and watching TV. Grace carries a lot of memories about her homeland. She loves talking about it and misses her time there. However, she is obviously enjoying her time in U.S. and feels here pretty comfortable without showing any signs of distress and frustration.

### **d. Sandra**

Sandra is the little princess of the family. Recently she has turned 7 and is very proud about this fact. She likes to be a center of family attention and being pampered by her older sisters and mother. She is very confident although at times can become very quiet and shy. Sandra has a very articulate and artistic personality. She likes to dress up, play with her dolls, to color and dance while watching a youth concert or show. Being a youngest in the family, Sandra is released from most of the household chores which older girls have to do. She has started her pre-primary education in the U.S. now she is in the second grade. She likes the school and enjoys her

classes. She has many friends at the school and her apartment complex. She likes to live in U.S. and does not miss anything in her home country except dad.

## PALESTINIAN FAMILY

This family shares almost the same history of coming to the U.S. as the family from Africa. They arrived here in 2007, as soon as the mother was accepted into a doctoral program. In the same manner, the father of the family does not live in U.S.; instead, family visits him during summer breaks. There are four children in the family. The oldest is 18 years old and the youngest is slightly over a year. Three children are attending the regional public schools.

Since English was not the medium of instruction in their country, the children have encountered difficulties in their academic achievements during their first year in the US. However, they have overcome this obstacle, and all of them are proficient English speakers now. The children have good academic standing and are enjoying the school, for the most part. They have developed quite a few close friendships in school. Most of their friends are children of minority population or immigrants. They have become friends from taking ESL classes and from the International student's club which they attend.

The family is observant Muslims. The mother tries her best to preserve their cultural traditions and beliefs. The children are very respectful to their mother and each other, in spite some small disagreements arising here and there. The family has meals together as much as their schedules allow. This is an important time for all of them when they share food, school events, concerns, and plans.

Everybody is especially fond of their little brother. The children do not consider care for him as a chore but are eager to spend some time playing with and caring for him.

### **a. Sami**

Sami is a young man age of 18. This year he will graduate from high school. He is very communicative and outgoing. He was very eager to participate in the interviews and did not feel shy or withdrawn. He is very reflective and observant, although very light and humorous. Sami looks very confident and, if he is not, one could never tell. He has an open and very friendly

personality. He considers himself as belonging to his home country and has a sense of pride in his nationality. This fact does not hinder him to enjoy an American life style. From my observation he did not show signs of distress, depression or anxiety.

**b. Omar**

Omar is a young man age of 16. Although very calm and quiet, he has a very good sense of humor and likes to have fun times with his friends making jokes, laughing, and sharing common interests. He enjoys school, where he has good grades, especially classes which some of his friends are attending as well. He is kind of a laid back guy who likes to talk about topics that are of interest to him and to be engaged in conversation about somewhat philosophical matters. Omar's observations and reflective skills help him to see through the heart of the matter and to come up with very insightful conclusions. As his older brother, he too considers himself more his home country nationality rather than American. Although missing his friends and time they spend together back home, he enjoys playing computer games, watching TV, making new friends, primarily with the children of other internationals and immigrants, and spending fun time together with them.

**c. Zain**

Zain is a girl, age of ten. She has a soft and gentle spirit and friendly personality. Zain could be cheerful, witty, very bold at times and even a little bit stubborn. She is cherished by her brothers and mother and is definitely pampered by them. She is a smart and observant girl. This helps her not only to have good academic standing at school, but also to analyze, understand, and verbalize very difficult and abstract topics about herself, others, identity, personality, friendship, and conformity. She was not overly enthusiastic about the interview, but her responses were very thoughtful and insightful.

**INDONESIAN FAMILY**

This family arrived in Amherst when the husband obtained a scholarship to do doctoral study at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. His wife and daughter joined him half a year after he arrived. Their son, who is 2 years old, was born in U.S. The mother is very kind, open, and hospitable young woman. She stays at home and is busy with her own children as well as

babysitting two neighboring children. Her English is quite good, and she is not reluctant to communicate in English. Most of her English language skills were obtained since she came to America. Interestingly, she speaks to her son in English because of the two children she baby-sits for (ages 3 and 2 ½). Their parents want them to speak English only since at home they speak native languages. The mother seems happy with her role as the mother and with life in America where she sees some advantages for children's education. She misses her family a lot since she has not had a chance to visit them in five years. She does not have many Indonesian friends and this makes her a bit sad.

**a. Daisy**

Daisy is a shy and soft-spoken girl age of 9. She looks younger than this and becomes very upset when classmates tease her because she is shorter than most of them. Although her English skills are very good and she does not encounter major difficulties in communicating, she was not feeling that comfortable to talk in the interview. This may have been because she had not met me before and was not sure how to behave with me. Daisy likes to play her violin, to read, and to draw. Sometimes she helps to cook or to supervise the children if her mother has to be in the shower or do other small errands around the house. She is very kind and gentle with her little brother whom she teaches English.

**AFGHAN FAMILY (1)**

The family has lived in the Amherst area for four years. The father of the family is pursuing a doctoral degree. His family came along with him. For the past year, he has been working back in Afghanistan while the family stays here and the children attend school. There are four children in the family. All of them attend the regional public schools. The mother is responsible for the education of all those children with assistance of her older daughter who helps her brothers to improve their academic skills. All the children are proficient English speakers and have only a barely noticeable accent. The family is very hospitable, open, and friendly. The children are friendly with each other and have fun playing together.

**a. Fatima**

Fatima is a very outspoken and friendly girl of age eleven. She seemed to be very confident meeting me even for the first time. She was very hospitable and welcoming and treated me as a 'good' girl from an Afghan family is supposed to treat guests. She has a very communicative personality and likes to talk. Her language skills are very strong: she is a fluent English speaker and seems not having any trouble interacting. Fatima enjoyed the interview and was very open in speaking her mind and expressing her opinions, feelings, and thoughts.

**b. Yaqoob**

Yaqoob is a boy age of nine. He was a bit shy when I first arrived but later he got used to me and looked comfortable, as he tried to present his thoughts and opinions to me. Perhaps the invitation to be interviewed and participate in the study gave him a sense of the importance and significance of his views. He was very eager to share his thoughts and feelings with me. Our conversation was very lively, and Yaqoob seemed to enjoy talking about himself and his country which he loves so much. Most of the memories he has shared with me were connected with Afghanistan.

**AFGHAN FAMILY (2)**

This family has Afghan roots, but they arrived to the U.S. from Iran where they lived for the past 20 years. The father is pursuing doctoral studies at the University of Massachusetts, and the mother lives in Iran with the youngest child where she is finishing her own doctoral program. There are two children in the family, two boys. The older one lives with his father in the U. S.

**Hamid**

Hamid is naturally soft-spoken boy, age of eleven.. He was born and lived all his life in Iran, excluding a few weeks spent in Afghanistan for U.S. visa purposes. Although I had a chance to meet with him before and spend some time interacting with him in informal settings, he was definitely shy to talk to me. The topic itself was bit unusual, and Hamid experienced some difficulties in opening up and expressing himself. This could be explained by the topic, his personality traits, and by the themes we discussed which required sharing feelings and thoughts. Most of Hamid's free flowing speech was about his friends. Although he was not verbally

expressive, our conversation showed that Hamid is very reflective and likes to think about things, events, and people.

## VIII. FINDINGS

In this chapter, I present the analysis of the children's interviews. The discussion is organized around the themes that emerged in the interviews. The most common topics were: "language", "ways of doing things", "feeling/being different", "religion", "identify more with...", "food", "dress" and "future plans". The children talked about all of these in reference to one of two countries or cultures: country of origin (they all were born outside U.S.) and America. Another salient topic I discussed with children was their perception of cultural identity: Is it something important to keep? What aspects should be preserved when moving to another country? What can change and what can be negotiated? In this section I discuss these themes. When I include an example of a child's answers, I italicize these direct passages from the interviews. In a few cases, I bold key words or sentences that I think are significant.

When I started to analyze the data, I could see a few common themes that recurred in almost each interview. In part, this had to do with the interview questions that were designed to ask children to compare cultures (American and the country of origin), and their experiences in them. On the other hand, it probably also had to do with the similarities in the processes children were going through in finding their place in a new country and culture.

My analysis highlights the children's reference to language as a main differentiating and identification factor. Another focus of the discussion is on how children negotiate their identity:

What do they choose to preserve and what to compromise in that negotiation and why? The final section builds an argument for the possibility of a creating bicultural identity with the ability to alternate between two or more cultural identities. This flows from the data analysis.

## LANGUAGE

Language was a theme that emerged into almost every aspect of the interviews with the children. Language was associated with their cultural identification and expression; an area of struggles; and a means for cultural preservation and assimilation, all at the same time. Joseph (2004) argues that “the entire phenomenon of identity can be understood as a linguistic one” and that “language and identity are ultimately inseparable” (2004, 12-13 as cited in Scourfield et al. 2006, p. 129). He states that most important function of language is interpretation and not communication, as in traditional linguistics. Through interpretation, children place people around them into categories (Joseph 2006:40 as cited in Scourfield et al. 2006, p. 129). Thus, language is the strongest identification factor in a child’s cultural identity. In my study, language was the most salient topic in many of the interviews. This was also the case in the study by Scourfield et al. (2006) with middle school children in Wales. In their study, language and accent were the most important cultural markers that children mentioned. The authors noted that both of these markers were used through which children were categorized by others and also how categorized themselves as different from others. Language was mentioned as a resource for cultural identity.

Although varying in degree, all the interviewees in my study were proficient English speakers. When Gibson (1988) studied a Sikh community in California, she found that there was a significant difference in English language proficiency between younger and older arrivals. Students who arrived in the U.S. by age six or seven did better academically, especially in English language acquisition, than those who arrived at an older age and entered higher grades

(Gibson, 1988, p. 93). In my research sample, the children who came from Africa and had a few years of formal schooling there were already fluent English speakers when they came to the U.S. in part because English is the medium of instruction in the schools in their country. The children who came from Palestine, Afghanistan, and Indonesia have struggled and had to be enrolled in ELL classes. In support of Gibson's (1988) findings, my research shows that the younger children had fewer difficulties with learning the English language and acquired linguistic skills much faster than their older siblings. However, the older children were more proficient in their native language and used it as the medium of family communication. They perceived their native language as an essential part of their cultural identity and emphasized the importance of preserving native linguistic skills to preserve their cultural identity. The younger children did not place that much value on knowledge of their native language. Two girls age of 9 and 7 had very similar responses:

*Zain (girl, age 9): When I was younger I used to talk in Arabic but now I got used to English*

*TK: What language do you speak with mom and dad?*

*Sandra (age 7): English.*

*TK: Do you know Yoruba (one of the African languages)?*

*Sandra: No.*

*TK: Why you do not want to learn it?*

*Sandra: It sounds like a lot of work.*

*TK: What language do you speak at home?*

*Paulina (age 11): I am not good at my language. Therefore, I speak English.*

There are different factors (age, familiarity with and the use of the native language) that come into play in this situation. However, three girls (age 11, from Africa; age 9, from Palestine; and age 11, from Indonesia) who prefer to speak in English and struggle with their native language expressed an interest, desire, and need to learn their language and to become more competent at it than they are now. Some reasons, of course, are very practical. First is the fact

that they will most likely go back to their home country in a few years. Besides, some of the children are going back during the summer breaks and need to communicate with their relatives and friends.

*Zain (age 9): When we were about to go there I did not know many words and I told my mom that I need to start speaking Arabic because we will start living there soon. So I started to speak Arabic.*

*Fatima (age 11): I know Pashtu and I know Farsi. I knew it a lot when I came here. It's easy to speak and it was like an extra language we knew. When I came here I forgot it. Now I understand it but cannot really speak it. When I went home I could not answer people in Farsi. At home I speak Pashtu but teach my mom English.*

Another girl (Paulina, age 11), although struggling with her native language, expressed a very serious desire to learn it. For her, the Yoruba language is something valuable and needed to be preserved and passed on to the next generation.

*Paulina: When I will speak to my baby I will speak my language, African because **I want my child speak African language***

*TK: Will your children speak English when they grow?*

*Paulina: No. They will know how to speak it and then they can learn English.*

*TK: Do you think it's important for people to know their language?*

*Paulina: Yes. My cousin in Africa is younger but speaks much better than I am. I am not in Africa that's why I only understand a lot. I knew a lot in Africa but then the words got out of my memory because I am in America now.*

*TK: Would you prefer your mom speak Yoruba to you?*

*Paulina: Yes. **I would prefer my mom speak Yoruba to me.** 'Cause I want to learn the language.*

Many children, especially the younger ones who had been educated for a very short time in the country of origin or had all their primary schooling in the U.S., said that they had largely forgotten how to speak the native language although they maintained some understanding of it. I, myself, find it hard to speak Russian at times. Often I will mix two languages. I also notice that I have lost the richness of my native language. When I am talking about complex issues, I take

some time to find the right word. Most children in my study speak their native language at home. It is more challenging for the younger children, since their primary schooling started in the U.S. and the medium of instruction is English. An exception is the African family. Although the oldest daughter speaks with the mother in Yoruba, most of the family conversation is conducted in English, since two of the younger girls arrived in the U.S. at very young ages and were exposed to their native language for a very short time. Another reason could be that the medium of instruction in their country was English.

Daisy arrived in the U.S. four years ago. She still speaks Indonesian at home but finds it difficult to develop her native linguistic skills:

*TK: What language do you speak?*

*Daisy (age 9): Mostly Indonesian but I usually mix them up. Partially Indonesian, partially English. I started to speak more English because I forget Indonesian.*

*TK: Do you want to learn Indo?*

*Daisy: Sometimes I want to learn it, but sometimes I do not want to care about it because I feel that I do not need to learn Indonesian but sometimes I think I need to learn it. I speak English to my little brother so he will learn it.*

Although children placed a different value on a native language and had varying degrees of knowledge and use of it, they all realize the importance of English language proficiency for better adaptation into American society and future success in it. This is also called “code switching” in bilingualism. As Ogbu and Matute-Bianchi argue, "it is possible and acceptable to participate in two different cultures or to use two different languages, perhaps for different purposes, by alternating one's behavior according to the situation" (1986, p. 89). This hypothesis implies that individuals who can “alternate their behavior appropriate to two targeted cultures will be less anxious than a person who is assimilating or undergoing the process of acculturation” (LaFromboise et al., 1993, p. 399).

*TK: Which language is more comfortable for you to speak?*

*Yaqoob (boy, age 9): Pashtu. With my brother and sister and mom. Sometimes I speak with my brother English when we watching TV. **I am comfortable with both, but English is easier.***

Most of the children whom I interviewed maintained that it is essentially important to preserve the native language as an expression of their cultural identity, or as the means to differentiate themselves from others, as something that connects a person with his/her culture and roots and the extended family. Some of the older children felt responsible to help younger children preserve their language. They were upset and a bit disturbed that the younger children were not fully competent in it, starting to forget it, and majority of the time preferring to speak English. Here are excerpts from the interviews with children from Afghan and Palestinian families:

*Fatima (age 11): With my brothers I speak Pashtu so they will not just speak English, English and forget their language. I notice that they speak a lot in English and I wanted them to speak Pashtu and English only at school. I talk in English with them and want to see if they will answer me in English or Pashtu. Sometimes they do not realize that I am testing them, but sometimes they think “Oh, I need to speak Pashtu!”*

*TK: Why do you think it's important to know the language?*

*Fatima: When we go back to Afghanistan everyone speaks Pashtu and it's their language, their religion, their culture. Or part of their religion. It's important.*

*Omar (age 16)*

*TK: What language you speak at home?*

*Omar: Only Arabic. We speak Arabic with Zain but she answers in English*

*T: Do you think language is important for you to keep?*

*Omar: Yes. It's important to keep you background history.*

*TK: Why?*

*Omar: **Because it's you identity, it's what you are.***

*TK: Family history or cultural history?*

*Omar: All together*

Omar, as many other children, was convinced that the most essential part they needed to maintain and preserve was language as an expression of identity:

*Omar: **The most important**....to keep... I have a second culture. Most people forget it. ...**Language**. If I am growing here...It could be hard for children when their parents are trying to enforce cultural traditions and the school is teaching them different thing. Zain forgets her language. **You started to lose your culture when you start to lose your language. That's a big thing**. This is your first language but now she cannot even to speak it.*

Although his sister Zain preferred to answer in English and found it much easier, she realized that knowing her native language was important to maintain nuclear and extended family ties. So she was trying to learn it:

*Zain (age 9): I thought it is important to my family. So I try to push myself to speak Arabic. Sometimes it's hard and frustrating. I speak mainly Arabic at home. Outside we speak with the friends in English... I knew it right away (Arabic words) when I went to Palestine in the summer. Like words I did not know how to say before. I also think that it's important (to preserve a native language) because you can **communicate with your family and people form your religion and country**.*

But at the same time, she mentioned:

*Zain: When I came to America and leaned quickly how to do things and how to speak. I know it really quickly. For my brothers took it a while.*

Her answer again supports Gibson's (1988) findings that the age of arrival is crucial in second language acquisition and academic success. The younger the age of a child when s/he arrives to U.S., the better is the language fluency and, thus, academic performance (Gibson, 1988, p. 90). It is also important to note that children can pretty easily switch languages: to speak the native language at home to maintain culture within the family and English outside, communicating with the rest of the world around them. English language proficiency was viewed by all the children as desirable and needed for better functioning within the host society:

*Sandra (age 7): If people get to know you and understand you, you can keep your traditions. So people make friends and understand you. If you know language you can do anything you want. If you knew language before coming here it will also help you.*

*Hamid (age 9): Their (native language of people coming to the U.S.) language is important to keep. They should **learn English and stay with their language too.***

As we can see, most children could successfully alter the languages depending on the situation. However, Sami (age 18) noted that “changing the language shows a change in mind”. This is a very perceptive comment and very much dependent on what language he thinks in.

*TK: So you are changing in the way of thinking?*

*Sami: The way the changes are shown is through the language. So to see **if a person is becoming more American it's through the language skills. If the mind is changing and it shows through the changes in the language.***

This topic was brought up in the conversation about becoming more Americanized through the improvement of English language skills and mixing the cultures:

*TK: Do you think that language skills make you more Americanized?*

*Sami: Probably... But some things you do in Palestine you would not do here and opposite.*

*Omar: If I stay here I will kind breaking it and mixing it...*

*TK: Breaking what?*

*Sami: The norms basically. Like mixing Palestinian and American together.*

*TK: Which norms you need to break?*

*Sami: ...the Palestinian... So you would be able to mix...*

The issue of language and negotiation of whether it should be changed and to what extent, or should it be preserved, was salient in most interviews. For this young man, breaking the norms was very closely connected with language and, through language, with the way he thinks. The change of the language preference and more active use of one language over the other (native language vs. language of the host country) signified for him, for his brother, and an Afghan girl, a change of the mind. Although one child saw this from a somewhat positive perspective, the other two were troubled by those changes and saw them as threats to their cultural identity.

## DOING THINGS DIFFERENTLY, FEELING DIFFERENT: BEHAVIOR, DRESS, FOOD AND VALUES

In almost every interview, children talked about doing/viewing things differently in different cultural contexts. The children often expressed the changes in, or preservation of, the cultural values and perceptions through doing things differently from, or the same as, one of two cultures. Sometimes they compared, juxtaposed or integrated both. The differences in the answers again were very much dependent on the age of a child, age of his/her migration, and duration of stay in U.S. There were, however, some differences that point out individual preferences for cultural traditions or values or personal choices. As two of the older children noted, we all first look at the differences and then notice similarities. As I mentioned in the Theoretical Discussion section, it is through perceptions of differences and through comparison with the other that we form our understanding of self (Chen 2009; Hall 1996):

*Sandra (girl, age 7)*

*TK: Do you think you are more American or African?*

*Sandra: American*

*TK: How do you think people see you?*

*Sandra: American*

*TK: Why?*

*Sandra: Because I do not speak like African and I do not do stuff like African. I talk like American.*

*TK: What do you think makes you different?*

*Sandra: Because they think I kind of speak with the weird accent*

*TK: Did they tell it to you?*

*Sandra: No*

*TK: Why do you think they think this way if they never told you?*

*Sandra: Because...I just think. When they first saw me **I do not want them to think I am African.***

Older and younger children acknowledged that they were changing, adapting to a new life style and its demands and doing things differently from how they used to. However, many of

them still gave preference to the ways of doing things in the country of origin and wanted to practice those ways, if circumstances allowed.

*Omar (age 15): No, I did not change. Maybe a little. Simple changes. Adapting to things. **Things I do in my country I do them differently here.***

*Paulina (age 13): Yeah. I will keep my culture. I think I am more African. Maybe now I **do things little bit more American.** (When she returns to her home country)*

*Zain (age 10): **I got used to talking and doing stuff not like in Palestine and more like Americans.** Like, for instance, clothing. I dress different than people in Palestine.*

*Yaqoob (age 9): There are so many different things in America and in Afghanistan. For example, stores are very close and you do not need to drive a car. When I went to the store there, so many people were on the street I did not know. They were all strangers. I was scared. Stores are not so close here and you have to drive a car. When I went back to my country, many things I did wrong because I did not know how to do things. When I came back from Afghanistan I forgot to use internet because we do not have much internet there.*

Partially, some of the things children were doing differently because they need to adapt to a new life style in the new society. Sometimes, these were purely mechanical changes in behaviors: like taking a school bus or driving to the store where only parents are involved in the money transactions, etc. Children understood that they were in a different world with different practices for the means of communication, expressions, and relationships. They felt the need to learn and adjust to be able to fit in to become a part of the society and to ensure that they were accepted in it:

*Yaqoob (age 9): There are some people who were not nice and mean to me. I was wearing Afghan clothes and they do not like it and say: "What is that?" They did not know anything about it. When I first came here I did not know how to say. They made a little fun of me. Then I got better and better in English and the people started being my friends. I have a lot of friends.*

Children compared and contrasted cultural norm, behaviors, values, ways of life, and differences in how society as a whole is functioning. Although shocked in the beginning, all of

them got accustomed to “mechanical differences”, to the “way of doing things”. Many of them adopted new behavioral patterns, perhaps, in order to fit in at first. Later some of those practices became a norm or even enjoyable activities. But some of the habits did not change due to personal preferences, cultural or religious expectations, or family influences:

*Yaqoob: When I came here I asked what Americans do so I can do to blend in. Americans like jeans and... computers. In my country we play outside not computer. People are walking outside. We play half video game and half we play outside. Here they talk all the time about new games. I learned a lot about games. Here people move all the time. In my country we stay forever in the same house. I needed to change.*

*TK: Did you change? (We talked about changes in a dress style here)*

*Yaqoob (age 9): Yes. People wear jeans here. But I still like more Afghan clothes because it's soft, not tight.*

*Zain (age 9): But I go to the store (in Palestine) and I see everyone wearing skirts and dresses I felt like left out because I was wearing jeans, but I still do not want to wear it. It's weird.*

*Fatima (age 11): I started to learn a lot of stuff. I started to feel that I am another person. But I still did not forget who I am. I learn about holidays like Valentine's Day or Christmas. It was different for me. **I started to wear different clothes.***

*TK: Did you want to wear it?*

*Fatima: We had to. I do not really wearing jeans.*

*TK: What do you prefer what style?*

*Fatima: I prefer Afghan clothes.*

*TK: Do you feel you have to dress differently? Why you are not wearing them if you like?*

*Fatima: I do wear them at home. I do not wear Afghan clothes at school*

*TK: Why?*

*Fatima: I do not know why.*

*TK: What do you do differently? The way you think, talk, dress?*

*Omar (age 16): There are changes but simple changes.*

*TK: Did the way you dress changes?*

*Omar: Yes. In my country they all wear skinny clothes, skinny jeans, shirts and gel on their hair...it's just a different style. Here is more hip-hop style. **I changed a bit here.** I was wearing a smaller shirt.*

*TK: Do you like more here? Which style you prefer?*

*Omar: It changes. It's so stupid. Why would you wear it so skinny? But when I am going there I am changing.*

*TK: So you are adapting to the style? If you are to choose which would you prefer?*

*Omar: I like it here, **I like this style***

However, sometimes it was not so much about the way of doing things, but about the values that a child considered important to preserve. It was more difficult for the younger children to differentiate between values. Older children made it more explicit. Obviously, in their everyday life, children were doing many things considerably differently than in their home countries. I also did not hear from any of them that they still struggled to adjust to the way things are done in the U.S. So, often when they said “doing things differently”, it seemed to me that they meant “valuing different things”. Special emphasis was given to family values and traditions and to religion. It was emphasized more in some of the Muslim families:

*Omar (age 15): When I came here I changed at some things. But **I still do most things I did in my country**. I still like to stay with my family members. I like to do things that are Palestinian*

*TK: What are those things?*

*Omar: Hanging out with the family, have a large family. Sit all together on Thursdays. Families do not hang out together. When you ask them: Who is your family? They will say only sisters, brothers and parents. They will never mention cousins, uncles, aunts. This is my family.*

*Fatima (age 11): I do something that is part of here. I am doing it and I am happy because I learned something from another world. But **I would never forget who I am or my religion**. Like Valentine's Day, it's part of their culture, their country, or religion.*

There was also recognition of stereotyping. In these situations, the differences were laid out by others (classmates) but not by the children themselves:

*Ruth (age 16): Now sometimes I will do something differently but generally, no matter what I do I would still have my African perspective to it. I would say I am 95% African 5% American*

*TK: What does it mean “to have African perspective”?*

*Ruth: They know I am from a different culture because I do things differently, because of my perspective. They think I am so proper because I say: "Guys, do not do it or do not be noisy in a hall". They think that in Africa everyone is noisy and partying. No. It's about who you are as an individual not from where you are.*

A study of biculturalism and adjustment of Ramallah-American adolescents by Kazaleh (1986) showed interesting results:

Although identity conflict was indeed present, many of the adolescents had acquired an array of mechanisms for dealing with the dissonance and were adept at alternating between both cultural orientations with minimal anxiety. Those who had more difficulty adjusting were the youth whose parents and clan members reacted with greater anxiety to rapid change and resisted mainstream influences (As cited in Ogbu & Matute-Bianchi, 1986, p. 124).

When I observed and talked to the children participating in my research, I noticed that all of them felt quite comfortable operating in different cultural situations. When we went to a restaurant with the African family, the girls were very eager to make the orders, knew exactly what they wanted, and communicated with the waitress freely. They ordered a typical meal for an American restaurant; they knew how to make the orders; how to respond to the questions; and what they could ask for. The oldest girl was very excited about the restaurant. She even said that she would have her "sweet 16" party there. When I observed the children at home, the older girls were helping with cooking and setting the table for a meal. The meal, as most of them, included traditional African food. The girls, especially the older ones, knew precisely their roles and responsibilities and the mother's expectations for them to help her with cooking and cleaning. In the interview, one of the older girls noted that she "*would feel weird when she knows that her mom is in the kitchen and she is not helping her there*" because she was used to help with cooking since she was a little girl. So, at home they practiced a different culture, the culture of their homeland.

I visited the Palestinian family during the month of Ramadan (*When people are fasting the whole month, eating the meals only after the sunset*). As I was conducting the interview with one of the boys, the time came to eat. He apologized, went to the kitchen, and served a table with all kinds of food. (At this time his mother was not home. She went to pick up his sister from the movie theater.) Although he did not pray as Muslim people usually do before starting a meal during Ramadan, he sat at the table at the exact time. All food was Palestinian style. By that time, the other family members had arrived. We had a nice family dinner. Most conversation was about school and the latest news from the extended family in the Palestine. After dinner everyone went to do their things: computer games, books, studies, and baby care.

Many children indicated that it was important for them to have meals together. Even if some families had very different schedules, they still tried to have a meal together in the evening. This was an important act to preserve family traditions and strengthen its ties.

## PLACE OF BIRTH

Place of birth was another significant marker of cultural identity. The children in this study often connected their national identity with the place where they were born and grew up. In some cases, children associated their cultural and national identity with their parents' birth place. As some researchers have pointed out, the length of residency in the home country may also strongly affect child's perception of cultural identity (Scourfield et al., 2006).

*TK: Do you see yourself more as an African or as an American?*

*Paulina (age 10): I think I am more African because I lived there longer. About 4 years. I took kindergarten and then academia. So 3 years and 7 months. This is my fourth year. 3 years and 6 months. I remember more of Nigeria. I used to love Nigeria more than America.*

*TK: Is it changing and you will love America more?*

*Paulina: No, I am still going to love Nigeria more than America.*

However, not only did the place of birth and the length of residency influence the children's identification, but such elements as color of the skin (for people of color) and parents' place of birth were mentioned:

*Paulina: I think people think I am African because I have different skin.*

*TK: You think the skin color make the difference? There are many Africans who were born here in America.*

*Paulina: Yes. But **I wasn't born here. I was born in Africa and my mom always lived in Africa.***

*Ruth (age 16): Remaining and keeping the culture of your country depends on how long you have been immersed in your culture. Someone like my sister who came here at the age of 4...*

*TK: Are you saying that they should not keep their African traditions?*

*Ruth: I would like them to. But I would not force it on them. **They did not live in Africa for so long, they do not know much about the culture.** We try as much as possible to tell them about African culture. They know they will go back.*

Here is a Palestinian girl who was born there but lived most of her life in America; she was trying to explain her identification. She realized that she has Palestinian roots, and they are very important markers in her national identification. However, she remembers more of her life in the U.S., and she connected with it more strongly:

*TK: How do you think of yourself? Are you more Palestinian or American?*

*Zain (age 9): More like an American*

*TK: Why?*

*Zain: I was born in Palestine and I know how to speak more English than my brothers. I also want to try what Americans do, what they eat. When someone says "I am American" I think they are born here and lived here for a long time and they knew America really well. If I am... If I was born in America... They stayed in America for a short period and then went to another place... because I was born in Ramallah... but I haven't seen that place for a long time. I forgot that I was born in Ramallah. I don't remember that place.*

*TK: So, because you lived here longer you think you are an American?*

*Zain: If you are born somewhere and lived there for a year. **I am American and I know I am not.***

*(I think she means that if you were born somewhere and live there only for a year you cannot really associate yourself with that country anymore. So, she considers herself as an American, although she knows that she wasn't born here)*

## RELIGION

Religion was yet another strong marker in children's identification with a culture. Although I did not ask any direct questions about religion, the children brought it up in their explanations of their national identity. This was especially articulated by the children from historically Muslim nationalities or countries. Some children (presumably from the families where they conduct religious practices daily) stressed this part of their identity more than the others. As Scourfield et al.'s (2006) research data suggest, for those children their self-identification of being Muslim refers more to the deeply rooted sense of self rather than a matter of social performance. Being a minority group, Muslim children see their "faith expression much more a psychological and culturally salient issue deeply entangled in question "Who I am?" (Scourfield et al., 2006, p.53).

*TK: Do you think people who are coming to U.S. from the different countries need to keep their culture or to Americanize as fast as possible?*

*Zain: I think they need to keep their culture. I think it's important to keep because you will visit your country and you would not know what do and what to say. This is important. Sometimes something pops up of you do not even know it. It could be a test or anything else...like about you religion and you would not know what to say.*

*TK: Why do you think it's important to know the language (native)?*

*Fatima (age 11): When we go back to Afghanistan everyone speaks Pashtu and it's their (her younger brothers and sister) language, their religion, their culture. Or part of their religion. It's important.*

*TK: What you think of your-self? Do you think you are Pashtu or Afghani or American girl or combination of things?*

*Fatima: I think I am Afghani girl because I love my country. Even if I am here I do not have to be like other people. No matter where you are do not forget who you are, your*

*religion, and your language. Do not forget things that are important for you. When someone comes here (to U.S.) and they say “I will change and be an American girl”. But I never will give it away and I do not want to change and become someone else. They forget their religion and things like that.*

Fatima’s younger brother mentioned religion as something important for him that he wanted others to see in him or know about him. He realizes that his religion was something that made him different from others. It seemed that, although other types of differences could be overlooked or adjusted to more easily (e.g. learn the language, western type of clothes), religious difference is much bigger. He even wanted people to know the things they did not understand about his religion because he saw that people cannot connect with it, thus, did not accept him on these terms. Yaqoob did not sway from his point (meaning religion) in order to be accepted:

*TK: How do you want people to think about you or to know about you?*

*Yaqoob (age 9): **Some people do not get religion.** We do believe in God and we pray 5 times a day. Morning, afternoon, evening...and before you go to bed. If you do not pray you can have a bad dream or be scared. We are Muslim. **I want people to understand it.** When we drive a car we say a word “Bismilloi Rahmon Rahim” So nothing bad would happen. **IF** someone died if they did good words, prayed they go to Heaven. If they did not pray or did bad things they go to Hell. I believe I go to Heaven because I do my good deeds.*

The girls from the African family were not as explicit about their religion, although they practice Christianity on a daily basis. Only one of the girls mentioned that part of their daily routines is morning and evening prayers together as a family. Interesting enough, the older children from the Palestinian family did not mention religion as a salient and important characteristic of their cultural identity. From my perspective, this could be attributed to two factors. One is that their religious practices are so in-grained that they are not as aware of them. They may see religion as a part of their history and national roots. Another factor, in my opinion, could be that they have learned at school (through direct teaching, observation or other cultural cues) that religion is a very sensitive topic that brings about a lot separation and

contradictions. Therefore, they may have decided not to bring it up in our conversation. It is also possible that they may hold their beliefs as something sacred and too personal to share with others.

## CONTROVERSIES AND DOUBLE MINDEDNESS

There seemed to be some level of conflict between cultural practices, values, and expectations that children are trying to internalize and balance. In her study of Ramallah-American adolescents, Kazaleh (1986) views this as an inner conflict caused by cultural tensions. She observed it as something that was expressed in the children's words, applications of different coping strategies like lying to parents, doing "forbidden things" in secret (e.g. going out with the friends or hanging out with Americans), or "consciously and unconsciously excluding thoughts and feelings which were incompatible with cultural norms of the community" (Kazaleh, 1986, p. 172).

I also sometimes noticed "doubleness" in children's explanations and descriptions. I think that the younger children were not even conscious about the contradictions in their answers. However, they were more like part of the developing reasoning skills expressed verbally rather than suppressing thoughts and feelings. Children, even very young ones, were laying bare their feelings and thoughts no matter how confusing these were or even did not make sense at times, like the Palestinian girl who could not figure out who she was: more Palestinian or American:

*TK: So, because you lived here longer you think you are an American?*

*Zain: If you are born somewhere and lived there for a year... I am American and I know I am not. (I used this quote before but feel that it is appropriate to use it in this context as well)*

*TK: Do you see yourself more American or Pashtu or Afghani?*

*Yaqoob (age 9): Afghani. When I look at the mirror I see that I am more brown and Americans are so white.*

*TK: Is it only skin makes a difference?*

*Yaqoob: No. I feel Afghan more*

*TK: If you look like me, would you feel more American?*

*Yaqoob: Definitely*

*TK: So it's the skin color that makes a difference.*

*Yaqoob: No, **I feel more Afghani inside.***

*TK: Do you see yourself more as an African or American?*

*Paulina (age 11): **I think I am more African because I lived there longer.***

*TK: So you are saying that if you live here longer you will be more American?*

*Paulina: Yes. Now I am used to African more but when I will be older I will be more English and I will know more words. I'm not used to America still. I am used to Africa more. I used to love Africa more than America.*

*TK: Is it changing and you will love America more?*

*Paulina: No, **I am still going to love Africa more than America.***

*TK: Do you think that you have changed and when you'll go back to Africa you will behave differently there?*

*Paulina: Yes. Maybe a little. But I still want to be African and I do not want to be different from my culture. **I was born there I want to be like my culture, I do not want to be different.***

## TO BE OR NOT TO BE? TO KEEP OR NOT TO KEEP?

I do not deny that there may well be conflict in a child's mind about his or her identity when they struggled to categorize themselves. However, this is not necessarily a permanent and negative conflict. Due to the relatively young age of the children with contradictory answers and the short time they have been in the U.S., it may be that this is part of a psychological process of adaptation to a new place and finding one's place in a new reality. Perhaps it is easier for the younger children to adapt to new cultural practices but more difficult to internalize and express the dissonance between the new and the old. Therefore, they more easily identify with an American culture than the culture of the origin. The older children, although also experiencing some difficulties with explaining their position between their ethnic identities and newly

acquired “American” identities, did not display (at least verbally or behaviorally) noticeable signs of imbalance and conflict in the identity discussions. Their answers were more sophisticated in justifying their choices of identification. But sometimes they, too, could not find an explanation for certain feelings they have. They were more reflective and observant of the patterns of their behavior and the changes that occurred in them. The interesting thing is that the older children could also see what constituted those changes and could project the future consequences of those changes. They also understood the role of their choices and that they had the freedom to make them:

*TK: What do you think of yourself: more as a Palestinian or American?*

*Sami (age 16): More Palestinian. I was thinking about it actually, we read a book about Indian and his son who lives in the US and does not consider himself as an Indian. The more I stay here, the more I become like Palestinian-American, not just Palestinian as I thought when I just got here. So **I am trying to balance each life. Being Palestinian and American.***

The most challenging part for Sami was to balance his identity choices. He acknowledged that he had changed over time, and he was not what he used to think he was. However, the change did not necessarily mean that he rejected his old self and original cultural values and traditions. Some of the changes were adjustment mechanisms. Changes in the way of thinking or values are much more complex. The children were trying to fit new thoughts or perspectives into their paradigm and adapt them without necessarily changing what they believed in before they were exposed to a bicultural experience:

*TK: What will happen later as you stay here longer?*

*Sami: No. I will probably be Palestinian American But it will be in a different ratio. Now it is like 80% Palestinian to 20% of American. The more I stay here it will get closer to 50-50. Unless, I will have nothing to do with the Palestine or if I will isolate myself. Then I will assimilate myself in America and I will be more Americanized. If I will not go to Palestine and do not talk to anyone there, I will not consider myself as a Palestine.*

*TK: Is it possible?*

*Sami: It is possible, but **I will not choose to do for myself. I do not want to do it.***

Sami admitted that he would change significantly if he spent more time in the U.S. (this could be contested, though). Nevertheless, he did not want to isolate himself from the larger community and his extended family that lives in Palestine. I think it is very important to recognize the role of a child's agency in negotiating cultural identity and in identifying him/herself in relationship to self and the others.

The fact that social identity depends on social interaction is supported by many researchers (Bechhofer et al. 1999, Hester & Housley 2002). The theory of self-identification states that we think in categories and that the process of categorization is influenced by social context and intergroup relationship (Oakes et al. 1994, as cited in Scourfield et al. 2006). These children, and perhaps other sojourner children, are trying to fit to a new social context and a new cultural environment. As Scourfield et al. note, we need "to consider both the potential agency in national and ethnic identities and also structural limitations on agency" (Scourfield et al., 2006, p.57).

*Fatima (age 11): If you are an Afghan you can choose what you will be, it's your decision. You want to be Japanese and you can go to Japan and learn about it. But if you stay here, you can learn new stuff or be like people here—**it's your choice.***

*TK: Do you think people who are coming from the different countries here to stay need to keep their culture (traditions, values) or they need to assimilate?*

*Ruth (age 16): I would say if you come to U.S. have grown in your country and you are comfortable with the life you live and you know your culture and stuff, you can keep your traditions.*

*TK: But if the family is coming here for good and is not planning to go back, do they need to assimilate or keep their traditions?*

*Ruth: **It depends on your own individual perspective.** They will never go back. It's just practicing something ... for me it depends if they want to do it. Fine, they can do it. But if not, **they should have freedom to choose.***

*Ruth: I am ok if they (classmates) say I have been Americanized. I do not care because I know what I am fully Nigerian. I can go to Nigeria today and I will fit right away I will*

*not be stressed and think what to say even after I have been in America for so long... I will be with my friends like before I came here. **It is not so much about culture but about who I am.***

Here we can hear her voice and a strong decision to be who she feels she wants to be, in spite of strong peer pressure and identification by others. But when I asked Ruth if there was anything she would regret to give up something from American culture, her answer reflected a need to comply with the cultural norms and expectations that limit her agency. She complained about cultural stereotypes because they did not truly reflect the nature of a person, but at the same time, I could sense that most likely she would comply with those stereotypes in order to fit into the cultural and social environment in her home country. Thus, she will have to re-adapt:

*Ruth (age 16): In Africa people will be really bothered by the way you dress. You know, it's so different. In the summer here people are wearing tank-tops. **But in Africa it will be weird.** People would say "Oh, what is she wearing? She cannot behave. All African stereotypes..." "Oh, she is exposing her body". People talk behind your back: "She does not know what she is doing. She has no training". Sometimes people need to understand that it's does not mean I am wrong person.*

*Zain (age 9): When we were about to go there (home country) I did not know many words and I told my mom that I need to start speaking Arabic because we will start living there soon. I thought it is important to my family. So **I try to push myself to speak Arabic. Sometimes it's hard and frustrating.***

Children have to adjust or change the components that constitute their identity in a specific cultural context and unify them with the social group in which they are operating. Even so, there is still space for a child's agency and independent decisions, mostly about much smaller and insignificant things. This is another conflict a child has to internalize: adjust, or compromise, or change completely to meet societal expectations:

*Zain (age 9): We visit Palestine in the summer and it's really hot there. We cannot wear jeans **and have to wear skirts. I do not like skirts and dresses.** Sometimes I would wear shorts. My mom tells me that I have to wear skirts. In Palestine you cannot see people*

*there wearing jeans except the boys. **You have to be a normal girl in skirts and dresses. I go to the store and I see everyone wearing skirts and dresses I feel like left out but I still do not want to wear it. It's weird.** I usually when play with my friends and they are not bothered by that. But strangers... they make me uncomfortable.*

Although children can make choices about their identity, those choices are limited by the social context in which they need to be accepted and by direct influence of their familial practices and cultural values (if they are reinforced at home).

Analyzing the children's answers, I could see that from an early age, they recognized cultural differences and sought conformity with the society where they lived and operated. This could be a larger societal context or a smaller one, like peer relationships. Sometimes they learned the hard way. They all went through stages when they felt "weird" and "outcast"; they know how it feels to be 'different'.

*Sandra (age 7): (talking about how she wants people in the U.S. to see her) I do not really like when people call me African. **I do not want to be African, because it feels kind weird. Most people are American and only me is from the different culture.***

*TK: What do you think makes you different?*

*Sandra: Because they think I kind of speak with the weird accent*

*TK: Did they tell it to you?*

*Sandra: No*

*TK: Why do you think they think this way if they never told you?*

*Sandra: Because...I just think. When they first saw me I do not want them to think I am African.*

*TK: What do you think other people think you are?*

*Sami (age 18): They think I am Palestinian. I lived here 4 years. I still have an accent. People ask me, "You have such a nice accent. Where you are from?" **I still do things differently than them.***

*TK: For example*

*Sami: I still feel kind different.*

*TK: What do you think is the main difference? Different from whom?*

*Sami: From the rest of the Americans. They say, "You are not American you are Palestinian". **You feel different...***

The older children admitted that there is no such a thing as 'an American' but a mixture of different nationalities and, yet, they differentiated themselves 'from the rest of Americans' or from the people in their home countries:

*TK: So, you say "they are Americans", and you see yourself still different, even though you say Americans it's the mixture of cultures.*

*Sami (age 18): Yes, because **people more look at differences than at similarities**. If you gonna compare things; you do not think "oh, they are the same color". You first notice differences. Then you think about the similarities.*

*Omar (age 16): If you think of it, there is no "Americans". Americans are made of different cultures: Russians, Europeans, Spanish, and Asian. They are all Americans.*

*TK: But you did put a line. You said that there are "Americans" and we, "foreigners".*

*Omar: **But they are not like us.***

*TK: Why you think you are more American?*

*Zain (age 9): I got used to talking and doing stuff not like in Palestine but more like Americans. Like, for instance, clothing. I dress different then people in Palestine.*

They wished that people's perception of them and certain stereotypes would change and also were working on changing themselves enough to be accepted:

*TK: How would you like other people to think about you or maybe stop thinking about you?*

*Omar (age 15): I do not want them to think that I am a terrorist just because I am from the Middle East. This is just a minority group (terrorists). You go to the internet and people are saying that I hate people from the Middle East. They need to think about people.*

In the children's attempts to negotiate places and identities, they all expressed the need and the interest to learn a new culture different from the own. This included, but was not limited to, learning the language to improve communication opportunities and networking; obtaining new information that was not available in their home country; taking advantage of educational and future career opportunities; new modes of cooperation and interaction with peers and adults; sometimes just a curiosity and desire to discover 'a new land'. Often this was perceived as a

compromise in order to smooth the friction in communication styles, expectations, differences in values and cultural norms. Most children were more than ready to make needed adjustments and compromises; some were even eager to do it or were encouraged by the parents or by possible future opportunities. Each child had to make a decision of what to keep from their cultural identity that would differentiate him or her from others; what to change to get the best of the opportunities or to better adapt to the context:

*TK: Is it important for people to keep their culture or become Americanized as fast as possible?*

*Omar (age 15): The immigrants who come here. They say "I want to be an American". I do not like that. I want them to stay with their culture, eat food they usually eat back in their country, celebrate holidays with other from your culture, and create a small community. It's not fun to loose, trade your culture. It's more fun when...*

*TK: Can you actually lose your culture? Are there ways to compromise? Is it possible to have a cultural compromise?*

*Omar: Yes. When you first come here you are 100 % from your back home country bat when you stay here longer you become 70% your culture and 30 % of American culture.*

*TK: Is it important to fit in?*

*Omar: **It's important to understand how they work and do things. If you do not understand their culture you will never fit to their culture***

*TK: How to balance: to fit in and keep your culture, not to lose yourself and your identity?*

*Omar: You have to create community of culture, you background culture. **You need to connect with the background culture or you will loose and forget it.** You can also learn their culture, how things work other here, and then you can have a job...*

*TK: Was it hard or challenging for you to learn something?*

*Omar: No, you get used to it*

Some of the changes sounded very radical like 'breaking the norms' of the culture of origin so they would be able to mix the cultures, or better fit into the new one:

*TK: What you had to change?*

*Sami (age 18): Now...4 years ago when I came here. It's a different culture so they deal with the things differently when back in my country. The more I stay here, my language gets better, my accent will be less noticeable and I will be like Palestinian-American*

*TK: So you think for you to be more American it is to have better language skills?*

*Sami: I would say yes. It will make you to adapt more*

*TK: So you are saying that once people would not hear your accent they will consider you as an American. What about you? Do you think that language skills make you more Americanized?*

*Sami: Probably... But some things you do in Palestine you would not do here and opposite. **If I stay here I will kind breaking it and mixing it...***

*TK: Breaking what?*

*Sami: The norms basically. **Like mixing Palestinian and American together.***

*TK: Which norms you need to break?*

*Sami:...the Palestinian... So you would be able to mix...*

*TK: What do you mean to break in order to adapt more? We are hypothesizing.*

*Omar: For example. In Palestine there is segregation between men and women. So, at the beginning I use to write “he” when I was writing stories, but now I write “they” male and female, depending on a story.*

*TK: So, stories in Palestine are more “he” stories? So, you would not say “she” even if it’s only one person?*

*Sami: There is a debate in our English classes to use “she” or “they”. In some English classes the teacher says “You have to write “she” or “he”.*

*TK: So do you think through the language norms you will break some of the habits of the mind?*

*Sami: I used to think this way (think in the “he” terms). I thought “he” but now I think both.*

*TK: So you are changing in the way of thinking?*

*Sami: **The way the changes are shown is through the language.** To see if a person is becoming more American it’s through the language skills. **If the mind is changing and it shows through the changes in the language.** (I used this quote before. I think it is an appropriate to repeat it at this point)*

Sami realized a need for compromise. Analyzing his previous answers about cultural preferences and how he related to his culture of origin, I would not think that he suggested here to break up the cultural norms to the point where they could not be restored or seen anymore, but rather to find a way to balance them both to be able to fit into the host society if he were to stay there. This may be my subjective interpretation, but it could also be that personal traits, character, and temperament are playing a role. Some children seemed more willing and open to negotiate and to adapt their cultural identity and adopt dominant culture traits than the others. Specifically:

*Omar (age 15): They need to keep their culture.*

*TK: Which part is the most important to keep?*

*Omar: The most important....to keep... I have a second culture. Most people forget it. ...Language. If I am growing here it could be hard for children when their parents trying to enforce cultural traditions and the school is teaching me different thing. Zain (his sister) forgets her language. You started to lose your culture when you start to lose your language. That's a big thing. This is your first language but now she cannot even to speak it.*

And if Omar was feeling sad about his sister forgetting her native language, Fatima (an Afghan girl) took it seriously enough to take action to help her younger siblings not forget their native language and not lose their connection with the community, values and traditions of their country of origin. She did this even though the younger children had a very vague picture of how their country of origin looked like until a short while ago when they visited. Although Fatima had lived in the U.S. for four years and came here at a very young age, it was her decision to preserve the language as the strongest cultural and national identification marker. Not only did she decide to keep it herself, but she also saw it as of a vital importance that her younger siblings (who were not very acquainted with the homeland context) would be able to connect with their nation, culture and origin:

*TK: What language do you speak at home?*

*Fatima (age 11): Pashtu. Sometimes English with my mom.*

*TK: Pashtu is it the similar with Farsi? Will people understand each other?*

*Fatima: I know Pashtu and I know Farsi. I knew it a lot when I came here. It's easy to speak and it was like an extra language we knew. When I came here I forgot it. Now I understand it but cannot really speak it. When I went home I could not answer people in Farsi. At home I speak Pashtu but teach my mom English. With brothers **I speak Pashtu so they will not just speak English, English and forget their language.** My mom would not forget it*

*TK: So you almost felt responsible to teach your brothers Pashtu? How did you realize it? Why did you make this decision? Did you notice they start forgetting?*

*Fatima: **I notice that they speak a t lot in English and I wanted them to speak Pashtu and English only at school.***

*TK: Do they answer you in English or Pashtu?*

*Fatima: When I talk in Pashtu they answer me in Pashtu, if I talk in English they answer me in English. They feel that they can answer me in English if I talk to them in English*

Nevertheless, most of the children expressed the need for an individual, or for themselves, to keep their culture of origin. For each individual child, 'keeping the culture' signified different meanings, though they were similar and overlapping. No matter what exactly children identified as 'their culture of origin', they perceived it as something very valuable and important, something that made them distinct from others and, thus, worthy of preserving. Even if they mentioned 'assimilation', they used the term in a different way from the social sciences definition. For them, assimilation was outward conformity without losing the cultural values which they considered important or even better than American values. Gibson (1988) has very similar findings in her research with the Sikh community residing in California. Some of the cultural values, such as family ties and values; respect for parents and adults in general; modesty, especially for the girls; and obedience to parents were perceived (mostly by parents but also by many children) to be better than those of the mainstream American culture (Gibson, 1988).

As my findings suggest, although the children sought conformity and were trying to blend in with the mainstream culture, some of their changes were often outward ones that helped them to adapt to the new social and cultural context:

*TK: What does it mean for you to assimilate? Losing everything you have?*

*Sami (age 18): **Outside, yes.** When people look at you they think you are not different from others, **but inside you are still yourself. People cannot see it. In order to assimilate you need to look the same outside.***

*Zain (age 9): I think people (who are coming to the U.S.) need to keep their culture. I think it's important to keep because you will visit your country and you would not know what do and what to say. This is important. **But you can also move on and also to stay***

***TK: What do you mean?***

*Zain: You can learn the language and meet people (in America or other countries), but **also stay with your religion at the back of your head. You have to keep it in your mind***

*and to know how to say and when. I knew it right away when I went to Palestine. Like words I did not know how to say before. I also think that it's important because you can communicate with your family and people from your religion and country.*

One girl (Paulina, age 10) gave me a very unusual answer for a child of her age about the importance of keeping one's culture:

*TK: Do you think people need to think their tradition, culture?*

*Paulina: Yes (did not, let me finish the sentence). They need to keep their culture. I think **they need to keep because they need still remember where they from no matter what. So they would not abuse their culture and tradition.***

*TK: How did you get to understand it?*

*Paulina: Because I am very smart...*

*TK: How can people abuse their culture?*

*Paulina: If someone made a commitment to keep their tradition even if they move somewhere, and then they are changed style. You forgot the promise not to leave your culture traditions because **you have changed your promise to keep your culture. Then you are abusing the person you made commitment to or your whole country. Because you are acting weird and you are also seems weird to them. Because you do not do things they supposed to be doing.***

We can see that children's reaction to the dominant, mainstream culture varied from some level of acceptance and only outward conformity to active resistance, as in case of the Afghan girl who insisted that her younger siblings would use Pashtu as the medium of communication in the home. In the case of Paulina, it is very interesting to hear her decision to stay the same with the people of her country of origin and preserve her native language skills, but on the other hand, to adapt to the new cultural demands.

For the children, the process of adaptation was associated with the desire for conformity, to 'fit in', to be viewed as 'the same', at least outwardly. The results of this process, in the children's views, would be better future opportunities in education, employment, and health benefits:

*Omar (age 16): I want to go back to my country hang out with my cousins and my family and do things what we like. But there are better things for my future. Better education. I*

would stay here for my future opportunity. Not just education. Job too, and good job means more money.

TK: Do you want to stay?

Ruth (age 16): It's an interesting question. For my own future career preferences I would like to stay. I want to study International relationship. I incline not to stay in one place. I want to travel the world. I do not what to stay in US. Not to stay in Africa whole life... but whatever I do, more of my ties, obviously, will belong Africa.

They all said that they would like to stay in the U.S. for the reasons mentioned above and also because they were more familiar with the U.S. than their home country (although this was mostly the younger children).

Although most children mentioned the importance of keeping one's culture, they all spoke about enjoying American movies, songs, food, dress style, and way of life. But in their family practices, the children successfully preserved important norms, values, and traditions. They also realized that when they returned to their home countries, they needed to be able to 'switch' into a different mode and be 'like people in their country' in order to fit in. This could be somewhat easier for the older children, since they have spent more time in their country of origin than their younger siblings.

Ruth (girl, age 16): I am ok what they say I have been Americanized. I do not care because I know that I am fully African. I can go to Africa today and **I will fit right away I will not be stressed and I will know what to say**, even I have been in America for so long.

TK: If you go back, will it be difficult to adapt?

Sami (boy, age 16): A bit challenging because people will view you differently... because you think differently, but people will adapt to you. **It's easier to adapt there than here. I lived most of my life there and I know my culture and language.** I already walked on that road.

TK: What will be most difficult in re-adaptation?

Sami: Put trash on the street.

TK: Do you think it will be easy for you to fit right away if you are to go home?

Omar (age 15): **It would not be difficult because I was raised there.** But it could be difficult because there are things that are different there. New things may come in I do

*not know about. Like before I came here there were a lot of check points. But now this summer all the check points were gone.*

*TK: If you are to go to Palestine, would it be difficult for you to fit right away?*

*Zain (age 9): **I am definitely ready** because my mom gives me homework, because I will start living there soon and I do not know how they do things. Last time **I thought I will be confused but I was not and had it in my brain.** (She talks about her experience of visiting Palestine last summer).*

*TK: Will be difficult for you to go back or you'll blend in right away in Afghanistan?*

*Fatima (age 11): **No, I will blend right away.** But I think it will be difficult for my little brothers and sisters. Like they say "HI" not "Asalom aleykum". They need to learn how to answer correctly.*

## PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

As I conducted this study, it was challenging at times to remember that I was doing interviews and observations because they were part of my research project. I became so engaged in my conversations with the children that I found it hard to concentrate on the purpose of those interviews. At the time and even as I reflect back, I marvel at the children's ability to interpret concepts that are very difficult for a child to understand, such as identity, culture, loyalty, assimilation, and acculturation. I wanted to keep asking them questions about how they manage to find a balance between two cultures, how school influences their understanding and perception of self, what they believe is best for children in their situation: assimilate, or compromise, or preserve who they are...

I found that I was often thinking about myself. Back home in Tajikistan, I worked with Americans for more than 8 years and thought I was very familiar with their cultural norms, expectations, and values. Even so, when I came to the U.S. and became fully immersed in its style of life, it was very difficult at times to accommodate this new culture in my mind. I

experienced confusion, culture shock, and sometimes even a rejection of what I could not or did not want to accommodate to or agree with. It took me a while to adjust and accommodate to the differences, the Otherness, without necessarily agreeing with it. I found that children have much more flexibility in the adaptation process: they are better at negotiating, compromising, finding a balance, and even changing in some ways if they find it necessary or advantageous for certain reasons.

## **IX. CONCLUSION**

I felt that I was given access to the innermost parts of their being when the children shared their experiences and thoughts with me. I felt privileged and honored, but at the same time I felt responsible to be entrusted with those ‘secrets’, with something that is not yet fully known even to themselves. I felt a deep responsibility to understand, to support, and to somehow ease their burden of uncertainty and confusion. I was not sure how I could do it... Perhaps, I can at least tell about what they feel and think to others; to those who one way or another are influencing those children lives, working with them, teaching or helping them.

As Mosselson suggests, we need to view the identity development process as relational—“the Hegelian self in relation to self as well as self in relation with others, to the local community and to the wider society” (Mosselson, 2006, p. 48). She sees that bicultural hybridity alters the encounters the self has. Many theorists agree that the ultimate result of adaptation in the new cultural environment should not be assimilation, as it was previously suggested, for example, by Gordon (1964). Children adapt, and in the process of adaptation through the encounters with the different cultures, they change, to some extent, their attitudes, values and identification over time in order to accommodate to their new social and cultural environments.

They do not necessarily view those changes as contrary to what they value or believe. The end result of those changes does not have to be giving up their old traits or their replacement. It could be more as an “additive process in which old and new traits are blended” (Haviland 1985: 628-29 as cited in Gibson, 1988, p. 25).

However, as Mosselson (2006) argues, drawing from various studies, the process of adaptation to a new cultural and social environment requires important adjustments to be made. Ultimately, those changes could either make an individual stronger or, as some researchers suggest, “leave an individual with long-lasting negative psychological consequences” (Mosselson, 2006, p. 64). In addition, based on their own preferences or because of parental influence or both, children place different value on different things and make decisions about outward conformity and inner changes. Although they may conform outwardly in order to ‘fit better’ to the mainstream culture to extract its benefits and reduce societal or inner conflict and tension, they may hold onto the values, practices, and beliefs ‘in the back of their minds’ considering these better than those of the dominant culture. Children may see themselves as a part of the larger society happily enjoying the benefits it has to offer or even consider themselves as Americans, to some degree. Nevertheless, most of them (except of one seven-year-old girl) openly or quietly resisted Americanization as a process of assimilation through which the ‘old culture’ is replaced by ‘the new’ and demanding giving up their old cultural identity. Gibson’s (1988) findings showed that Sikhs in overseas settings also often conformed publicly to the requirements of the mainstream society to avoid conflicts. In certain situations, they chose to subordinate their ways to the dominant culture if they perceive that this would benefit them or their children (p., 25). Parents often walk on a tightrope balancing between encouraging their

children to obtain new competencies in the new society and, at the same time, resist others, maintaining traditions and native language at home.

The majority of children in my study (consciously or subconsciously, explicitly or implicitly) separated their inner and outward life and with it their sense of identification.

*TK: What does it mean for you to assimilate? Losing everything you have?*

*Sami (age 18): **Outside, yes. When people look at you they think you are not different form others but inside you are still yourself***

*TK: What's inside?*

*Sami: People cannot see it. **In order to assimilate you need to look the same outside.***

*TK: If you go back, will it be difficult to adapt?*

*Sami: A bit challenging because people will view you as different... because you think differently, but people will adapt to you. It's easier to adapt there than here. I lived most of my life there and I know my culture and language. I already walked on that road.*

*TK: What will be most difficult in re-adaption?*

*Omar: Put trash on the street. It took me about 3 weeks to put garbage on a side walk...(in Palestine)*

*TK: Will you conform to majority even if you are not necessarily agree with them?*

*Sami: **In your outside life be like them. But in your inside life you put things in a trash can. And when you raise your kids you teach them to put the things in a trash. But this is a minor change. Major changes... If you broke the norm you have to rebuild it when you go back. It depends how much you broke and what have you broke.***

*Yaqoob (age 9): I wear jeans but I really like Afghan clothes. **So outside I need to blend in but at home, inside I do my culture; I like Afghan clothes. I do my culture. I blend in in America but inside my home I do my culture.***

*TK: Is it hard?*

*Yaqoob: **No, it's not hard. Both of them are no hard. Blend in was not hard. When I came here I asked what Americans do so I can do to blend in. I needed to change. I do not know. I was Afghan and nothing will turn me to American. Sometimes I say hi in English but outside I say in the language of my country. Sometimes I cannot even say in what language I said it. If I rushed and I do not remember on which language I said it. Outside I am American. Sometimes at home I act like American... I do not know...***

We can see that once children went through the process of adaptation (we can also call it acculturation), they acquired some traits from the new culture. Some of those traits will not

necessarily go away when they move back home, as quite a few children in the study suggested. Internalization of some aspects of the host culture, as the process of their selection, depends on child's personal choices, which in turn are influenced by family practices, community, school, and media. Those choices and children's agency, as well as how and what influences them, are very much dependent on the age of a child. One of the boys in Scourfield's et al. study (2006) expressed different national or cultural identification when interviewed in his home and then when outside of it. The authors suggest that "the boy's national identity was not fixed; rather, he displayed different aspects of himself for different audience. This process of children's presenting their national/ethnic self for public consumptions in specific social settings. The children frequently altered what they said in the different settings" (p.53).

Most children are open to and willing to compromise. They are also curious and want to learn about different cultures and countries and take the best they like out of those encounters.

*TK: Are there things you had to learn to do in American way to adapt to the way people do it here?*

*Omar (age 15): Back in my country we were all close together. Here people stay 10 feet away from each other and they will text to each other, I do not like it. I do not do it.*

*TK: Do you want to adapt to them or you want them to adapt to you?*

*Omar: **We compromise.** I learn how to text more and they call me. The immigrants who come here say "I want to be an American". I do not like that. I want them to stay with their culture, eat food they usually eat back in their country, celebrate holidays with other from your culture, and create a small community. It's not fun to loose, trade your culture. It's also important to understand how they work and do things. If you do not understand their culture you will never fit to their culture. We are from different country and we are all interested in something different. We want to know.*

*Fatima (age 11): I do something that is a part of here. I am doing it and I am happy because I learn something from another world.*

The older children could even see how to best preserve their culture and what prevented rapid assimilation of themselves, younger siblings or even the next generation if they were to

stay in the U.S. Some children were, however, are adamant in their determination about what identity they wanted to hold on to. I think it could be that the child cannot perceive that the changes he/she undergoes affect the way he or she thinks or reacts. However, it could also be that a child has a very strong character and will, besides all the other factors that influence and shape their identity choices (e.g. parental influence, former schooling or extended family). Therefore, it is harder for outside cultural influences to swing them away from who they think they are.

*Fatima (age 11): I think I am an Afghani girl because I love my country. Even if I am here I do not have to be like other people. When someone comes here (to the U.S.) and they say “I will change and be an American girl”. **But I never will give it away and I do not want to change and become someone else. I do something that is part of here. I am doing it and I am happy because I learn something from another world. But I would never forget who I am or my religion. Like Valentine’s Day, it’s part of their culture, their country, or religion. I am doing it because it’s fun you’ve get candy. But I still do not forget my culture.***

*TK: What helps you to resist the outside influences that changing you?*

*Grace (age 15): My mom. I think she just has some special powers to do it...*

The idea of biculturalism encompasses the notion of identity that integrates aspects of two cultures (mainstream and origin). Development of such identity, as suggested by Szapocnik and Kurtines (1980), “can enable the individual to function satisfactorily in the both cultures” (as cited in Mosselson, 2006, p. 67). Bicultural competency is defined by them as a process through which immigrants can “adapt their behavior to a particular social or cultural context without having to commit to a specific cultural identity” (Mosselson, 2006, p. 67). Children are actively involved in the negotiation of their cultural identity and often make difficult choices “which elements of each culture to retain and value, what to modify and which to reject (Yeh & Hwang, 2000, as cited in Mosselson, 2006, p., 67). The same authors also suggest that “learning how to

maneuver ethnic characteristics according to various cultural and situational contexts” should be identified as a development task (Yeh & Hwang, 2000, as cited in Mosselson, 2006, p., 68). If we see the process of development of ethnic or cultural identity as interdependent with the socio-cultural context where agency plays not a small role, we recognize that this process is very “fluid and overlapping over space and time—according to situation and experience, current, past and future” (Mosselson, 2006, p. 69).

Thus, my findings support the alternation model of second-culture acquisition (LaFromboise et al., 1993). They strongly suggest that it is possible for a bicultural individual to alter his or her behaviors to fit the demands of a particular social and cultural context. The children in this study were able to successfully differentiate the social and cultural cues and respond accordingly. However, for them it was more like a process of negotiation and alternation between their outward life, visible to others, drawn out of desire for conformity, and the inner life which consisted of personal or familial practices, traditions or beliefs they wanted to preserve. Perhaps, *this is* the identity alternation process itself. And as they grow older, they will likely become more and more culturally competent, mastering the needed adaptation skills. They very likely come to know even better how to balance their identities: to be ‘the same’ with the people of their immediate cultural context but to keep a uniqueness of their personality and choices so they can celebrate true diversity.

Yet, I must say again a few words about my participants’ differences. Since their parents are educated people, this most likely is reproduced in children. This also will determine largely their social status in the new society. They are definitely in more advantaged positions than their counterparts from low economic and educational background. For such individuals, besides negotiating languages, personal representation and behaviors, they have to learn new socio-

economic status rules and cues and negotiate between them. Thus, the level of education (either parents' or children's) could play a crucial role in determining a child's perception of self, his/her cultural identity and its representation, his/her relationship with the dominant culture, his/her position in the new society, and future perspectives. Therefore, the role of school in the process of adaptation of student-sojourners is very important. It could be argued whether the educational system in the U.S. "reproduces inequalities by replicating the existing social order? Or does schooling help to overcome social inequalities by being a venue for status mobility?" (Scourfield et al., 2006, p. 93).

Perhaps a longitudinal study would shed some light on what might happen to these children in five or ten years from now. We could compare the perceptions of their cultural identities they will have then with the current ones. Further research could address the role of the schools and the parents (family practices and traditions) in the process of adaptation, assimilation or accommodation of international students' children in their new cultural contexts. There are still many questions about student-sojourners, or transnationals, that remain open. This study has brought some of them to the fore: How does school influence sojourner-students' identity formation process and their perceptions of the cultural values and norms that they bring with them to the U.S. and the new ones? Is cultural assimilation still viewed by the schools as the most desirable and inevitable for new international students? How do parents and family practices assist or impede children's process of negotiation, preservation or change of their cultural identities?

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# APPENDICES

## 1. CONSENT FORM FOR PARENTS OF MINORS PARTICIPATING IN THE PROJECT

**Project Title:** Exploring the paths of the cultural identity formation among the children of international graduate student at University of Massachusetts.

**Investigator:** Krayushkina Tatiana, University of Massachusetts, Amherst

I am doing a research about international children who have come to U.S. with their parents and are going to live here for extended period of time. The main focus of my research is how those children view themselves or their identity in a foreign context; how do they negotiate two or more cultures inside themselves and if there are any changes occur how they explain them. If you can help me to understand those perceptions and processes children are going through I will be very grateful.

I would like you and your son/daughter to participate in this research. If you and your child would agree to participate in this project, I will conduct one or two interviews with them which will last about 30-45 minutes. I will ask a few questions. I can show you a questionnaire prior to my interviews or even before you agree that you and your child will participate. I will ask your child to answer some very easy questions about him/her, family or country. I would not ask him/her anything that may affect him/her in a negative way. There are will be no “right” or “wrong” answers to the questions I will ask—I just want to hear what your child thinks.

Another way that I think may help me to better understand your child/children would be observations. I ask you a permission to visit your family at any convenient for you time and place. You can decline to participate in observation part of the research and only participate in the interviews.

All information I would obtain from those interviews and observations will be protected and nobody will have an access to it except me and my project supervisor. Your real names would not be mentioned unless you want me to use them. Your child has a right not to answer to any question if it makes him/her feel uncomfortable. Because I want to remember everything you or your child have said I would like to record all our interviews. Nobody will have access to these records except me and my project supervisor. All the record will be deleted after I have analyzed all data. I however, want to reserve the right not to disclose your child’s answers.

You and your child have the right to decline to participate in this project. You and your child can stop at any time. If you decide not to allow your child to participate, or if your child does not want to participate, it will not affect either of you in any way.

You and your child may not directly benefit from this project. However, the results of this research can be used to inform policy-makers and educators so that they would better understand cross-cultural issues and adequately accommodate international children.

If you need to reach me, my e-mail address is *[krayush@educ.umass.edu](mailto:krayush@educ.umass.edu)* and my mobile is 413-695-7833. I live on 7 Eaton Court in Amherst, Massachusetts. In case you have a question you can always contact me at this number or address. Here is contact information of my professor in University:

Gretchen B. Rossman, PhD  
Chair, Educational Policy, Research & Administration Professor,  
tel: 413-545-4377  
[gretchen@educ.umass.edu](mailto:gretchen@educ.umass.edu)

If you think this project is something you are interested doing, I need to ask you or/and your parent(s) to sign up here:

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## 2. INFORMATION SHEET FOR ORAL INFORMED ASSENT

**Project Title:** Exploring the paths of the cultural identity formation among the children of international graduate student at University of Massachusetts.

**Investigator:** Krayushkina Tatiana, University of Massachusetts, Amherst

I am doing a research study about how people, (specifically children), from different cultures/countries who are coming to the United States see themselves (Do they think they are different? How? Do they think they are the same? How? Do they want to be ‘like Americans’ or they want to stay different from them?)? A research study is a way to learn more about people.

If you decide that you want to be part of this study, I will ask you to answer some very easy questions about you, your family or your country. I would not ask you anything that you need to know at school or anything hard to know. There are no “right” or “wrong” answers to the questions I will ask—I just want to hear what you think. However, if you feel that certain question makes you feel uncomfortable, you can skip it without answering. I want to make sure that you feel respected. When I interview you, I will tape-record our interview unless you do not want me to do so. After I have finished my research project and transcribed all the interviews I will eliminate all my records from the recording device and will not download any interview on my computer. If you don’t understand a question, you can always ask me to explain it until it makes sense. It is always OK to ask me questions, and I will try my best to answer them. It may take us about 30-45 minutes.

No one who takes part in this study will personally benefit from it. I do hope that what I will learn through this project will help the community, especially schools and universities, to better understand the international students and help them in their new life in America.

When we are finished with this study I will write a report about what was learned. If I use your interview, I will not write your name with the material. You would be using photographs of you and your family that I took during the project, unless you and/or your parents ask not to use them or to put your name on them.

Just so that I'm sure you understand what is expected of you here, would you please explain to me what you think we're going to ask you to do? What more would you like to know?

You do not have to be in this study if you do not want to be. If you decide to stop after we begin, that’s OK too. If you need to reach me, my e-mail address is *krayush@educ.umass.edu* and my mobile is 413-695-7833. I live on 7 Eaton Court in Amherst, Massachusetts. In case you have a question you can always contact me at this number or address. Here is contact information of my professor in University:

Gretchen B. Rossman, PhD  
Chair, Educational Policy, Research & Administration Professor  
tel: 413-545-4377

[gretchen@educ.umass.edu](mailto:gretchen@educ.umass.edu)

If you think this project is something you are interested doing, I need to ask you or/and your parent (s) to sign up here:

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### 3. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Tell me about your typical day: from the time when you wake up till you go to bed.
2. When you are at home, what languages do you speak with your parents: English or (Arabic)? With your siblings? Is language important for you? Do you want to learn your language better?
3. Has your behavior changed since the time you came to America? How? Why? Is it a good change or not? How do you know?
4. Are there any changes in the way you dress since the time you came to America?
5. Can you tell me what your favorite meal is? Is it Palestinian or American cuisine? Why? What is your mom usually cooks/you are eating? Do you eat together as a family? Is it important time for you?
6. Are there things that you had to learn how to do in “American way”? Have you done it differently back home? What was the most challenging for you?
7. Do you think of yourself as an American or (Palestinian)? Why? Why not? What makes you think this way?
8. Do you think people around you (friends, classmates, teachers, and neighbors) think of you more as of an American or as a (Palestinian)? What makes you think so?
9. How would you like other people to see you, or to think about you, or stop thinking about you? What is the main thing you want them to see/know about you? (basic descriptions)
10. Do you think it is important for people who are coming to the U.S. from other countries to keep their cultural traditions, values or language (food, dance, costumes, songs, or the way of communicating with others)? Or it is better for them to become more “Americanized” as fast as possible? Why?
11. Would you like to go back to your home country or prefer to stay in America? Why?
12. If you go back, do you think it will be easy or difficult for you to fit in right away? Why? What will be easy? What will be difficult?
13. Do you miss something from your country? What?