**Notes from initial visit (19th December 2013) and favourite thing interview (11th January 2014) with Aliyah (14).**

**Object from the present:** A HTC Android mobile phone with a Starbucks cover.

**Object from the past:** A Tamagotchi (no longer working).

Prior to the favourite thing interview, I visited the home at 11am on 19th December 2013. Walking up from the train station, I pass down a long industrial road littered with warehouses, wholesalers and distribution centres. At the other end, I’m met with a long main road lined with current or former council housing, leading off into various cul-de-sacs. On this occasion I accidently ring on the doorbell of a house with the same number (but different letter at the end) and a tall white man answers the door. He doesn’t seem to mind the intrusion and asks who I’m looking for. I give him the surname of the family, and he says that I want the ‘Indians’ next door. I’m later told that the neighbours get along well together, with the two fathers regularly talking over the fence to each other about gardening. On both occasions that I visit, I get the impression that he road is predominantly made up of white working class families.

One of Aliyah’s older sisters, Masruba, answers the door – I taught this sister when she was an undergraduate a couple of years previously and she recommended Aliyah for the study. Aliyah is quite shy on this first visit, but I still get the sense that she is enthusiastic about taking part in the study. The older sister stays for much of the conversation and we are also later joined by two other sisters (one is a first year university student and the other is in year 7.) We’re also occasionally joined by her younger brother (in year 3) who mostly stays upstairs watching television. We sit in the living room, which is ornately decorated and very spacious. Tucked away in one corner of the room is a large sewing machine. The room has a large bay window looking out onto the lawn, and their cat (called ‘Kitty’), meows at the door to be let in.

The parents are currently visiting family in Bangladesh and the older siblings are looking after the three younger siblings. The parents have given permission for Aliyah to start taking part in the study, under the guardianship Masruba. The family interview will be organised for when they return. The sisters tell me that their parents have struggled to get credit for their mobile phones. Apparently this is due to someone having recently been hung in the area near to them, and consequently the local shops haven’t been open for the parent to purchase phone credit. As such, the children have to call their parents if they want to get in touch with them. This doesn’t appear to be too much of an issue for the children, and I’m told that the youngest ones aren’t bothered about calling their parents too much anyway. The father has left his work mobile at the house and so the older children have been taking it in turns to take messages for him.

We set a date for the favourite thing interview in January and agree to arrange the family interview and first day in a life on that visit.

On the January visit (also at 11am), the door is answered by the older sister (my former student) who welcomes me. We ask about each other’s respective Christmas holidays and have a quick catch up as she takes my through to the living room. Up to this point, both of my visits have been organised through this sister via text messages or calls. I sit in the living room waiting for Aliyah to come downstairs from her room, and I stroke the cat – who has followed me into the sitting room – whilst checking my equipment. Aliyah comes into the living room and says hi. We chat about her holiday and first week back at school, and then go through the consent form. Her older sister is present for some of the discussion and countersigns the form. We discuss where to do the interview and Aliyah says there isn’t a lot of room in her bedroom, though we agree to go up there later so that she can show me around and I can take pictures. For the interview we sit at the dining table, which is also in the living room. I ask if she has looked forward to taking part in the study, and she says that she has been quite excited though also a little nervous. I explain that today’s interview is just a way for us to get to know her better and that it won’t be very formal. Aliyah fetches her chosen objects and we begin recording the interview. The family mostly keep out of the way during the interview, only occasionally popping into pick something up from the sitting room or the adjoining kitchen.

We start by discussing her object from the past, which is a Tamagotchi that no longer works. In this first part of the discussion Aliyah plays with the Tamagotchi in her hands quite a bit, idly touching it and moving it about. This isn’t the case with her second object, her mobile phone – however in this instances she spends a lot of time showing me the apps she uses, nimbly flicking between screens. She doesn’t open the apps, but instead describes them and moves between them in the course of the discussion.

Aliyah often pauses to consider the answers to questions. At first I was concerned that some of the questions might be poorly phrased on my part, but I quickly realised that she is just taking time to carefully consider the questions before answering. Some questions elicit a slightly confused response from Aliyah, particularly in relation to how she feels she has changed in the past year. Perhaps a more general set of questions about how she felt she had changed since becoming a teenager might have been more appropriate. In some cases Aliyah appears to have anticipated the questions and seems to give almost a rehearsed response to questions. This is partially confirmed later when I ask if the questions were what she expected and Aliyah tells me that some of them were.

After the interview Aliyah shows me her bedroom, which is shared with Masruba. The room contains a large double bed and a bunk bed against the furthest wall from the door. Aliyah tells me that the bunk bed is hers and that the other bed is Masruba’s. Aside from the beds there isn’t much room for other furniture, aside from a vanity table. Though slightly cramped (it’s difficult to move around the double bed), the room is very tidy with the beds all neatly made-up. During the interview Aliyah tells me about her memory box, which is usually kept in the garden shed. She currently has it in her room, under her bed, as she has retrieved it especially for the interview (for the Tamagotchi.) She seems happy for me to take photographs of the box and even opens it up so that I can take photographs of its contents. The memory box is quite recent and she tells me that she was inspired by one of the YouTubers that she follows who once made a video about his own memory box – JacksGap. (I later look up the video online, see here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dByIv_i8ds4>). I also take photographs of the mobile phone in her room, which she places on a nightstand next to her bed where it is normally left to charge. We briefly talk about the Tamagotchi and she tells me that she had also considered a Winnie the Pooh bear that she had tried to look before the interview but had been unable to find. She tells me the bear is from her childhood and that she was really into Winnie the Pooh at one point. I attempt to take a panoramic photograph of the room but fail as I’m to find a suitable place to stand.

Back downstairs we discuss the next parts of the study. I’m told that her parents have delayed their return from Bangladesh and won’t be back until early February. We look through the proposed family interview questions and she seems quite happy with them. The only questions that she appears unsure about are ones relating to rules about media use. She says the main issue in their household is deciding who gets to use what screen at a given time – particularly the laptop she shares with her sister. She tells me that her dad is an early riser and wakes everyone up early on weekends. We then discuss the day in the life and agree to try and organise it for a school day. Aliyah is slightly embarrassed at the thought of a researcher coming to her school just to observe her. Apparently she hasn’t yet told her school friends that she is taking part in a study. She also would prefer that I came to lessons that she enjoys – particularly IT and Maths. Both of these are on a Monday afternoon and we agree that I’ll start my observation of her day from 3rd period onwards. Her school day starts at 8:15am and ends at 2:50pm. We talk about the possibility of the other students in her classes being told I am there for a class observation and not for her as an individual. Apparently this is not uncommon at her school. At the moment the school is under special measures and has an acting head teacher who also runs another local school. Both during and after the interview she sounds disheartened by the schools current situation. I agree to get in touch with her again once I have permission from the school to carry out the observations.