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**Female Malaysian Muslim Students' Experiences
in the United Kingdom: Piety and Everyday Life
in Manchester and Cardiff**

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Doctor of Philosophy

PhD in Migration Studies
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February 2019

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been and will not be submitted in whole or in part to another University for the award of any other degree.

Signature:

FEMALE MALAYSIAN MUSLIM STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES IN THE UNITED KINGDOM: PIETY AND EVERYDAY LIFE IN MANCHESTER AND CARDIFF

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the transnational life experiences of female Malaysian Muslim students in the United Kingdom (UK). The research both documents and explores the everyday lives of the students, reflecting on the challenge they face and the concerns and pleasures they experience while living and studying in the UK. The research focuses on two key themes. Firstly, it looks at the production of social space by female Malaysian Muslim students and their communities in the UK. Secondly, it emphasises the ways in which female Malaysian Muslim students sustain social space and social networks. The thesis contributes to the literature on transnationalism, the anthropology of Islam and an expanding body of work on internationally mobile students. It contributes to knowledge in these fields specifically through its focus on the experiences of female Muslim students – many of whom are committed participants in piety-minded forms of Islamic movement and organisation – in a non-Muslim country. A further central aspect of the thesis addresses how Malaysian students who are beneficiaries of government scholarships handle the pressures and challenges attached to holding such awards while studying overseas. The thesis is based upon multi-sited ethnography carried out in two cities in the UK over the course of a twelve-month period. During the research, ethnographic participant observation and in-depth interviews with thirty informants were carried out. Analysis of my empirical qualitative material shows that senior students and the Malay community in the host country play an important role in shaping Malay students' religiosity and participation in piety movements. The findings also reveal that Malay students' experience is managed through an extraordinary range of institutions, rituals, practices, organisations and spaces in a manner that provides the possibility both for students to think actively about their Muslim selfhood and to learn how to handle those forms of social and cultural diversity with which they are not familiar. Thus, the thesis argues that, while these students strive to be good Muslims, they also wish to cultivate the social skills required for life away from home. However, the situation becomes more complex due to their status as sponsored students. They are called upon by the government of Malaysia to act as the country's 'mini-diplomats'. Besides a commitment to piety-minded Islam, this factor also results in the women striving to perform well in their studies while simultaneously seeking to fulfil the conceptions of 'good moral behaviour' advanced by the Malaysian government and their families. Nevertheless, in spite of these complex pressures, female Malaysian Muslim students also regularly emphasise their ability to develop alternative identities that reflect their individual interests and concerns.

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ABBREVIATIONS

IKRAM	IKRAM Malaysia
ISMA	Ikatan Muslimin Malaysia (Malaysian Muslim Solidarity)
IST	Independent School of Thinkers
JPA	Jabatan Perkhidmatan Awam
KPM	Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia
MALECS	Malay Language and Culture Society
MARA	Majlis Amanah Rakyat
MCC	Malaysian Community of Cardiff
MCOT	The Malaysian Community of Old Trafford
MSSM	Malaysian Students' Society of Manchester
NEP	National Economic Policy
PETRONAS	Petroleum Nasional Sendirian Berhad
PRISM	Platform Siswa Islam Malaysia
SKMM	Sekolah Komuniti Malaysia Manchester (Malaysian Community School of Manchester)

CHAPTER 1

AN INTRODUCTION

Studying abroad is viewed as a route along which to experience new life and new cultures, together with numerous aspirations about being in a new place. Like migrants, international students experience the process of leaving their home country and making their way to a new country through their many aspirations and with a great deal of hope. The substantial number of international students entering the United Kingdom (UK) should not be treated solely as a statistic or a figure but should be embedded with colourful individual stories or collective experiences. Studies pertaining to international students cannot be confined to documenting the students' experiences within the campus environment – such as lecture theatres, seminar rooms, the library, the hostel or the gym. Instead, a vast number of activities, events or places outside the academic arena which are essential to the students on a daily basis should also be taken into account. Over the past five years (2013–2017), more than 16,000 Malaysian students arrived in the UK with the sole purpose of pursuing their studies at a UK higher-learning institution (Higher Education Statistics Agency 2018). In 2017, statistics from the Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) reported that as many as 19,689 Malaysian students were studying in the UK and Ireland, of whom 6,725 had sponsorship. Scholarships from both the government and private agencies, such as the MOHE, the Public Services Department or *Jabatan Perkhidmatan Awam* (JPA), People's Trust Council or *Majlis Amanah Rakyat* (MARA), PETRONAS, and other private and government-linked agencies are awarded to qualified citizens and government officers to enable them to study abroad. Although the UK has been a top higher-education (HE) destination for Malaysian students, there is very little information or studies pertaining to these students' transnational migration practices and experiences. Since most of the Malaysian students appear to be scholarship recipients, my study investigates how these students handled their position as scholarship recipients and the impact on their daily lives in the UK.

My thesis essentially contributes to the study of Malaysia and of international migration within the educational context. It also contributes to the study of transnationalism, the anthropology of Islam and the emerging studies of internationally mobile students that

specifically focus on the on-going experiences of Muslim female students' educational mobility in the UK. My ethnographic fieldwork unpacked several key themes (e.g. religion, food, social space and education) embedded in the everyday lives of contemporary Malaysian students in the UK, particularly in the context of the Islamophobic events that were occurring while this fieldwork was conducted in 2016.

1.1 Research Aims and Objectives

This ethnographic research explored the life experiences of female Malaysian Muslim students as transnational migrants in two cities located in the UK. It was motivated by my encounter with the negative views and concerns voiced by Malaysian parents regarding the social activities indulged in by Malaysian students in the UK. Students were advised not to get involved in radical Islamic movements in the UK – a piece of advice which increased my curiosity and desire to delve into this issue mainly because it seemed rather surprising. Instead, they could have been warned against being influenced by the Western lifestyle, such as hanging out in pubs or consuming alcohol. Similar advice was given to me during an informal communication via Skype with a friend who had lived in London for three years. She suggested that I refrain from using the *niqab* (face cover) upon my return to Malaysia, although she could not provide any valid reason for such a suggestion. As such, this study explored the position and the life stage of female Malaysian Muslim students within the UK setting. As a Malaysian Muslim and a female student, I was able to participate in the female students' everyday lives, including their private space such as their activities at home; it would be deemed impossible for a male researcher to have such close access. Another reason why I chose to study Malay women is our common background and gender. I am well aware of the limitations that these students have as Muslim women, where it is forbidden in Islamic teaching for a non-*mahram*¹ male to share private space with a Muslim woman. A similar situation applies to conducting ethnographic research with Muslim male students. Substantial limitations would be faced in terms of observing their life within their private space, thus preventing the accumulation of rich data. Since only a handful of studies have investigated the experiences of Malaysian Muslim women and, due to the absence of data on female students' experiences, this ethnographic research presents the voices of Malaysian female students in the UK, particularly in the cities of Manchester and Cardiff.

It is essential to highlight that the term ‘Malaysian Muslim’ in this study is not restricted to Malay Muslim students alone but also refers to any Malaysian student either born a Muslim or converted, or who has parents who have inter-married – such as a Chinese or Indian Muslim parent with a parent of Malay ethnicity.

In carrying out my fieldwork, I spent a year with Malaysian students in Manchester and Cardiff. By deploying a transnational lens, my multi-sited ethnographic study probed into the transnational activities, social movements and social spaces that Malay female students were engaged with in the UK. Transnational migration refers to a process whereby migrants simultaneously forge and sustain social relations between both the society of their country of origin and that of the country in which they currently reside (Basch *et al.* 1994; Faist 2000; Glick Schiller *et al.* 1995). Another viewpoint suggests that the transnational migration process should highlight the on-going and continuous ways in which migrants structure and restructure their simultaneous embedding in more than a society (Glick Schiller *et al.* 1995; Pries 2005). As such, this study focuses on the strategies and approaches which the Malaysian student community employed to sustain its social relations, especially in Islamic movement organisations, as further elaborated on in Chapters 2 and 3.

Steven Vertovec (2009: 19), in his book entitled *Transnationalism*, describes how transnationalism among people can be categorised into three types: i) someone who travels regularly between specific sites, ii) someone who stays in their place of immigration, but engages with people and resources from the place of origin and, lastly, iii) someone who never moves but whose locality is significantly affected by the activities of others abroad. The transnational students in this study belonged to the first and second categories. First, these students travel back and forth from Malaysia to the UK over the period of their studies. Second, in the UK, apart from travelling with friends and attending classes, the Malay students’ everyday experiences include engagement with their families and friends in Malaysia via phone, internet or visit. The other transnational practices or activities on which I focus particularly in this study are the forms of support that these students provide to their societies in relation to space, education, gender and religion. These key themes are further discussed in the following chapters of the thesis.

In an attempt to comprehend students' everyday lives and experiences, the notion highlighted by Waters *et al.* (2011) was adopted, which asserts that fun, excitement and escape from the familiar are important reasons for student mobility. Escape from the pressure and expectations within the UK education system and the pursuit of happiness are the main factors for the decision to study abroad alongside British students. Youth mobility and education highlight the importance of 'fun' and 'happiness' in shaping the educational decision-making for British youth (Waters *et al.* 2011). In my thesis, by using the lens of female Malaysian students in the UK, I engaged with anthropological debates about Muslim piety, along with the role of fun in the lives of these pious women. Deeb and Harb (2007), writing on 'Leisurely Islam', discovered how religious youth in Beirut sought fun and negotiated between piety and pleasure. Another work on pleasure, fun and piety in Northern Pakistan by Marsden (2008a) looked into the ways in which religious Muslim in Chitral seek enjoyment in their lives through the shared experience of music and dance which also brings out diversity notion about how to live Muslim life in Chitral.

To explore a student's life on arrival in the UK, pertinent questions should be asked, such as 'What will happen to female Malaysian Muslim students when they come to the UK?' and 'How do female Malaysian Muslim students experience the process of transnational migration during their stay in the UK?'. In order to answer the above questions, one needs to examine the on-going process and the flow of transnational migration that place the focus on female Malaysian Muslim students in the UK. The literature on international students seems to focus predominantly on intercultural adjustments, motivations, trends and mobility, class participants, academic experiences, HE policies and visa and immigration issues (see Brooks and Waters 2009; Findlay 2011; Kim 2008; King *et al.* 2011; Rizvi and Lingard 2010). However, through the lens of an ethnographer, only a few scholars have discussed migration stories and the experiences of international students as transnational actors (see Baas 2010; Brooks and Waters 2010; Fong 2011; Robertson 2013; Soong 2016).

1.1.1 Transnational Migration and the Anthropology of Education

In this ethnographically based/informed thesis, the approaches of transnational migration and anthropology to education are combined when discussing Malaysian students' experiences in the UK. The field of the anthropology of education and migration has

expanded considerably over the past decade. Scholars have explored the experiences of child migrants by examining the schools where they studied and exploring how their lives were affected by the citizenship regimes of the receiving countries (Fong 2011; Ong 2000; Sancho 2017). My ethnographic research examined the ongoing experiences of female Malaysian Muslim students abroad (their life trajectories) based on several other ethnographic works by scholars that served as guidelines for this thesis. Within the UK landscape, ethnographic studies on international students by an anthropologist, Lorraine Brown, appeared to focus on a university setting in a town located in the south of England. Brown claimed that ethnography is an approach that captures the students' experiences of adjustment to academic and socio-cultural life, from their arrival in the new country to the return home one full year later. According to Brown (2008), there is a dearth of literature using the ethnographic approach as a methodology to probe into students' experiences. She argued that most studies only captured a snapshot experience, instead of tracking changes over time. In her article, she identified several gaps in the literature on international student research. One such gap mentioned by Brown referred to the importance of this present study in its focus on religion on students' identity and interactions, the link between faith and racial abuse among international students in the UK, and the significance of food to identity and interaction (Brown 2009: 114–115).

Much of the literature seems to focus on students from Asia who travel for higher education (HE), especially those from China. A paper in the *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs* on the lives of Chinese students abroad focused on ethnographic fieldwork in several countries – China, Finland, England, Denmark, Hong Kong, the United States and Japan (Hansen 2015). While substantial differences exist between the Chinese and Malay experiences, the initial theme that appeared significant for my study concerned life transformation. The article focused on unfamiliar social environments that may influence the everyday lives of Chinese students abroad and how it could affect their future aspirations. One way to explore this is through the work by Hansen on elite Chinese students in Denmark. In the article, he argued that the dimension of change in international students' environment should be considered by exploring the meaning and the experiences of self-development abroad. By deploying temporality as a lens in analysing the Chinese students' narratives, Hansen asserted that the experiences of living abroad made students reconsider the way in which they spend their time. The findings showed that students had plenty of free time in the host country, when compared to their

lives in China. The students described their life in China as restless, and more relaxing in Denmark (Hansen 2015). In contrast to Fong's (2011) student informants, the Chinese students' imagining that studying abroad was 'Paradise' was dominated by the 'floating life', which she referred to as full of struggles and dilemmas faced by the students abroad.

Fong's work demonstrated a critical approach on transnational educational migration and the anthropology of education in understanding Chinese young people's pursuit of education abroad. In her study on Chinese students' transnational experiences, Fong (2011) argued that there should be more literature on the present anthropological research that deals with the young people's experiences, especially transnational students. This is mainly due to the increasing number of Chinese international students who register at higher institutions across the world. Fong focused on the Chinese students' decision-making process, as well as on the hardships and obstacles they faced in confronting their lives abroad. In her book, she analyses three main issues: (1) the motivation of Chinese students to study abroad, (2) the 'floating life' and dilemmas faced by the students abroad, and (3) the students' decision to return or to stay in the host country; this is linked to the discussion of her book entitled *Paradise Redefined: Transnational Chinese Students and the Quest for Flexible Citizenship in the Developed World*.

In order to understand the life experiences of transnational migrants, I reviewed several theses, journals and books related to the subject. The ways in which a transnational migrant creates and experiences social space are elaborated in a book by Fechter (2007) entitled *Transnational Lives: Expatriates in Indonesia*. The book claims that expatriates in Indonesia create their social spaces through boundary-making and developing a European lifestyle, including living in expensive houses, eating Western food and employing servants. In exploring the types of spaces expatriates produce, Fechter drew on the concept of Csordas' (1994) notion of the body as an agent and applied the phenomenological perspective in order to comprehend space. Nevertheless, these boundaries offered limited and exclusive social space between the migrants and the host society. Expatriates in Indonesia preferred building connections with other international migrants from the West. In a similar vein, Mueller (2013) highlighted the limited interaction in transnational social spaces between German migrants and the host society. Her studies on Germans' translocal lives in the UK showed that German migrants did not express their social spaces through friendship and solidarity. They preferred building

boundaries as a way to avoid their co-nationals, due to the highly judgmental images and stereotypes about other migrants who wish to appear as open-minded and cosmopolitan by making friends with others rather than with their co-nationals.

Both studies demonstrated the various ways in which transnational migrants expressed and created their transnational social space. Based on the above concept, focusing on the migrants' transnational social space generates ways to understand the migrants' subjective experiences and emotions, which is useful within the context of 'transnationalism from below'.² Although Fechter's research focused on 'transnationalism from above',³ it explained the aspects of social status, social practices and historical stances that exist amidst the transnational migrant community, which is beneficial in this thesis. While both studies derived from the Western perspective in expressing 'spaces', my study focuses on the South-East Asian and mobile Muslim female students' perspectives. In doing so, this study highlights the importance of leading a sociable life abroad and how these students dealt with their religious boundaries as a Muslim. It is vital to understand the idea of being open-minded from the Malay students' perspective. The religious element was embedded in this study in order to assess the issue at hand. The next section depicts the religious aspect in several studies of transnational migration.

1.1.2 Transnational Migration and Religion

Focusing on the aspect of religion in transnational migration, Levitt (2001) asserted that there is a lacuna in transnational migration studies concerning transnational practices within the context of religion in the everyday lives of migrants in at least two locations. She further highlighted the importance of religion as a key role in transnational networks. In her article entitled 'You know, Abraham was really the first immigrant: religion and transnational migration' (2003), she outlined several ways to understand the role of religion in transnational migration. One is by considering the ways in which a migrant practises his or her religious activities in the destination country and analysing how these activities affect his or her connection between the two nations. Drawing on the fundamentalist model of Muslim identity and practice, Kibria (2008) explored the meaning of 'new Islam' for Muslims of Bangladeshi origin in Britain and the United States (US). She added that revivalist Islam offers a way of coping with the challenges

posed by living in a new society, especially for Muslims who find themselves in the minority (Kibria 2008: 244). As a response to the growth of revivalist Islam in these two countries, Bangladesh-born Muslims prefer 'Muslim' to be their global identity, instead of their ethnicity. The findings of her study were confirmed by Mandaville (2007), who showed that British-origin Muslims prefer to use their religious identity, which they are comfortable presenting based on the new environment in which they are living, where 'Muslimness' is natural and a self-reproducing part of everyone.

Roy (2004) claimed that, apart from adopting 'Muslim' as a global identity, a person can also choose his or her own identity by giving precedence to citizenship and original nationalities, such as regional, ethnic or religious identities when a person lives in the West. New identities can be cast in either hyphenated terms or as reconstructed identities, such as 'Arab', 'Arab-American', or 'Asian'. As Marsden (2008a: 241) pointed out, 'as Muslims move between their region's different spaces, they identify with very different values, traditions, and things; some of which stand in stark contrast to one another'. Similarly, Vertovec (1997) argued that, when migrants become a minority in their diaspora or engage in transnational practices, religious and socio-cultural values are bound to progress in varied ways. This causes Muslims to objectify their religion and to engage in self-examination or a critique of Islam and its meanings (Mandaville 2007).

Studies by Levitt (2002) and Kibria (2008) display an interconnection between religious activities and identity in a migrant's life in two different places. Although Levitt (2002) did not specifically focus on Muslims, her suggestion of investigating religion and practices in more than one place offers new findings in the field of transnational migration. Hence, my study examined whether religious practices and the piety movement in the female Malaysian Muslim student community played a significant role in our understanding of a migrant's transnational experiences in host country.

1.1.3 The Transnational Lives of Female Malaysian Muslim Students in the UK

Malaysian Muslim women – commonly known as Malay women – are an especially interesting group to focus on due to their association with much anthropological literature that places great emphasis on upholding Malay etiquette, such as modesty in the way they dress, and in their eating habits (Carsten 1997). Malay women can also be categorised by

their relationship – if they are married or otherwise. Both categories have different values and attributes. In Malay society, unmarried women are widely referred to as *anak dara*. Most of the Malay students in this study are *anak dara*, as they are still young and single. They come to the UK when in their early twenties to follow undergraduate university programmes. The postgraduate Malay students in my sample ranged in age between their mid-twenties and mid-thirties. Nonetheless, only a few of them were married. The relationship status of the students is important, especially in the case of mobile female Malaysian students because, when these Malay students study abroad, they need to deal with a new space and environment. Based on Islamic teaching and Malay culture, a Malay woman is forbidden to live in a shared space with a man with whom they have no ties of first-degree kinship. For instance, the selection of accommodation for Muslims, especially amongst *anak dara*, differs as they have to deal with issues related to gender or *mahram*. Hence, the search for appropriate and safe accommodation is a major concern for many Malay women coming to the UK as students. As such, this thesis has explored the links between the search for accommodation and broader analytical concerns about space and space-making, as well as their importance to everyday behaviour and identity. This issue has yet to be widely explored by scholars within the context of international students; this discussion therefore contributes to issues of space and space-making, as well as its significance to the identity and everyday behaviour of Malay female students. Chapter 4 presents my analysis of how the Malaysian student community in Manchester sustained the concept of *mahram* via an accommodation arrangement.

Carsten (1997) mentioned that ‘when visitors come to the house, young girls are expected to busy themselves in the kitchen’. Thus, mastering household chores, especially cooking, is a must for *anak dara*; they are expected to conform to conceptions of diligent and not anti-social behaviour. Traditional values expect Malay women to have a strong sense of *malu* (shyness) and politeness when they are outside the house and in the company of men. Collins and Bahar (2000) compared shyness in Western and Malay societies. They asserted that *malu* in Malay societies is a positive feeling (such as respect for one’s elders), whereas in Western societies, such conceptions are not as important.

In contrast to Malay men, Malay women value their relationships more with other Malay women in kinship terms, regardless of whether or not they have already met each other. This is in the hope that familiarity and intimacy between them will grow, even though

they are not biological siblings or share kinship ties (Janowski and Kerlogue 2007; Karim 1995). For instance, a younger woman calls an older woman *kakak* (older sister) – a symbol of respect. As most of the informants in this study were undergraduates and younger than me, they addressed me as *kakak*.

This ethnographic research contributes to how relationships and friendships grow in the community of Malaysian women in the UK. In Malay society, new friends are invited as guests to the house if the host feels comfortable with them. They are served home-cooked dishes prepared by the host – a symbol of friendship and kinship. It is important to understand the notion of kinship relations in the everyday lives of Malay female students abroad in the migration context. This research shows how, through practices of commensality, female Malay students from Malaysia in my sample quickly built quasi-kinship relations in the UK and how importantly it affected their relations to each other, as well as their student and academic experiences. I suggest that living and studying in the UK is best conceptualised as being a form of training that allows those who are unmarried to polish their domestic skills prior to marriage. The outcome of my fieldwork showed that those who had never known how to cook slowly learnt to produce many Malay dishes, due to their yearning for and limitation to the obtention of Malaysian food. A key driving force behind the close relations that many Malay women form with one another in the UK appeared closely connected to practices of cooking together and sharing food. In the UK, such activity is practised not only within families but also with other non-kinship Malays who live together under one roof or in a community. This study also explored how certain activities – such as cooking, sports, gatherings and food exchange between Malay women – helped to create ties of emotion through kinship categories and ideas. For instance, some students may see their life experience in the UK as a starting point to becoming more independent and for the purpose of self-exploration.

1.2 Methodology

As this study is interested in documenting the everyday experiences of female Malaysian Muslim students in the UK, an ethnographic approach is chosen as the best method. According to Schensul *et al.* (1999), ethnographic research is commonly associated with participant observation. This latter is a process of learning and understanding through the researcher's exposure to or involvement in the routine activities of his or her participants or communities in the research setting. This method allows the ethnographer to observe the participants' daily lives – listening to them and engaging with them through in-depth conversations. Ethnography involves a thick description and the researcher often lives within the community over a lengthy period of time in order to fully understand their daily routine in terms of economic, social, political and religious activities (Schensul *et al.* 1999; Winchester 2005). In participant observation, the researcher has the freedom to choose to be either a passive observer or an active participant, both of which require an ethnographer to record extensive field notes. Participant observation is an essential method for my data collection because it enables me to gain in-depth knowledge and understanding of these students' lives, especially in their religious circle or *usrah* activities. Malinowski (1922) states that the aim of participant observation is to help the ethnographer to understand a phenomenon from the perspective of the participant and to blend into the field setting in order to lessen the distraction (O'Reilly 2013).

Thus, in this ethnographic study, the data were collected in a number of ways. Methods such as participant observation, interviews, conversations and fieldnotes were deployed throughout the fieldwork. During the participant observation, I used visual data such as photographs, field notes and recordings to support my observations during the data collection. According to Bernard (2006), there are four types of field note – jottings, a diary, a log and field notes proper. The field notes are descriptions of the events and the people whom I met during the fieldwork. They are the most important data in my research. I also took several photographs of the events and places that I visited. Some of the reports and censuses have visual data such as diagrams, charts and tables. During my fieldwork, I bought two small notebooks to help me to jot down on the spot whatever things I found interesting or salient about the Malay community in my research. I found that the field jottings or scratch notes were a useful way to document my informants' perspectives at a particular moment regarding a specific issue. Roger Sanjek (1996) also

mentions that scratch notes help the ethnographer to produce the informants' viewpoint while observing or talking with them – sometimes out of sight. Therefore, most of the keywords gathered in my scratch notes enabled me to explain something in more detail later.

The two notebooks that I bought were reserved for the two field sites of Manchester and Cardiff. My proper fieldnotes cover mainly the meetings of the piety movement, social gatherings, school meetings and house visits. However, in reality, it was quite impossible for me to write down everything during participant observation, especially when my informants and I went to social gatherings where everyone was busy chatting and eating together. Also, when my informants shared with me their emotional stories in their room, I preferred to listen attentively rather than to record them in writing during the conversation. As Bernard (2006: 390) said, 'It is always appropriate to be sensitive to people's feelings, and it is sometimes a good idea to listen attentively and leave your notebook in your pocket'. Obviously, it depends on the situation and the flexibility of the researcher in writing the fieldnotes. Besides, taking photos during the event also helped me to describe the situation when later writing up my field notes.

In my fieldwork, I usually wrote down everything I remembered from the day once I was back in my room in the evening. The data in my fieldnotes were developed through interactions with the informants or any interesting events that occurred which I found invaluable for my research. After scrutinising my fieldnotes, I typed the essential elements on to my laptop and saved the documents according to the day and event, a method which enabled me to determine the emerging themes according to the name of the event in question. Next, I started to identify my potential informants and set up appointments with them for an in-depth interview. The interviews were semi-structured so that I could to understand certain practices and identify the reasons for any observed relationships. After the first interview, I also decided to modify some questions by adding, editing and recasting to make them easier for future informants to understand and answer. The rationale behind my decision to conduct in-depth interviews is because I needed to seize the most important ideas and themes which emerged in these students' lives – at least until reaching saturation point, by which time the most salient ideas had been obtained (Weller *et al.* 2018).

When I followed my informants to their *usrah* or any social events, I would carefully ensure that they covered their *arah* before recording or taking photos of them. This was to make them feel safe and to show my concern and respect as a female Muslim researcher. The fieldnotes were kept safely in my bedroom drawer and other digital documentation such as photos, recordings and transcripts were stored in the Fieldwork folder on my laptop, Dropbox and external hard disk – purchased expressly for my PhD project as a backup. To ensure that they remained secure, I set a password for the documents and my external hard disk. I also always emailed to myself copies of my research documents which I had prepared in case my laptop was stolen and all my backup disks destroyed (Bernard 2006).

Throughout my fieldwork, I introduced myself to the respective informants and explained my position as a research student who was interested in exploring their everyday lives as female Malaysian Muslim students in the UK. Before an in-depth interview started, I handed the interviewee the information sheet and briefly explained to them the importance of my research. Most importantly, I convinced them of the ethical issues of the study in order to ensure that the students felt safe and comfortable sharing their stories with me. Thus, being careful to explain the concept of ‘informed consent’ was a crucial step for my research. The information consent form enabled them to understand the aims of my research. It also protected their rights as research informants – to privacy, confidentiality and anonymity – when participating in my study.

I also asked for my informants’ consent to record the interviews using a voice recorder. They were free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason and could choose to speak in either language (Malay or English) to answer my questions. After the interviews, I usually verbally summarised the data with my informants. If I found that there were any ambiguous statements or content in the transcription, I would share them with the interviewees to ensure that they were accurate and which bits might be particularly sensitive. Besides, if I needed any additional information, I could call or text my informants via WhatsApp – for example, if I wanted to reconfirm any jargon or the specific name of a place or event mentioned by the informants during the interview. This helped me to ensure that the data obtained were accurate.

1.2.1 Field Sites

The ethnographic fieldwork for this thesis was based in two locations in the UK: Manchester and Cardiff. As the starting point for one year of intensive ethnographic research with Malay students in the UK, I spent an extended period of time in the northern English city of Manchester. The consideration of statistical data related to the presence of Malaysian students indicated that the city was indeed a favoured destination for Malay university students. Through the help of a Malay friend in Brighton, I managed to rent a student house occupied entirely by Malay women in Manchester. As a Muslim female researcher, living with these female students during my fieldwork offered me an unparalleled opportunity to document their everyday lives. Not only did this offer me the possibility to study the women's private spaces but it also enabled me to be part of their everyday lives where, most of the time, interaction and participation took place in their daily activities through cooking and eating together when they were at home.

In Manchester, the students' two-storey house was located in Rusholme, a culturally diverse neighbourhood well-known to international students and near to the local mosque, Al Furqan. I lived in the house with three Malay students: Afia, 23, Afiqa, 22 and Anisa, 21. The house had four bedrooms and a bathroom. The first room on the ground floor was occupied by Afia and her cats, while the remaining three bedrooms upstairs were occupied by the other housemates and me. Since they were aware that I was conducting research for my thesis, the household members regarded me not only as their 'new housemate', but also as the *kakak* (older sister). I familiarised myself with my new role as *kakak* in the house. This status, somehow, put me in an ambivalent situation as I did not want the students to create a gap between me and them after knowing my age and my status as a postgraduate student. Concurrently, it was a privilege to be a researcher as they allowed me to ask questions whenever something came to mind. For example, in many events and houses that I visited, the students would ensure that I felt comfortable; I also did not have to worry about finding potential informants as they helped me to find them. They guided me to the places that they assumed would be the most helpful for my research interests. As a researcher and a new housemate, although I was aware of their busy schedules with their academic work assignments, they were willing to spend their time

chatting with me on daily basis to share their life events. These students displayed their interest and kindness by helping me as much as they could in my research.

On my arrival at Manchester Piccadilly station, one of the informants, Afia, met me and we took the bus home together. Even though it was our first meeting, she greeted me warmly with a broad smile on her face. At home, I was welcomed by a famous Malay dish, *Nasi Lemak*, which had been prepared by Anisa. Unfortunately, Anisa was not at home at that time, as she had gone to the city to entertain her Malay friends who studied in Jordan. This was important because these students received visits not only from family and friends from their home country, but also from friends who studied in other nations; such as Jordan and Egypt. This showed that students' mobility occurred not only between the home and the host country, but also between the host country and elsewhere. Students in the UK seemed to play an important role in sustaining social connections between Malays residing abroad.

Another housemate, Afika, was also not at home at that time as she worked at a Saturday school as a teaching assistant. Thus, only Afia was available then. That night, Afika and Anisa met me in my room, where we did *salam* (shook hands) and they introduced me to Anisa's friends from Jordan. The latter had come to visit Anisa and planned a holiday in the UK. Thus, my time in the house enabled me to gain intimate glimpses into the global nature of their friendship networks, academic lives, roles and routine in the house, as well as the ways in which they passed their time as international students in Manchester.

In my research, thirty Malay students became my participants. I interviewed over fifteen students during my fieldwork in Manchester, yet most of my time in the city was spent with six Malay students – my housemates and their three best friends, Yasmin, Ayda and Ira. All were pursuing accountancy and business courses, except Yasmin and Ayda, who were taking a financial accounting course. Yasmin, Ayda and Ira lived together in a two-bedroom flat. From the house, it was only a five-minute walk to go to their flat. The close distance between their residential areas strengthened their bond. The houses were not considered as the homes of strangers but places where they could drop by, hang out, sleep and, of course, eat. My ethnographic findings were enriched with these students' daily activities and food sharing and the friendships they treasured while studying abroad.

1.2.2 *Daily Routine and Schedules*

On Sunday evenings, I followed my housemates to Ayda's house, where we had dinner, watched movies and, sometimes, slept the night there. On weekdays, they came to our house to hang out and cook together. Household visits allowed me to establish a rapport with them and eased our in-depth interview sessions. I confirmed my data and observations by comparing my interview notes with those cases that I had observed and listened to. When compared to other students, they also felt comfortable sharing their personal and untold stories with me. I found that some informants who had been recommended to me by my friends initially felt shy at the beginning of the interview session because they did not know me personally. To overcome this, I had to make more of an effort to join specific activities in order to bridge the gap between us. The situation was similar in Cardiff, when I was invited by my informants to have lunch at their houses after meeting them several times. They cooked for me their best dishes and talked about themselves more openly in their homes than in the public space, such as on university campuses. I learned that it is important to show interest and look familiar for them to be more 'open' while gathering data.

The informants went to classes every morning, and I would look online to see if there were any events organised by the Malaysian society that I could attend. When one or two of them had no classes, I accompanied them on their fortnightly grocery shopping trips. For instance, there were one or two days when the three of them had different classes, and I went shopping with them for groceries or chatted with them in their bedrooms. We had a cooking rota at home, and I cooked dinner for them on the day I was on duty; I helped them to prepare food in the kitchen when they were on duty. Apart from observing the way they cooked and enquiring about how they learned to cook, or who had taught them, I also had many conversations with them about their personal lives, family backgrounds, and interests or hobbies. A living/dining room in a house is a particularly critical place for rich ethnographic research. Most of my informants gathered and ate together in this particular space. It was also the spot to watch movies, meet, gossip, and calculate utilities bills or debts.

In my fieldwork, I used a lot of social media platforms (especially Facebook and Instagram) to determine the current events that were going on in the community that I was researching. Using Facebook was crucial for my research because I gained much real-time information, especially pertaining to the Malaysian community – much of which was displayed on their organisation page. To be on that group page, I had to get approval from the administrator, who was also a committee member of the community organisation. After spending some time with the students, I was finally accepted, and became officially an online community member. Becoming a member in a virtual community helped me to get to know more about my potential participants, their interests, and their daily activities. During the course of the fieldwork, I followed or added my informants on social media to sustain our bonds as a researcher and a friend. Aside from contacting them by phone or meeting them in person at the events, I used this method to contact them for interview purposes prior to meeting up with them.

My fieldwork was not limited, however, to what is conventionally thought of by anthropologists as ‘private space’. My week as a researcher was replete with social events, sporting activities, religious discussions and social gatherings. I attended many activities and events organised by the Malaysian students’ associations. During the study week, I also followed the students to the university library. The students booked a study room and we talked there. It was a place where I observed them praying, helping each other in their studies, and listened to them complaining about the noise made by students in the next room. Every Tuesday or Wednesday night, I followed my housemates to *usrah* (an Islamic discussion group that I document in detail in Chapter 3), and on Thursday evenings, I went to intellectual discussions conducted and organised by Malaysian students under the auspices of an organisation they had founded that went by the name of the Independent School of Thinking (IST). Being involved in this more public side of the students’ lives allowed me to witness their enthusiasm for learning about disciplines (such as philosophy) that fell well beyond the boundaries of their largely business-oriented degree courses. I discovered that IST was a new type of organisation for the Malay students as it was run by Malaysian students in Manchester who were studying various disciplines and were working together with the goal of creating an academic discourse amongst their co-nationals.

Every Friday evening, I went by bus with Afia to the Manchester Aquatic Centre to go swimming. The session for women was from 6 pm until 7 pm. We met Ayda and Min at the swimming pool. Sometimes, they booked a badminton court at Moss Side, located close to Ayda's house, where the six of us took turns to play. We shared the cost of the court and the hire of the rackets. Participating in sports activities, Islamic discussion and intellectual discourse with them helped me to view their life in a way that went beyond the notion of their 'just coming here to get the degree'. Without such unparalleled access to their daily activities, it would have been impossible to gain such rich ethnographic data only via interview. It had dawned to me that these students had to put a great deal of effort into enjoying life and friendship, while socially investing their knowledge in multiple ways.

1.2.3 *Work Experience*

During my fieldwork, I also had the opportunity to work while collecting data. This position allowed me to gain a full understanding not only of people's individual lives but also of community experiences. Several of my study informants took up part-time jobs and participated in voluntary work to gain some skills and experiences. In Manchester, I had two informants who worked as teaching assistants while, in Cardiff; I had students who worked as tutors and also gave coaching to Pakistani children. Every Saturday, I went to Cheetham Hill, located in north Manchester, with Afia to teach Malaysian history to Malaysian migrant children in supplementary school. The purpose of this supplementary school is to preserve the heritage of the Malay community and to facilitate access to its culture by teaching the Malay language and Islamic lessons.

The journey to the Malaysian Community School of Manchester (*Sekolah Komuniti Malaysia Manchester* or SKMM) took us one hour by bus from our home. We went there early in the morning with other students who were also teachers and volunteers. It all began after Afia told me that she worked there as a teaching assistant. At first, I never thought that the SKMM would be my field site and I only went there to follow my informant. It turned out that this school had many perplexing elements linked to my guiding ethnographic research concerns. I initially started teaching at the school as a volunteer and later was offered the post of a teacher after Afia recommended me to the headmistress of the school. After I told her about my research project, the headmistress,

Dr Hazirah or *Kak Zi*, offered me the position of teacher since she was looking for a postgraduate student to teach a class. My role as a teacher at SKMM gave me complete access for data collection.

1.2.4 Attending Formal Events

In comparison to other days of the week, my ethnographic scope at Saturday school was comprised of a broader variety of elements: I managed to talk to and meet people from various social groups, including Malaysian migrant children, teachers and volunteer students, Malaysians who sold food in the school canteen and Malay parents who worked and studied there. On one occasion – Council Achievement Day at the University of Manchester – I was lucky enough to meet the Mayor of Manchester. It was an honour for our school to receive an achievement award on that day. It was also a symbol that the Malaysian supplementary school was recognised by the local council. We also had to perform during the event. The feeling of excitement and honour was clearly displayed when *Kak Zi* asked us to give our best for the ceremony preparation, which included performances of traditional dances by pupils, of patriotic songs, and the presentation of Malaysian food and snacks.

I was even allowed to attend the school meetings and take the children to cultural events, and was trusted to be a choreographer for a Malaysian traditional dance group in the school. It was my first time teaching the children to dance – most importantly, they had to perform in front of the Mayor and other schools. The children in my class were nine to ten years old. It required much patience to teach and to communicate with them. Some of them were born and raised in the UK and therefore understood but did not speak the Malay language, which meant that I had to be careful with the words that I used in the class. When speaking in Malay, we (teachers and volunteers) had to speak slowly and clearly, so that the children could understand and pick up the language. The school canteen had a crucial role for it provided the ambiance which showed what it was like living as Malaysians abroad; the people displayed their appreciation of and longing for traditional cuisines at the *Kedai Kopi Rakyat (KKR)*. During recess, the parents and the visitors queued to buy the Malaysian cuisine and Malay savouries for their families and friends. It was also a place where transnational networking was quite visible and where my study informants met and interacted with professional Malaysians who had resided in

the UK for many years, working as doctors and engineers. It was almost impossible for Malaysian students to get to know them in the area – Rusholme – in which they lived as it was quite a distance from the school. A depiction in greater detail regarding the importance of food to the Malay student social networks is given in Chapter 5.

After attending the formal events and working together with the students and teachers in preparation for meeting the Mayor of Manchester, the Malaysian students' in their life abroad are seen as 'mini ambassadors'. The students came voluntarily and some chose to work as teaching assistants at the weekends to teach the Malaysian diaspora about their culture of origin and to promote Malaysia to the local society. Chapter 6 presents my analysis of these students' aspirations and their role as Malaysian mini ambassadors.

1.2.5 *Travelling with my Informants*

During my fieldwork, I had several opportunities to travel with my informants on trips and to events. The first trip that I participated in was called MABIT (*Malam Bina Iman dan Takwa*) (The Night of Faith and *Taqwa*) held in a church mosque located in Edinburgh, Scotland. I was invited by my *naqibah* (the leader of the *usrah* gathering) to participate in this event. There, I conversed extensively with many Malay Muslim student participants who came to Edinburgh from all over the UK and Ireland. I introduced myself and told them about my project. From this event, I managed to collect data by praying with the congregation, sharing food with the other participants, playing games organised by the event committee, and attending the Islamic talk and group discussion. I carefully listened to the students' opinions about the various aspects of Islamic tradition and selected topics about tests in life during the group discussion. I saw that my *naqibah* was on duty as a kitchen helper for the event. I observed the high commitment which the students had to the Islamic *dakwah* movement. These students sacrificed their time and energy while studying in the UK; an example of what Mahmood (2005a) famously referred to as the 'piety movement'. Chapter 3 presents my analysis of the various approaches used by this group to recruit new members in the UK and thus sustain the organisation of their piety movement.

My second trip to Scotland was in December 2016. This time, I crossed the Anglo-Scottish border not to better understand the piety movement, but for the Christmas

holiday. It was an impromptu plan. In Cardiff, I lived in a Malay house with a group of optometry students. Fortunately, I had a generous friend who was willing to share her room with me during the course of the three months that I conducted fieldwork in the Welsh city: in return, I paid the utility bills. As my relationship with the women in the house grew stronger, they invited me to join them on their winter break in Scotland. I was a bit reluctant, initially, due to the short time I had in Cardiff to collect data, as I had only stayed in the city for three months. After realising that this was the group with whom I spent most of my time, I decided that a trip to Scotland would be an excellent way of collecting data for my ethnography thesis. In Manchester, I spent much of my time following the students' organisation and personal activities, and only had a chance to travel for a day to York with them. Besides, I had some difficulties in tracking the Malay community activities in Cardiff. The situation differed from that in Manchester, where the Malay student community was very active and persistent in organising events for their fellow Malaysians. In Cardiff, this aspect of Malay students' lives differed as only a few activities were held in the city during my fieldwork there. This was partly because I was there at the beginning of the semester, when most of the students had yet to arrive in the UK; others were busy preparing for their final examination. Hence, there were not many community activities that I could focus on. With the limitations depicted above, my fieldwork in Cardiff offered me different ways of collecting data. For example, travelling with the informants allowed me to document their ways of being a Malay and a Muslim on mobile. To be precise, I noted their commitment as Muslims abroad by observing them reciting a prayer before starting the journey and then in the airport on landing in Edinburgh, how they decided where and how to pray when the prayer time was almost at an end, how they chose to book the whole dorm when booking a hostel for their safety and religious purposes in addressing the issue of *mahram*, how they kept saying سبحان (God is perfect) on witnessing the magnificent and picturesque mountains along the road, and الحمد لله (Praise be to Allah) when successfully accomplishing a task or arriving at their destination. Hence, travelling with the informants appeared to be the best way possible to explore their personal agency and creativity in articulating their faith, attitudes, music interests and the ways in which they dealt with different people and cultures along the journey. The outcomes differed from the trip to Scotland with the Manchester students. In terms of religiosity and mobility, both sets of students displayed their faith in God by praying and maintaining good moral behaviour, although I was unable to feel their individual and creative agencies since the trip was organisational and collective-based.

My fieldwork in Cardiff taught me to reflect on the methods that I deployed in Manchester. It highlighted the diversity of the Malaysian community in a particular place, as well as what made them unique, especially in their way of living. Having observed the Malaysian community in both cities, I saw that the Malay students did not participate in the same activities or share similar interests in the two locales.

In fact, I experienced two extraordinary circumstances during my fieldwork in Manchester. First, I witnessed a theft right in front of my eyes while walking to a restaurant with Anisa. It was my first time witnessing such an incident in our residential area. We were extremely shocked and stood close to each other. Anisa, who was still in shock, walked closer to me and exclaimed, '*Takutnya akak...*' (Sis, frightening...). Although I had always heard about crimes nearby from the news, I had never seen or experienced one before. Anisa's reaction reflected our feelings, and the experiences these students might need to encounter in their everyday lives as international students. The ethnography fieldwork managed to capture the Malaysian students' everyday experiences on both sides of the spectrum – from pleasant experiences to shocking or traumatic ones.

The second incident occurred in May 2017 at a critical juncture in the history of Muslim experiences in the UK during my study. While I was revisiting my informants in Manchester, a suicide attack took place at the Arena, where an explosion took the lives of 22 people, while affecting more than 800 people both physically and psychologically. It was believed that the terrorist involved was Salman Abedi. Within the context of the attack, the house of the Malaysian students whom I knew was raided by the police, as further discussed in Chapter 6. The incident allowed me to document their experiences of being Malaysian students and part of the Muslim community at a time of unprecedented media coverage pertaining to the position of Islam in British society, as well as public anxiety about the activities of transnational Muslim networks in Britain.

1.3 Overview of the Chapters

This thesis is composed of seven chapters. Chapter 1 – An Introduction – presents the aims and goals of the research in the context of an autobiographical account of the researcher's background. It highlights how and why this inquiry was initiated in the first

place. The central themes in the literature and discussions revolve around transnational migration, religion, gender, education and the researcher's experiences in the field.

Chapter 2 focuses on the historical context of Malaysia, and particularly on the evolution of the Malaysian education system before and after British colonisation. The chapter provides the reader with an enhanced understanding of the pattern of migration for education among Malaysian students and education policies that influenced this following British colonisation in Malaysia. The chapter also lays out the history of transnational piety movement amongst Malaysian Muslim students during the early period of their migration to the UK. This is critical if the reader is to understand the forms of Islamic organisations and the Muslim identity fashioned by my informants.

Chapter 3 contributes to an understanding of the piety movement, which involves female Malaysian Muslim students in the UK at the present time. As mentioned in Chapter 1, this research was motivated by the concern of parents left behind in Malaysia for the Islamisation or piety movements of their overseas-educated daughters. This chapter explores the occurrence of Islamisation and the extent to which involvement in these piety movements is important for Malay students in transnational migration.

Chapter 4 explains how female Malaysian Muslim students and the community members sustained the Malaysian and Muslim space at the same time, while analysing other crucial elements linked to their living experiences. This chapter unravels the practices and efforts made by the student committee members to address the challenges faced by those living as a Malay community abroad. Building on *Kabyle House* by Bruck (1997), this chapter also unpacks how the Malaysian students negotiated their identity and space, including the elements that formed their experiences as mobile female Malay Muslim students abroad. This chapter also explains how the students overcome issues related to Islamophobia during their stay in the UK.

Chapter 5 discusses the consumption of food and commensality amongst Malay female students in the UK. Since all the 13 states in Malaysia have their own signature dishes, food appears to have a functional role, especially when Malay women from different states meet in the UK. The experience of sharing and preparing food amongst the Malay women in the UK offers an interesting perspective on how Malay women abroad

demonstrate their regional identities, while also forging collective identities when far from home. Apparently, the main cuisine they decide when cooking and the negotiation that takes place while living together contributes to the life adjustment of Malaysian student migrants. Apart from cooking and eating together, the chapter also reveals the kinship shared between Malay women during the preparation and consumption of food, as well as other elements of kinship or networks which these students develop when eating in ethnic restaurants and the Malaysian canteen.

Chapter 6 discusses aspects related to education and aspiration through the on-going experiences of Malay students in UK higher institutions. It focuses on the various aspects of the students' lives as scholarship holders, addressing in particular how they handle diplomatic practices in their everyday lives as Malaysian mini ambassadors overseas. The notions of aspiration, well-balanced citizenship and 'everyday diplomacy' are deployed in this chapter in order to understand the everyday experiences of these students. The challenges and struggles faced by a Malay female student migrant in the UK are elaborated on in this chapter.

Finally, Chapter 7 outlines the conclusion to this thesis by presenting a summary of the research findings in line with the main aims. It considers the conceptual and empirical contributions of the study – in particular, the notions of religion and education as an integral part of the migration education experience, which overlaps with a diversity of factors manifested across and within multiple scales. Lastly, the chapter concisely outlines how some of the main findings of this study can fruitfully be taken forward in future research.

CHAPTER 2

THE HISTORY AND CONTEXT OF MALAYSIAN EDUCATIONAL MIGRATION

The aim of this chapter is to familiarise the reader with Malaysian history, politics and society. Most importantly, this chapter introduces the politics of Malaysian education in conjunction with British colonisation and the legacies this has left for policies related to Malaysian students' overseas migration today. In line with this aim, the chapter presents the history of the early Malay diaspora to the UK, demonstrating how the community consisted of a range of migrants with diverse social statuses – from royal families to seamen via trainee teachers. The transnational Muslim networks that incorporate both Malay students and Muslims from different cultural backgrounds in the UK have, up to now, always played a major role in laying the foundations of the piety movement in the country – as further chapters in this thesis explore; the commitment to Islamic movements of reform and piety remains a powerful and vital aspect for UK-based Malay students. This chapter is divided into five main sections. The first introduces several aspects of Malaysia's history which are salient for this thesis. The second section explains the establishment of schools before, during and after British colonisation and addresses how this history has shaped Malaysian education policies today. The third section discusses the establishment of a National Economic Policy with specific emphasis on the education of Malays after British colonisation. The fourth section lays out the pattern of educational migration among Malaysian students to the UK, before the final section critically examines the literature related to the history of the role of the early Malay diaspora and students in the progressing of transnational piety movements in the UK.

2.1 Background to Malaysia

Malaysia is a commonwealth country located in South-East Asia. It is bordered by Thailand to the north, Indonesia and Singapore to the south, and the Philippines to the east. Malaysia is strategically located along the Straits of Malacca, which is a major sea route connecting the Far East to Asia, Europe and the Middle East. The country is divided into two parts; *Peninsula Malaysia* and *East Malaysia*, which comprises the states of

Sabah and Sarawak on the Island of Borneo. Peninsular Malaysia is separated from the states of Sabah and Sarawak by the South China Sea. Sarawak and Sabah share their borders with Brunei. Although the capital city of Malaysia is Kuala Lumpur, all official matters regarding the government take place in the newly developed capital – Putrajaya – which is a well-planned Malaysian government administrative centre located twenty-two miles from the busy city centre of Kuala Lumpur. The country covers an area of 329,847 km² (127,320 miles²). The federation of Malaysia was formed in 1963, with the inclusion of Sabah, Sarawak and Singapore. However, within two years, in 1965, Singapore was excluded from the federation.⁴ Malaysia gained its independence from Britain on 31 August 1957. To date, Malaysia is composed of 13 states and three federal territories. The total population in the country was recorded at 32.17 million people in 2018. Malaysia is a multi-ethnic and multi-religion country and hence home to many people with different cultures and languages. The Malaysian population consists of Malays (69.1 per cent), Chinese (23 per cent), Indians (6.9 per cent) and others (1 per cent) (Department of Statistics Malaysia 2018). The state government has divided its citizens into two basic groups; the *Bumiputera* (sons of the soil) and the *non-Bumiputera*.

Figure 2.1 Map of Malaysia



Source: World Atlas: www.worldatlas.com/webimage/countrys/asia/my.htm

The term ‘Bumiputera’ is assigned to a person whom the government recognises as having cultural affinities indigenous to the region, while *non-Bumiputera* goes to a person with immigrant ancestry and whose cultural affinities lie outside South-East Asia (Hwang 2003: 4). The *Bumiputera* group consists of Malays, the ‘*Orang Asli*’ – the indigenous people of Peninsular Malaysia – and the natives of Sabah and Sarawak. With this combination, the *Bumiputera* forms the majority of ethnic groups in the Malaysian population. As such, this study has focused on female Malaysian Muslim students who belong to the *Bumiputera* category, mainly because it is they who have been receiving substantial education scholarships. The issue of having *Bumiputera* status in relation to economic and education policies in Malaysia is elaborated on in the fourth section.

2.2 The British Colonial Context: Malaysia’s Education Structure and Economic Policy

As a Commonwealth country, Malaysia cannot escape from the British influence in its economic, political and social institutions. The formation of a ‘plural society’ in Malaysia began in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries with the migration of labourers from India and China. The very term ‘plural society’ was initiated by Furnivall, who defined it as:

... in the strictest sense a medley, for they [ethnic groups] mix but do not combine. Each group holds by its own religion, its own culture and language, its own ideas and ways. As individuals they meet, but only in the market-place ... [and] ... with different sections of the community living side by side, but separately, within the same political unit. Even in the economic sphere there is division of labour along racial lines; Natives, Chinese, Indians and Europeans all have different functions, and within each major group subsections have particular occupations (1956[1948]: 304–305).

Furnivall concluded that the community lives in their own circle, where each is divided based on economy, faith, lifestyle and race. Other scholars view ‘plurality’ as a process of migration through cultural borrowing and adaptations that can be differentiated by various degrees and combinations of linguistics, religious, origin and political factors (Nagata 1975: 3; Shamsul 2003). The migration of Chinese and Indians into Malaysia was stimulated by the expansion of British economic and political control (Hirschman 1972). In the case of Malaysia, this plural society began under colonial rule; there was a

great change in the ethnic composition of pre-colonial Malaysia when the British brought in vast numbers of Chinese and Indians to work in the mining industry and on rubber plantations (Abhayaratne 2004). Structurally, Malaysia's ethnic cleavages emerged from British colonial policies that had been designed to 'divide and rule', thus resulting in an ethnic division of labour amongst those colonised (Lee 2012). The British government 'managed' this plural society by maintaining the Malay feudal social structure in the countryside and a 'temporary' immigrant population working in the mines, on plantations and in cities (Hirschman 1986: 356). As in India, the divide-and-rule concept was implemented by the British colonialisers to hinder national unity and to spark ethnic warfare upon their departure (Sandhu 2014: 11).

Therefore, the ethnic groups in Malaysia distinguished themselves through varied economic sectors and areas. For example, the Chinese organised the labour and capital needed to mine and export tin, as well as becoming middlemen in many burgeoning business enterprises. The Indians were recruited to work on rubber plantations and in the civil service, while the Malay peasants were kept in the rural areas doing farming and fishing. The colonial state maintained the segregation of economic and political power in order to curb labour strikes and to ensure business continuity (Koh 2017). As this study has focused on Malay students, the stances taken by the colonisers towards Malay characteristics during the colonisation era were taken into account. The extent of these characteristics in influencing the aspiration of contemporary Malay students' to study abroad is depicted in Chapter 6. One stereotype held about Malays amongst South-East Asians refers to their indolence or laziness (Hirschman 1986). Malays had been described as lazy and not hard working – in contrast to Chinese and Indians – due to their lack of interest in economic activities, especially in mining and rubber plantations. They were depicted as preferring to be pleasure-loving or as being idle, unambitious and carefree, only responding to calls to be economically active when proper motivation for doing so is offered by government policy or supervision (Butcher 1971; Slimming 1969).

Such claims concerning this supposed characteristic of Malays have been addressed via scholarships and by a Malaysian politician and social scientist, Hussein Alatas (1977) in his book entitled *The Myth of the Lazy Native*. In it, Alatas asserted that this so-called Malay laziness arose from the unwillingness of Malays to work for the colonisers. Besides, Malays preferred and enjoyed their life in the *kampung* (village), where they

could be their own masters by growing rice and coconuts and fishing and farming (Comber 2009). Another reason used to explain the apparent lack of participation of Malays in the modernisation and opening up of their country is that employers would have to offer greater wages to the Malay peasants to work in the mines and on the plantations, when compared to new immigrants. Malay peasants would need to give up their autonomy and relatively strong socioeconomic standards for the conditions of work and wage employment during that time (Hirschman 1986). Issues of labour shortage and cheap labour were solved by the colonial government by bringing in Indian and Chinese immigrants. In terms of capacity, Frank Swettenham (the first Resident General of the Federated Malay States), in his study entitled *Malay Sketches*, described Malays as having no lack of intellectual capacities (Swettenham 1895). Another scholar of the British rule who was an observer in the Straits settlement portrayed Malays as ‘adventurous and, in many respects, [a] noble race, that like English colonists in more modern instances, have laid the foundation of a great empire on but a very small beginning’ (Cameron 1965: 8–9). After addressing the labour shortage issue by importing overseas labour from different parts of the Empire, the British decided to focus on their relationship with Malay society by giving better support to the colonial administration. The British – in Malaya (the name for Malaysia before independence) as elsewhere in the Empire – emphasised the need to preserve traditional Malay society and regarded education as an especially crucial mechanism of social maintenance. Aside from the economic and political effects, one of the greatest influences of British colonialism in Malaysia was on the education system.

2.2.1 *Early Malay Education*

The education system during the colonial period was similar to the school system in Britain but was adapted by the British in several important ways to reflect what they regarded as being the distinctive needs of the colony’s three major racial groups. Prior to British colonisation in Malaya, the Malay were ruled by the Sultan. During this period, the Malays received an informal Islamic education from an Imam – or Islamic teacher – at their home, the local mosque or the *surau*. Islamic education during that period focused on core Islamic practices, such as memorising the *doa* (prayers) and learning the *Quran*. The emergence of the Islamic education resulted in the establishment of religious schools, such as *sekolah pondok* (hut schools) and *madrasah* or Islamic college (Mior Khairul Azrin 2011). The Malays who went to these schools learned Arabic in order to better

understand the texts and the *doa* in Arabic (Mok 2000: 1–2). Hence, the principal focus of Malay education was the key Islamic ritual and knowledge, which was achieved by memorising the *Quran* and studying the basic Arabic texts. However, the system of religious education in Egypt was established by the British colonial administration and the state in order to manage public morality by integrating Islam as an academic subject in the school curriculum (Starrett 1998). In Morocco, the traditional Islamic education played a significant role in helping the students of Berber origin to socialise and meet the challenges of colonialism. Memorisation of the *Quran* and mastery of the Arabic language helped them to acquire a social status within the wider Arabic-speaking Moroccan society. However, under French colonisation, many mosques and universities and the traditional Islamic education were eroded due to the establishment of French-sponsored government schools (Eickelman 1985). In line with such progression elsewhere in the Muslim world, as the British colonial state extended its activities in the country, the early Malay religious education system became more intricate and eventually resulted in the introduction of two categories of schools: vernacular schools and English schools.

2.2.2 Vernacular Schools

Vernacular schools were usually attended by students whose mother tongue was the same as the language of instruction. For example, the language of instruction in Malay medium schools was Malay, the Chinese medium school was for Chinese and the Tamil medium schools for Indian. These categories of school were introduced for ethnic reasons and partly due to British government policy (Ozay 2011). As depicted above, the divide-and-rule policy at that time displayed the reluctance of the British to integrate all the races through standardised education. The main idea was to preserve the *status quo* of the various ethnicities in Malaya and to accept their roles in life via different economic activities. All the races were convinced by the idea of the British as a government, the Malays in agriculture, the Chinese in mining and business, and Indians on plantations and estates (Abhayaratne 2004; Hirschman 1972; Lee 2012).

Another argument is that the colonial education system was traditional in nature (Hirschman 1972). Its main purpose was ‘to create a corps of suitably-trained locally-recruited minor officials and clerks for the colonial service’ (Holmes 1967: 1). The

objective of the British education system during the colonial period was not to change the social structure for the sake of progress, but to enhance the existing social structure (Hirschman 1972). Initially, the establishment of Malay vernacular schools did not receive a positive response (the number of Malay student attending the school was very low) from the Malay parents because it differed from the traditional *Quran* classes established in indigenous villages. Malay parents were reluctant to send their children to school, fearing the dissemination of Christian or Western values both theoretically and practically.⁵ To raise attendance in school, the British Assistant Director of Malay Education (1916–21) suggested the inclusion of *Quran* lessons in schools on condition that they took place in the afternoon (Waser and Khan 2004). There were important parallels in this regard with the establishment of *Deoband madrasah* among Muslim societies in India during British colonial rule, in which the traditional Islamic materials were organised in a manner influenced by British customs⁶ (see Metcalf 1982). In Algeria, Islamic education was deliberately destroyed by the French during its colonial period and only a handful of traditional schools of poor quality remained at the time of the country's independence (Colonna 1975). The expansion of Western colonisation interrupted the traditional Islamic education in most of the colonised countries (Eickelman 1978).

2.2.3 *English-Medium Schools*

Since most Malays lived in rural areas during the colonial period, many did not have the opportunity to attend English-medium schools located in towns and cities, where the majority of the Chinese population resided. Only elite Malays (the sons of royal families, chiefs and aristocrats), most Chinese and some Indians had benefited from attending these schools. Those who studied in English-medium schools had the opportunity to pursue HE at colleges and universities, winning important posts in the government and gaining access to scholarships (Darmi and Albion 2013). These advantages, however, only benefited the Chinese and elite Malays who lived in urban cities. As for the Indians, only a few had attended the English-medium school as they lived on estates and were poor. Like the Indians, most Malays lived in rural areas. Other reasons why most Malays declined to attend English-medium schools during the colonial period included their poor proficiency in English, as the subjects in such schools were taught in the English language, which made it harder for the Malays to gain admission. British policy prevented

Malays from attending English-medium schools due to the latter's wariness of the rising intellectual Malays who might challenge the British administration in Malaya (Sufean 2002: 129). This scenario differed in India. Based on Macaulay's minute in (1972[1835]) on Indian education, English education civilised people and was more useful than Arabic or Sanskrit. This civilising mission, as stated by Macauley in his minute, is known as the 'white man's burden' (Kipling 1899), in which white men believed that it was their moral obligation to civilise the peoples of their colonies through English education and Western culture (Kipling 1899).

2.2.4 *The Establishment of Full Residential (Elite) Schools and Scholarships in Malaysia*

This section explains the history of boarding schools in Malaysia, which were established during British colonisation. The first residential school in Malaya was the Raja Selangor School, which was built in 1890 during British colonisation, when RO Winstedt was the Deputy and later the Director of Education in Malaya. Through its English-medium education, the Raja Selangor School was established 'as an initial measure to produce the Malay elite from the royalty and children of state dignitaries' (Stevenson 1975). This school was later closed down for renovation and re-opened in Kuala Kangsar in 1905 as the Malay College Kuala Kangsar (MCKK). MCKK is also known as 'the Eton College of the East' and was established for the Malay aristocracy. The establishment of MCKK was supported by the Sultan of Perak, who criticised British education for 'producing better Malay farmers or fisherman only'. The Sultan of Perak offered the site to build the school with the aspiration that it would serve for the education of the Malays of good family and for the training of Malay boys for admission to certain branches of the government service (Stevenson 1975). The Malay Girls' College, Tunku Kurshiah College (TKC), was established in 1947 in Kuala Lumpur and later moved to Seremban. TKC was renamed after Malaysia's first Raja Permaisuri Agong (Queen). To date, these elite schools have become boarding schools and are known for their excellent standard of education – they regularly produce outstanding and charismatic students who go on to graduate from universities abroad. The students must excel in both academic subjects and sports if they wish to enrol in such schools.

In Malaysia, applications to enrol in boarding schools or colleges start at the age of 12. A student who excels in academic and extracurricular activities during primary school is offered a place at a boarding school for five years. If they fail to succeed due to poor results, the students may be given a 'second chance' to apply for boarding school by scoring straight As or the equivalent in the Form 3 examination. The benefit of studying in a boarding school is that it serves as a platform for excellent students throughout Malaysia to earn a place at local and international universities via a fast-track programme that only uses trial examination results. Boarding schools have exceptional education and curricular activities taught by highly professional teachers who offer care and concentration for the students, enabling them to score exceptional results, in comparison to regular secondary schools.

For many Malays in Malaysia, getting into public boarding school or junior science college is not an individual achievement but, rather, a collective one (cf. Bayly 2014). Malay students who have been offered a place at boarding school or college are said not only to display the level of intelligence of their family, but also to raise the status of the family. Those with good results are perceived as role models and inspirations to their families and the village communities from which they hail. The competition gets harder if the students come from rural areas or from inferior urban schools, where most of them have, on average, poorer results and where only a few have results excellent enough to get selected for scholarships or critical courses at university (Mahathir 2008). The criteria include excellent academic results, curricular activities, family background and socioeconomic status, as well as selection via interview.

The impact of the British education system is that it has led to four types of school in Malaysia; English-, Malay-, Chinese- and Tamil-medium schools. At present, the elite schools for Malays established by the British have been transformed into fully residential (boarding) schools, generally to serve the excellent Malay students. However, only a small fraction of the quota of places is offered to non-Malay students. This quota is influenced by the British policy of 'divide and rule' and has affected the integration of Malaysian citizens, especially in educational institutions, until today. To solve such a problem of racial integration, many attempts have been made to promote national unity amongst Malaysians, one of which is by establishing a national, standardised education

system. The next section elaborates on the creation of this national school system after the end of British colonial rule in Malaya.

2.2.5 *Towards National Education (Post-Independence Period)*

Prior to independence, the British attempted to develop a national school system by introducing a national language policy. The establishment of national education policies through the school system is designed to promote unity among the various ethnic or racial groups in Malaysia. Gellner (1983) asserted that, indeed, nationalism is a modern sociological phenomenon in which the role of an education system should be tied to unification of the language and be a central part of building a nation-state. In 1950, the Barnes Report proposed that primary education in Malaya should be standardised, with both the Malay and the English language as the medium of instruction and lasting for six years. The Chinese and Indian communities protested against this notion as they argued that any new definition of the Malay national identity must include the three main races. As a result, the British ratified the bilingualism aspect in Malay schools (English-Malay), while the Tamil and Chinese schools remained on the condition that they need to be trilingual, with the inclusion of Malay and English. After the failure of the Barnes Report, the effort to reform the education system continued with another proposal in the Razak Report. This report was proposed, in 1956, by the then Minister of Education in the Federation of Malaya, Tun Abdul Razak. The Razak Report was an improvement on the Barnes Report and the Fenn-Wu Report (proposal of education for Chinese) because it endorsed the Malay language as the medium of instruction while allowing other vernacular schools to exist (Darmi and Albion 2013). The ultimate aim for the national education system using the Malay language as the medium of instruction for all vernacular schools was to unite all the races using a common national language.

After Malaysia gained its independence in 1957, the new Minister of Education, Abdul Rahman bin Talib, produced the Education Act 1961. In so doing, he adopted the suggestion outlined in the Razak Report and generated the new Rahman Talib Report. The Rahman Talib Report emphasised the establishment of a common curriculum with the Malay language as the main medium of instruction, with the Malay and English languages used as the medium in national public examination system. The report also recommended the changing of vernacular schools to *Sekolah Rendah Kebangsaan*

(national primary schools) for Malay medium school, *Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan* (national-type schools) for Chinese and Tamil primary schools, and the English national-type schools were transformed to national schools in 1968. Malaysian students also had to undergo the Primary School Achievement Test, also known as *Ujian Pencapaian Sekolah Rendah* (UPSR) at the end of their sixth year before entering secondary school. The subjects included Bahasa Malaysia (the Malay language), Chinese and Tamil (for national-type school students), English, Science and Mathematics. In secondary school, third-year students had to sit two national examinations: *Pentaksiran Tingkatan Tiga* (PT3) (Form 3 Assessment) – formerly known as *Penilaian Menengah Rendah* (PMR) (Lower Secondary Assessment) – and all fifth-year secondary school students had to take the *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia* (SPM) (Malaysian Certificate of Education). On top of this, there is a standard integrated school curriculum for both primary and secondary schools, known as *Kurikulum Bersepadu Sekolah Rendah* (KBSR) and *Kurikulum Bersepadu Sekolah Menengah* (KBSM). With such a common curriculum, all types of school (national and national-type) must teach Islamic religious knowledge to Muslim students and moral education to non-Muslim students. The Malaysian education policy of promoting unity through the common syllabus and medium of instruction can be observed from Malaysia's National Education Philosophy, established in 1988 by the Ministry of Education Malaysia:

Education in Malaysia is an on-going effort towards further developing the potential of individuals in a holistic and integrated manner, to produce individuals who are intellectual, spiritually, emotionally and physically balanced and harmonious, based on a firm belief in and devotion to God. Such an effort is designed to produce Malaysian citizens who are knowledgeable and competent, who possess high moral standards, and who are responsible and capable of achieving a high level of personal wellbeing as well as being able to contribute to the harmony and betterment of the family, the society and the nation at large.

The above philosophy clearly spells out that the Malaysian education system focuses on individual development. The students are not only expected to be mentally and physically balanced, but also spiritually harmonious based on their faith in and piety to God. This explains how education produces well-balanced citizens. The importance of commitment to God, the nation, the family and society outlined in the education philosophy by the Malaysian government is in line with the *Rukunegara* (national principles): 1) *Kepercayaan Kepada Tuhan* (belief in God), 2) *Kesetiaan Kepada Raja dan Negara*

(loyalty to king and country), 3) *Keluhuran Perlembagaan* (supremacy of the constitution), 4) *Kedaulatan Undang-Undang* (the rule of law), and 5) *Kesopanan dan Kesusilaan* (good behaviour and morality).

The *Rukunegara* was formulated on Malaysia's 13th Independence Day on 31st August 1970, following the racial clash that occurred on 13 May 1969.⁷ Besides *Rukunegara*, the 13 May incident, which is also known as the black history of Malaysia, led to the birth of another policy – the new economic policy (NEP). Chapter 6 explores the concept of the well-balanced citizen – as presented in the Malaysian education philosophy – in greater depths by analysing its key components: commitment to God, the nation and the family, as well as to Malaysia's international reputation. The next section explains the NEP that has helped to address the trigger sparking dissent among ethnics due to the imbalance of economic distribution.

2.3 Evolution of the New Economic Policy (NEP)

After Malaysia gained its independence in 1957, Peninsular Malaysia was confronted with the problem of consolidating a multiracial society characterised by socio-economic and cultural variance. The birth of Malaysia in 1963 started another period of national integration fraught with many threats and challenges. In 1969, Malaysia witnessed an outbreak of racial conflict that undermined the very foundations of the nation. The racial riots that occurred on 13th May of that year owed their origin to the government's inadequate efforts to redress the socio-economic imbalances that had characterised Malaysian society for so long. Abhayaratne (2004) claimed that the inequalities between the main ethnic groups in Malaysia happened in three ways: ownership of capital assets, employment, and occupation. The trauma from the racial riots led to a critical self-analysis of what had gone wrong and new approaches were initiated to strengthen national unity. In the aftermath of the racial riots, the NEP was instituted with the overriding objective of establishing national unity.

The economic disparities between races in Malaysia are real. The NEP is an affirmative-action policy with a 20-year-old plan launched in 1970. The aim of the NEP was to eradicate poverty amongst all Malaysians and to restructure Malaysian society so that the identification of race with economic function and geographical location was reduced and

eventually eliminated – especially as the average incomes between the major social groups varied widely. During the 1957–69 period, Malaysia already had a relatively sizeable Chinese bourgeoisie and middle class, as well as a great many Chinese proletariats. However, the Malays, who were the *Bumiputera* ethnic group, made few advances in the modern economic sector, as their business class was very small and weak economically, even after 12 years of independence (Joseph 2008; Singh and Mukherjee 1993). Malays still represented 74 per cent of the population of Peninsular Malaysia who were living in poverty. With its focus on eradicating poverty and income disparities between ethnic groups, this policy had managed to reduce poverty from 49.3 per cent in 1970 to 16.5 per cent in 1990. However, this achievement did not help to resolve another main target of NEP, which was to have 30 per cent *Bumiputera* ownership in the corporate sector.

Hence, this aim was continued in a wide-based programme in a 10-year development plan called the National Development Policy (NDP) between 1991 and 2000. The essence of the NEP continues to feature prominently in recent ten-year plans, such as the National Vision Policy (NVP) in 2001–2010 and the New Economic Model (2011–2020). The economic plans comprise the add-on NEP called *Wawasan 2020* (Vision 2020), which proposed the country's vision to become a developed country by 2020. *Wawasan 2020* was launched by the former Prime Minister, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad (re-elected as the present Prime Minister) in the sixth Malaysia plan. The government effort to rebalance ethnically based inequality has impacted on Malaysian citizens in four sectors: healthcare, public service, employment and education (Gomez and Saravanamuttu 2013).

The remaining section focuses on the education fraction related to NEP. The Malaysian government considered education to be an important tool with which to lift the social and economic status of poor ethnics – ‘access to better education for all has become a strategic long-term goal of the government to enable Malaysians to climb the social ladder’ (Mohd Nahar Bin Mohd Arshad 2016).

Various affirmative action policies were implemented to minimise inter-ethnic difference in educational attainment, especially for the *Bumiputera* ethnics. Policies in education, such as the ethnic quota system, fully residential schools (science schools and colleges), matriculation (pre-university programmes) and education scholarships, were all

implemented in the NEP in response to the Majid Report of 1970, which claimed that only a small number of Malay students were represented in local universities, especially in the sciences and engineering. The percentage of Malays who graduated from local universities, such as University Malaya, in 1970, showed that, despite the fact that 54.7 per cent of the 10.8 million people in Malaysia were Malays, only 4.5 per cent graduated in science, 1 per cent in engineering, 6 per cent in medicine and 31 per cent in agriculture (Kenayathulla 2014; Selvaratnam 1988).

To enhance the educational attainment of Malays in tertiary education, a quota system was introduced in all public universities, with 55 per cent of places reserved for *Bumiputera*, 35 per cent for Chinese students, and 10 per cent for Indians (Sato 2005). The government also built fully residential schools and MARA junior science colleges for performing *Bumiputera* students, focusing in science and technology subjects: such institutions were conceived to be in preparation for tertiary education in Malaysia and overseas institutions that most such students had little exposure to. Access to education has improved for *Bumiputera* through the scholarships awarded by the government, such as MARA, to enable these students to pursue their studies abroad. For instance, three out of four scholarships were specially awarded to *Bumiputera* in education in the early 1980s (Mehmet and Hoong 1985). The NEP has been criticised, especially by non-Malays, as it prioritises the Malays in both the education and economic sectors. The government has also been accused of introducing policies that favour the *Bumiputera* – thus the debates between the politics and the economics of education have been a combative issue in Malaysia's social landscape to date (Brown 2007; Joseph 2008; Mohd Nahar Bin Mohd Arshad 2016).

In 2002, the merit quota system was introduced by Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad to replace the racial quota system in tertiary admission. This marked a significant change for *Bumiputera* and other races in their admission to tertiary education. Students' admission to university no longer depended on their ethnicity, but was instead purely based on merit. The merit system was introduced to create a spirit of independence and competence amongst the *Bumiputera* and to reduce their preferential treatment in gaining access to HE (see details of the NEP above under Malay access to tertiary education). The merit system means that only excellent students can go to university. Thus, the Malays must perform well in education; educational meritocracy was perceived as a wise policy, as it

has created an equal opportunity for all to further their studies at public universities (Kenayathulla 2014).

Regarding access to public university, a 10 per cent *non-Bumiputera* quota was introduced to MARA junior science college and public matriculation colleges. After secondary school, selected students join the matriculation programme for one or two years, a programme that offers science and accounting pre-university courses (Joseph 2008). Nevertheless, students from public secondary schools who gain exceptional results by scoring straight As in examinations and extracurricular activities also have the same opportunity to enrol in the matriculation programme and be awarded scholarships to study abroad.

The effort to study in the UK for many sponsored students does not merely rely on 'straight A' scores and being active in curricular activities. Those who are selected and pass the interview are must follow a two-year foundation course in a pre-university college before they can study abroad. Most of the Malay students in this study claimed that they attended this pre-university college course at *Kolej Mara Banting* (KMB), *Kolej Yayasan* (UEM) and INTEC (Centre for Preparatory Studies). During this two-year course, the students have a tight schedule. The classes and lectures run from morning to evening and, to secure their scholarship, the students must pass all the subjects. Having done this, they must then take a bachelor's degree at one of the top 100 or 200 universities in the world based on the Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) World Ranking list. The fields of study are limited to areas specified by the government. The ranking of the university depends on the requirement of the sponsors. For a Public Service Department (JPA) scholarship, which is known as the government scholarship, the students must enrol in one of the top 100 universities, while MARA scholarship recipients must go to one of the top 200 universities.

Malaysian students also travel to other non-European countries, such as Japan and Korea, under the Malaysia Look East Policy introduced by Malaysia's fourth and current prime minister, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad. The primary aim of this policy was to transfer values, and in particular, to encourage Malays to learn from Japanese work ethics and managerial skills. Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad also believed that a lack of motivation caused Malays to be poor and unsuccessful economically. With this goal in mind,

Malaysian students were encouraged to study in Japan through the award of government scholarships. Interestingly, apart from the Look East Policy implemented in 1982, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad had a turbulent political relationship with Margaret Thatcher, principally as a result of his decision to establish the 'Buy British Last Policy' (a preference for non-British products) in 1981 as a reaction to the British government's decision to charge higher fees for overseas students and to the London Stock Exchange's hostile reception of a Malaysian take-over of a British company (Overtoom 2014). However, the grudge between Tun Dr Mahathir and Lady Thatcher was temporary, as the Buy British Last Policy was withdrawn two years later. From then on, the relationship between the two leaders became stronger (Sunora Sagi and Azlizan Mat Enh 2017).

The aim of the Malaysian government to balance economic disparity through education policies, as depicted above, has been a serious and recurring dimension of the country's modern history. Inadvertently, The Buy British Last Policy in 1982 demonstrated that Malaysia has a long and rich history of educational partnership with the UK. Since the implementation of the NEP, Malaysia has spent billions of *ringgit* (5 *ringgit* equal approximately £1) sending its students for overseas education, especially to the UK. An estimated 17,000 Malaysian students studied in the UK in the 1980s, resulting in HE being used as a diplomatic bargaining chip. From the 1970s to the 1980s, a majority of Malaysian leaders and government officers were educated in the UK. In the context of this history, it is important to explore the aspirations of the contemporary Malaysian Muslim students there. To do so demands a focus on *Bumiputera* Malays as it is they who are the main subject of the controversial NEP policy. As the above discussion shows, the UK has been one of the top education destinations for Malaysian students for decades. The next section places the Malay history in a wider context by discussing the key trend of international students' educational migration to the UK.

2.4 The UK as a Destination for International Higher Education (HE)

Over the past 10 to 15 years, international student mobility has become an increasingly important aspect of the global HE landscape. The number of students migrating across borders to further their education in recent years has become one of the most important developments in the field of migration, one which demands further investigation. During the late 1990s and the early years of the current decade, the international student market

expanded from almost three-quarters of a million students in 1997 to just under one million in 2002. In 1999, according to UNESCO (2007), 1.68 million ‘internationally mobile students’ studied abroad. In the same year, the Australian international recruitment organisation, IDP Education Pty Ltd, projected that, between the years 2000 and 2025, the demand for HE is bound to triple to a total of 7.2 million potential students; Asia has been thought to have by far the greatest growth potential and is expected to account for 70 per cent of global demand by 2025 (Verbik and Lasanowski 2007).

Over the past decade, international students have predominantly travelled to the US, the UK or Australia for the purpose of HE (Verbik and Lasanowski 2007). These three nations are viewed as established ‘learning centres’ that offer educational products to the international market. In terms of absolute numbers, the UK and the US are the two main destination countries for foreign students, hosting around 460,000 and 620,000 students respectively in 2008 (Dustmann and Glitz 2011). The US is the dominant destination for students seeking to study in a Western country, followed by the UK, where huge growth in the last two decades of full-fee paying foreign students has turned HE into a massive export industry (Williams 2012). The economic benefits gained from the trade in education seem to be a key motivation for the development of policy in the UK to attract more international students. It has been estimated that international students are worth an additional £12 billion indirectly via education-related exports (British Council 2005: 2). The impact of the student market in the UK is massive – its value has doubled over the past five years, from £6.5 billion to £10.3 billion. This has made its educational services one of the UK’s greatest exports – ahead of tobacco, food, insurance and beverage industries (Brown 2005).

Benefiting from its position within the EU as the sole English-speaking country, the UK has become the top English-language destination and upholds a healthy tradition of welcoming international students. During the late 1990s and early 2000s, China and India were the major source countries, sending a large number of students to the UK each year. Much effort was made by the UK government to attract international students from non-EU nations. It is important to note that the UK HE sector, as a whole, seemed to generate approximately one-eighth of its income from international students’ tuition fees (Universities UK 2014). One of the most significant efforts was the Prime Minister’s Initiative (PMI) established in 1999. The UK’s then Prime Minister, Tony Blair, launched

an initiative to recruit an additional 50,000 foreign students by 2005. The aim of this initiative was to place the UK at the heart of the world's international student mobility map; harnessing the economic benefits of international student mobility and building long-term relationships with key economic allies (Krause 2006). This recruitment goal was surpassed by nearly 43,000 over a five-year period. As a result, there was a decline in funding per UK student of around 50 per cent in real terms between 1980 and the start of this century. Due to the success of this PMI, British universities have become enthusiastic supporters of high-yield overseas activity.

In 2006, a second phase of the PMI (known as PMI2) began with its key theme – emphasising the quality of international students' experiences. Unlike the PMI of 1999, which focused almost exclusively on international student recruitment, PMI2 embarked on a broader notion of 'international' beyond simply revenue generation from student mobility to the UK (Krause 2006). What is more, the PMI2 is composed of four interconnected strands and performance indicators, designed to enhance Britain's competitiveness in providing international education both in the UK and overseas. One of them was the launch of the 'Education UK' brand to provide a unified marketing message showcasing British education, and ensuring a more proactive and cohesive approach in an increasingly competitive market. The 'Education UK' campaign focused on several key areas, such as visas, immigration and employability, to 'ensure the right mix of countries, messages, and activities' (Krause 2006). For instance, international students interested in studying in the UK are allowed to work part-time as a result of reduced restrictions in UK immigration policy (Tier 4). International students were also eligible to apply for scholarships under the Chevening Scholarship scheme. The next section presents the numerical and statistical trends in the Malaysian student population in the UK.

2.4.1 Trends in the Number of Malaysian Students in the UK

The history of the Malaysian government providing scholarships to its students to study abroad goes back a long way. In 1985, Malaysia was ranked the third-largest provider of outbound international students (UNESCO 2013). Based on UNESCO (2007), Malaysian students were the largest group of South-East Asian students in the UK (UNESCO 2013). In 1995, for instance, 20 per cent of all Malaysian students in HE were studying abroad,

mainly on government scholarships to the tune of an estimated US\$800 million (Clark 2014). During the 1997–1998 financial crisis, more than 10,000 Malaysian students abroad were mainly in the UK and the US. Subsequently, funds for scholarships were dramatically slashed after the crisis. The weaker Malaysian currency during this period made studying overseas unaffordable and expensive for most students. Those on public scholarships were recalled and were instructed to continue their studies locally.

In anticipation of the 1997 financial crisis, the Malaysian government had to call upon the private sector to participate in providing HE through the passing of the Private Higher Educational Institution Act (PHEIA) in 1996. This decision was made to meet the upsurge in demand for tertiary education and to mitigate the inability of public local institutions to accommodate these students. This new government policy and strategy provided the impetus for private colleges and universities, as well as elite foreign universities, to establish their institutions to cater for local and foreign students. Some private universities and colleges offered twinning programmes, franchise programmes and distance learning. From a positive perspective, the 1997 crisis propelled Malaysia into becoming a regional and international centre of education excellence (UNESCO 2013).

Although the UK has experienced stronger growth in Asian and African markets, it has witnessed declining numbers from some of its previously most consistently performing source nations. For instance, over the past ten years, the number of Malaysian students declined by more than 36 per cent from 18,015 to 11,450. Between the academic years 1999–2000 and 2004–2005, UK enrolment grew by around 30 per cent, a figure that, whilst significant, is comparatively less impressive than the growth recorded by competitor HE destinations like Australia, Germany and France, during the same period (Verbik and Lasanowski 2007).

Nonetheless, a marked increase was noted between 2009 and 2010 in the number of Malaysian students choosing to study in Australia, compared to the UK and the US. As of 2009, of those Malaysian students who were studying abroad, 47.6 per cent were enrolled in Australian universities, followed by 23.8 per cent in the UK and 16.2 per cent in the US. Malaysia appears to be one of the top countries sending students overseas for their education, although inward and outward mobility numbers have been heading in opposite directions in recent years. To date, Malaysia is among the biggest markets for

transnational education (TNE) provision and the biggest overall for UK providers, with some 48,225 students studying for a UK qualification in Malaysia in 2010; four times the number of Malaysian students in the UK (Clark 2014). In 2013, 14,500 Malaysians studied at tertiary level in the UK, making Malaysians one of the largest overseas student ethnic groups in the country. Recent statistics from HESA – Higher Education Statistics Agency – (2018) showed that, over the past three years (2014–2017), Malaysia was the second-highest non-EU sending country to the UK after China: more than 16,000 students have enrolled in the UK HE. This striking statistic reveals the need to go beyond the analysis of student numbers and to better understand these students' life and migration experiences due to the fact that these will contribute to the dynamics of both the UK and Malaysia in manifold ways and for years to come. As this study is focused on the UK as an education destination, migration is embedded within the context of the history of the early Malay diaspora to the UK, as depicted in the next section. Additionally, this study reviewed publications by scholars regarding the earliest Malay students (trainee teachers), Malay ex-seamen and transnational Malaysian students in the light of piety movements.

2.4.2 *Malay Diaspora in the UK*

The Malay diaspora has been transplanted into multiple global settings since the 19th century. The early Malay diaspora to the UK began with members of the Malay royal families and elites. Historically, the first Malay who travelled to Europe in 1866 was Sultan Abu Bakar, a Malay ruler. Informally, he is also known as the 'Father of Modern Johor'. His first visit to England, however, was not for education, but to receive formal recognition as the Sultan of Johor from Queen Victoria. From then on, he became a lifelong friend of the Queen, and their friendship played a significant role in shaping the relationship between Johor and Britain. With his preference for European ideas and tastes, Abu Bakar was well-known for his diplomatic skills. At that time, he became the reference point for both the British and the Malay rulers who sought his advice in making important decisions (Lim 2009).

During British colonisation, the opportunity for Malays to study abroad was limited. Only excellent and fortunate students were qualified to receive British scholarships to the UK (Jamil and Razak 2010). In 1919, another Malay royal family member visited the UK; Tunku (a Malay royal title) Abdul Rahman. At the age of 16, Tunku Abdul Rahman was

the first student to win the Kedah state scholarship to pursue his studies at the University of Cambridge in the UK. Tunku Abdul Rahman was the first Prime Minister of Malaysia (1957–1970) after the country gained its independence from Britain. He is also known as *Bapa Kemerdekaan* (Father of Independence). In 1920, while he was in the UK, he was appointed secretary to the *Kesatuan Melayu United Kingdom* (KMUK or the Malay Union of the United Kingdom). KMUK is the earliest Malay nationalist group formed by Malay students in the UK with the objective of cultivating the spirit of nationalism amongst younger Malay scholars. The President of the KMUK was Malaya's First King (Yang di-Pertuan Agong), Tuanku Abdul Rahman ibn Almahrum Tuanku Muhammad. He decided to study law in the UK while accompanying his father, who was the Ruler of Negeri Sembilan, Tuanku Muhammad, on a trip to the British Exhibition in Wembley in 1925. On 4 September 1957, four days after Malaysia gained its independence, he was appointed as Malaya's First King.

While early Malay visitors to the UK hailed from royal and upper-class families, some Malay diasporic groups from the middle and lower classes also travelled to the UK between the pre- and the post-British colonisation period. According to Bunnell (2010), maritime migration was a major factor governing the existence of the Malay community in Liverpool in the UK. During the 1940s to the 1960s, a small group of Malay seafarers worked on British-owned and other ocean-going merchant ships that sailed from Malaya. These Malay seamen lived in Liverpool and claimed to hail from different states such as Singapore, Indonesia and Malacca. The reason why they lived in Liverpool was because, during the middle decades of the 20th century, the city was a major seaport with long-standing maritime connections to South-East Asian and across the Pacific (Bunnell 2010).

Most of the Malay seamen travelled to the UK and other maritime contexts in two distinct periods: during the era of British colonisation and after the formation of the independent state of Malaysia when, in 1965, Singapore pulled out from the Malaysia Federation. About 500 Malays from Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia lived in Liverpool in 1945. Nevertheless, this figure declined to approximately 100 in 1989 (Harith 2012). Some of them fought and died in World Wars 1 and 2. Apart from Liverpool, some Malay seafarers settled in other port cities – for example, New York, London and Cardiff (Bunnell 2010).

Interestingly, the community of Malay ex-seafarers was not the only Malay community residing in Liverpool. In 1952, the Federation of the Malayan government with the assistance of the British government sent 150 Malaysian trainee teachers to the Malayan Teacher Training College (MTTC), located in Kirkby, Liverpool, England. This was to fulfil the recommendation made in the Barnes Report to establish a national school system in Malaya (Malaysia) for students aged between 7 and 12 years with Malay and English as the languages of instruction. Other reasons for student migration were internal conflicts in Malaya and the disappearance of teachers during the Japanese occupation (Milner 1952: 437). These two Malay groups met for the first time when some Kirkbyites (Kirkby college students) participated in a film entitled 'A Town like Alice', together with several ex-seamen who acted as Malay villagers. This film was adapted from a novel by Nevil Shute published in 1950. It is the story of an English lady, Jean Page, who worked in Malaya in 1939 and became a Japanese prisoner of war in World War II. After the war ended, Jane lived with the Malays in a village and built a well for the Malay villagers as a gift.

The historical geographer, Tim Bunnell, critically explored the relationship between the Malaysian students and the Malay ex-seamen community. In his 'Route of Identity' project, he focused on the life geographies of Malay ex-seamen in Liverpool. Through life-history interviews with the remaining first-generation ex-seafarers there and spending time with them in a range of locations – including Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore – he analysed the shifting political geographies of the Malay identity (re)formation. Apart from identity (re)formation, he also highlighted the spaces or places of collective identification. The Malay ex-seamen bought a house and set up a Malay Singapore Club at 7 Jermyn Street in Liverpool as a community meeting place called the 'Malay Club' or 'Malayan Club' (Bunnell 2007: 417, as cited in Harith 2012). Later, the name of the club was changed to the Malaysia-Singapore Community Association (MSA). While the Malay Club in Liverpool was set up by the Malay ex-seamen, Malaysia Hall had been set up in London and Dublin by the Malaysian government to provide facilities exclusively for Malaysian students.

In the early 1950s, the former Malaysia Hall or Malayan Students Unit of the Colonial Office located at Bryanston Square, London (presently at Queensborough Terrace) served as a meeting point for the early Malay political leaders to plan their strategies to free their

beloved country from British colonisation. Malaysia Hall, today owned by the Malaysian High Commission and Malaysian High Education, functions as a second home to thousands of Malaysian students who reside in the UK and Ireland. Most functions and official events are held there, where students from all over the UK and Ireland go for *Eid* celebrations or official meetings with the ministers from Malaysia. Malaysia Hall in London is also famous for its economy and delicious food in the Malaysia canteen situated in the basement of the building. The canteen has been a vital eating place for Malaysian students and tourists to the present day. Malaysia Hall in Ireland is situated in Leeson Park, Ranelagh in Dublin. However, it is not equipped with a famous canteen service as that found in London. Malaysian students and visitors also visit Malaysia Hall in Dublin to access affordable accommodation, which is based on a hostel concept and reflects Islamic strictures whereby male and female students are housed on different floors.

Interestingly, apart from documenting the Malay seamen's life histories in Liverpool, Bunnell also looked into the transnational connection between the Malay ex-seamen and the Malay students who studied there. Two decades after British colonisation (the 1970s and 1980s), the number of Malay students in Liverpool increased. The Malay Club was earmarked as a social space where Malaysian students could socialise with the remaining Malay seamen, whom they called '*pak cik*' (uncles). The house played a crucial role in producing collective identification and relational reconstruction of Malayness in Liverpool, besides being a place for visiting Malay seamen a long time ago (Bunnell 2010). Tim Bunnell proposes the role of specific sites in the shifting of migrant identities. He portrayed how these *pak ciks* knew about the development of Malaysia and Singapore from the Malay students who visited the place and exchanged stories of migration and politics. He asserted that 7 Jermyn Street was the principal site where different visitors came together with their universal ethnic label of 'Malay'. Bunnell's work highlights the importance of places of identity to which transnational migrants abroad can come to share their stories and memories. He also documented the particular places attributed with the role of shifting the migrants' identities. As such, this thesis expands on Bunnell's research by focusing on the transnational experiences of contemporary Malay female students and the extent to which place is important to their Malay identity while studying abroad. The next section presents the Islamic resurgence of early Malaysian and other Muslim students at UK institutions.

2.4.3 *The Specific History between the UK and Malay Student Relations (Specific Interactions with Jamaah Islami in UK Institutions)*

In 1971, the Malaysian government began sending many Malaysian Muslim students to the UK. Islamic students' organisations, such as the Malaysia Islamic Study Group (MISG) and the Federation of Student Islamic Societies (FOSIS), both based in London, were already in existence at that time. FOSIS was established in 1963 and was dominated by Arab and South Asian students with the aim of increasing awareness amongst Muslim students about the world of Islam. This information is vital to understanding the significance of Islam to students' on-going experiences in the UK. The organisation caters to the needs of Muslim students in HE across the UK and Ireland. FOSIS, on the other hand, has a dual vision – to represent and to serve Muslim students. FOSIS covers seven areas: the countries of Wales, Scotland and Ireland, and the English regions of the North, the Midlands, London and the South. The conflict between FOSIS and MISG saw the birth of two new *dakwah* (piety) movements: Suara Islam and the Islam Representative Council (IRC).

The two *dakwah* movements were founded by Malaysian Muslim students at the University of Sussex and at Brighton Technical College in 1975. Since then, Brighton has become a focal point for most Malaysian students in England (Anwar 1990). During this period, the University of Sussex became a centre for the study of Islamic idealism. Embracing the setting offered by the University of Sussex, the Malaysian Muslim students at that time were influenced by Javed Ansari, a member of the Jamaat-i-Islami Pakistan, who was then a part-time lecturer in international economics. Ansari gave a radical interpretation of Islam to Malaysian students; not only did he expound the teachings of Maududi but he also compared them to the thinking of Mao and Lenin. Hence, many Malaysian Muslim students returned to Malaysia in the late 1970s with the religious fervour to which they had been exposed and which started attracting nationwide attention. At this point, both the government and the students' parents became very concerned about this *dakwah* movement (Anwar 1990).

Anwar (1990) concluded that British universities were where Malaysian students came into contact with other Muslims from around the world. The radical interpretations professed by

students from other Muslim countries, such as Pakistan and the Middle East, generated a transnational community – such as the Muslim Brotherhood in the UK – in the post-colonial period. Hence, the transnational process brought a new religious identity and ideas of Islam to the Malaysian Muslims in Malaysia. As Spiegel (2010) in her thesis entitled *Contested Public Spheres: Female Activism and Identity Politics in Malaysia* pointed out, ‘the British campuses were the terrains where new translocal Islamic consciousness was developed based on the globally attractive concept of Islam as a ‘complete way of life’ (2010: 87). Thus, the Malaysian Muslim students began establishing transnational social spaces within the borders of their destination countries (Ozkul 2012; Voigt-Graf 2004). However, in contemporary Malaysian student migration to the UK, only a handful of studies have looked into the active role of piety movements or into questions concerning how their experience as student migrants has played a role in their discovering and embracing such forms of religious concept. In light of this gap in the literature, my thesis contributes to it and discusses contemporary piety movements among female Malaysian Muslim students in the UK. In the spirit of the excellent historical works by the scholars depicted above pertaining to Malays, the next empirical chapter of this thesis discusses the ethnography of piety movements amongst my Malaysian female student participants.

CHAPTER 3

RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCES AND PIETY MOVEMENTS

In the previous chapter, I spoke of the early *dakwah* movements in British universities among Muslim students as one of the most important events contributing to Islamic revivalism among Muslim students around the world. In this first empirical chapter of my thesis, I aim to contribute to an understanding of piety movements among female Malaysian Muslim students in the United Kingdom (UK) today. Thus, this chapter seeks to peruse the ways in which contemporary Malay Muslim students experience and negotiate Islam in the host country, and identify the depth of their participation and commitment towards piety movements as an important aspect of their migratory experience in the UK. The chapter comprises five main sections. The first section discusses the key scholarly literature relating to religious experience in general and piety movements in particular. The second section describes the piety movement's enrolment and motivation among my Malay female informants. In the third section, I analyse and explore ethnographically these Malay students' experiences of participation in piety movements through *usrah* gatherings and student-community religious gatherings. The fourth section documents the specific relationship between participation in piety movements and migration in the students' lives, analysing how being religious becomes an important aspect of their everyday experiences in this context. The last section opens the ethnography beyond the consideration of piety and explores the diverse ways in which Islam is an important part of female Malay students' lives, especially amongst students who are not committed members of one or other of the piety movements discussed in the preceding sections.

3.1 Muslim Women's Piety Movements and Morality

Moving to the UK for a period of study is a significant event for many of the female Malaysian Muslim students with whom I have conducted research. With its multicultural environment and wide range of prestigious universities, the UK serves as an excellent platform for international students to explore life and acquire rich intercultural experiences. For the Muslim students in my research, living in the UK also provides them

with a space for personal reflection and the opportunity to develop their understanding of worship more specifically. This chapter also suggests that several challenges – such as those faced when studying, when lonely and when unable to explain Islam to others – add an important dimension to their everyday lives as Malaysian Muslim students in my study.

The piety movements among overseas Muslim students are not a new phenomenon; yet it has received less scholarly attention, comparatively. Piety is an important aspect of daily life, specifically in Muslim-majority cities or established diasporic communities in the West. The piety movements such as *usrah* (Islamic circle-group discussion) in which I participated did not merely arise from the influence of Islamic movements in Malaysia itself; they are historically linked to the previous Muslim (and often Malay) transnational networks abroad. Kahn (2006) argues that the historical mobility of Malaysian Muslims who have travelled for centuries to the Middle East for the *haji* (pilgrimage) and study purposes has led to a discourse on transnational Islam and the worldwide Muslim community (*umma*) that is an important part of Malay life. Apart from Middle Eastern countries, as I mentioned in Chapter 2, religious movements have also played a significant role in the UK as initiators of substantial social change in Malay Muslim students' lives throughout history. In the early 1970s, many Malay students who returned to Malaysia became far more religious than they had been when they left Malaysia and became advocates in their local communities and workplaces (Oliver 2016; Ong 1990). According to Abu Bakar (1981: 1043):

The students who were involved in *dakwah* were mainly Malay-educated and the religiously educated were ambivalent about Western education. When Malaysia began sending its first batch of government-sponsored students to Western countries in 1974, the Pakistan, Libya, India, Saudi Arabia and Iran connection became important to the Malays. It was through these students that books on Islam written in English by Pakistanis, Indians and others became popular.

Hence, through migration for higher education in non-religious subjects, Malay students implicitly become the transnational Islamic social agents or main actors of *dakwah* (piety) movements in Malaysia (Mamat 2016). While the above discussion illustrates the role of students as *dakwah* agents and the host country as a *dakwah* space, the material presented here focuses on the ongoing process of piety movements amongst Malay Muslim female

students that occurred in the UK. The religious movements or Islamisation among Muslims in society has become an interesting topic in the anthropology of religion. Many studies have focused on piety issues involving Muslim communities – such as religious practices, mosque movement, virtuosity and morality – and the ongoing importance of critical ways of thinking about Islam. The literature on Muslim and piety movements attests that religious practices can be thought of in terms of ethical self-fashioning societies (Anderson 2011a; Hirschkind 2006; Mahmood 2005a; Marsden 2005; Schielke 2009). There are also a number of studies dealing with women (e.g. Deeb and Harb 2007; Mahmood 2005b). Thus, this study examines this important body of work but focuses more specifically on the study of mobile Muslim women.

One of the excellent works to which I refer in the thesis is *Politics of Piety* by Saba Mahmood (2005a). The author worked in an urban women's mosque movement in Cairo, Egypt and focused on the teaching and studying of Islamic scriptures, social practices and forms of the bodily compartment that are part of the larger Islamic Revival in Egypt. In her ethnography, Mahmood compares three mosque movements, describing the difference in context and approach suggested by the *dai'yat* (teachers), which includes their styles, modes of argumentation and forms of sociability. She also demonstrates how mosque movements shape the piety of women in finding the ways to be and the meaning of being a Muslim while living in Egypt, a country with a secular government that has seen decades of Westernisation. Mahmood argues that the concern and dialogues raised in the mosque movements by the women are not due to the objectification of religion or the rejection of modernity: they need to be understood instead in terms of an aspiration to live an Islamic life in the modern world. In this sense, Mahmood's argument is coherent with that of Oliver Roy (2004), who argues that the objectification of Islam not only affects Muslims who migrate to the West or to secular countries but also Muslims in Muslim countries as a result of declining degrees of social authority. In *Globalised Islam*, Roy argues that:

True believers are confronted with the ways of life, images, films, cultural models, educational systems, consumer habits and economic practices that are heavily influenced by a secular and Western world (2004: 154).

Muslims travelling from a Muslim country to the West or a secular country, they would find themselves a minority community and the tendency to objectify their religion is high

compared to those who live in Muslim countries. The above statement by Roy helps to perceive if these elements could influence the ways in which my informants understand the meaning of Islam. Is there a tendency among Malay students to 'objectify Islam' in the UK? How do the social environment and the secular aspects of daily life affect these students' ways of understanding and practising Islam? Thus, the concept of the objectification of Islam by Eickelman and Piscatori (1996) is suitable for analysis as it implies attempts to define Islam, as Islam is no longer immersed within and throughout culture and social practice. It also happens as a result of a relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims, especially in a period of crisis, when Muslims are often summoned to answer questions such as 'What does Islam say about...?', 'What is Islam?' Objectification results in religion becoming a self-contained system that its believers can describe and distinguish from other belief systems (Eickelman and Piscatori 1996: 38). What the two scholars mean is that Muslims come to regard religion not as a taken-for-granted aspect of daily life but something that requires understanding and defining. 'Objectified Islam' is deployed as a symbolic frame to make sense of the contemporary and the contexts in which they currently inhabit – for example, life in the UK or a world in which various aspects of their daily lives are undergoing 'secularisation' (Atzori 2015).

In his article 'Being good in Ramadhan', Schielke (2009) discusses the concept of morality and the ambivalent nature of the practices of young men in a northern Egyptian village. He argues that, while his male informants consider Ramadhan as a holy month in Islam, there are many contradictions in their attempts to replace their un-Islamic entertainments during the holy month. The concept of piety becomes more complicated during the Ramadhan season, a month in which Muslims seek to perform extra religious practices and good deeds for spiritual reward. Schielke emphasises how the moral behaviour of young Egyptian men shifts from or replaces un-Islamic activities (such as watching pornography or going after girls) to beneficial activities during the month of Ramadhan. However, playing football during the hours of Ramadhan is considered as good exercise by most Egyptian men to help them to focus on fasting rather than undertaking *haram* (forbidden) activities. This is seen as an ambivalent exercise as it diverts their aim to worshipping the Almighty during the holy month of Ramadhan. While much immoral entertainment is stopped during the month of Ramadhan by these young men, Schielke argues that the practice of morality is not only unsystematic and ambiguous, it is also accompanied by amoral aims and strategies that people deem

necessary to fill the everyday emptiness and to reach material well-being (Schielke 2009: 31).

What is most intriguing about Schielke's approach is that he focuses on the daily activities of young Egyptian men during Ramadhan rather than on their religious practices. It shows how the month of Ramadhan could shift the ways in which Muslims behave and are committed Muslims for given period; at the same time it leave them in the position of leading an ambiguous and complex life. As much as Schielke agrees with Mahmood concerning the importance of moments of resistance and subversion for the women's piety movement, he also criticises Mahmood's analysis (2005a). One of his comments is that Mahmood should widen the scope of her understanding of religious expression by not focusing only on women who are actively involved in the Islamic movement but also on the religious experiences and thinking of those who are not active in the women's piety movement. According to Schielke (2009: 36), this could avoid the bias of the committed groups of study. In my consideration of piety's place in a student's life, I also seek to address the methodological issues raised by Schielke through interviewing and spending time with students who were not involved in the women's piety movement.

In light of the above discussion, this chapter will draw on my ethnography in order to contribute to the literature of Muslim women's piety movements and education in a transnational migration context. It focuses on their on-going migration and elements that shape their experiences of piety. I am interested to know how and why these students become involved in piety movements during the course of their studies. In the next section, I engage my ethnographic findings with Saba Mahmood's approach to the study of women's piety movements.

3.2 Malaysian Piety Movement Organisations in the UK

I started my fieldwork in February 2016 at Rusholme in Manchester. Through the help of a friend in Brighton, I managed to acquire my fieldwork accommodation in a Malay students' house in Manchester. Before departing for Rusholme, I did some research about the place as I have never been to any cities in the North-West of England. Interestingly, besides being famous for the Curry Mile, Rusholme is a neighbourhood in which a substantial number of Muslims from different parts of the world all live. As this road is

situated close to both the University of Manchester and Manchester Metropolitan University, it is an ideal place for Malaysian students to live. One of the most vibrant activities which I found in the Malay student's community was a *dakwah* (piety) movement run by several Malaysian student organisations long-established in the community in the UK such as IKRAM (IKRAM UKE), ISMA (Ikatan Muslimin Malaysia, or Malaysian Muslim Solidarity) and PRISM UK (Platform Siswa Islam Malaysia or Malaysian Muslim Students' Platform).



Figure 3.1 Malaysian Islamic organisations in the UK

The IKRAM UK and Eire is a Malaysian non-governmental organisation established in 2009. This NGO focuses on *dakwah* and on religious and charitable activities that are in line with Islamic teaching and ways of life. It seeks to be a hub producing leaders who can guide, serve and lead the community. Like IKRAM UK & Eire, ISMA UK and Eire was established in Malaysia in 1997, and aimed to produce excellent Malaysian students in the UK and Ireland through the Islamic Foundation in all aspects of academic, moral (*akhlak*) and personality teaching. PRISM was then founded in 2013 and run by a group of Malaysian students studying in the UK with the main objective of creating Muslim professionals. The goals behind the establishment of these Islamic organisations are similar: to produce professional Muslim leaders among Malaysian graduates. Interestingly, these organisations operate in several cities in the UK and Ireland. For instance, in Manchester, the branch of the piety movement in which the majority of the Malay students participated was organised by IKRAM UK and Eire. In Cardiff, most of my informants belonged to ISMA UK and Eire. (Malaysian Muslim Solidarity). Compared to a new organisation like PRISM, both IKRAM and ISMA are more experienced. The main activities of the organisation are *usrah*⁸ (religious circle discussion), charity events and motivation camps that are held seasonally during winter, spring and summer.

Therefore, during my fieldwork, I spent much time focusing on the piety-related activities organised by IKRAM in Manchester such as *usrah*, as well as attending other social or religious gatherings and occasions organised by Malay students. My participation in the Malaysian piety movement started when my housemates invited me to join them in *usrah* as part of their weekly activities. This invitation provided me unparalleled access and rich ethnographic data, allowing me to explore in detail what drives some students to join such activities and others to keep their distance? I also investigated whether participation in Islamic movements was something they had considered before moving to the UK or whether it was completely new. The next section discusses these students' enrolment in the piety movement organisations.

3.2.1 *Enrolment in Piety Movements: Motivation and Recruitment Strategies*

In order to explore these students' involvement in *usrah*, I suggest that we need to focus on the students' family background and on the transnational Malaysian students' community (senior students) both in the UK and abroad (returning students). I realised this when I asked such students how they came to know about *usrah* and why they chose to be part of such activities in the UK. Surprisingly, most of them told me the same story: they knew about *usrah* through their seniors, who had helped them during their first few days after their arrival in the UK. These students refer to such established students as a *kakak* (elder sister) and were welcomed by them at the airport on arrival. The relationships stretch back to the very moment of the students' arrival and produced a fictive kinship.⁹ One of my informants, 21-year-old Aini from Manchester, shared with me how she became involved in *usrah* while still at the airport:

You know what, these *kakak-kakak* (senior female students) picked me up from the airport, and they hosted us for few days, and then they took us to the city. They were so nice, and that's how I know about *usrah* from them.

The *kakak* welcomed them by meeting them at the airport, offering them their home to stay in temporarily (while the new students found their own place to stay), cooking for them and taking them on a tour of the city. The *kakaks* were part of the Manchester Malaysian Community and members of Islamic organisations. With this hospitality, the

new students were quickly put at ease on their arrival in Manchester because there was an active community to help them (this will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5).

I recently also discovered that pre-departure camps in Malaysia were also arranged by Islamic organisations during the summer break. Anisa (22 years old) told me that she had attended a pre-departure camp organised by the IKRAM. It was named the Journey of Muslim (JOM) and was aimed at college students who had been offered places and scholarships to pursue their degrees in the UK or Ireland. The pre-departure camp lasted three days and was designed to guide the students in their preparation as a Muslim student abroad. The students were given guidance on survival skills as a Muslim, including ways to offer prayer during a flight, and to make *wudhuk* (ablution) when travelling. The event also helped to build networks among new students and with the senior students who studied at the same university. Following this pre-departure camp, members of the organisation would be provided with the contact details of participants at the universities at which they would be studying. However, none of my participants had taken part in this camp before their arrival in the UK and most of them told me that they only met members of the piety movement when they arrived in the UK. Students who were very active in *usrah* events or became committee members of the piety movement organisation in their second year of study would participate in such pre-departure camps.

The relationship between the new female students and senior students does not end at arrival. The connection was sustained through the networking in piety movements such as *usrah* and other religious events organised by the society and Islamic organisations. For example, in the next section, I explain the role played by senior students in providing a system support and reference point for new students to enable them to survive as a Muslim student abroad.

Usually, a few weeks after the new students' arrival, these Islamic organisations and the Malaysian student community would put on 'meet and greet' sessions. Through these gatherings, new students are introduced to the piety movements in the Malay community. Similarly, in Cardiff, the Islamic organisation, ISMA, organised similar events to welcome the new students. My findings show that many students participate in piety movements and that this arises largely because of the efforts of the existing community. Five students informed that they knew about *usrah* from their family members and friends

who had studied abroad in the past. In the example below, three of my informants – Afia, Jasmine and Nat – explained that their involvement in *usrah* was due to their family member. The first example is Afia, who was encouraged by her mother, who had studied in the US 30 years earlier. Afia's mother is an engineer, and was sponsored by the Malaysian government in 1988 to study in Wisconsin in the United States. During her time in the US, she was involved in Islamic piety movements and became a *naqibah* or discussion leader in *usrah*. Afia's mother encouraged her to participate in *usrah* when she arrived in the UK, as Afia mentions:

My mum was a *naqibah* when she studied at the University of Wisconsin in the United States. She told me to join *usrah* in the UK because it could provide the Islamic values and teachings which help to boost our *iman* when studying abroad.

As the eldest daughter, Afia wanted to be a good example to her siblings by becoming a good daughter and a good Muslimah. She took her mother's advice, and registered with the *usrah* group by asking a Malaysian student who studied in Manchester at that time. For Jasmine and Nat, the influence to join the piety movement came from their siblings, who were studying abroad. Jasmine shared her first experience in *usrah* when she visited her twin sister in Brisbane, Australia. She fell in love with the discussion and became determined to participate in the *usrah* once she started her studies in the UK. In Malaysia, she had not been exposed to piety movements because she did not know anyone who participated in them. When she came to the UK, she met Kak Diana, a senior student who helped her on her arrival and invited her to join the *usrah* group. Like Jasmine's, Nat's participation in *usrah* was influenced by her brother, who was studying in the UK too:

My biggest influence is my brother. Because he is in *usrah* himself. Oh my God, he is such a nice guy, he is not like me (laughing). He said to me, 'Sis, *cubalah* (try) to join *usrah*. You just try to see what it is like'. At first, I was reluctant, and then I said 'Fine'.

Nat comes from a *mualaf*¹⁰ (a converted Chinese Muslim family).¹¹ Both of her parents converted to Islam before they got married. Though she does not wear a headscarf, it did not stop her trying out the *usrah* after she was persuaded to do so by her brother. She also describes her brother as a religious and good person because of his active involvement in the piety movements in Manchester. Hence, the piety movements of the female Malaysian

Muslim students are fashioned through their relationships with their family and the Malay students' community in the UK. The members of piety movement organisations in the UK who are also students invested considerable efforts – through their generous hospitality – to introduce the piety movement to the new students. In addition, this approach managed to attract many students in my research to participate in these piety movements, which they found vital in their migration lives. In the next section I explain Malay students' experiences of the piety movement and how its activities could benefit their everyday lives as Muslim students.

3.2.2 *Experiencing the Piety Movement*

3.2.2.1 The *Usrah* Gathering

It was winter in early February 2016; my housemates and I were getting ready to attend our *usrah* session in the evening. We wore sweaters with tracksuit bottoms and a headscarf. The *usrah* started at 8 pm at Masyitah's house. Masyitah was a final-year pharmacy student at the University of Manchester and the *naqibah* (leader) for our *usrah* group. She had been the *naqibah* for two years even though her active participation in *usrah* was not well accepted by her mother, who was worried that it might affect her studies as she is a sponsored student. This happened when her mother saw her actively promoting the *dakwah* activities in the UK on Facebook. After coming to an agreement with her mother that she will manage her time wisely between *dakwah* and her studies, her mother accepted Masyitah's continued involvement. From this finding, we can see that a student's participation in *usrah* can also lead to a change of character and potentially distract a student from focusing on their education. Therefore, Masyitah's situation has driven me to explain the piety movements among Malay students to many parents in Malaysia, who constantly worry about their offsprings' *dakwah* involvement abroad.

After donning my scarf, Afika came to my room and reminded me to bring my *Quran*.¹² I took the *Quran* and my notebook from the table and went downstairs to meet them. We all had our *Quran* in our hands and made our way to Masyitah's house. Along the way, we passed the famous road, the Curry Mile. Afika told me, '*Kak*, this is how nightlife is in Curry Mile, and you don't feel like you are in the UK at all'. The Curry Mile is more

impressive at night than during the day and is different from other cities in the UK because the road is swamped with neon lights and loud Arabic/Pakistani songs along the street. Moreover, our clothes were soon scented with the sweet smell of *shishai* (tobacco smoked water-pipe).

Masyitah lived on the top floor of a terraced shop with four Malaysian students. As we arrived, she was busy preparing food for us. Besides us, there were three Malay students who were also members of the *usrah* waiting for us in the living room. The *usrah* took place in Masyitah's bedroom; due to the limited space, we all had to sit and eat on the floor. Masyitah started the session with the *ta'aruf*¹³ (knowing each other) and introduced me to others as a new group member. The group now had six members including me. During the *ta'aruf* session, I found out that they were all undergraduate students, aged between 20 and 25 years old. They were quite surprised when I told them my position as a PhD student who had come to Manchester for my fieldwork. Masyitah looked at her watch and explained to us the activities that we would be doing on that day, such as *taddabur* (pondering over and contemplating the meaning of the verses of the *Quran*) and *tafsir* (an Arabic word meaning the interpretation or explanation of the verses of the *Quran*). All the students were ready with their *Quran* and to read the *surah* (chapter) instructed by their *naqibah*. Each of us would read two or three verses of the selected *surah* – the number of *surahs* read depended on the length of the *surah*. For example, the *surah* for that day was *Al-An'am* (The cattle), the sixth chapter of the *Quran*, with 165 verses. In the *taddabur* session, Masyitah decided to discuss *Surah Al-An'am* from verses 152 to 165. In these 14 verses, six members who attended the session were allocated to read two or three each. After reading the *surah*, all of us were given a short break to try to understand the texts and to choose any verses that were significant in our lives.

During the session, the members voluntarily shared what they understood or thought about the *surah*/text to others and linked them to their personal experiences. For example, during the session, Afia shared her thoughts with us on verse 162, which stated, 'Indeed, my prayer, my rites of sacrifice, my living and my dying are for Allah, Lord of the worlds' [6: 162]. According to Afia, this verse reminded her of the purpose of life.

This verse made me realised that, in whatever I do, I shouldn't be too focused on the *dunya* (world). Because, at the end of the day, we will die and for every

deed we have done in this world, will be judged by Allah. Sometimes I feel too lazy to go to class – I forget that Allah gives me this opportunity (to study), so we should check back our *niat* (intention) when we are doing something.

Based on the quotation above, what Afia meant by the *dunya* (world) are the everyday schedules such as meeting with friends, watching films, playing games; a Muslim should also think of the *akhirah* (hereafter) aspect of their life and the importance of having the intention to do something that must be for sake of Allah.

While in the *tafsir* part, the *naqibah* would share the story of the *surah* or *hadith* to the members, we were allowed to ask her any questions. Here, I would like to restate the point that my analysis of the students' piety movement is not focused on the content or material that these students use in *usrah*. I am interested, instead, in understanding the nature of the ways in which *usrah* is conducted and experienced by those Malay students who are part of this piety movement.

Besides the above activities, Masyitah also used her creativity and organisational skills to arrange a board game during the *usrah* meeting. By playing the *Hadith Challenge* game, the members could work together to answer the questions, which were all related to the Islamic Hadith. For example, like monopoly or any other board games, students have to pick a card after throwing the dice. The questions will be things like, 'The key to Paradise is *salah* (prayers). What is the key to *salah*?' or 'According to a *hadith* of the Prophet s.a.w, Allah seals the heart of anyone who neglects the Friday prayers. After how many lapses would this punishment be given?' Playing the board game not only tests the members' knowledge of the *hadith*, but is also regarded as providing new *ilmu* (knowledge).



Figure 3.2 The Hadith Challenge board game

Throughout my weekly participation, the *usrah* session was not conducted in a formal manner. Every week, Masyitah would plan and ask the members' suggestions for how *usrah* should be organised, and the venue and time as well. The venue of the *usrah* was also flexible and we went to any member's home and other public place for *usrah* meetings. The member who would be the host for the next *usrah* meeting would prepare some food for the other members. Usually, Masyitah will buy the food or snacks for the members, as a way to show her appreciation for those coming for the *usrah*. I also found it interesting that the piety movements of Malay students in my research focused not only on the building of the Islamic foundation and character, but also on physical development. Besides having *usrah* in private places, we also went to the park or the sports centre, participating together in such activities as swimming and playing badminton before starting the *usrah*. Thus, the piety movements among these students were also fashioned in fun and fit ways.

This is quite different from other cases where most of the Islamic gatherings or religious group discussions would be held in mosques or Islamic centres. In Saba Mahmood's ethnography on Cairo, two difference characters of *da'iyah* teachers demonstrate mosque movements and participants have to either accept these or go to a different mosque which suits the way they wish to understand the lessons. In the case of Malay groups in the UK, the *usrah* sessions are less formal, and this creates a *santai* (relaxed) and warm environment for the members. For example, students could negotiate with the *naqibah* on their preference for the day of the meeting, so that as many people as possible have a chance to attend. They are also comfortable about sharing aspects of their personal life and problems such as the assignments they are busy with until they embark on reading the *Quran*. Moreover, the *naqibah* also shares the same status as the students – a full-time student studying at the same university. This horizontal relationship develops a stronger bond. The members would also call their *naqibah* their sister since most of them are senior by age, and this relationship is fitting with the meaning of *usrah*, which means family in the Arabic language.¹⁴ It is also necessary to appreciate the efforts made by the *naqibah*, who seeks to make the *usrah* session interesting – as I mentioned above – by creating many fun, intellectual and physical activities to attract the members, such as playing board games or badminton, or watching *dakwah* videos. In this sense, the *naqibah* plays an important role in sustaining the ties of sisterhood and modes of piousness among the

members. As mentioned in the introduction, where the younger Malays show their respect to their elders by using with familial terms such as *kakak* and, in this piety movement context, the sisterhood relationship is focused more on the collective Islamic goal to be a better *Muslimah*. These efforts and commitments in the piety movement are documented in the next section.

3.2.2.2 The Religious Gathering: A Collective Experience

My discussion of *usrah* gatherings above has shown the multiple aspects and dimensions developed. They are central to the ways in which students cultivate pious dispositions, but are also critical of the ways in which students offer support to one another in the context of migration. A further important aspect of such gatherings is that they lead to the warm forms of sociality that I suggest throughout this thesis and many Malay students in my field sites invest considerable energy in maintaining and developing them. In this section, I expand my analysis on Malay female students' collective experiences in the piety movement concerning the forms of sisterhood relationships, as mentioned above. This section also lays out the problems faced by the students regarding the preservation of Islamic morality, especially in terms of interactions with non-Muslims.

Other Islamic activities besides *usrah* are also important features in the lives of Malay students. These include a type of social gathering called Trip 'n Treat (TnT) and Quranic circles which provide a social space for students to learn about Islam and share any experiences or problems they face in the host country. Mahmood (2005b) demonstrates that Islamic lessons at the mosque have shaped the women's piousness to the Almighty and their subjective morality as wives and mothers. The mosque, with its Islamic teachings, is also seen as a space for the women to discuss their family matters with the teacher (*ustazah* or *daiya*) in the hope of solving their problems according to Islamic teachings. While in Manchester, besides the mosque, various places and public spaces (such as a house, café or park) could be a space in which, as a Muslim student, a friend and or a daughter, they could shape the piety of female Malaysian Muslim students in the UK. Although these students have rarely received 'formal Islamic lessons' from knowledgeable teachers (*dai'ya*), they could still have Islamic discussions and lessons from senior students in the host country, especially because many of these new students need support in adapting to a Muslim lifestyle in the host country. Below I set out my

field notes from when I attended one of the religious TnT gatherings in Manchester (see the poster below).



Figure 3.3 Poster event for the female Malaysian Muslim student community in Manchester

TNT is a new activity for me. TnT is an acronym for Trip 'n Treat, which is a community gathering for Malaysian Muslim students in Manchester. It is organised by the Malaysian student community there in what they regard as a '*sharia*-compliant' style that involves the event being conducted separately for the two sexes. For example, Malay male and female students will each have their own TnT events which will be held in the neighbourhood. The crowd is more prominent than the *usrah* group. There were between 10 and 30 students attending the event. In other words, it is like a mini reunion for all the Malay Muslim women in Manchester. The TnT event was designed to strengthen friendships among Malaysian Muslim women. Usually, the event is held twice a month at a Malaysian Muslim woman's home. The event will begin with the reciting of the *Surah Yasin* or *Al-Kahf*, followed by knowledge sharing. At this event, you can meet most of the Malay students, especially undergraduates, in Manchester.

At first, I felt rather awkward, because I was an outsider, not a student from the University of Manchester. Secondly, I was the oldest and only postgraduate student at the event. There was a time when I managed to meet postgraduate students at the event but it is unusual to see them there as this event is organised by undergraduates. However, I did not worry about my role as a researcher because I believed that, once they knew what my

research was about, I was sure they would cooperate. I was lucky this time because the TNT was held just in front of my house. At 7.10 pm, we went to the house and saw some female students sitting on the sofas and floor. We shook hands and met the host, who was busy cooking in the kitchen. About 7.25 pm, there was a stream of attendees and most of them filled up the space by sitting on the floor. At 7.30 pm, the host, Amal, welcomed the guests with a short speech. She also explained about TNT to the new students who had just arrived in Manchester that term. Before we started reciting the *surah*, Anisa, as a committee member and my housemate, recited the *doa* for the event. The dishes for that night were noodle soup and chicken nuggets. As a courtesy, another guest, Ira, brought popcorn as an additional snack.

Then the event began with the reading of the *Surah Al-Kahf* and *doa*. After that, the host started the discussion, the title of which was *Hijrah* (migration), in conjunction with the *Maal Hijrah* that had occurred a few days ago. Amal used the *Hijrah* text, which was delivered by a Muslim scholar, Sheikh Abdul, on the lessons which Muslims could learn from the *Hijrah* event. She also described how Prophet Muhammad PBUH had made sacrifices for Muslims during *Hijrah* and related it to the students' own migration status:

The *Hijrah* is not complete without sacrifice. As much as our Prophet has sacrificed his life for Muslim *Hijrah*, Muslims must also do their *Hijrah* to the fullest. The *Hijrah* to the UK that the students made should include, for example, leaving the comfort zone of their home country, refraining from unimportant chorus, and much more. It is always good to ask oneself the reason for being in the host country. If you forget why you are here, you will be easily led astray from the right path. Thus, it is important for us when we make *Hijrah*; we should do it for the sake of Allah and be the best Muslim possible.

The points that she made about the *Hijrah* incident is that the Malaysian Muslim students should reflect on their original goal of being in the host country, the UK, to study for the sake of Allah. She reminded us that, in the *Quran*, it states that Allah would grant to you whatever you wished. For instance, if you want to be rich yourself, then He will give you wealth. However, if you want to be rich for the sake of Allah, which can benefit others, He will grant you wealth and you will be blessed for it. Thus, students should aim to be the best Muslim they can and benefit from the time that they are in the UK as much as possible.

When attending the TNT for the second time, I concluded that this activity has many benefits for Malaysian Muslim women. First, it acts as a locus of mini reunion in which to gather together all the Malaysian Muslim women in Manchester. It only takes about one hour and a half to hold this session. Since it is held just twice in a month, many students can manage to find time to attend this event.

Secondly, TNT can also be considered as *makanan rohani* or a food for your soul (spiritual) session for Malay students abroad who are longing for Islamic reminders and religious advice when far away from family and their Muslim environment. During TNT, as we already know, the main agenda is reading the *Surah Yasin* or *Surah Al- kahf*. After that, there will be an Islamic sharing session based on the *Quran* and *Hadith*. In this session, a selected person will discuss the challenges and experiences of Malaysian Muslim students in the West based on the *Hadith*. Then, as for the *surah*, the topic of the discussion is open to anyone who would like to share her experiences with others. If someone has a problem and needs advice, she is welcome to share it. Similarly, others are also welcome to offer advice or solutions to the problems.

For instance, a senior student shared that remembering Allah helps her to survive in the host country. She told of her experience of facing the hardship of being a student abroad and put her trust in Allah by talking to Him (making *doa*), thinking about her parents in Malaysia, and how her non-Muslim supervisor encouraged her to pray to God. She also encouraged the junior students to be brave and to inform their lecturers or friends when they wanted to pray during the discussion or class, as many of them struggle with the tight schedule and juggle finding time to pray on campus. She convinced them that the non-Muslims would understand and would not think it a problem. The students also discussed how to explain to their non-Muslim male friends that they cannot have any physical contact such as hugging or shaking hands. They confessed their concern that, when these things are happening, it is awkward and hard to resist because they know that most of their non-Muslim friends do not know that there should not be physical contact with Muslim women; thus, they do not want to embarrass them by rejecting the handshake.

What I can conclude from my field notes is that this session can serve as a reference point for Malaysian Muslim women who face problems as Muslim student migrants in their daily lives. When these women attend the event, they are expanding the bond of

sisterhood through a sense of belonging and building a social support network. The senior students are also seen as a point of reference for the younger students who can ask about any problems, especially the issue of maintaining their religiosity while with non-Muslims. Therefore, the bonding between Malaysian Muslim women will remain strong throughout these events, due to their continuity and periodicity.

Piety movements among Malay students in the UK should be seen not only as a space in which students learn Islamic lessons, but also as a social space which allows them to negotiate by exchanging piety and cultural experiences, gain emotional and spiritual support and undertake recreational activities together. The problems and struggles these students face are also similar to Saba Mahmood's in her ethical formation, where she argues that there are two challenges which Muslim women face in their attempts to maintain a pious lifestyle. The first problem is learning to live amicably with people such as immediate kin and colleagues. The second was the internal struggle these women had to engage in within themselves in a world that constantly beckoned them to behave in impious ways (Mahmood 2005: 156). For instance, based on my field notes above, these students confessed their concern for their ethical formation as a Muslim woman.

Thus, to settle these problems, the students use the piety-story-sharing-experience approach to help each other onto the path of Muslim piety (see Karimova 2014). This session helps them to use their reflections and be able to relate themselves with others (Linde 1993). Therefore, attending *usrah* or Islamic events does not merely mean that these students openly claim themselves as religious or that they are resisting secularism in the host country; rather it is a space in which they can negotiate ways of being Muslim and sustaining a good relationship with the Malay Muslim community in the host country. The next section indicates how religious gatherings are important to women dealing with the more complex aspects of being international students abroad.

3.3 The Importance of Piety Movements in Students' Migration Lives

When I asked my informants how the piety movement or religion helps them in the context of migration, the answer that I often received was that it helped to remind them of their duty and purpose in life as Muslims. As much as they enjoy their life in the UK – such as going to car-boot sales or watching football at the stadium – these students also

face stressful experiences in the UK. They wanted to be excellent in both their studies and their attempts to lead virtuous Muslim lives. During my stay with my informants, I saw how these students struggle in their studies. Every night, after dinner, my housemates would go to their rooms to study and prepare for tutorials. Sometimes they would go to each other's rooms to discuss the subjects they were studying and to revise together. The situation regularly became tense as they were scholarship recipients and thus expected to perform well in their studies. There was one case whereby a Malay male student lost his scholarship due to poor results in his studies. Thus, it is important for them to ensure that they get good results every term. However, doing so is not as easy as it seems.

These students have to deal with the emotional aspects such as the stress over studying and being alone (loneliness) because far away from home. These stressful life experiences and loneliness lead students to directly reflect both on their being away from home and on the importance of spirituality in supporting their studies. They realised that they actually long for a spiritual environment to comfort them and in which to escape from their stressful life. Thus, participation in piety movements abroad meant a lot in their everyday lives as Muslim students. For example, the *usrah* activities described above, such as reading the *Quran* and *taddabur*, helped them to reflect on their spiritual purpose in life as a Muslim, an activity which made them feel less stressed about their studies, as they could focus on eternal life as their priority. From *usrah*, they not only learn things that they never knew about Islam before but also understand the reason why they are practising them. For example, they could reflect on what they have done in the week and how they benefit from their time as a Muslim student. It is also a way for them to sustain the sisterhood and with the Malay community abroad. Yasmin, 23, who is also a member of our *usrah* group in Manchester, explained what she feels when she goes to *usrah* and how *usrah* helps in her migratory life:

I find it very helpful in connecting things. It is spiritual but you also get to see your friends. We are like a family, because we love each other for the sake of Allah, it is something reliable, to keep reminding you what you have to do every week.

For Yasmine, *usrah* is a spiritual discussion and social gathering where she can meet the circle of friends who share the same interest in religion, beliefs and Islamic values for the

sake of Allah. Another informant in Manchester, 22-year-old Nat, shares how the reminder of *usrah* helps her to overcome stress in her studies:

I think that most of the things they taught me is, like, things you should already know but you did not realise before, but now you realise it. You know when you are stressed, and should not forget that Allah already plans everything. No matter if you are facing hardship in life, like, whatever happens, happens for a reason – put your trust in Allah. I love this little reminder.

From the above citation, we can see that Nat perceived the word stress in study as one of the hardships that she must face in her life as a student. The stressful feeling when studying or the depression among Malay students in Manchester was also mentioned by Shah, the President of the Malaysian community. He told me that several male students came to talk to him regarding their stressful student life and that there was even an attempt to commit suicide. I asked him about the female students and he told me that he only heard about female students' issues from his female friends. For Nat, going to *usrah* helps her to think like a religious Muslim where everything that happens in her life, the sufferings that she had, she should acknowledge were for her own benefit. The reminder that she got in *usrah* should comfort her stressed mind and increase her spiritual feelings. Nat's situation is coherent with that of Filipino domestic workers, whereby religion played a pivotal role in their migrant lives and acted as a strategy to overcome despair, hopelessness and futility (Valerie 2015). It shows that engagement in religious discussion is regarded as being an important way in which students overcome their depression and tension.

3.3.1 *Overcoming Loneliness*

Another Malay student, Halina, who studies linguistics in Manchester, shares the importance of spirituality in overcoming loneliness when living far away from family. According to her, 'living in the UK a thousand miles away from family makes me more religious'. She also adds, 'Here (Manchester), we have no family with us, and we are unable to control what will happen. Therefore, it is important for us to make *dua* (pray) for our family in Malaysia'. Halina is a *naqibah* (leader) for her religious circle and a member of a spiritual committee in the Manchester Malaysian community. She told me, 'Kak Rina, even though there are many Malays here (Manchester), most of the time we

are alone. And the only thing we have is Allah (God)'. What Halina tries to say is that the new environment she lives in – far away from her family – and her loneliness, have increased her religiosity. She also finds that migration provides her with an opportunity to develop her *dakwah* skills through *usrah* among the Malay community. At the same time, this activity and role shaped her as a pious Muslim woman.

Here, I argue that the piety movements are important to many Malay female students in my research. They offer the students Islamic knowledge, care and support. They are also strengthened by the sisterhood relationship between the *naqibah* and the piety movement members, which is important to ensure that these students do not feel isolated and always have a 'good circle of friends' to both support them in daily life and guide them on the right path. The members of the *usrah* group see it as a mechanism to help join the hearts of its members by developing solidarity in the form of brotherhood and sisterhood, trust, mutual understanding, loyalty and a sense of belonging among Muslims (Nabisah *et al.* 2015). Besides, this piety movement also provides a space for the members to negotiate Islam and come up with strategies to survive as a pious Muslim in the host country. In the next section, I extend my focus to those of my informants who are not involved in such movements and explore their religious experiences as Malay Muslim female students in the UK today.

3.3.2 *Diverse Ways of Living Islam*

While most of the discussion above involves students' experiences with piety movements, I also interviewed students who are not part of these religious movements in a bid to understand the ways in which they experience Islam. As Schielke (2009) critiques Saba Mahmood's (2005b) work by saying that she should widen the scope of her religious expression by not focusing only women who are actively involved in the Islamic movement but also taking into account the view of those who are not religiously active in the women's piety movement. According to Schielke, this would avoid the bias of the committed groups of study. Therefore, this section is focused on discussing the diverse ways in which students who are not part of the Islamic movement fashion their piety in the UK.

One aspect of my fieldwork in Manchester and Cardiff was meeting Malay students who are not as concerned by the piety movement as those addressed above. I also met many students who lived in the UK without being associated with the Malay community in terms of their affiliation to the formal organisations laid out above. I hoped that these students would give me a new definition and new perspectives of living as a Malay Muslim abroad. I have explored, above, the nature of processes of Islamisation affecting Malay students and the importance of piety movements to them. I argue now that such piety movements do not form a totalising aspect of the Malay student experience in Manchester and Cardiff. While it is important to recognise the important roles that affiliation to piety movements do play for many Malay students in the UK, there is a parallel need to explore spaces and contexts in which transformations in self and community relationships to Islam are less evident and striking. During my fieldwork, I met several students who were either uninterested or not especially concerned by these piety movements. Though they are not part of the piety movements, however, it would be wrong to think of these students as irreligious or secular. Instead, the way in which they enhance, or understand, Islam is different from that of others who do join the piety movements. These students also have their approaches and decide how they want to live as a Muslim in the UK.

3.3.2.1 'I Don't Follow the Crowd'

While searching in Manchester for students to interview who were not committed members of piety movements, an informant recommended that I spoke to Nina. Nina is 21 years old, and an accounting student at the University of Manchester. She is different from many female Malay informants whom I met because she is both a singer and a guitarist, as well as a fan of heavy metal music. Besides going to many busking performances around the UK, such as in Leeds, she also used to work as a part-time singer in a Malaysian restaurant in Manchester which was no longer open.

Having gained access to her number, I called her to make an appointment for me to interview her. She agreed and suggested that we meet at the Ford Madox Brown restaurant for an English breakfast. Knowing that she plays the guitar, I asked her to bring it along to the interview if she did not mind. While having our breakfast, she introduced herself. What I found interesting is when she told me she started wearing the *hijab* when

she came to the UK. This was her father's condition for allowing her to study abroad. Nina is an amiable student who lives with her male cousin and a female housemate. At first, I was rather shocked to hear of the nature of her living arrangements because it is not common for a Malay Muslim woman to live with a Muslim male;¹⁵ they are cousins (paternal) and can marry each other according to Islamic law and, as a result, the relationship is not considered *mahram*.¹⁶ She told me that she had had a bad experience with her first housemates. She was being bullied and they forced her to join *usrah* circles, which she does not like to attend. The main reason she told me she did not want to join because she found the teaching technique in the class to be 'peculiar':

There was one time I joined, and I felt the approach and teaching was peculiar. My friend who joined it says we (Muslims) can *jamak* (combine) *Isyak* and *Fajr* together. From my understanding, even though I am not so Islamic, I knew we could never *jamak fajr* any prayers, so when I asked her where she got her source materials from she said from *Ustaz-ustaz* and other reliable sources.

Nina speaks of her first *usrah* experience, when she critically analysed the source materials, which she found were not on a par with what she believed, so she decided to leave the group. She thinks her friends who participated must have been given incorrect information in terms of combining the prayers. Moreover, she dislikes the fact that her friends failed to give her any details on the 'reliable' source of the information and refused to join them in *usrah*. This point is important because it shows that people who are not interested in participating in the Islamic movement are not passive believers. Nina is very critical when it comes to Islamic sources though she claimed to be a not-so Islamic person. After sharing her refusal to attend the piety movement activity, Nina spoke of her emotional and memorable experience of having attended a heavy metal concert in a cathedral, 'It was awesome, and I felt like crying. So, when the band performed, I sang along, so they knew I was a huge fan of theirs'. Nina showed her openness when she mentioned the cathedral and how music does not affect her faith as a Muslim. For Nina, the definition of living as a Muslim and piety is when someone can find a balance between life and religion. Though she plays the guitar, sings in cafés and goes on tour to heavy metal concerts with random non-Muslim male friends, she also seeks to lead an informed and reflective Muslim life. She would pray during the road tour, while her non-Muslim male friends showed their respect and watched over her, and she did not join the party after the concert. Deep in her heart, she believes that going to heavy metal concerts in a

cathedral does not make her faith in God fade and her less Muslim.¹⁷ She would also maintain body contact when she was on tour with her male friends. She felt honoured each time she attended the concerts; the security and the male fans would ‘protect’ and ‘help’ her by giving way to her so she could stand in the front row and handed her mineral water. This was because she was the only woman fan who wore the *hijab*.

According to Nina, she had done all this without her parents knowing. ‘My parents would not like what I am doing now. When I said to them that I wanted to be an artist, they show their disagreement. They do not really like or support me when I play music. So, my life here (in the UK), all my music life here is secretive’. She also labelled herself as a ‘lone ranger’ who ‘does not follow the crowd’, does not have many Malay friends and always travel alone in the UK. One of the reasons contributing to this is because she is not interested in any Malaysian organisations or piety movements.

Although she has a passion for heavy metal music and few Malay friends and does not go to *usrah*, she found that she became more religious when she came to the UK. Like many informants in my research, Nina could also not escape from thinking about her religion when being a Muslim abroad.

You know what, I think I’m learning more about my own religion. I am being more critical, why do I pray? Because these people (non-Muslims) they question me. ‘Why do you pray 5 times, why not 6?’ You know, I have to go back (to studying Islam), because I have been born as a Muslim, but I take things for granted.

In this confession, Nina realised that she took her religion for granted while she was in Malaysia and this has put her in an ambivalent position when her curious non-Muslim friends have asked her about her religion. Nina’s situation is what is described as an objectification by Eickelman and Piscatori (1996) where the pressure she received from non-Muslims in the UK made her reflect and think on the meaning of being Muslim and Islam.

I asked Nina, if piety movements are not of interest to her, how she handles such religious issues while living abroad? She stated that she would contact her religious friends or *ustaz* in Malaysia as her point of reference or watch *dakwah* videos on Youtube, to which she

subscribed.¹⁸ Nina told me that watching the *dakwah* videos of Muslim scholars on YouTube – such as Nouman Ali Khan, Dr Zakir Naik, Dr Maza and Mufti Menk – helped her to understand Islam, more especially during migration and adaptation processes in the West.

3.3.2.2 A Rock 'n Roll Muslim

Another Malay student from Cardiff, Fara, 28, said that she has come to the UK to study for the second time in order to chase her UK dreams. Fara is a PhD student at Cardiff University; she is unveiled (free hair) and married her British husband three years ago. After the interviews, she introduced to me her two-year old son, Hayden. Her first visit to the UK was during her Master's at the same university. She concludes that her one-year Master's experience was a social experiment because she did not learn much in the way of cultural exchange; or improve her social and English language skills, which she referred to as her UK dreams. Fara said that one of the main reasons why she did not achieve her dreams was because she stayed with the Malay students, spent most of her time with them and did not explore the many other international things in the host country. According to Fara, the reason why she came back to the UK was because she wanted to catch up on what she missed out on in the UK and wanted to become a new person; an open-minded person.

I used to be very conservative when I was in Malaysia. I used to think that it was unacceptable to mix or mingle with people who drink or eat bacon or things like that or go to the pub....it's not always about me just because I am a Muslim so yeah, I do not really know whether it is sinful or not but, like, personally I think it's unfair...

Fara states that, to live as a Malay Muslim in the UK, she should not be a selfish person. She also used to consider herself as a conservative person by not being open to socialising with others who did not follow Islamic values. When she returned to the UK for her PhD, she decided to live the way she wanted to, by hanging out at the pub with local people in order to broaden her horizons. Though she was unsure whether her action was permissible or not in Islam, she believed that there are many benefits to be gained from the way she chooses to live. For example, by stepping out of her comfort zone, she managed to improve her social skills, and learn much about British culture and food. Another reason

was that she wanted to prove that it is acceptable for a Muslim to enter such a place to learn and to socialise with others. Her moral behaviour is similar to that of Schielke's (2009) informants – she would justify her moral action by saying that a religion or being Muslim should not be a reason for someone to be unable to socialise. However, she was also unsure about her actions because religion comes with rules and laws – in the *Quran*, sociality between male and female or *ikhtilat* (free mixing between men and women) is spoken of.

When I asked her whether husband is practising Islam, she seemed a bit reluctant to answer and replied honestly that he is still consuming alcohol (because he is convinced that he is not going to get drunk) and eating bacon. She also referred to him as a 'Rock 'n Roll Muslim' because he only practices what makes sense for him as a Muslim. For example, when Fara told him that the reason why Muslims fast in Ramadhan is to teach us about patience, he could see its logic and now fasts too. She told me that she is OK with her husband not following Islamic teachings as long as he is willing to learn, and she said it is between him and God.

Interestingly, though she claimed to be open-minded in terms of her thinking about British culture, she demonstrates her respect towards Islam in her individual manner. One day, for example, she told me 'I never try to basically drink alcohol because I know, like, the limit you know, maybe because of my upbringing, so I respect my religion; I, er, I'm not really, like, open-minded in that kind of way, yeah. So, yeah, it is very weird'.

Apart from that, Fara shared her plan to organise a charity event with her husband for Christmas. However, she was a bit upset when her Muslim friends told her that it is *haram* for Muslims to celebrate Christmas and gave the following justification to me for her actions:

I don't think it's wrong to celebrate Christmas as long as you know your limits. You do not really go to church to celebrate Christmas like the birth of Christ or Jesus Christ you know.

Similar to Nina's situation above, though Fara married an Englishman, adapting to a British lifestyle, she still maintains the boundary of a Malay Muslim woman where she

often says that she knows the limit in whatever she does, such as drinking alcohol or worship other than Allah.

She also admitted that, although she went to a religious school when she was little, her knowledge of Islam was not as comprehensive as that of other Malay students she knew in the UK. Like many of my informants above, she also faced the same problem in explaining Islam to others. When her parents-in-law asked her why Muslims are forbidden to eat pork, she could not explain the Islamic position clearly, as she did not have sufficient knowledge of Islamic teachings on the issue. 'I am personally not really knowledgeable about Islam, so sometimes I do not even know, like, why I'm doing certain things; since I was little I have known that I'm not allowed to eat pig so that's why I don't'. As she seldom mingles with the Malay community in Cardiff, she would refer to her mother in Malaysia, find the answer from Islamic books which she bought online, or simply refer to the Internet when she wants to know about Islam.

From these ethnographic examples, both students have different ways of living with others who participate in piety movements. They are people who are brave enough to challenge themselves and live a pleasurable and sociable life as Muslims yet with their own principles and limits in mind, rather than those that arise from their being part of the piety movement. To enhance their Islamic knowledge and to objectify Islam, they use several alternative ways to learn and understand Islamic sources such as Islamic books, online videos or contacts with religious friends or *ustaz* in Malaysia as their point of reference.

3.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that religion and involvement in the piety movement among Malay students in the UK are important in building their understanding of Islam and this knowledge helps them to live a sociable and pleasurable life with others as a Muslim abroad. My findings also show that the sisterhood ties between pious students play an important role in shaping these students' attempts to lead virtuous Muslim lives. These social relations not only diminish when the students arrive but also expand throughout the whole migration process. The ways in which these students sustain their sisterhood is through piety movements such as the weekly *usrah* and Islamic gatherings. What is more,

the research on which this chapter is based also found that the transnational piety movements today are dominated by three Malaysian Islamic organisations that operate in the UK – IKRAM, ISMA and PRISM. These organisations work in various locations in the UK and forge transnational ties, especially through relationships with religious experts based in Malaysia. On the contrary, in the early 1970s, piety movements, where most of the students engaged with Muslim scholars and students located in the UK, I now argue that the contemporary piety movements of Malay students in the UK prefer to engage, in their events, with Muslim scholars from Malaysia rather than international Muslim scholars. However, students who do not get involved in the piety movements prefer to learn Islam from both the local and Muslim international scholars and families using diverse platforms such as new media.

This chapter also contributes to the meaning of the piety movement – seen not only as a space for them to learn Islamic lessons and exchange pious words but also as a social space in which they can negotiate life as international students by exchanging piety stories and cultural experiences and gain emotional and spiritual support. Besides the above as my central argument, I also contribute to the existing literature by showing that there is still some variation in the way that this process affects individual students – not all Malay students coming to the UK are going back to convey a specific type of Muslim but, rather, their engagement with Islamising processes in multiple ways. For example, there are students who do not seem to conform to this process, and decided to live as Muslim students but to do other things too, such as going to heavy metal concerts in a cathedral, hanging out at the pub with local people and celebrating Christmas. Hence, these elements are not totalising and will not result in the homogenisation of student identity. Those who are not engaged in piety movements are not necessarily passive Muslims and not religious, while those who go to the piety movements do not feel that they are religious. Thus, it is argued that religion and piety movements play a significant role in shaping the everyday lives of female Malaysian Muslim students in the UK. In the next chapter, I extend the importance of this sociality and religion in sustaining the Malaysian students' community space in the UK.

CHAPTER 4

SPACES AND COMMUNITY

In the previous chapter, I explained the effort made by religious Malay students to do *dakwah* to new students to enable their survival as Muslims in the UK. I have shown that students' networking – such as the sisterhood relationship – managed to create an Islamic space in Malay society in the UK by organising the piety movements and their activities. In this chapter, besides piety movements, I seek to explore the extent to which the Malaysian students' community networks are important in sustaining the Malaysian space abroad. In doing so, I focus on their private and public spaces such as accommodation, housing experiences, neighbourhood watch and living experiences in the city. There are four main sections in this chapter. The first section reviews the literatures on migration, community and space. The second section concerns the ways in which these students sustain their social relationship as a Malay community abroad. I am interested to know how they maintain and secure this Malaysian space. To analyse this, I use the concept of reciprocity and engaged my findings with current work on reciprocity for new migrant integration by Phillimore, Humphris and Khan (2018). The third section deals with the students' private space; I seek to understand how they negotiate religion and culture in the Malay household, and to what extent these aspects are important in their everyday lives as transnational Malaysian Muslim females abroad. In this section, I document their living experience in Malay and non-Malay households and engage with Bourdieu's (1979) analysis of the Kabyle house by Bruck (1997). In the final section, I explore their transnational experiences in the cities in which they live in the UK, focusing on their minority experiences and security as Malaysian Muslims abroad.

4.1 Migration, Community and Space

Adjusting or adapting to a new place after migration can be stressful and affect the psychological adjustment of new students who study abroad. The adaptation process is harder when a student migrant moves to a country that is very different from their home culture and language. As much as migration can offer fun, enrich a person's knowledge and be an opportunity for students to travel, it also can be stressful if the students does not have enough information, supportive relationships or social support networks in their host country (Mallinckrodt and Leong 1992). This is especially important during their first arrival experience. Many scholars explore the importance of education providers or universities as an ideal institution for support services or networks (Baker and Hawkins 2006; Dunne and Somerset 2005). However, far too little attention has been paid to the assistance provided by the student network community in the host country. Apart from universities, there are many benefits which newly arrived students can gain from this community networking, one of which is that the members of the community share a similar background to the new migrants, thus making the latter's adaptation easier and significant for students' well-being (Shakya and Horsfall 2000). Transnational social networks among the student community are particularly important in providing access to resources or information. In my research, most of the Malay students faced very few problems on arrival in the UK. The risk of them feeling stressed or having adjustment problems in the early period of their arrival was low because they had good support system in the Malay community – which helped them in particular with housing issues. In Manchester, as I mentioned in Chapter 1 – the introduction to this thesis – most of my Malay informants belonged to the Manchester Community of Old Trafford (MCOT), while students in Cardiff were associated with the Malaysian Community of Cardiff (MCC).

The Malay community in both cities also demonstrated a sense of collectiveness as Malays in their everyday lives. The students preferred to live with their co-nationals in the same space – such as the same house or residential area. Only a few of them were happy to live with international students. My findings also contrast with those concerning Korean and German female migrants by Fechter (2007), Kim (2008) and Mueller (2013) – their female migrants preferred to build a boundary with their co-nationals and make friends with other international migrants. The Malay students' community in my research helped the newly arrived students in a systematic way and this networking led to a

reciprocity between them. Reciprocity refers to actions that are contingent on rewards from others and which cease if these expected reactions are not forthcoming (Blau 1974). It is believed that the norm of reciprocity helps to maintain, renew or forge fresh and symbolic ties which are essential for the formation of kinship, friendship and community-centred migrant networks (Faist 2000). According to Sahlins (1965: 144), reciprocity can also be understood as

a whole class of exchanges, a continuum of forms ... At one end ... stands the assistance freely given, the small currency of everyday kinship, friendship, and neighbourly relations, the 'pure gift' Malinowski called it, regarding which an open stipulation of return would be unthinkable and unsociable. At the other pole, self-interested seizure, self-appropriation by chicanery or force required only by an equal and opposite effort on the principle of *lex talionis*, 'negative reciprocity' as Gouldner phrases it. The extremes are notably positive and negative in a moral sense. The intervals between them are not merely so many gradations of material balance in exchange, they are intervals of sociability.

Sahlins, in his article on the general principle of sociability, classifies reciprocity in three categories; i) generalised, ii) balanced and iii) negative reciprocity. The types of reciprocity were transformed according to kinship or social distance and the extent to which concern for self or others was shown (Sahlins 1972). Generalised reciprocity means a purely altruistic gift which assistance has provided and which may be returned if necessary, whereas balanced reciprocity involves less-personal exchange and direct and detailed calculation. The value of the objects is comparable. Negative reciprocity refers to the lesser affection or negative feelings the parties have towards each other such as the exchange of punishments (Widergren 1983). However, as much as the practice of reciprocity, especially generalised reciprocity, could benefit the Malay students in my research, it could also cause a rupture in community relationships. The ostensibly altruistic exchange that these students participated in can be seen as symbolic violence. In this research context, the term 'symbolic violence' means that individuals or groups who confront one another will enter into conflict or competition with one another, each from a more or less advantageous position (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 16–18). For example, in Manchester, many Malaysian student organisations competed with each other to recruit new members; some of these latter, when they had committed to an

organisation, lived in their own circles and decided not to participate in other activities. This was one of the consequences of competitive giving among the informants in my research.

From an economic anthropology perspective, Christopher A. Gregory (1982) explains the concept of 'gift' and 'commodity' in his book, *Gifts and Commodities*. According to Gregory (1982: 40), 'The distinction between gifts and commodities ... gift exchange establishes a relation between the transactors, while commodity exchange establishes a relation between the objects transacted'. Meanwhile, Mauss (1966) on his view of gifts, also argued that gift and commodity exchange could be different. According to him, gift exchange can be understood as i) the obligatory transfer of (ii) inalienable objects or services between (iii) mutually obligated and related transactors (see Gregory 1980: 640). The obligatory transfer means the parties involved are obliged to give presents, receive presents and repay them. However, these views and practices contradict the Western academic view of the gift, which is understood as something voluntarily given, and where there is no expectation of reward (Belk 1979: 100).

Looking at reciprocity and integration from a new perspective, Phillimore *et al.* (2018) focus on the ways in which migrants use reciprocity, access the new resources and sustain connections. In their paper, the scholars argue that, to build new relationships and to substitute resources, migrants have to engage in the exchange of resources. These latter, according to Hobfoll (2011), can be in terms of objects, energies or personal characteristics such as money, feelings, intimacy, help and belonging (Phillimore *et al.* 2018). In their analytical framework, there are five types of reciprocity; informal, norm-based, under-reciprocity, over-reciprocity and no reciprocity. In my case, I found that these students were engaged in two forms of reciprocity – a combination of informal reciprocity and over-reciprocity. Informal reciprocity refers to the exchange of resources generously shared by individuals with strangers in the expectation that the former might benefit from their good deed someday (Godbout 2005). The exchange, however, was open-ended, which meant that new migrants did not necessarily repay the kindness of those who had originally helped them. Meanwhile, over-reciprocity can occur voluntarily between individuals with the idea that offering help is an important aspect of one's cultural or religious identity, which gives one a sense of purpose. Unlike informal reciprocity, this type of reciprocity does not expect any return or exchange from the

recipients. As we can see, the two types of reciprocity have contrasting characteristics, yet show the dynamics of the social network relationships of the Malay community in my research. I give an example of this in the accommodation arrangements and dealings with landlords in the sections below.

In the literature on international students' space and gender, Gunjan Sondhi (2013) analyses the relationship between gender and migration among Indian students in Canada and India. Gunjan's findings show that the Indian female students in her study were able to shift their subjectivities and gender performance to varying degrees in order to maintain their friendship with members of both the home and the host society. She argues that the spaces in which Indian students live are not limited to ethnicity and kinship relations but also include different social-class backgrounds that are linked to religious identity (Sondhi 2013). This point is important in this chapter, as religion has become one of my central themes in my research findings. To analyse the Malay female students living in mixed-occupation houses, I compare my ethnographic findings with those of Bruck (1997) on the Kabyle house in the section on living together with Malays

Adopting Bourdieu's (1979) analysis of the Kabyle house or the world reversed, Bruck explored whether this model is applicable outside Algeria. In her ethnography findings in Yemen, she argues that there are other elements to be considered – such as who interacts in and occupies the house, their status within the domain of kinship and the social hierarchy – that have been neglected in Bourdieu's model. Bruck (1997) also identifies that Bourdieu's model is not readily adaptable in the Yemen's case, where movement in both exterior and interior spaces is not reversed. In her work, she demonstrates how Yemeni women deal with the modalities of body exposure in their inhabited space, where the decision to expose the *aurah* (intimate body parts) can be made depending on the *mahram* such as the husband or on the women themselves. In this case, Bruck concludes that the decision to unveil in front of unrelated men depends on such diverse factors as their social location, the way in which their husbands relate to them and the degree of familiarity between them. In her ethnography, one example she provides is that of the guard who has been working with the family for long time and is trusted by them; the guard can see his employer's wife face. For the Muslim women in Yemen, wearing the *lithmah* (face veil) depends on the shifting contexts they inhabit – they selectively apply specific parameters (Shilling 1993). This finding is important here in understanding the

ways in which the Malaysian female students negotiate their private space in mixed-occupation houses or when there is a male guest visiting the house.

Besides private space, another aspect of space which this thesis has been interested to explore is the international students' security and social environments, such as the neighbourhood and the city in which they live. A recent article by Forbes-Mewett and Wickes (2017) on hate crimes among international Indian students in Australia examines the victimisation of international students in the context of specific neighbourhoods. Drawing on social disorganisation and resource-threat theories, the research explores the motivations associated with attacks on Indian students in 2009 in Melbourne. In this paper, the scholars argue that two factors led to these attacks on Indian students. The first is the students' lack of knowledge and information regarding their housing options and the social environment in the area they live in. Secondly, the young men in the neighbourhood purposely attack them due to their ethnicity. In the authors' study, the area where these students lived was home to a disadvantaged community where there was low social control, high crime levels and an ethnic diversity which led these students to become vulnerable. Furthermore, the outsider status and recent arrival of these students might also make them vulnerable and potential victims (Forbes-Mewett and Wickes 2017).

Another study by Richard Sundeen (1984) on international students' safety in the host country was conducted in United States. In his article, Sundeen examines the fear of street crime among international students from developing countries. He revised Garofolo's (1979) model of influences on the fear of crime by using international student variables. The results show that four variables – such as the comparative danger of a person's neighbourhood, the students' number of months in the US, the frequency of their participation in cultural events and activities and any perceived local protection (by the police and neighbours) were correlated strongly with a fear of crime in the students' neighbourhoods. What I found interesting in his findings is that there is a positive amount of fear associated with students' participation in cultural groups and activities. He argues that international students' participation in these activities tends to make them potentially at high risk of victimisation. Social activities, meetings and events may serve as a place for the exchange of stories of crime and rumours, all of which can increase the feeling of fear among students (Sundeen 1984). In his argument, Sundeen challenges the notion of

difference between social ties and spatial ties among international students. Social activities are seen as important for international students' well-being, strengthening the bond and social ties between them, yet it may also create a sense of fear. Merry (1981), on the other hand, suggests that one way to diminish the feeling of fear is to become familiar with (or used to) 'strangers' or local ethnics in one's neighbourhood.

Both literatures demonstrate the safety issues for international students predominantly in Australia and the US, focusing on the students' safety in their host city and neighbourhood. From these studies, we can conclude that information about the place of residence or neighbourhood in the host country is extremely important for international students' adjustment and safety. This is because, in educational mobility, many students are given plenty of information about university accommodation. However, there is a dearth of information and research on the private housing available in the area. There are various reasons – such as financial and cultural issues – which might lead these students to decide to live off campus. The problems occur when they move to low-cost accommodation that is commonly situated in high-risk areas. These students also may get become exposed to multi-racial society in the neighbourhood and many unpredictable things may happen to them every day. Forbes-Mewett and Wickes (2017) suggest that the students need to feel that they will receive good protection from the police or local society due to their vulnerability as international students and their outsider status – seen as a lack of family support and low levels of informal social control in the neighbourhood.

Building on the above literatures, I analyse my ethnographic data to explore the initiatives used by the Malay student community to combat crime and racial issues in the neighbourhood in which they live; this is known as the *Musyrif* system. My findings also help to explore the extent to which this approach is significant in the everyday lives of my female informants and their community and what the bad remarks or experiences are which they face as female Malay students in the UK today.

4.2 Forming the Malaysian Space



Figure 4.1 The airport pick-up scene during the sketch competition

In my chapter on religion, I demonstrated how female Malay students' participation in piety movements are motivated by the generosity of existing Malay senior students in the UK. I also demonstrated how the non-Muslim environment and everyday social factors have led to these students' objectification of Islam. Thus, in this section, I analyse how the Malay students experience having to deal with finding and maintaining their private space, their home. The first thing which a Malay student cannot avoid when coming to the UK is the housing issue. Like piety movements, the newly arrived students receive much support and assistance from senior Malay students who are committee members in Malaysian organisations in both cities – Manchester and Cardiff. However, in the case of Manchester, where there are a substantial number of Malaysian students, the reciprocity process happens in a competitive manner.

Besides MCOT and IKRAM, there is another Malaysian student community that is deeply involved in the issue of student arrival – the Malaysian Students' Society of Manchester (MSSM). MSSM is an organisation registered with the University of Manchester. The picture above was taken when I attended the Malay Sketch competition organised by The Malay Language and Culture Society (MALECS) at the University of Manchester. The theme for the sketch is life as a Malaysian student abroad. Interestingly, during the play, many students laughed at the airport scene. I did not understand why until Anisa whispered to me, '*Kak*, this is what happens every year. There will be many organisations

waiting for us at the airport, and sometimes it creates confusions for a new student'. Anisa was a committee member of MCOT in her first year of study. She had a similar experience when the student whom she was supposed to pick up at the airport was 'stolen' by another Malay organisation. She told me that this is the risk when there are too many Malaysian organisations in Manchester. According to her, every organisation wants to use the airport as a platform on which they can help the new students in the hope that they can recruit them to their organisation as a committee member. In this sense, the reciprocity occurred in an informal way, whereby individuals are expecting some return or exchange from the new migrant they helped. There are also students who register themselves as volunteers and do not expect anything in return – they do what they do for leisure and as an element of Malay culture. Most importantly, the newly arrived students in my research stated that they did not face any stress or difficulties during their arrival because they had a good system of support from their community in the host country.

This support system is important for the survival of new international students when they go to a new country (Huang and Chang 2011). However, free services such as airport pick-ups, temporary hosting and the preparation of good food by the senior Malay students would not be enough to explain how they preserve the Malaysian space as a Malay committee abroad. There is little attention given to international students' space which focuses on their housing experiences (Calder *et al.* 2016; Najib *et al.* 2011; Obeng-Odoom 2012). When discussing international space in the migration context, we also need to think about how Malay students find their accommodation and what themes emerged ethnographically about their experiences of finding somewhere to live in the host country. This is because dealing with accommodation issues can be especially arduous for international students, for whom it involves many 'structures'¹⁹ and 'agents'²⁰ at different levels (Calder *et al.* 2016). Research by Calder *et al.* (2016) on international students' experiences of housing, finance etc. at Canadian universities, reported that more than half of the international students did not know where to find assistance with accommodation. They also discovered that the problem the most often reported regarding housing among the international students in Canada was affordability. This issue is serious because it has a definite outcome on the nature not only of students' experiences but also their academic outcomes. Furthermore, their findings also suggested that information such as housing rents, evaluation criteria, tenants' rights and specific contact information should be provided to all new students (Calder *et al.* 2016).

In my case, most of the Malay students in Manchester have good access to information and assistance regarding housing. The community organisation uses their Facebook group as a tool to help new students from the home country. In fact, instead of being supplied with an overload of information, the newcomers are able to decide and learn what type of housing and rentals are available depending on their preference. In Manchester, MCOT has prepared three types of form for students to apply for housing services via the Facebook group: a housing recommendation form, a house search form and a form to apply for help with house-hunting from a volunteer. These forms show how the community relationship works in multifaceted ways and involves: 1) the students who provide the aid or resources in the host country (usually an organisation committee member, 2) students who received the aid and want to repay the kindness to the new student migrants (the volunteers), and 3) newly arrived students from Malaysia who will receive the aid.

4.2.1 Housing Recommendation Form

The first form is for housing recommendations, where current students or students in their final year of study would recommend their house to the Malaysian community organisation. On the form, students provide basic details such as their landlord's name or the agency's name, the contact number of the landlord, the address, the amount of the rent and what is included (electricity, water, gas, internet), what furniture there is and the size of the house. The form is also open to current students who are searching for a new housemate. During my fieldwork, since all my housemates were final-year students, they decided to fill in the form to recommend it to newly arrived students.

4.2.2 House Search Form

This form is for new students who wish to pursue their studies in Manchester. Essential questions such as name, gender, when and with who he or she will be arriving in the UK should be filled in by the students. A student is also required to state their budget and how many person she/he is willing to share the house with so that a committee member can search for suitable houses.

4.2.3 *House-Hunting Volunteer Form*

Although the MCOT is responsible for housing services, the committee members consist of students. Every year, house-hunting usually occurs in the summer vacation in July and August. Therefore, many Malay students go back to Malaysia for the summer break. The volunteers must be those who will be in Manchester during the summer vacation and their job is to view the houses on offer on the websites on the students' behalf. They also need to get a contract and ask the agents or landlords if there is the need for a guarantor. The final task is to negotiate the booking deposit, which can range between £100 and £300, since the new students have not yet received their living allowance. This is an essential element in the study of international student migration because it involves communication and establishes the relationship between the current and the new students in both countries. In this case, we can see that a remittance process occurs. Some of the current students also occasionally use their money first to secure the house for the new students.

I came across this information when I was having a conversation on the bus with my informant, Fatia. Fatia is 24 years old and from the Malaysian state of Sabah. She is a final-year student in Education and was a member of the welfare committee for the Malaysian community in Manchester. While on the bus, I asked her about her experience of being on the welfare committee in the organisation. She shared with me her experience of managing housing for new Malay students in Manchester. Interestingly, the committee works together with the volunteer students to find houses to rent. What caught my attention was when she told me that she used her own money to pay the booking deposit. I asked whether she thinks her action was too risky since the amount was huge. She said yes because she had experienced students who were not satisfied with the house she had selected for them; some of them wanted to live with their friends in a difference house. However, according to Fathia, this rarely happens as the students are aware that they should *mengenang budi dan bersyukur* (be grateful and thankful) because of the *jasa baik* (goodwill) of the Malay students already in Manchester. This also emphasises the importance of everyday religion in students' modes of experiencing mobility. Moreover, the students feel happy with their social responsibility as a Malay community member who helps newly arrived Malay students in their area. My findings are similar to the case of Bangladeshi migration to Singapore by Md Mizanur Rahman. Rahman (2017), in his book, describes how reciprocity works in the Bangladeshi migrant community. For

example, he shows that new Bangladeshi migrants would ask the help of a fellow-villager in Singapore to obtain better accommodation. He also argues that the return of help should not necessarily be to the person who helped the migrant first but may extend to migrants who arrive later from the same village. The services exchanged may not be the same – in his case, accommodation assistance may be given to the first migrant while, for the second, the reciprocated help may be in the form of a different service such as assistance in finding a job for the new migrant (Rahman 2017). My research also supports that of Anderson (2011b), who argues that the exchange among migrants can also be in the act of sharing, hospitality and generosity which can establish a dynamic of intimacy, thus diminishing the formality between individuals.

In my case, reciprocity among the Malay students' organisation committee in Manchester and Cardiff is a continuous process. In Cardiff, the Malaysian students' community of Cardiff (MCC) helps new students in different ways. The MCC does not provide housing forms but they can help the new students when needed. According to Hidayah, an ex-committee member of the MCC, a new student can ask about a room either by posting to the group's Facebook page or by personally contacting Malay students in Cardiff. Besides, final-year students in Cardiff would also advertise their rooms on Facebook. From this explanation, we can see the dynamics of the Malay community in creating a Malaysian space abroad. I have shown how, in Manchester, the welfare committee works together with the volunteer students to find housing for new students. In return, current students recommend their accommodation to the committee members and some of them may even volunteer to help with viewing houses as a way to reciprocate the kindness to them by previous committee members. This reciprocity will continue with the new students, some of whom will also become committee members by accepting a position in the organisation. For these students, this is one of the ways in which they can contribute and show their social responsibility as Malays abroad. When new students obtain accommodation via the Malay committee, they feel responsible for sustaining the links with the landlord. This shared responsibility and collective effort also echos what Giddens (1984: 377) defines as 'reciprocity between actors or collectivities across extended time-space'.

In this section, I argue that reciprocity is a significant element in the maintainance of the Malaysian students' space and social networking while living abroad, particularly on the

issue of housing arrangements. With the help of the Malaysian community organisation, finding accommodation is something negotiated with relative ease by Malay students in Manchester and Cardiff. Moreover, through online media such as Facebook, new Malaysian student can easily complete the housing form provided by the MCOT in Manchester. Today, most of the homes that Malay students rent in Manchester are houses that were rented originally by the previous generation of Malay students. Though this tradition may sound simple and straightforward, it is essential to study this practice in detail – this is very important because it is a critical aspect of the way in which these students fashion ties of belonging to and solidarity with one another.

4.2.4 *Dealing with Landlords/Agents*

According to Fatia, most of the landlords in Manchester love to have Malaysian students as their tenants because *budak Malaysia ni baik-baik* (Malay students are good people). I asked Fatia what she meant when she says Malaysian students are *baik-baik* (good). She replied ‘*Orang kita jarang buat hal* (Because we, Malay people, cause less trouble for them). Here, Fatia explains that the landlords prefer Malay students as their tenants because Malaysian people rarely complaint; they also take good care of the property, especially the cleanliness of the house and the furniture. This statement is supported by my interview with one of my informants.

Halina, a 23-year-old student of English at Manchester University, told me that the house that she lives in has been passed down through three generations of Malaysian students. Every month, her British Pakistani landlord, Kabil, a middle-aged man, comes to their house to collect the rent in person. He also check the house during his visits. Usually, Halina and her housemates ensure that their house is clean and tidy before the landlord comes. They work together to clean the ‘public space’ such as the hallway and the living room. She also described her landlord as a fatherly person. According to Halina, Kabil only rents his house to female Malay students because he convinced that they take good care of the property.

When I lived with my female Malay informants in Manchester, I saw that they followed the tenancy contract carefully by not hanging pictures or mirrors on the wall. Instead of hanging them using a nail, they just stuck the mirror on the wall with some removable

tape in order to decorate the wall. These students are very particular when they want to make any changes in the house and avoid making any mess when and after leaving the house. This is similar to the care demonstrated by Chinese international students in Canada, who avoid hanging a picture in their rented accommodation for fear of losing their deposit due to damage (Li 2006). The Malay students in my research also kept saying '*Ini bukan macam tinggal di Malaysia*' (It is not like we are living in Malaysia), referring to the straight rules about renting the UK house. They also quickly report any damage or house maintenance to the Pakistani agent, Imran, who is responsible for dealing with housing issues. Unlike Halina's case, we only dealt with the agent. During my stay, I did not have the opportunity to meet the landlord. Most of the time, we only dealt with Imran, our housing agent who always travels to Hong Kong to meet his family there. Imran is aged between 25 and 30 years old. I frequently met him during my stay because the house I lived in was old and in a poor condition. There was a leak in the toilet and it affected the kitchen ceiling downstairs. Another common problem we had was the heating. According to my housemate, Anisa, our landlord was a British African man who lived in London. He rarely comes to Manchester and most communication with him was done by phone. We had to wait for a long time for the heater to be replaced as it was already old and all Imran could do was to ask someone to fix it, after which the problem then happened again. Imran told us that he had already asked the landlord for a replacement and had to wait for the landlord to give him the money. The female students in the house seemed frustrated but they still managed to control their emotions and behaviour when dealing with the agent and landlord. For example, Anisa spoke politely to the landlord when she called him to explain the situation. The landlord later sent his wife to visit the house during the summer to fix the problem. These students, although they had to ferry the hot water from the kitchen to the bathroom to have a shower due to the broken heating, still managed to handle the issue in politely without shouting or getting mad with the agent or landlord.

By demonstrating good moral behaviour and having a good relationship with the landlords, the latter show their interest by eagerly asking them if there are any Malaysian students who wish to rent the house after they have left the city. This was the case in Halina's house. This point shows the reciprocity between Malays and non-Malays. What these students do is to recommend new students to the landlord. In return, the students sometimes have their rent reduced by half over the summer break when they go back to

Malaysia – this way they can leave all their Malaysian food or unwanted belongings in the house for the next set of Malay tenants. For students who have to pay the full rental fee during the summer break, they sub-let their homes to Malay tourists such as their friends' families or cousins or Malay friends who wish to pay inexpensive visits to Manchester. This situation also explains the importance of maintaining intergenerational relations in the Malaysian space overseas. To support this relationship, the Malay students demonstrate excellent moral behaviour in order to maintain their positive reputation with the landlords, such as paying the rent on time and following the rules laid down by the landlords. I also argue in this section that space is constructed through two forms of reciprocity: first between Malay students in the host country and newly arrived students, and second between Malay students and the host society – i.e. their landlords or housing agents.

Another important reason why these students behave in this way is because they know that if they do not follow the rules they might not only lose their deposit but also *buat malu* (cause shame) to the Malay community in Manchester if they are found to be *pengotor* (an unhygienic person) and careless tenants. The substantial number of Malays in Manchester makes them somewhat vulnerable. For instance, if the students make a mess and cause trouble, it will give a bad name to the Malay community and cause *malu* to the Malaysians there. It would then be difficult for the next generation of Malay students to rent the house due to the bad reputation their predecessors had earned. In this sense, *malu* also can be shared in collective ways and may be evoked by the reactions of close relatives (Collins and Bahar 2000). As Wikan (1990: 64) notes for Bali, to be accused of arrogance elicits shame whether the accusation is made in a sheltered group or a more formal gathering. It shows how the Malay students take serious care of their space and how the environment shapes the way they behave and present themselves.

This also happens in the Korean neighbourhood in New Malden, where the Korean landlord would spread gossip about previous tenants to the other Koreans in the neighbourhood, causing Korean women to be careful in Korea-related places (Kim 2008). The main point is that any rumours or gossip from a landlord in the host country could affect the migrant community's image and individual identity. In my research, though, there were some students who preferred to live with non-Malays, the main reason

for which was to experience the different cultures rather than avoid pressure or gossip from the Malays.

4.3 Space and Religion

4.3.1 Living Together with Malays

In the previous section, we saw the effort made by the Malay community to form and maintain Malaysian spaces in the host country. Why do these students bother to stay together in the UK? What are the reasons behind the emphasis they place on collective living? Before we simply assume that these people are not open towards strangers, let me explain the reasons why Malay students prefer, or feel more comfortable when, staying together. This section investigates the importance of gender and living together for Malay people. In my research, Malaysian students were quite reluctant to share their personal space, especially their homes, with students from other international backgrounds for a complex combination of religious and cultural reasons.

Although these Malay students live far from their home country, they put great emphasis on maintaining their commitment to religion and culture. My findings show that Islam plays an essential role in the everyday lives of Malay students in the UK. Zainal Kling (1980) argues that, in Malay society, Islamic characteristics are the basis for conduct and action, form and relationships; the essence of values, attitudes and views. Islam becomes the soul of the whole Malay social and cultural society. Thus, there are many aspects of Malay culture that are connected to Islamic practices.

The idea of living together for the female Malay students in my research contradicts that of the female Korean students in Kim's (2008) study. For Korean students, their main goal when studying abroad is to avoid having close relationships with their co-nationals, including not living together or sharing a flat. For these students, the less contact they have with other Koreans means the better cultural adjustment they make and avoids them being too dependent on each other. In my case, the Malay students prefer to live and stay together because this is in their nature. The Malays like to do and share things together, living as a collective society and always prioritising the needs of society (Noriati 2005). This can be observed through the reciprocity and help they extend to each other at events.

For the Malays students in my research, helping and depending on each other is one of their social responsibilities and what makes Malays Malays. For them, living together and in close contact with other Malays in a host country is not seen as a negative. In fact, they look at this as a symbol of unity and strength in a society. Besides, living together in the same neighbourhood not only provides them with a sense of belonging and of home but is also important for their emotional and social support.

My ethnographic findings show that the main reason why these students prefer to live together is because they can practise Islam proficiently at home. This echoes Sondhi's (2013) findings which show that religious identity also shapes the ways in which students inhabit the space. In Islam, a female Muslim cannot expose her *aurah* (intimate body parts that should be kept covered) to any man except for her husband and *mahram* (family members). This is written in the *Quran surah An-nur*, Chapter 23, Verse 31:

and tell the believing women to reduce [some] of their vision and guard their private parts and not expose their adornment except that which [necessarily] appears thereof and to wrap [a portion of] their headcovers over their chests and not expose their adornment except to their husbands, their fathers, their husbands' fathers, their sons, their husbands' sons, their brothers, their brothers' sons, their sisters' sons, their women, that which their right hands possess, or those male attendants having no physical desire or children who are not yet aware of the private aspects of women. And let them not stamp their feet to make known what they conceal of their adornment. And turn to Allah in repentance, all of you, O believers, that you might succeed. [24:31]

I illustrate this in Table 1, which provides a simple explanation about Muslim women's *aurah* as stated in the *surah* and compares the categories and situations within my research context:

Table 4.3.1 Situations in which the aurah must (or need not) be covered

Categories	<i>Aurah</i> (covered part)	Research context
In front of the husband	No <i>Aurah</i> in front of the spouse	When my husband stays in the house for a short visit, the Malay students wear the <i>hijab</i> and proper clothes at home – for instance when going into the kitchen, living room or toilet. I don't have to since I'm married to him.

Categories	<i>Aurah</i> (covered part)	Research context
In front of Muslim women	Same for a man's <i>aurah</i> in front of other men – i.e. from the navel down to and including the knees.	During my stay with them, I did not see them wearing shorts that exposed their knees at home.
In front of <i>Mahram</i> (unmarriageable kin such as father/mother; son/daughter, grandson etc)	Between the navel and the knees	Since most of my female informants are single and live together, I only saw when they video-called their family. It also depended on whether the contact was made in a public or private space. The student would not cover her hair when making a video call with her family in her room. However, in a restaurant, they obviously wear the <i>hijab</i> and proper clothes, as it is a public space.
In front of non- <i>Mahram</i> males / non-Muslim <i>Mahram</i> males or in public	Same as when a Muslim woman is performing <i>salah</i> . The Muslim woman needs to cover herself completely, except for her hands and face.	The students would wear appropriate clothes that cover their <i>aurah</i> , and the <i>hijab</i> when they go out from home or when there is an unrelated male visitor to their home such as the postman, male friends, the landlord, or a plumber (male worker).
In front of non-Muslim women	This is a matter of some disagreement between scholars. Some permit the same covering as per Muslim women; others recommend stricter covering depending on the situation.	This situation applies to Malay students who live with international students in the same accommodation. In Manchester, Zara chose to cover her hair in front of non-Muslim female flatmates after seeking advice from a Muslim scholar. In Cardiff, after swimming, Nurul would show her hair in the changing rooms to non-Muslim women in that female space.

From this verse and Table 1 above, we can understand why most Malay Muslim females cannot and prefer not to live with non-*mahram* males (other men as mentioned in the above text) in the same house. The reason why this *surah* obliges Muslim women to cover their *aurah* is to protect their pride and dignity. Besides, in the *Quran*, living with a non-*mahram* male in the same house can also cause *fitnah* (slander) and *Zina* (adultery).

Sharing a mixed-gender house, they would not only have to wear the *hijab* but would also need to cover the other parts of the body when at home. In this research context, this is the thing that they need to consider when living with non-*mahram* males or international students. Home is a private space, and these students want to feel comfortable about practicing their religious boundaries even in a private space with no male around the house.

In this section, I engage my findings with those of Bruck's (1997) research on how Yemeni women deal with the modalities of body exposure in their inhabited space. Using the lens of migration, I analyse how the Malay Muslim female students negotiated their religious identity at home. Bruck (1997) argues that Bourdieu's (1979) model does not consider who interacts in and occupies the house, and the status and kinship which the Yemeni women have with the unrelated male in the house. Yemeni women, with the permission of their husbands, are allowed to expose their hair to an unrelated man in the house. Those women who are not yet married can decide for themselves or ask advice from their father.

In my case, the gendering of space in Muslim students' homes in the context of everyday life, however, is more fluid and complex. When these Malay students live together in one house abroad, they share most of the spaces together such as the toilet, the kitchen and the living room. This means that they do not have to cover their hair and are free to go anywhere at home without the *hijab*, as there is no male occupant in the house. However, this does not mean that male guests are prohibited from entering the house. Nevertheless, this situation does not often arise because, in Malay culture, *tak manis anak dara pergi pergi rumah lelaki bujang* (it is inappropriate for an unmarried Malay female to visit an unmarried male's house or the another way round) – the Malay word '*tak manis*' meaning 'not sweet' or, in this context, 'improper', a word frequently used by Malays to describe an unpleasant action. In fact, the Prophet (PBUH) stated: 'No man should enter into the presence of a woman after this day unless he is accompanied by one or two other men'. [*Sahih Muslim*]. Though these Malays are living abroad, they are very careful with their actions and manner as Malay Muslims. Customarily, before having male guests come to our house, these students would inform each other so that they could prepare themselves for wearing the *hijab* and covering their *aurah*.

However, one thing they need to negotiate when living in a shared space is when there is an unrelated male (non-*mahram*) visitor to the house. In this context, we are not discussing men who knock on the door like the postman or the Asda deliveryman. My point here concerns male guests who are related to one of their housemates – such as their father, husband or brother – who come to visit them in the UK. In the Kabyle house, the male guests have their own entrance and space, which not connected to the female members who live there. For the Malay students, the British house is a space open to all genders. Thus, my research is not concerned with who comes in or out but, rather, with the unrelated visitor who comes and stays in female Malay Muslim students' houses and how these students negotiate their space. From my experience of living with them, these students will usually ask their housemates' permission or opinion if there is a family member or friend – especially male – who would like to come to the house. This is because, as we can see from Table 1, Muslim women have to cover their hair if they are meeting an unrelated male guest.

To relate this with the migration space, for Malays it is understood that the cost of flights to the UK is not cheap. When a family comes to visit their daughter, they will usually stay at the daughter's place. This situation happened to my informant, Aini, a Malay student who was also my neighbour in Manchester. When I was on my way to the grocer's, I met her in front of my house. She told me, '*Dekat rumah kita ada pakcik datang duduk sebulan*' (At my house there is an uncle, and he is staying for a month). In this context, the *pakcik* refers to her housemate's father, who is an unrelated male for Aini and her other housemates. This means that they have to wear the *hijab* at home when they are in the open spaces such as the kitchen or toilet in case they meet the *pakcik* along the way. Aini is fine with that because she understands that they are living abroad, where staying in a hotel can be very expensive, and the *pakcik* is not a stranger because he is a father and has relationship as a *mahram* of her housemate, and this justification helps her to negotiate the situation.

Moreover, she finds it is too much for her not to agree with the favour her housemate asked of her. Aini's expression and words show her emotion, which in Malay says, '*tak sampai hati*' (can't stand) and not do something. In Malay, *hati* stands for heart. Like heart, *hati* can stand for the full person's deep emotional reactions (Sharifian *et al.* 2008; Wikan 1990). She also told me that she swapped rooms with her housemate since her

room is a master bedroom – thus the housemate and her family could feel more comfortable. This section shows how Malays negotiate their in-between identities – being a Malay and a Muslim in a transnational space. This is one case whereby a Muslim woman has to balance living up to Malay standards and at the same time adhering to Islamic teaching. In this case, Aini knows that, being Malay, they should help each other and that, in the future, she might also have her family come to visit her and stay at her place. At the same time, she also knows that she needs to cover her *aurah* at home as a practicing Muslim. Although her parents are far away, she is able to decide whether or not to wear the *hijab* without her parents knowing, but she chooses to keep her faith by wearing it when there is an unrelated male in the house. In my research, the meaning of home as a private space for female Malay Muslims can shift to the public space with their gender-performing identity. Thus, the only private space for them at home is their bedroom when there is an unrelated male guest staying.

The same thing happened when my husband came to visit me. My husband was supposed to go home the day before my housemates returned to the UK. Unfortunately, his company changed the flight to the next day. I was worried whether my husband's appearance in the house would make the stud feel uncomfortable, since we had never had a male guest sleeping over before. I texted them and asked if they were okay with it and that I was willing to book a hotel for him if they were not comfortable with it. They said okay and, during that day, they just stayed in rooms, sometimes texting me if they wanted to go out of their room, in case my husband was using the toilet. From this section we can see how the Malay female students negotiate their gender and religious identity in their shared space. Even living together as Muslims, these students show the complexity of combining Malay cultures and Islamic teaching, which they try to accommodate and to balance the spatial and social relations.



Figure 4.2 The living room in a female Malay student house

4.3.2 *Living in Mixed-Gender Housing*

It is also important to emphasise that not all Malay students live in Malay-only accommodation – emphasising the fact that, while culture and religion are critical in shaping the spaces inhabited by Malays in Manchester, they do not shape this aspect of students' lives in an instrumental way. During the course of my research, I encountered two informants who lived in a mixed-gender flat. I went to Zara's flat to interview her. Zara was 29 years old and from Selangor state. She was a doctoral student in Education at the University of Manchester. This was not the first time that she had lived abroad. Previously, she lived for one year in Australia while studying for her Master's and told me that she used to live with non-Muslim females in one house. Since she was living with non-Muslim females, Zara asked advice from a Muslim scholar regarding the issue of *aurah* between Muslim women and non-Muslim women:

In Australia I lived with all girls, but they were non-Muslims so, at that time, *Ustaz* Don Daniel, a young and famous Malaysian religious celebrity, came to Sydney. I asked him whether I could take off my *hijab* when living with non-Muslim females, and the *Ustaz* said 'No, you can't, based on *Shafie*', and he explained to me the *hikmah* (wise) about why I should cover my hair in front of them. 'By covering your hair, they won't talk about your hair with other people, and imagine if they took pictures with you and shared them with others, so the responsibility is on you', he said. It is better to be safe than sorry. So I believe that our *aurah* is the same with non-Muslims, girls or boys.

The above excerpt relates to the explanation of Muslim women's *aurah* in front of non-Muslim women, which I have shared in Table 1. This situation depends on the scholars: some scholars permit women to expose their hair to non-Muslim females while other scholars say they cannot. After listening to the *Ustaz*'s advice, Zara decided to cover her hair in front of non-Muslim females and males. Zara's flat was located on the main road, next to the *halal* grocer's shop where most of the Malay Muslim students in Rusholme buy meat. Outside the block of flats, there was an advertisement: 'Student accommodation, 120 pw, wifi and bills included'. As I arrived at her flat, I saw her eating in the communal kitchen with her Malay friend from Nottingham. They invited me to eat together, but I refused, as I did not want to interrupt them. Instead, I handed them two cups of Booster juice, which I had bought earlier. Both of them had a *hijab* on their head. Although there was no man around, she told me that there was one male student living in her unit: as a result, she had to inhabit the space veiled. Zara shared the communal kitchen with four other flatmates. She asked me to wait in her room. The room came with an ensuite bathroom, which Zara found very convenient as she could use it by herself without worrying about covering her *aurah*. In her flat, she only covered her hair when she went to the kitchen or met up with her male and female flatmates in their rooms or when they came to her room. She showed me her photos with her male flatmate and shared her experiences of living in a mixed-gender flat. For her, though she had to consider the culture and religious boundaries, it did not stop her from making friends with the male flatmate, although the closeness between her and her male housemate sometimes made her feel a little ambivalent.

We spent a lot of time together, you know housemates, sometimes he doesn't feel guilty hugging people, hugging is their culture, so I have to be careful regarding that – high five – sometimes, they love to do that.

From her statements, we can see that Zara realises that her status as a Malay Muslim means that she needs to ensure that she does not go overboard when making friends with men to the extent of having bodily contact with them. However, the thing that Zara told me bothered her the most was when she heard them stereotype Muslims. According to Zara, she felt embarrassed and sad when a female Muslim student across from her flat was accused of stealing food. Her emotional feeling became stronger when the housemates mentioned the student as the '*hijabi*' girl or Muslim girl. They also compared her with other Muslim women and said that she is the difference between them – Zara

was not sure what they meant. To avoid being stereotyped and judged for being Muslim by her flatmates, she chose to keep everything to herself and not to create any trouble with them, such as doing anything suspicious.

I represent Malaysia and Islam. Whenever I am mad at them, I don't do any bad things, I don't make any nasty comments, because they are sometimes annoying because they don't do the dishes; they are very dirty, but I won't say anything, not because I don't want to say anything, but because I don't want them to judge me as a Muslim. It is easy for them to overgeneralise, especially when a lot of incidents are taking place now.

In this quotation, Zara also shows her awareness of recent terrorist incidents and the ways in which the local media portrays Islam. She therefore finds it essential to demonstrate reasonable behaviour as a Malay Muslim towards her flatmates and others. According to Zara, the Islamophobic environment in the UK has caused her anxieties about her appearance as a Muslim.

Another informant, Jasmine, is 20 years old and an urban planning student in Manchester. She told me that she learnt that living with non-Muslims is like testing her *iman* where she needs to respect other cultures and diversity. For Jasmine, the difficult moment is when the rest of the house members are having a party and drinking alcohol at home. As a practising Malay Muslim, this is a new experience for her and something that she has to address and confront.

Every Friday night they have a party; every Saturday morning, when I walk into the kitchen, the bottles will be strewn all over the floor. I am a person who doesn't really care, but in the end, I can start to smell the alcohol, and my flatmates ask me to go to the bar. The biggest challenges for me are culture and adaptation.

In the quote above, Jasmine described how her level of tolerance was tested when she could smell the alcohol. She also mentioned that she is a person who does not really care but when she stated that she could smell the alcohol it meant she was not happy with the situation. Interestingly, Jasmine shared with me how she handles invitations to go to the pub. As a practising Malay Muslim, she tries her best to avoid going to such places; at the same time, she does not want to disappoint her flatmates. What Jasmine does is to politely reject their invitation and suggest that they have a coffee somewhere or go to the

cinema together. Luckily, they agree and understand her situation. Like Zara, as much as Jasmine loves to stay with her non-Muslim housemates, there are aspects of such a relationship that involve coping and demonstrating *sabar* (patience) as a Malay Muslim.

Thus this section has provided two cases of Malays to help us to understand female Malaysian Muslim students' living experiences in the UK context. In a female Malay Muslim house, these students have fewer problems although they have to negotiate certain aspects when receiving unrelated male guests who are members of their housemates' families at home. However, for Malay female students who live in mixed-gender flat, they do establish close relationships across gender and religious boundaries and appear to enjoy many aspects of mixed living such as playing games together in the communal area, learning each other's culture and languages, having interfaith conversations and watching films in the living room.

4.4 Space and Security

4.4.1 Experiences of Anti-Muslim Racism or Harassment

While many Malay students express their pleasure and gratitude at receiving good support from the Malay community in Rusholme, they also stress their concern about safety in the neighbourhoods in which they live. Looking at this issue from the perspective of an outsider – as someone who is not living there but who visited the city from Brighton, I found Rusholme to be very different from the image which Malays hold of the typical English town. I remember when I was walking down Wimslow Road – known as the Curry Mile – one night with one of my informants; she said to me, 'Welcome to Mumbai', referring to the neon lights and ambience of the street. From the road to the neighbourhood area, I could see lots of migrants mainly from South Asia and Africa. Here, the restaurants and shops close later than other local stores. Along Curry Mile, people were wearing traditional clothes such as the *salwar kameez*, the Arabian *thobe*, *abaya* and more. It is very common to see people shouting, swearing, drunk and high along the street. I somehow felt like I was in a scene from the online game Grand Theft Auto (GTA). Furthermore, there was always a group of teenagers having a fight in front of the shop beneath our house. This was in addition to the boisterous sounds from the streets such as loud music from passing cars. Each time I walked along the street, I began

to experience mixed feelings – both anxiety and thrill – as it was quite different to my experience of living in the city of Brighton.

In my research, my informants in both Manchester and Cardiff mentioned that they had not experienced Islamophobic attacks in their residential area. However, they said that places such as the city centre or the countryside were the potential spaces where religious intolerance – including Islamophobic attacks – could take place. According to my informants in Manchester, the only negative experiences that had taken place in their residential area was being disturbed by strangers or drunks. Below I illustrate some of the stories shared by my informants about their bad experiences in both cities.

In Manchester, Nina, 20, an accountancy student, recalled her experience of being harassed by a stranger while she was on the way home from the library:

I was on my way home, and suddenly a stranger came up to me. He was twice my size. He asked for my phone. I refused then he said he wanted to put in his phone number. I didn't believe him. I was so scared because he started to act aggressively. Luckily, there was a random lady was walking on the opposite side of the road, so I shouted a name and ran towards her.

Apart from this incident, Nina told me she had experienced Islamophobia twice in the city centre. The events happened immediately after the Paris attack:

There was a strike in the city centre. I was on the bus, and suddenly there was a man shouting 'Islam, is blah, blah, blah, and go back to your country!' I didn't know it was meant for me until I realised that I was the only one wearing a hijab. So I got off the bus.

Nina knew that the man shouted at her because she was the only one who wore a *hijab* on the bus.

She also stated that Islamophobic attacks are not only initiated by adults but also by local teenagers. The second incident happened in the city, where a bunch of local teenagers approached her and her acquaintance and shouted: 'Islam is a c..t' and spat on them. When I asked her how she felt about it, she said she did not know how to react and decided to ignore it because she thought they were just teenagers. As someone who has twice experienced verbal harassment in the host country, she decided to stay calm and quiet and

not make the situation worse by fighting back. Moreover, she told me that she well understood why some people act like that because are easily influenced by the local media reports on Islam.

Another informant from Manchester, Jasmine, 20, also shared her experience of Islamophobia when she and her twin sister went into the country in the UK. The incident happened in a restaurant where they decided to have lunch. Unfortunately, their presence was not welcome by the waiter and the local customers.

It was a Christmas market day. We went into the restaurant and suddenly we heard people saying 'Get out of here'. I thought it wasn't for me, so I said 'Can we have a table for two people?' Then the waiter said 'You make the customers uncomfortable, please leave'. I was so sad and I realised that the two of us were the only ones wearing a *hijab* and who looked like terrorists in the village. But in Manchester itself, it is safe.

While these informants had experienced Islamophobia in the context of the recent terrorist attacks which happened in Europe, I also managed to interview a return informant who suffered Islamophobia in the UK in the wake of the 9/11 attacks in the US.

Back then, 9/11 was a recent issue and people are not very open; they called my mum a terrorist because she wears a *hijab*. They don't befriend me. I didn't tell my parents because I don't want them to worry about me because both of them are doing PhDs.

Ayda, 21, is a finance student at the University of Manchester. She shared her school experiences as a victim of Islamophobia in the UK. Among my informants, Ayda's migration story is interesting because she has lived in the UK for many years over different periods. At the early age of 6, she received her childhood education at a kindergarten in the UK for a year; she then returned to Malaysia, because her father was doing a Master's at that time. At the age of 9, her father studied for his PhD in Scotland. As a result, she received four years of primary education in the UK. When she was 15 years old, her family came back to the UK because her mother did a PhD at a university in Wales. Having been a return migrant from both Malaysia and the UK over a number of years allows her to compare the different atmospheres as a Malaysian Muslim female in the UK in that period.

I had a bad experience after the 9/11 incidence. I was 15 years old and had just started to wear the *hijab*. On my first day at school here, there was a student who pulled off my *hijab*. I cried in the toilet. And the place we stayed in was a black area; it was a dangerous place because there was a shooting in front of my school. However, the person who did that now is my friend. I did not blame him more open-minded compared to the UK last time.

From Ayda's stories we can see that, although she has experienced Islamophobic attacks since she was a teenager, she still believes that the UK is a safe place to study for Muslim female students. When I asked her what made her choose the UK for higher education, she told me that, though she also received offers from universities in Canada and Australia, the familiarity of the UK environment made her want to return. She explained that coming back to the UK for education is one of the ways for her to meet her high-school friends. Another reason why she chose to study at the University of Manchester was that it is a requirement of the scholarship to study in a top one hundred world ranking university.

In Cardiff, my informants stated that they had not experienced Islamophobic attacks, but they have been racially abused in the context of the Missing Malaysian Airlines, MH370 tragedy and Asian identity. Zaty, 23, an optometry student at Cardiff University, explained that the incident happened when she was walking with her friends in the park.

Well I have never faced Islamophobia, but I was verbally attacked about the MH370 incident. It happened when I was walking in Bute Park, when suddenly there was a man shouting, like, 'Where's my flight? Where's my plane?'

According to Zaty, the man purposely shouted at them because there are many Malaysian students studying in Cardiff. Thus, it is not difficult for others to recognise them as Malaysians. I asked her what she felt, and she said she was speechless and just ignored the man. There was nothing she could do about it, and she has no idea why the man suddenly came out with the missing plane issue, as it was an unfortunate tragedy that happened in Malaysia. From the data, we can conclude that such a negative experience also could occur in different ways – such as against the students' national identity – and not only focus on their religious identity.

Another informant, Fara, 28, a postgraduate student in Media Studies at Cardiff University, states that she is experiencing a different acceptance from the Welsh community. Fara is a free-hair Malay married to a British man. However, when she was with her Malay Muslim friends who wear scarves, she could sense that people would stare at them bizarrely.

It became more intense when was with my friend who wears a *hijab*. I think the old people, they tend to have...err ... I don't know the full specific term (Islamophobia?). Yeah, because the way they look at you, you can tell that, they're not comfortable being around you.

Though Fara does not wear the *hijab*, she could feel the unfriendly responses from some of the local community, especially the senior citizens. Fara also felt like a foreigner rather than an international student when she was with her husband. She shares the different treatment she gets from society.

When I was alone in the city, people would not be so friendly towards me, and they looked at me like a foreigner, an Asian girl. However, if I'm with my husband, I don't get that look. Yeah, I think they accept it, like, okay, you're with a white guy (like, part of the community). People seem so friendly and always ask me whether I want to stay here (Cardiff) after my studies.

From this quote, we can see that Zaty feels that she was received, accepted and respected by the local community only when she was with her husband. From this, we can understand the voice and identity of an unveiled Malay Muslim female and also a Malay wife married to a local British man.

In this section, based on my findings, we can see that many of my Malay female informants find that religious appearance such as wearing the *hijab* is one of the main reasons why they have been verbally or physically attacked. They also feel that the veil is seen as a symbol of terrorism and fear of extremists. By wearing the headscarf or *hijab*, the students know that their identity by local societies no longer as Malaysians but, rather, as Muslims in the host country. In the case of the *hijab*, these students try to make sense of what had just happened to them by looking at their surroundings to ensure who the attackers were referring to. When they realised that they were the only people wearing the *hijab* was the moment when they felt that they were seen as a threat to society. This

is supported by the findings of Tyrer and Ahmad (2005) who argued that many Muslim women in their research emphasised their experiences of anti-Muslim racism linked to the *hijab*. Other scholars also argue that the *hijab* is a strong signifier of Muslim women's oppression and treatment in Western societies (Ahmad 2009; Khosrojerdi 2015; Mahmood 2005b). We can thus see that the visibility of the *hijab* has caused Muslim women to become an easy target and vulnerable to Islamophobic attack compared to men, whose Muslim appearance is not as visible. Thus, there is a clear gender dimension between men and women when experiencing anti-Muslim racism and harassment in the host country (Tyrer and Ahmad 2005). However, it is important for us to know that these experiences of racism or religious hate crime towards international students could impact on their students' security and also give a negative impression of the UK as a tolerant, multicultural society (Brown and Jones 2013; EHR 2010).

Despite the unpleasant treatment they received from some people in the community and the bias in media coverage about Muslims, my participants also believe that it is crucial for them to maintain a true image of a Muslim as a whole. Thus, Malay Muslim females in my research feel that study in the UK is not just about experiencing the different cultures but also gives them a responsibility to portray the idea of being a good Muslim towards both the host and international society. To overcome the issues of crime and ensure the safety of the Malaysian students, the Malaysian community in Manchester decided to set up a Neighbourhood Watch scheme in their area. The next section explains how Neighbourhood Watch works for these students.

4.4.2 *The Musyrif System (Neighbourhood Watch)*

Malay students in Manchester focus not only on maintaining the social and religious aspects of the community but also on ensuring that Malay students in the city feel safe and at home while studying abroad. During my stay in Rusholme, I was curious to know what these students thought about the part of the city in which most of them lived. Occasionally, I have seen students sharing posts on the Malaysian community Facebook page, drawing attention to crimes and negative experiences that had taken place in the area, presumably as a way to warn others to be careful.

One day, as I was browsing the Malaysian community Facebook page to get information about Malaysian events in Manchester, I saw a long post that caught my attention. A Malay student confessed her frustration towards the welfare community who failed find someone to accompany her back home the previous night. The student reported that a random man disturbed her when she was on the way home. She contacted someone on the committee. Unfortunately, there was nobody available at that time. The committee apologised to her and made sure that it would not happen again.

The studnet's frustration relates to the Malaysian community organisation's initiative to create a safe space by offering an escort system for members of the organisation who return home late at night. The system is called the *Musyrif* System or Rukun Tetangga (Neighbourhood Watch). In 1975, the second Malaysian Prime Minister, Tun Abdul Razak, initiated the Rukun Tetangga Scheme. This voluntary scheme, run by the government, is aimed at ensuring the safety of residents who could have been threatened by the lack of national unity at that time in Malay history. It was implanted at the community association level formed in local residential areas. Rukun Tetangga was also inspired by the United Kingdom's model – Neighbourhood Watch – which similarly seeks to build a permanent association with the aim of protecting residents. The Malay community runs this voluntary programme to promote the welfare and harmony of the Malaysian community living in Manchester. Disturbed by some crimes that happened in Rusholme, and motivated by the fact that substantial numbers of Malay students live in that area of the city, the Malay community decided to implement the *Musyrif* system to ensure the Malay students' safety and welfare.

The neighbourhood community is a socially interactive space inhabited by a close-knit network of households, most of whom are known to one another and who, to a high degree, participate in common social activities, exchange information, engage in mutual aid and support and are conscious of their common identity, their belonging together (Cater and Jones 1989: 169; Valentine 2001: 112). The emergence of the neighbourhood community can be identified from four factors – proximity, territory, social homogeneity and time. In my case, the Malay students' neighbourhood community fell under proximity, whereby individuals build the social networks through the shared activities, relationships and support which naturally emerge through the accident of proximity – for example, the *Musyrif* system initiated by the Malay students' community in Manchester.



Figure 4.3 The zones of Malaysian students in Rusholme

Source: MCOT's Facebook Page.

In the context of Malaysian student migration to the UK, the *Musyrif* system helps to ensure the safety of Malay students abroad, especially female Malaysian Muslim students in certain neighbourhoods and protect them from crimes – such as burglary – and gangs of drunken youths and sexual harassment. To make the plan visible, the welfare committee provides the residential map in Figure 4.3 to monitor members in the different zones. From the image we can see that there are four zones in which Malaysian students reside. The students can contact the person who is responsible in their zone to seek assistance. According to the information I obtained from this system, the committee

members provided the contact numbers of male students who live in each zone. However, the committee members will provide female members as escorts if they are preferred and requested. The map shows the role played by the male students in the space to protect the female students in a community. Based on my interviews with my female informants, and despite the unfortunate incident mentioned above, these students shared their positive experiences of using the *Musyrif* system.

From a gender perspective, the *Musyrif* system does not imply that women are weak or helpless creatures; instead, they see it as a system that is developed to ensure their safety. The female Malay Muslim students feel valued because the community is not neglecting the issue of their safety. During my fieldwork, two of my informants shared their experiences of using the *Musyrif* system when coming home late at night. They also told me that the male committee members would ask female members to escort the female students, so they feel comfortable. These students also feel proud of this system because they find it very helpful, especially in the winter when the nights are longer. Most of the female students I knew usually came home late from the library or laboratory. The limitation of the operating schedule of night buses sometimes left them no choice but to walk home alone at night. The situation was different when they were in Malaysia because most of them would drive to wherever they were going and coming home late was not something they were concerned about. However, in the UK, they are either full-time public transport users or pedestrians. In this context, albeit busy with their assignments and examinations, the committee members volunteer and feel responsible for protecting the Malay community, and especially for ensuring the safety of female students in the host country.

The *Musyrif* system also helps us to see how Malay female students perceived the space in which they live. In my interview with Tasha, 21, a law student in Manchester, she told me that, although she heard many people say that Curry Mile was very dangerous, she found that walking there posed no problem for her as long as she walked in a group and returned home early. Having lived in Manchester for almost two years, Jasmine, an urban planning student, talks of her mixed feelings. According to her, she does not mind wandering around alone but, in her mind, doing so felt like she was breaking a taboo, because she described walking alone in Rusholme as like going through a drug place, and she felt scared. Other than that, she feels grateful because Curry Mile has so much to offer

for visitors. Therefore, as much as these students state their happiness to be living in Rusholme, they also show their awareness of the dangers of the place.

In Cardiff, there were fewer cases of crime and no severe cases in the Malay students' neighbourhood or city. Therefore, I did not see whether the MCC had a similar system to Manchester. Moreover, the neighbourhood where I lived consisted of international students from Cardiff University. The only place these students perceived as dangerous was a street near to the railway station which they always use every day. During the daytime, the street was busy with lots of students walking to the university. At night, it was dark and quiet. There was one time, in the winter, when we left the city for home at 7 pm. I was exhausted so asked my informant and also my housemate, Hidayah, to use the usual route. She told me not to use that street because there was a rumour about someone getting mugged while walking in the street at night. From the bridge, I could see that the street was dark and quiet. There was only one light in the middle of the street and it was quite difficult to see people walking there at night. I felt frightened when looking at the street from the bridge. Another reason why Cardiff does not appear to have an escort system was because the areas where the Malay students lived were scattered about. Some lived near Riverside and some in the city, which is difficult to manage. In this section, the definition of safety issues among the Malaysian student community in the UK is broader depending on the localisation and the student population. In this section, I have provided in-depth interviews with female Malay students in both cities, both of whom have shared their personal stories with me about the space they live in.

4.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, what we have seen from the material presented is that the Malay students' spaces are fashioned by combining elements such as reciprocity, Malay values and Islamic teaching. One of the essential points that makes them Malay is their collective effort to help the newly arrived students through the airport pick-up scheme, and the housing services which they have been running steadily for a number of years. The Malay students' reciprocity occurs from one generation to another – generations with which they do not have any special relations or kinship. It is all based on the trust, role and social responsibility of being a Malay abroad. I also argue that this practice of reciprocity is one where the kindness (*Budi*) is paid by exhibiting good moral behaviour and social relations

not only towards other Malays but to non-Malays as well – such as landlords and housing agents. The Malay students' willingness to work together as a community has resulted in positive housing experiences for many of the current students in my research. This ethnography could be an important guide for Malay or other international students in dealing with issues of accommodation for newly arrived students, especially when renting in the private sector. Through the concept of reciprocity, resources such as information, housing forms and services (which I have documented in this chapter) provide a new way in which transnational networks and transnational space occur in the mobility and education literature. New students from the home country can efficiently access information in advance about the place where they will go to study when there is a good platform to assist them. They can access information about the city, the university, the cost living, *halal* food and housing directly from their co-national students in the host country.

These students also emphasise their complex religious identity as a central point when negotiating gendered space. This can happen in two places; same-gender households and mixed-gender flats. In this chapter I have drawn on the study by Bruck (1997), who argues that issues of gender and body among Muslim women and unrelated males in a private space should also take into account those who live in the house and the kinship and familiarity they have among them. In general, it is argued that Malay female students in both situations seek to maintain and demonstrate their commitment towards Islamic norms and Malay cultural values while, at the same time, having to listen to their *hati* (heart), which reflects their true emotion and ambiguity when dealing with difficult situations. Thus, this study proves that Malay females also show flexibility when living with non-Muslim students by enjoying their friendship as much as they can while, at the same time, keeping their faith and Malay culture

Lastly, another interesting theme which has emerged in this chapter is Neighbourhood Watch and the *Musyrif* system organised by the MCOT. This study has also demonstrated the international students' concerns about international student safety and stories of hate crimes and victimisation in the literature. The *Musyrif* system shows the strength of the Malay values – care for each other while living abroad. Despite being busy with their commitments as students, the Malays do not neglect their social responsibilities as part of the Malay community abroad – to ensure all members' safety. My findings show that

male Malay students can also play an essential role in ensuring the female members' safety. Although they are an unrelated *mahram* for these women, they find that the safety issue should be everyone's responsibility. Hence, to understand Malay students in this space, we need to take account of all these aspects, and this ethnography is valuable because it allows us to understand the Malay women's world from both the individual and the community perspective. In the next chapter, I extend the study of transnational space by focusing on the friendships between Malays and non-Malays through their commensality practices in the host country.

CHAPTER 5

COMMENSALITY AND KINSHIP

In the previous chapters, we have seen the importance of religion in the everyday lives of female Malay students in dealing with loneliness, sociality and space-sharing. In this chapter, I extend the study of space and piety by exploring the everyday practices of food consumption and commensality among these female Malay students. According to Bell and Valentine (1997), food consumption practices can be collectively understood as daily commonplace activities such as grocery shopping, cooking, eating and drinking. Food consumption is also a part of the foodways which involve the process of behaviours and beliefs that are surrounding the production and distribution that influence the shaping of community, personality and family (Counihan 1999: 6). Commensality is a fundamentally social activity that involves eating and drinking at the same table. It is also can be defined as the exchange of sensory memories, emotions, substances and objects incarnating remembrance and feeling (Seremetakis 1994: 11).

Ethnographically, I am concerned by the role played by food in the construction of social relationships between female Malay students in Manchester and Cardiff. To investigate these elements, I explore the role of food in two spaces –the private space (home) and the public space (restaurants or cafés). I explore in particular the way food functions as a consumption site and the importance of commensality to these Malay students. My analysis consists of several elements in the study of food and commensality in relationship to the Malay community, to spaces and to identity (e.g., Bell and Valentine 1997; Brown *et al.* 2010; Carsten 1995). By using the lens of female Malaysian student migrants in the UK, I also focus on the students' consumption experiences of food – such as tastes, textures and aromas – at ethnic restaurants and co-ethnic eating places (e.g., Longhurst *et al.* 2009; Ray 2014). Thus, the first section in this chapter discusses the literature and previous works related to food, commensality and international students. The second section demonstrates my ethnographic findings on food, commensality and a friendship developed in the female Malay students' household. The third section deals with commensality and social relationships in the public space that these students established at ethnic restaurants and *Kedai Kopi Rakyat* (coffee shops). In this section, I

compare my findings with those of Krishnendu Ray (2014) on immigrant restaurateurs and Law (2001) on Filipino food among Filipino domestic workers in Hong Kong. The final section concludes the findings and discussion of this chapter. Questions that this chapter will specifically address are: How do food consumption and commensality in the host country shape the female Malaysian Muslim students' experiences in the UK? and What role do national and ethnic foods play in the social relationships they create in these settings? Through the lens of Malaysian student migrants in the UK, this chapter also contributes to the discussion on the anthropology of food, which recognises that people on the move are agents of dietary change (Mintz and Du Bois 2002).

5.1 Food, Migration and Space

Malaysia is a country that celebrates both its cultural diversity and its uniqueness. In Malaysia, the most significant ethnic group is the Malays, who belong to the tribal proto-Malays. Malays are also known to be a mixture of modern Indian and Thai, with an Arab and Chinese ancestry, who inhabit the Malay peninsular, coastal Borneo and eastern islands (Nor *et al.* 2012; Sharif *et al.* 2015). As Islam is the religion of the federation in Malaysia, consuming *halal* food and products is important for many Muslims there. Thus, Malaysia has been a critical player in the global development of *halal* certificates (Fischer 2011). The concept of *halal* means that food that is safe and permitted. For example, meat from livestock must be slaughtered according to Islamic methods. The consumption of pork and alcohol is prohibited for Muslims as it is stated in the *Quran* that pork²¹ is categorised as raw meat and the effect of alcohol²² can cause harm to individuals and society. Fischer (2011) in *The Halal Frontier* explores the engagement of middle-class Malays in contemporary *halal* in London. In his book, he notes that ‘Malays in London largely manage to negotiate religious diversity, as it contingently arises by doing something that their parents and grandparents used to do in Malaysia itself’ (Fischer 2011: 48). Fischer also demonstrates the understanding of the certification and logo of *halal* among Malays in London. He argues that the element of trust and personal relationship is important for Malays in determining the reliability of *halal* certification. In this case, the local *imam* and websites become the first sources to identify *halal* status and the ‘vegetarian’ (V) symbol as a ‘second’ reliable certificate if there is no *halal* logo. Building on Fisher’s argument above, I am interested in developing the element of trust and

personal relationships with *halal* food with the Malay kinship that occurs among my Malay informants' household in the latter section.

In the same vein, in exploring the Bangladeshi diaspora diet in East London, Mannan and Boucher (2002) explain how the increase of vegetarianism has broadened the range of food choices for Muslims in Britain. For example, many supermarkets and food companies now market products which are animal-free, and food labelled as suitable for vegetarians or approved by vegetarian society becomes the alternative for Muslims to food containing animal products. This is similar in my case, where the students I lived with in Manchester would read the product label thoroughly, especially when buying non-meat foods, since they may contain animal products such as pork or meat that has not been prepared in a *halal* way. For example, non-meat foods that may contain animal products are cheese – prepared using animal rennet – yoghurt, ice cream, sweets and some puddings – which may contain gelatine – and biscuits, cakes, and pastries which may contain animal fats. Similarly, most of my Malay informants in Manchester and Cardiff would use the 'V' sign as an alternative to help or convince them of the *halal* status of the food. Nevertheless, we should note that the 'V' sign also could be *haram* if the food contains alcohol. My findings show that Malay students in Manchester and Cardiff were also actively referring to the *halal* code website to avoid the *rasa was-was* or *syubhah* (suspicious feeling) between *halal* and *haram* food. In Cardiff, I bought a packet of croissants from Lidl for my informant, Hidayah, who generously offered to let me stay in her room during my fieldwork there. While eating the croissants, she read the ingredients and asked me where the 'V' sign was. She then told me about the E471 code stated on the packet which can be either animal or plant origin. To confirm this, we browsed the product's website and other Islamic websites. After further reading about the *halal* status from various websites, including an Islamic website, she told me that, if a product does not state that the fat is from a plant or an animal, but there is a Vegetarian sign, it is considered *halal*. However, if the product does not have specific information about the additives used, and no V sign, the status of the food is *Mushbooh* (doubtful) for consumption. She concluded that the croissants were actually not *halal* and I apologised to her for not knowing that. After the incident, she performed a *Salat al-Tawbah*²³ (repentance prayer) for eating *haram* food. This example demonstrates the common experience of many Muslim students living abroad and emphasises the importance of eating *halal* food and being a good Muslim.

Besides Muslims, other ethnicities such as Indian Hindus also have rules of dietary behaviour. The cow is symbolised as a sacred object which embraces an identity. Nevertheless, the restrictive diet among Malaysian ethnics is not a constraint for the Malaysians in enjoying their national cuisines. Malaysian food demonstrates that Malaysia is a multicultural and multiracial country. Additionally, it is essential to know that the Malay staple food is rice. There many rice dishes in Malaysia, from the different geographical states, such as *Nasi Dagang* from Terengganu and *Nasi Kerabu* from Kelantan. There is a great study by Janowski and Kerlogue (2007) which focuses on rice in South-East Asian communities. In the book, *Kinship and Food in South East Asia*, the scholars discuss the importance of rice as an essential food in the construction of kinship and how it is used for religious festivals and daily consumption. In Eastern Indonesia, the rice rituals help to create kinship and strengthen ethnicity in the village community and ethnic groups (Janowski and Kerlogue 2007). Rice is symbolised as a scarce and precious foodstuff in the Central Flores community. The study also shows that the rice ritual has created hierarchical identities in the community.

From the preparation and the taste of traditional Malaysian food, one can tell that this country is undoubtedly a melting pot of different cultures, races and ethnicities. Besides having various ethnicities such as Malay, Chinese, Indian and others, this nation also provides a rich food heritage that was highly influenced – by geographical region – by neighbouring countries such as Indonesia and Thailand. However, through the process of acculturation and assimilation with these neighbours, the taste and preparation of Malay-heritage food has undergone some alterations but maintains its ancestral characteristics (Omar *et al.* 2015; Sharif *et al.* 2015). In the northern region of Peninsular Malaysia, the states of Kedah and Perlis are profoundly influenced by the characteristics of Thai food, which is hot and spicy. Malay food in east-coast states like Kelantan and Terengganu is sweet and creamy, with glutinous rice, while the southern states like Negeri Sembilan, Melaka and Johor have been significantly influenced by Indonesians such as the Minangkabau, Bugis and Javanese whose food is associated more with the thick, sour and spicy sauces (Nor *et al.* 2012). In general, Malaysian food is known for its hot, spicy and aromatic taste. As my informants came from all over Malaysia, I documented their experiences in preparing dishes for others and how this regional identity emerged through the home-made food in their daily lives. Besides regional identity, I also recorded their

visceral experiences of food that focus on the senses such as the taste, textures and aromas associated with space. The understanding of migrant women's experiences of food and space using a visceral approach has previously been achieved by few geographical scholars. Previous work by Longhurst *et al.* (2009) on eleven migrant women of multiple nationalities in Hamilton, New Zealand, demonstrated that domestic space such as the kitchen was a comfortable place for them, while taste and aroma in cooking and sharing food was an essential way of staying connected with home. To build a good rapport with and trust by their participants, the researchers visited their homes, went to their kitchens, ate and shared food in a variety of ways. Building on the same approach as above, Neil (2015) furthers her work by focusing on Egyptian migrant women settling in Waterloo, in Belgium. In her work, she interviewed her participant while they together prepared and consumed the significant ethnic cuisine chosen by the participant. She argues that the visceral approach – such as sensual experiences within the kitchen – is very useful in accessing the knowledge, experiences sensations and moods of migrants that could not be obtained through the traditional interview process.

5.2 Commensality and Malay Kinship

In the anthropology literature on commensality, Carsten (1995), on the substance of kinship and the heat of the hearth, explains the importance of commensality and kinship in the Malay fishing community in Langkawi. In Malay households, rice is perceived as the main substance which many Malay people always cook and eat together when sharing the same house. The main idea of commensality is that all the family members in a household should return and sit and eat together full rice meals. Carsten also analyses the construction of kinship and suggests flexible ideas of relatedness in anthropology analysis and Western notions. First, she emphasises the importance of the house in South-East Asian societies. In Langkawi, the house is regarded as a resistance to division and a symbol of unity. The hearth, or *dapur*, is a place where women spend most of their time, performing activities such as cooking and preparing food. This is important for the Malay community, as rice is one of the main substances – besides blood and milk – in the reproduction of kinship and relatedness. Carsten (1995) argues that relatedness should not necessarily come from biological or social constructions but, rather, be expressed regarding procreation, and from living and eating together. Eating together is also a sign

of trust and relatedness between two parties. Sharing food is regarded as a symbol of harmony (Janowski and Kerlogue 2007: 81). In this sense, the best way to understand kinship from Carsten's analysis is that it is a process where outsiders can incorporate as kin through feeding, adopting children, marriage and living together in the same household. In her analysis, kin means when people in a house are living and consuming together (Carsten 1995:224). Building on her arguments, I analyse the relationship that emerged among these young Malay students through their cooking and consumption practices in the household.

Through reviewing some of the literature above, I am interested in understanding what happens to the idea of commensality and social relations in a shared household when young female Malay students go to the UK. However, what I learned was important during my fieldwork is that the different aspects of food are crucial in the construction of different types of relationship and community. In what follows I not only focus on cooking together and sharing food, or on the provision of the ingredients, but I also demonstrate how students talk about their visceral experiences of food – the texture, taste and aroma of food in cooking – and relate this to the different group or type of relationships that they build in the UK.

5.3 Commensality in the Private Space

5.3.1 Commensality in Non-Malay Households

Brown *et al.* (2010) note that there is little knowledge of international students' experiences of food consumption in the host country. As well as the increase in international student numbers, contemporary research on their food experiences abroad is important, as there is a changing landscape in source markets and societies from both sending and receiving countries (Brown *et al.* 2010). Thus international students should develop specific strategies, including food procurement and purchasing strategies, to handle long- and short-term migration (Vilela *et al.* 2014). Since my informants are female Malay Muslim students, it is therefore essential to understand the kind of food experiences, strategies and preferences they have in the new environment in which they live, especially when they live with non-Malays or non-Muslims.

Findings from research by Brown *et al.* (2010) show that international postgraduate students in England preferred to consume home-cooked national dishes at home as these foods are considered healthy, tasty and emotionally comforting. The students in Brown *et al.*'s study indicated that eating the local Western food (such as ready-prepared meals and fast food) was harmful to health and not pleasant. In contrast to the above findings, a study by Vilela *et al.* (2014) shows that there is an increase in fast-food/takeaway-food consumption among Portuguese students in London. The changes for the majority of Portuguese students from a Mediterranean diet to a Western-style diet was mainly because of the difficulties in finding the fresh, quality ingredients needed for Mediterranean diets such as fresh fish, fresh vegetables and fruit. A majority of these students had moved away from the family home for the first time when entering university. When students start at university, they are experiencing a transition process between adolescence and adulthood, and this leads to changes in identity from that of a child to that of an independent student, which requires them to make their own decisions on matters of food consumption (Bell and Valentine 1997; Blichfeldt and Gram 2013). Thus, changes in their living arrangements and life transition could affect the students' food consumption, especially who were responsible for food preparation for the first time (Brevard and Ricketts 1996; Papadaki *et al.* 2007; Vilela *et al.* 2014). In the next section, I explain how the living arrangements of Malay students affect their food consumption and identity in the UK context.

Like any other international students, the informants in my research were also facing this transition process and demonstrated the complexity of food consumption and commensality in the host country. Most of these female Malay students in my study indicated that this was their first time living abroad; only a few of my postgraduate students had already experienced living abroad. Thus, many of them experience the transition in food consumption and commensality. In Malaysia, there is a greater diversity in urban Malaysian food habits. Before coming to the UK, these students lived with their families or in boarding schools, later entering local colleges for A levels. At home, they would help their mother in the kitchen to prepare the food. Although they mentioned that they helped their mothers in food preparation, they emphasised that they did not take part in the cooking process. Their mother did most of the actual cooking. What they meant by 'helping their mother in the kitchen' was assisting in the preparation – such as chopping the vegetables, laying the dinner table and washing the dishes. During the meal, their

family would all sit and eat together, especially at dinner, when all family members are at home. At lunchtime, it would be difficult, as most of the family members would be at work or school. Only those who remain at home would have home-cooked lunch together with other family members; this applies to students whose mothers are housewives.

Likewise, when these students entered A-level college, they also mentioned that they did not cook in their lodgings because student accommodation in universities or colleges in Malaysia do not provide kitchen space for students to prepare their meals. Some of them said that they have a slow cooker, though this does not help them to make a proper meal like rice with a side dish. As a result, they would have their lunch and dinner in the canteen, in restaurants or at food stalls near their college or university. Therefore, these students' consumption and commensality experiences in Malaysia were profoundly influenced by their role as a daughter who assists her mother in the kitchen for a family meal and as a student who consumes outside food due to the absence of kitchen facilities in university accommodation. In both situations, we can conclude that these students had neither experience of living together with strangers in a rental property nor cooking for the family and others when in Malaysia.

However, things get more complicated when these students go to the UK for study. This is the moment when these students will experience the transition from someone who has never cooked or does not know how to cook to someone who has to prepare meals for herself and other household members. When these students come to the UK, they live in rental accommodation with other Malays. Only some live in university accommodation with other international students. Therefore, it is essential to understand the role of food and commensality where these students live. In this case, the Malay students' commensality and consumption experiences can be separated into two situations. First, those who live with other Malays may have fewer intercultural adjustment problems compared to those who live with international students. However, they might experience a new role as a household member – to commit to certain rules or agreements when living as a Malay in the same household, such as culinary divisions that lead to the construction of social relationships. Second, those who live with international students, sharing the communal areas and kitchen, may experience cultural difference and learn to negotiate food storage and space division in the fridge in order to retain their Muslim identity.

For example, Jasmine, a 22-year-old urban planning student from Selangor, Malaysia at the University of Manchester, shared her experiences of living with international students in university accommodation during her first year of study. The household consisted of eight members, of whom she was the only Muslim. At first, she was very anxious because it was her first time living with non-Muslims. She had to explain to them what she could and could not share with them while living in one unit – especially when her housemates decided to share the cost of buying kitchenware such as pot and pans:

When they proposed to share the pots and pans, and I was like.. umm. I said no, which was a horrible way to start with your housemates but that's one thing, you know, we had to differentiate. There is a *halal* section in the fridge that I got for such a very long time.

Since Jasmine was the only Muslim and ate *halal* meat in the house, the other household members decide to provide her with a small compartment in the freezer to keep her *halal* meats separate and to avoid confusion between *halal* and non-*halal* meats. Therefore, though living with others, Jasmine had her own pot and pan, and only cooked food for herself. She also mentioned that she usually ate alone in her room as other members had different meal preferences and different eating times. They only used the communal area to play games and have snacks. In this case, the idea of commensality and consumption occurred in different ways, whereby Jasmine would only have a light meal with others in the communal area when they were playing games and would have a proper meal alone due to difference meal preferences. The situation was similar for Suzanna, who lived in private housing. A PhD student at Cardiff University, Suzanna stated that, although she lived with Malaysian Chinese students, they did not eat together due to her busy schedules and religious boundaries. When I visited her house, she told me she usually cooked large quantities of one dish and froze them so that she had a stock of food for a week.

Kak Rina, this is my one-week stock of chicken curry (showing her freezer compartment to me). You know, sometimes I feel tired and lazy, so I just reheat the food and eat it with rice. I usually eat alone because I always come home late from my office.

From her explanation, we can see that Suzanna preferred to have a home-cooked dish rather than eating out every day. Due to her busy schedule, she decided to cook a week's worth of her favourite dish and freeze it. Eating home-cooked frozen food shows the

transition she had to deal with in her busy life as a PhD student abroad. Moreover, she finds eating rice and Malay cuisine at home gave her a sense of comfort because she is a *tekak melayu* (Malay taste) person and rice could make her feel *rasa kenyang* (full) and *sedap* (tasty) compared to other cuisines. As Brown *et al.* (2010) stated above, eating a national home-cooked dish at home was perceived as healthy, tasty and emotionally comforting for international students. However, the impact of this was that she did not have time to cook and eat together with her housemates. Another reason why she ate alone at home was due to her identity as a Muslim and because her two Chinese housemates were siblings and commonly shared their food.

From the above findings we can see that, besides religion, another reason why commensality among Malays is unlikely to happen when living with non-Malays due to their busy schedules and different meal preferences and eating time. In this situation, my findings echo those of Delphy (1980), who suggested that home is a distribution centre for its household members where different forms of consumption take place, such as individual and collective consumption. In Jasmine and Suzanna's cases, the collective consumption or commensality only occurred when the students had an activity together rather than the food itself actively bringing people together. The above cases are examples from my fieldwork that demonstrate how female Malay students share the same kitchen and house with non-Muslim housemates. In the next section I analyse my ethnography experiences of living in a house with Malay students, which resulted in the production of different types of social relationship between us all.

5.3.2 *Commensality in All-Malay Households*

In this section, I look at the importance of food to social relationships among young Malays in the UK. Previous literature on Malay food and kinship has significantly highlighted the house as a site of unity – resistance to division and sharing the *dapur* (hearth) and rice could produce kinship (Carsten 1995 : Janowski and Kerlogue 2007). In my research, I argue that the house and especially the *dapur* (kitchen) is not just a place for Malays to share food, but also a space for them to reduce their stress caused by their studies and maintain harmonious forms of interpersonal relationships through cooking and food preparation. In searching for the meaning of food, Long (2004) discovers its voice through the foodways model – which includes eating and food production – such

as product, performance, procurement, conceptualisation, preservation preparation, presentation, consumption and clean up (Long 2004: 121). She argues that, to understand the meaning of food, one should focus on the activities in preparing the food rather than on the ingredients of the dish. For example, attention should be on those who make the dish. This would help to show us which specific memories, relationships, cultural histories and personal life stories of an individual are especially important. She also suggests that cultural, ethnic and regional identities are displayed through the selection of dishes, ingredients and spices and through ways of eating. These meanings are fluid, changing over time and circumstance, and being shaped by the settings and social dynamics in which we express them (Long 2004: 119).

During my ethnographic fieldwork in Manchester and Cardiff, I had the opportunity to cook many Asian and Western dishes with my informants. After a year living with female Malay students in the two cities, I found out that *kepercayaan* (trust) is the key in their everyday consumption. This element is entangled through the models of food consumption and commensality that are active in a Malay's household. The female Malaysian Muslim students with whom I worked preferred to cook at home every day and have lunch or dinner together. My findings show that these students not only live in one house but they also develop their friendship as housemates through cooking and preparing food for each other. When I moved into the house, I was the oldest among them. Since I am the newest member of the house and the oldest student, the informants addressed me as *kakak* to create a fictive kinship. As Karim (1995: 37) notes, 'as if to recreate intimacy and familiarity of consanguineal and affinal ties in local groupings in other spheres of life'. According to Janoswki and Kerlogue (2007), this practice is evident in everyday life in central Seberang; kinship relationships are invoked regarding the form of address used when speaking to anyone, whether there is formal kinship or not. As I lived with them, I learned that the most critical thing that connected us was the food. The Malay students with whom I worked often built their trust and friendship by sharing and cooking together for each other. These students each have their role in the house which makes trust important in notions of friendship. Trust is established by each other through the sharing of space, food and utility bills. Every month, the household members paid the rent to Anisa, as she was responsible for communication with the landlord and agent, while Afiqa was in charge of the Internet bill and Afia for the water and gas bills. Besides sharing the utility bills, we were also sharing the cost of food. This is because everyone

would cook for all household members correspondingly. Every month, we would share the cost of the ingredients and groceries such as chicken, fruit, vegetables and rice. Everyone in the house would have kept a record of the cost and was happy to pay for the food that they shared. Thus, Malay students also learn to be responsible as household members, committed to domestic tasks and contributing to the domestic expenses. Besides cooking, these students also demonstrated their regional identity through the menus and the ingredients they brought from their home country. This gives us some idea of how the role of food in the transnational education migration process plays a part in Malay students' experiences. According to Tanner (1971), eating together is a sign of trust and 'relatedness' between two parties. Here I suggest that the friendship and trust among these students was not only about the sharing of the food, eating together and sharing the *dapur* but also about the roles they played in preparing the food and the sharing of the ingredients they brought from Malaysia.

5.3.3 Food Sharing and Regional Identity

Ethnic food plays a significant role in shaping culture and identity. When people move or migrate to a new place, food is one of the ways for them to maintain contact with the home country. At the same time, they also encounter new food, culture and people in the new place. The fact is that these students, when they come to the UK, do not just create a Malay *national* identity but also use food to express their *regional* identity. This is important because it would be easy to assume that, when these students go to the UK, they either emphasise their Malay national identity, or new forms of religious identity or both. However, what I see now is that they also cultivate other elements of who they are, this time in relationship to their regional identities. This contributes to the wider argument of this thesis because it demonstrates that the students work hard to maintain, develop and sustain multiple aspects of their being in the UK: they go to *usrah* and become members of Islamic organisations but, at the same time, continue to emphasise their regional backgrounds.

The Malay travellers would take the basic Malay cooking ingredients with them to the destination country – this is the difference between their culture and their environment. Basic Malay ingredients such as dried shrimp, shrimp paste, tamarind, anchovies, dried chillies are typical foods which occasionally travel in Malays' luggage. As well as the

above ingredients, food pastes and chilli sauce are considered as 'lifesavers' for Malay students because they provide instant cooking ingredients in a paste and only need meat or fish to be cooked with them. My students also told me much about the availability of food from senior students who had returned to Malaysia and also from family or friends who used to study abroad. This tells us that these students' experience is also a part of the transnational migration process in which they would refer to returnee students for information in the host country.

After the summer break, my housemates in Rusholme would bring Malay cooking ingredients with them. While in Malaysia, they would discuss what kind of ingredients each would take to avoid all buying the same food and to control the weight of their luggage. When the list was prepared, they would buy them at their nearest market or grocery.

Anisa, one of my housemates, told me that, a few days before she went back to Manchester, her mum would take her to the supermarket to buy food stocks for her. In the kitchen, she showed me a 2-litre bottle of black sweetened soy sauce (*kicap manis*) she had brought from Malaysia. I was surprised because the bottle was huge and this sauce meant a lot to her. She said her family had been consuming this sauce for so many years, so it was necessary when she cooked many Malay dishes in Manchester. It was not surprising to me because, in the house where we lived, Anisa was known for her Malaysian spicy soy sauce chicken dish, which she always prepared for us when it was her turn to do the cooking. According to her, the sweetness of the black soy sauce could also be used to reduce the spiciness of the food. Thus, the taste of the dish she cooked had a balanced mixture of spicy and sweet. This shows how balancing the taste of food using ingredients from home was vital in satisfying the taste of home in the host country. The students would play with their local food ingredients and adjust the flavour to suit the taste of the food they consumed when at home in Malaysia. As Longhurst *et al.* (2009: 342) argue, the 'taste, texture, touch, look and smell of food may not be exactly the same when it is created in a new home, but it does so in a visceral (deep inward feelings) way'.

Two other housemates, Afifa and Afia, also shared the food they brought from the home country. Interestingly, there was some food that was specially brought from different geographical regions of Malaysia. Afia shared the story of how she purchased *tom yum*

paste in the northern state of Malaysia, Perlis, near to the Thai border. According to her, many Thai restaurants in Malaysia use this *tom yum* paste in their cooking – something which not many people realise. Since Perlis is located near the border with Thailand, it is easier for Malay citizens to buy the products from Thailand at a lower price. The journey from her home in Selangor to the northern state, Perlis, is 300 miles by car. Every year, Afia and her family would travel to Perlis for the Eid celebration at her grandfather's place and go shopping at the Thai border as well.

My experience in Cardiff was particularly interesting because the food that my Malay informants had brought caught my attention. In the fridge, I saw that there were frozen torch ginger flowers, curry leaves, lime leaves and frozen *Pengat Durian* (sweetened durian pulp) all of which were nicely packed in a plastic bag brought from Malaysia. I was so impressed with how they stored the food and pack it carefully in the fridge. One of the housemates, Atie, a Penang-born Malay, told me that her mother helped her to pack the food. Penang is a state famous in Asia for its good street food. Penang Laksa is a popular dish which is also known as Assam Laksa. It consists of thick round rice noodles and is served with mackerel soup. The main feature is tamarind and frozen torch ginger flower. It is a noodle soup with a sour taste. There are many types of Laksa in Malaysia depending on the state, and what distinguishes the Laksa are the soup base and the noodles.

Whenever Atie felt homesick and longed for home food, she would cook Penang Laksa using the torch ginger flowers that she brought from Malaysia or heat up the frozen *Pengat Durian* (sweetened durian pulp) when she feels a craving for durian. She also told me that she learned to cook Penang Laksa from her mother after coming to Cardiff and had serve it to her friends for few times, pleased that they liked it. As we know, Durian is identified as the king of fruit in South-East Asian countries. It is also famous for its strong (and rather repulsive!) odour and thorn-covered husk. Durian fruit is used in much Malay cooking. According to Atie, 'It's hard to get durian here (UK), and even if it's sold here, the price of the durian slices can be too high'. Atie's statement also proves that she is also driven by the need for frugality, a typical condition experienced by many international students, mainly from Asia, living in developed Western countries (Brown *et al.* 2010).

In the same vein, in Manchester, a Malay student from Borneo Island, Yasmin, also brought Sarawak Laksa paste in her luggage all the way from Sarawak. According to her, Sarawak Laksa is easier to make because it does not require as many ingredients as Laksa from Malaysia. The most important ingredient for making Sarawak Laksa is the paste, which is manufactured from an extensive range of components. The paste is the key ingredient for the delicious taste of Laksa Sarawak soup. Other ingredients are rice vermicelli, prawns, chicken, coconut milk, coriander and bean sprouts. Other than Laksa paste, she also brought the famous tourist product in Sarawak – Sarawak layer cake.

During my visit to her apartment, I saw the famous Sarawak layer cake on the dining table. I asked her whether she knew how to make it and the conversation became especially interesting when the students who were my housemates went to Yasmin's house in Bintulu, Sarawak, for a holiday during the summer break in their experience buying Sarawak layer cake at a Salhah shop. The Dayang Salhah Layer Cake Shop is a unique attraction for tourists because customers have to travel in a *sampan* (boat) across the Sarawak River to get to the shop. They shared their thrilling experience of going in a sampan because the sampan itself is quite an adventure. The sampan fare is very cheap – only 50 cents one way. They also had a chance to taste all the cake flavours at the sampling table. The texture and colour of the layer cake reminded them of their beautiful memories visiting Sarawak that Yasmin was so proud of.

Besides cooking ingredients, Yasmin also brought tea and palm sugar (known as *gula* in Borneo) to Manchester in her luggage. When I went to her house for a gathering, she would serve three-layer tea as a signature beverage. I remembered I used to drink three-layer tea sometimes back in Malaysia but did not know that it originally came from Sarawak. In Sarawak, three-layer tea is known as *The C Peng*, and is a local speciality drink served throughout Sarawak. After visiting Yasmin's house several times, my housemates and I often had an opportunity to eat Sarawak Laksa and Three-Layer Tea prepared by Yasmin and her housemates, which we considered to be an extraordinary authentic meal from Borneo.

The food that these students brought from Malaysia was not seen as a symbol of national identity, but told us a lot about their family background and regional identity. My findings also show that regional foods were more important in satisfying the students'

longing for home. Besides sharing these ingredients from the home country, the students also worked together when preparing the food. The following section looks at the cooking rotas used at home by female Malay students, who make the food as an important aspect of their friendship.

5.3.4 *The Cooking Rota*

The cooking rota or culinary division of labour is a domestic task whereby the household members agree to take a shift and cook and prepare a meal for each other. In this task, the students not only share the cost of the ingredients but also put their trust in each other to cook and prepare the meal for the new households that they meet in the host country, which also means that they learn to prepare and cook food for someone who has no biological kinship to them in the household. The cooking schedule in a house also reveals the Malay students' friendship and the extent to which food consumption and preparation play a role in their everyday activities. Anisa suggested the idea of this culinary division. She first learned about this activity from her former housemates with whom she lived in her first year of study. However, the activity only lasts for few weeks because of dietary changes among the members of the household. The barriers happened when some of them started to adopt a healthy lifestyle (eating brown rather than white rice); there was also a member who could not commit to cooking for others because of a tight study schedule. This task, which could bring the people together, may also potentially rupture the relationship within the households. The changing patterns of food consumption and personal lifestyle choice resulted in them eating separately, which is often perceived as a rejection of the household's food and the family (Bell and Valentine 1997). Despite what happened in her previous house, Anisa tried to implement this idea of the culinary division of labour with her current housemates as a way for them to strengthen their friendship and socialise through food. The reason why these students agreed to this routine was that sharing the food was cost-efficient and they felt happy and emotionally comforted when someone was preparing food for them. Especially when living abroad, having a cooking rota was good because they did not have to cook every day. The most important thing was that these students became closer to the food-sharing and everyday commensality.

After moving to her new home, Anisa and her housemates managed to maintain their cooking rota. They would take a turn and each pick at least one day when they would be free to cook for their housemates. The students were free to decide what menu they wanted to cook – usually, their own favourite meal. Anisa loved to cook *Ayam Masak kicap* (black soy chicken) because it only needed black soy sauce, chicken, chilli and onion to cook it. They also used this task as an opportunity to experiment with their cooking skills. In Cardiff, Zaty, 21 years old and an optometrist student, frequently asked her mother for recipes and tried to cook her family dish for her housemates. Sometimes, she complained if the food did not taste the same as her mother's dish. On weekdays, the students would cook around 5 or 6 pm, after returning from class. This was not a problem for them because they were studying the same course at the university and their daily schedules were not much different each day. The cooking routine was suspended during reading and examination weeks because the students needed to focus on their studies. If someone could not cook on her duty day either because she was too busy or feeling unwell, another person could replace her. Table 5.1 is an example of the cooking schedule in the houses I live during my fieldwork:

Table 5.3.4 Sample Cooking Rota

Day	City	
	Manchester	Cardiff
Sunday	Free/anyone	Sakeena
Monday	Ireena	Atie
Tuesday	Afiqa	Bot
Wednesday	Anisa	Sakeena
Thursday	Ireena	Atie
Friday	Afia	Bot
Saturday	Free/anyone	Free/anyone

In Manchester, as a new member of the household and knowing that these students each have a cooking shift, I volunteered myself to cook for two days a week as my contribution to the household chores. Since they did not have a schedule indicating who will run errands etc., I established the habit of accompanying the students on their trips to the market and to buy groceries. As we can see, there is a similarity for the groups in both

Manchester and Cardiff on Saturdays, where everyone is free to have their meal at home or to eat out. This is because, at the weekend, the students would go into town together – perhaps to a car-boot sale or to the stadium to watch a football match – or hang out with their friends at their favourite restaurant. They would have lunch or dinner out rather than cooking at home. On Sunday, there would usually be someone who would volunteer to cook and others would help in the kitchen. I occasionally wandered into the kitchen to help. While helping them, I took the opportunity to conduct informal interviews with them by asking where they got the recipe from and what the food meant to them. My ethnographic findings also show that cooking and eating Malay dishes together could also help to overcome stress in their studies. For example, when exams were just around the corner, they would plan the menu in advance, mostly Malay cuisine, and share the cost of the ingredients. They would cook together in the kitchen, laughing, talking and gossiping about local and international artists. This activity is a way for them to relieve their stress before an exam and also to overcome their longing for Malaysian food. This is an important dimension of the contribution that geography and migration studies make to our understanding of female student migrants in their relationship with their kitchen, through food, through the home, through the visceral realm (Longhurst *et al.* 2009). Moreover, it is also economical because the students can eat many national meals by sharing the cost of the food. This might be different in Malaysia where my informants told me that they could simply go to any local restaurant and order the local meals that they wanted to eat together. According to Farah, ‘It is easier in Malaysia – whenever you wish to eat, you can just go and buy the food that you want on the street or in a restaurant. Here, you have to cook because the options are not available’. Thus, the above demonstrates the importance of cooking together and sharing food for the Malay students’ friendship and education.

5.3.5 *Food Preparation*

In the previous section, I explained how the Malay students drew up a cooking rota in their daily lives and how the role was created when they study abroad. In this section, I discuss and analyse how these students deal with food preparation issues due to the new tasks they have agreed to take on in the house in the UK. As I explain in the above section, Malays’ taste characteristics are highly influenced by the region they come from in Malaysia. Therefore, when these students lived in one house, they would potentially meet

members from different parts of Malaysia. The new Malay housemates may come from the southern region, such as Johor; some may come from far away in Borneo, like Sarawak. Some may eat spicy food; others may prefer sweet food. Thus, it is not always easy to accommodate each other's tastes or needs in the cooking and preparation of food.

In this study, the Malay students were well informed and aware of each other's food allergies and tastes. Afia, one of the housemates, explained how her cooking and food preparation decisions were affected by one of these factors:

In this house, we try to avoid cooking seafood because two of our housemates have food allergies.

Similarly, Dayah, 28, from Cardiff also stated that she would make sure that the food she cooked and prepared would suit all her housemates' tastes so that they would eat her dish without feeling uncomfortable.

There is only one person who can't eat if the food is too spicy – the others can eat spicy food. So whenever I cook, I make sure that my cooking is not too spicy so all of us can eat.

My interviews have shown that these students manage to tolerate change and are prepared to familiarise themselves with each member's food habits. Thus, living together and cooking for each other formed a great understanding of their friends' food restrictions, created consideration through food preparation and trust in each other. They became more tolerant when preparing food each day. Another aspect of tolerance in food preparation in my research also analysed it in relation to the emotions.

Things became more noticeable when I lived in Cardiff, my second fieldwork site. There I lived in a shared room with my informant, Hidayah, a doctoral student in Media Studies at Cardiff University. She is 28 years old and from Terengganu, Malaysia. Before she came to the UK, Hidayah worked as a lecturer in Media Studies at a private college in Kuala Lumpur. As in Manchester, Hidayah and I were the oldest members of the household. So the rest of the household would call us *kakak*. Her busy schedule and status as a PhD student make her presence in the kitchen difficult. The younger members showed their understanding by cooking food for her every day according to their rota.

According to Hidayah, she would sometimes cook and buy food for her housemates because she felt *rasa bersalah* (guilty). This emotion (see Beatty 2013 on the complexity of emotions) showed in her actions and facial expressions. There were a few times when I accompanied her to buy a huge sausage from the *halal* restaurant near our house. In the kitchen, she would cut the sausage into small pieces and invite her housemates to eat together. On the way home, she told me she felt grateful for having such good and understanding housemates. We can see the ways in which these students negotiate their collective identity not only by eating together in the same house but also by taking care of each other's meals. I remember that there was one night when we arrived home late from the library; we went into the kitchen to look for something to eat. Then we saw that there was a proper meal of rice and a side dish – chicken curry with vegetables – prepared on the table. The portion was just enough for two of us. Though I was living there for a short period, the students accepted me as their guest and 'new' housemate by preparing food for both of us in their everyday meal. As Carsten (2004: 40) has noted, in many parts of South-East Asia, the consumption of rice meals, 'not only strengthens existing ties of kinship between household members, it can create such ties with those who recently come to share residence'. In this case, even though Hidayah rarely cooks in the house, she still responsible for taking charge of the electric bills and water in the house every month.

I conclude that this household was not just about the relation between food, trust, friendship and who cooks and who eats but also about the emotional aspect –how people compensate for their feeling of guilt by occasionally cooking. The next section explains the Malay students' commensality and consumption experiences in public spaces and their relationship with the transnational community.

5.4 Commensality in Public Places

5.4.1 Eating in Ethnic Restaurants

While eating home-cooked food prepared by housemates can develop a sense of tolerance, friendship and comfort, I argue that eating in public spaces creates nostalgia and develops transnational networks; such occasions are also a source of pleasure and entertainment for students. If we are looking from an outsider perspective, we might assume that the primary culinary concern of Malay students in the UK would be the

danger of inadvertently consuming non-*halal* food. I am suggesting that this is not the case or a key issue in Manchester because most of them live in parts of the city which, in many respects, represent a *halal* environment. In my research, Malay students migrating to Manchester did not need to start thinking about *halal* food in great detail because it was quite widely available. The part of Manchester where these Malay students lived was quite clearly a *halal* environment. In my field site – Rusholme or the Curry Mile – it was quite challenging to get non-*halal* meat as the area was occupied by so many *halal* and Muslim-owned restaurants. For a student in this context, the search for *halal* food was not something to worry about. I argue that their identity can be complicated when they go to places or events that serve both *halal* and non-*halal* food. For example, these students emphasise more their Muslim identity when they go to towns that have no or limited *halal* food and would go for the vegetarian option while, when they went to *halal* restaurants, they were more likely to follow their regional or Malay identity by eating rice and spicy food. They would also ask for chilli sauce or pepper when consuming *halal* food to suit the local taste. Wherever they went, a rice meal would always be their top preference when choosing a restaurant. Similarly, during the housewarming events that I attended in Manchester and Cardiff, rice would be served as the main dish, accompanied by *sambal* or meat cooked in coconut milk. Meat was the most valued side dish to accompany the rice during the feast (Janowski and Kerlogue 2007). The chicken or meat dish was sometimes cooked in response to the housemates' request or because it was the cook's speciality. Besides rice and side dishes, an instant salad which replaces the *ulam-ulaman* (Malay salad) was frequently chosen as an extra side dish to replace cooked vegetables. These students loved to eat collectively with their close friends.

Interestingly, since there is a substantial number of Malaysian tourists and students in Rusholme every year, there were two Afghan-Arab restaurants which competed to meet the Malaysian students' taste. The rivalry between immigrant restaurant owners in this research contributed to the interesting discussion on working with tastes among immigrant restauranteurs. Krishnendu Ray (2014), in his outstanding work on immigrant restauranteurs and the American city, focuses on the efforts and struggles of the immigrant restauranteur, Rasool, who changed his restaurant's name from Taj Mahal to Bread & Butter, and included some Western meals on the menu. In his work, Ray (2014: 108) argues that 'The immigrant restauranteur struggl[es] to name and define their project under discursive pressure of conceptions of taste and its relationship to race'.

In my case, these Afghan-Arab restaurants are not famous because they provide the spicy food that many Malays usually eat, but because they came up with brilliant marketing strategies. Things become more complex when a restaurant's management offers the best deal exclusively for Malaysian customers. In my interview with a female informant, 23-year-old Anna from Manchester, there was a fascinating history of two famous Middle Eastern restaurants along Curry Mile that were famous eating places for Malaysian students and tourists:

There is a history of these two restaurants; this is just word of mouth from the employees, I am not sure how close the truth is. Previously, there was only Al Jazeera. Then the owners of the restaurant fell out, so Taiba opened. So they competed. Now, I hear that both restaurants provide free drinks. I love Jazeera because the rice is moist and tasty. I have also tried a few other restaurants here – Afghan – but the taste is a bit different.

While Anna stated her preference for eating at Al Jazeera because of the moist and tasty rice, other Malay informants in this research felt the opposite. Syahida, 23, and her friend, Anisa, found that Taiba has a unique menu that other Middle Eastern restaurants do not serve.

We always go to Taiba because this is the only restaurant in the Curry Mile that serves delicious and fresh grilled fish. We know how hard it is to eat grilled fish here (Manchester) in a restaurant.

According to Syahida, the main reason why she goes to Taiba is because it serves grilled sea bass. When I went to Taiba with my informants, they suggested that I order it too. As Anisa said:

I love to eat grilled fish in Taiba because the price is lower and includes the rice. The sea bass is big enough that I can take away half of the fish for dinner. So it is like I am paying one price for my lunch and dinner together.

Many informants in my research also agreed that they loved to eat at these two Middle Eastern restaurants. Most of them preferred to eat at Taiba because the texture of the rice and the menu were exceptional because it served grilled sea bass. According to them, it was hard to eat grilled fish in the UK, and this reminded them of eating it in Malaysia. Besides, the students also mentioned the economical element wherein the restaurant

offered a huge portion of food at a lower price and with a free drink. As Brown (2009) argues, the cost of the food in the host country could affect the enjoyment of eating similar food primarily for students on a tight budget. Thus, my findings show that the affordable price and the large portion of food provided by the restaurant owners gave pleasure to the Malay students in Manchester. At the same time, the menu provided by the restaurant also created a sense of nostalgia for and comfort of their home dish. Apart from the above reasons, the Malay students also felt like privileged customers when the restaurant displayed the special offer in their native language.



Figure 5.1 Grilled sea bass and rice in Taiba – the primary choice for many Malaysian students in Manchester.

One of the ways in which this restaurant received many Malaysian customers was by displaying a special offer in their target customers' native language. The first time that I went to Taiba was exhilarating because I found this notice in front of the restaurant in the Malay language:



From the picture, we can conclude that communication – in this case a foreign language – is an important way for restaurants to gain access to their target customers and make the Malay students feel emotional when reading the promotion in their native language. Jonathan Swift (1991) argues for the importance of using a foreign language in marketing. Sharing a culture and language in a market can create a sense of closeness to the customers and could enhance their sensitivity to customs, tastes and patterns of consumption (Swift 1991). Besides the promotion in the Malay language, the restaurant's staff also spoke Malay fluently. There was a funny incident when my informants and I went to Taiba for dinner. Once we entered the restaurant, the waiter, as usual, greeted us in the Malay language by asking '*Makan sini atau tapao?*' (To eat here or take away?). I was about to laugh because he used the word *tapao*, which is primarily used by Malaysian and Singaporean Chinese. *Tapao* means 'to take away' or 'to pack'. Somehow this situation and dialogue reminded them of how it felt to eat in Malay restaurants and explained how the transnational relationship between the restaurant staff and the Malay students took place in public space.

Thus, Malay students dining out experiences are predominantly about tasting international cuisines in the host country. However, I argue that the selection of food consumption and restaurants happened in complex ways to these students' identity. Their choice of food was connected with their religious diet and the taste of home. The students also emphasised their identity in multifaceted ways. They shifted to the vegetarian menu when a restaurant had no halal option and demonstrated their regional identity more when eating in the *halal* restaurants. Moreover, the Malay students also established good networks with other transnational communities such as Afghan restaurants, which

specialised in providing Arab-style food in Arabic-named restaurants to Malaysian customers.

5.4.2 *Saturday Breakfast at Kedai Kopi Rakyat*

In Manchester, every Saturday morning I followed my informant housemate, Afiqa, who works part-time as a teaching assistant at Manchester Malaysian School (a supplementary school serving the Malay community). I decided to follow her because I find this school an exciting place in which I was able to explore the Malaysian community space and activities. At the same time, Afiqa suggested that I attend the job interview since there was a vacant position for a teacher that required a postgraduate student. This was how I started to collect my data and to work there as a teacher every Saturday. The session ran every Saturday from 10.00 am to 1.30 pm. The journey took us 40 minutes on the bus from Rusholme to the Abraham Moss Community School in North Manchester, which serves a multi-racial community aged between 3 and 16 years. On the bus, I saw a few female and male Malay students who also work as teachers at the school. The school building has three floors. The ground-floor entrance has an automatic sliding door, in which the teachers and parents always got stuck when trying to enter the building as the door was locked at the weekend. When we arrived at the school, we needed to wait for someone inside the building to open for us. Afiqa said this was not something new for them. While waiting for the entrance door to be opened, the teachers would talk to the parents and say hello to the children. The children's parents were mostly professional Malaysians from middle-class families. Some worked as doctors; others were postgraduate students who came to the UK with their families.

On Saturdays, the building was occupied by the Malaysian and Libyan supplementary-school community. The Libyan community classes were held on the ground and first floors, while the Malaysian community classes were on the third level. During the break, both communities shared the canteen but at different times. When we entered the building, Afiqa showed me the canteen on the ground floor. There were four booths set up by Malay women selling home-cooked Malaysian breakfasts such as *Nasi Lemak* (coconut rice in banana leaves), fried noodles and traditional Malay *kueh* (savouries or sweets). At the same time, several Malay parents were enjoying breakfast and chatting with each other. Afiqa told me that this 'canteen' was called *Kedai Kopi Rakyat* and was

initiated by the Malaysian Community of Cheetham Hill, Manchester. According to her, the Manchester Malaysian School organisational community was active in fundraising as a part of the school events. The school charity team worked together with the Malay ladies in Manchester to do the fundraising. Most of the events would be held in the *Kedai Kopi Rakyat*, the school's canteen. The Malay ladies would cook delicious Malay food and sell it in the canteen. Most of the sellers are Malay women who had been living in the UK for more than five years. Some of them were married to locals and others were housewives whose husbands worked as doctors or engineers.

The *Kedai Kopi Rakyat* was not only attended by parents but also attracted Malay students from both the University of Manchester and Salford University. Most went there to eat a Malay breakfast, and some helped to sell the Malay dish for charity fundraising. Besides, the Manchester Malaysian School also provided part-time job opportunities for Malay students who were interested in teaching Malay and Islamic subjects to the children. This is how the Malay students in Manchester got to know and kept in touch with the rest of the Malay community residing in Manchester.

The *Kedai Kopi Rakyat* was a social space where sharing food and drinks helped to bond the Malays into a community. It functioned as a space of commensality, and a site of interactions and networking between the existing Malay migrants and temporary Malay student migrants in Manchester. The role that food consumption plays in strengthening the bond between international students and migrants from different generations has barely received any discussion in the literature. Janowski and Kerlogue (2007) explain the importance of shared food consumption in strengthening community links. They describe how Malay ceremonies such as communal feasts – *kenduri* – unite the community in eating together. Lisa Law (2001) explored the consumption of Filipino food by Filipino domestic workers in Hong Kong. Using the geography of senses and migrant women as embodied subjects, she demonstrates that eating Filipino food ceremonially at the Central known as Little Manila on Sundays become a home from home for thousands of Filipino migrant women in Hong Kong. By adopting the concept of ‘we are where we eat’, she argues that food acquires its meaning through the place in which it is assembled and eaten.

In my case, the aroma of *sambal* and *daun pisang* (banana leaves) of *nasi lemak* (coconut rice) created a sense of home to many of the Malay informants in my research. Every morning, people would rush to the canteen to buy the *nasi lemak* because they could smell the aroma of *sambal* from the entrance. Some teachers would buy *nasi lemak* before the class started and some would ask the seller to reserve the food for them. They also enjoyed eating the *nasi lemak* using their fingers. The ambience in the canteen, surrounded with Malays and Malay food stalls made them feel comfortable and evoked the memory of having a Malaysian breakfast back home. It was also a space for them to publicly perform their Malay identity by speaking Malay and eating Malay food together. The taste of the spicy *sambal* in *nasi lemak* in banana leaves evoked a sense of home. Here I echo Bell and Valentine (1997) who state that ethnic cuisine only becomes a self-conscious, subjective reality when ethnic boundaries are crossed.

In conclusion, *Kedai Kopi Rakyat* was an important site for the collective identity of Manchester's Malay community. Most importantly, this space and the ethnic cuisine played an important part in articulating this sense of community which existed between the Malay students and the long-term migrants. For example, the female Malay students who came to the Saturday School to volunteer either for teaching the Malaysian migrant children or for selling the food for charity in the canteen. In the case of Afiqa, she went to the school as a volunteer and later met *Kak Zi*, the headmistress, who had been living in the UK for almost twelve years. Apart from *Kak Zi*, Afiqa also knew several Malay women who had migrated to the UK and married British residents selling Malaysian food at the *Kedai Kopi Rakyat*. These women were also active in school activities such as charity and cultural events. During the charity or fundraising events, the female Malay students usually went to the school to help these women sell the food for fundraising. At the same time, they also could appease their longing for Malaysian food from the aroma and eating together with the Malays in the canteen. Thus, the food aroma is significant in making a connection between the community and the national food. Thus, I argue that *Kedai Kopi Rakyat* evokes a sense of home for many Malays in Manchester and also strengthens the bond of community between existing Malay migrants and Malay students through their ethnic food consumption.

5.5 Conclusion

The food consumption and commensality of Malay students in the UK is an essential example of how international students experience and negotiate their Malay identities in the host country. By focusing on two types of space – private and public – this research describes in detail the role of food at home and in restaurants, constructed as a consumption site for these students. The contributions to this chapter demonstrate different ways in which food consumption and practices have shaped the everyday lives of Malay students in the UK.

From the food in the luggage across the border to the domestic work at home such as the cooking rota, this study has contributed to an understanding of the meaning and role of food for international students. The cooking rota is one of the significant discussions in this chapter that unpacks the transition between the students' role and the emotions that transformed the social relations by starting to establish trust between the new housemates and develop a friendship. These students also learnt to cook for the first time while dealing with each other's dietary requirements and the obstacles posed by a busy study schedule in the preparation of food. It is also a way for them to maintain the relationship and overcome stress in their studies and fulfill their desire to create harmony at home.

I suggest that the experiences of the Malay students in Manchester are also shaped by their interactions with the transnational community – mainly with the Afghan community who run the Afghan-Arab-style restaurants which provide free drinks exclusively to Malaysian customers. The students also maintain their network with the Malay community through the commensality every Saturday in the school canteen. This study also emphasises the significance of the taste, aroma and texture of food to the students' relationship with the community. Therefore, I argue that, besides food and commensality, places such as the kitchen and ethnic restaurants play an essential role in building the different types of social relationship between female Malay students and transnational communities in the host country. Furthermore, it also helps to overcome the pressure on students during their studies. In the next section, I further analyse the importance of space concerning students' aspirations through volunteer activities such as teaching at the Manchester Malaysian School.

CHAPTER 6

EDUCATION AND ASPIRATIONS

In the discussion in Chapter 2 of the historical context of student migration from Malaysia to the UK, I explained the impact of British colonisation on the Malaysian education system and economic policy. The aspiration to balance the economic distribution among Malaysians, especially the Malays, has been implemented through affirmative action policies known as the New Economic Policy or NEP. As a result, much educational assistance and necessary financial and technical skills have been provided to the Malays to uplift their social status to a middle-class community.²⁴ I have also mentioned the aspiration of the Malaysia education policy to produce well-balanced citizens through the national education philosophy. Against this backdrop, this chapter seeks to explore the everyday experiences of Malay scholarship-holder (*pemegang biasiswa*) students in the UK who see themselves as mini-ambassadors of Malaysia.

Three different aspects of the production and experience of aspiration will be discussed in this chapter. The first section deals with the key literature and previous works related to aspirations, achievement and everyday diplomacy. The second section demonstrates the students' aspirations to study abroad in relation to the historical context in which they do so. In this section, I analyse the notion of aspiration and achievement in relation to the experiences of Malay students' desire to study abroad through a consideration of the effort they made in Malaysia to win the scholarships that allow them to pursue their dream. The third section provides a connected discussion of the notion of aspiration and the pressures of student life in the UK in terms of everyday and mini diplomacy. In the fourth section, I extend my discussion of the students' educational and career aspirations by engaging my findings with the concept of 'the well-balanced citizen' that is developed in Malaysian government education philosophy; I do so through an analysis of its key components: commitment to God, nation and family.

6.2 Aspirations and Achievements in Life

According to Quaglia and Cobb (1996: 127), a student with aspirations is someone who is involved in various activities for both their inherent value and enjoyment and their

connection to future goals. In a recent article by Scheibelhofer (2018) on aspirations among European migrants, aspiration is perceived as hopes, plans, ambitions or goals which are produced or unclearly expressed (due to biographical changes). She also argues that, in the context of migration, aspirations endure throughout the life course and influence the ways in which people act and react over an extended period of time. Thus, aspirations can shift and be unstable over time due to changes in social contexts and transformations in a person's biography, such as migration, marriage and retirement (Scheibelhofer 2003). In my research and my ethnographic approach, I analyse how the aspirations of female Malay students shift with the context of biographical change such as their status as a scholarship student and mini-diplomat after succeeding in going to the UK.

Focusing on youth living through the upheaval of Egypt's Arab Spring in 2011, Schielke (2015) critically documents the nature of his informants aspiring efforts in terms of achieving a balance between their hopes and the frustrating conditions of their everyday lives. Schielke builds on the 'grand schemes' approach, which he defines as 'persons, ideas and powers that are understood to be greater than one's ordinary life, located on a higher plane, distinct from everyday life, and yet relevant as models for a living (2015: 13). Doing so helps him to explore the moral dilemmas facing his male interlocutors; ethnographically, he focuses in particular on the 'pressure points' that occur in the young people's daily lives. In his work, I am interested in the ways in which he invests the term 'hope' experienced by these youths with specific meanings and attributes, such as the hope to live a God-fearing life, avoid boredom, and with aspirations for freedom and money, love and marriage. This approach helps me to discover the ways in which hope is specifically perceived through their everyday life in the UK.

Long and Moore (2013), in their book, *The Social Life of Achievement*, provide critical ways in which to explore the notion of achievement within the context of its social life, such as the ways in which achievement is attained and experienced, as well as how its meanings shift in specific contexts. One example that I found relevant is Susan Bayly's (2007) book, *Asian Voices in a Postcolonial Age*. Bayly highlights the complex relationship between a generation of liminal Asian intellectuals in India and in Vietnam. In her fieldwork in Vietnam, Bayly (2007) explored the French-educated Hanoian intellectuals who signified themselves as active participants in the process of making and

mapping the revolution and liberation in urban and rural areas in the period from 1946 to 1954. In her analysis, she also includes the experiences of those who were left behind, such as the French-educated Hanoian families, their emotions of return and separation, nurturing, education, services and sacrifice. From this analysis, we can see how the colonial education and language of socialism was able to structure the experiences and aspirations of students for their nation and family in the context of both colonialism and the post-colonial landscape. In another work, Bayly (2014) engages with the vision of Vietnam as one of the 'tiger states',²⁵ analysing how this has shaped the ways in which Hanoians understand citizenship,²⁶ especially with regards to students' notions of aspirations and achievement. To sustain their status as global achievers and to make Vietnam one of marketised South-East Asia's top producers by 2025, the students and parents generate a real effective charge around notions of achievement (Bayly 2007). This, however, has affected the state's education sector and produced a condition widely referred to in the country as the 'achievement disease'.²⁷ For example, the parents would bribe the school to make sure that their child became an excellent student or reached a top attainment status. Bayly's works demonstrate the dynamics of aspiration and practices of actors in this context of both colonialism and post-colonialism. This is similar to my study, whereby the parents of Malay students in my research gave their full support and motivation to ensure that their children won an educational scholarship, as I demonstrate in the next section.

Besides aspirations and achievement, the chapter also explores diplomacy practices in the everyday lives of the students after going to the UK. Many studies on diplomacy, especially in International Relations, deal with diplomats, states, foreign policies, embassies, consulates, ministries and international organisations, as both actors and instruments (Cohen 1998; Constantinou *et al.* 2016; Sharp 2009). However, scholars from various disciplines find that the practice of diplomacy is not limited to the formal actors outlined above; it can also be observed or imitated by a multiplicity of actors and instruments beyond states –such as traders, intellectuals, religious organisations or minority groups (Cooper 2008; Marsden *et al.* 2016).

According to Constantinou (2016), actors need to diplomatically identify and learn knowledge about the facilities they can deploy in order to deal with conflicts. By this he means that actors who practice diplomacy should recognise their role, who they represent

and in relationship to what particular cause. Marsden *et al.* (2016) demonstrates through ethnography the diplomatic practices, skills and capacities that are deployed by Afghan traders. These transregional traders identify themselves as diplomats and emphasise how the skills of the trade are also those of diplomacy. The notion of being diplomatic here is the ability to speak multiple languages, the capacity to be flexible when representing themselves to others and also the convenience of living in multicultural surroundings. Drawing on the everyday diplomacy framework by Marsden *et al.* (2016), this chapter seeks to make a case for exploring the everyday diplomacy of student migrants. It aims to extend the thesis focus to the diplomatic practices and activities of these state-sponsored students. It also seeks to understand these practices and activities as part of the effort they must invest into fulfilling the aspirations of Malay education policy and becoming both outstanding citizens of a good nation and the global *ummah* or community of Muslim believers. I now explore Malaysian students' aspirations to study in the UK.

6.1 The Aspiration to Study Abroad in Historical Context

In her book on race, education and citizenship, Sin Yee Koh (2017) argues that the culture of migration among Malaysian students abroad is the result of the legacy of British colonial-era racialisation, something that has been inherited and exacerbated by the post-colonial Malaysian state. In her findings, she concludes that the migration for education of the Malaysian-Chinese is seen as an exit strategy (Cartier 2003; Fong 2011). The desire of Malaysian-Chinese students to study abroad is due to the failure to the home country's failure to provide satisfactory education opportunities in prestigious universities or colleges in Malaysia, a situation arising from the NEP. Thus, building on this policy, this section would like to extend and contribute to the study of the effects of the NEP on Malaysian student migration. It will do so, however, from the vantage point of *Bumiputera* Malay students' aspirations to study abroad. This entails exploring not the experiences of an excluded minority but those of a privileged and dominant race that has received the highest proportion of scholarships from the Malaysian government through the NEP. In this latter, priority has been given to Malays in terms of access to education, government scholarships, property ownership, civil service jobs, subsidised housing and business licences (Lee 2012). As a result, a sizeable Malay middle class has evolved that has had the opportunity to study in both local universities and overseas institutions.

Financial aid and scholarships in education have been offered to help to satisfy Malays' aspirations for educational attainment.

Like Malaysian Chinese students' migration, above, transnational Chinese students in China also explained that study abroad was seen as an alternative route for students after their access to a prestigious education in China was denied (Fong 2011). Hence, to achieve this aspiration, many parents invest an unprecedented amount of money, sell their homes and borrow money from their friends and relatives to pay for their children's tuition and living expenses. In China, this aspiration became more convincing with the one-child policy in 1970, whereby many urban middle-class parents encouraged their children to study abroad (Fong 2011).

However, the situation is different in the case of Malay students. The privileges which have been given to Malays in education have shaped the nature of their aspirations to study abroad. Though they are categorised as Bumiputera Malays by birth, and have an advantage as a favoured race since British colonisation and the NEP, these students' aspiration to migrate overseas for their education nevertheless involves a great effort on their part, usually over the years in which they studied in primary or secondary school. Despite investing an unprecedented amount of money on their children's education, Malay parents encourage their offspring to study hard by giving them full moral support in applying for places at boarding school and then government scholarships which facilitate their studying abroad. In this context, high achievement in education for many Malays is when their children succeed in winning scholarships for a university education abroad.

Investing money on education since their children were small (in a manner comparable to the Chinese and Malaysian Chinese students discussed by Fong (2011) and Koh (2017) is not an affordable practice for Malays largely because of their relatively low income levels. In an exclusive interview on *Channel NewsAsia* in June 2018 with the Malaysian Prime Minister, Tun Mahathir Muhamad, explained why these privileges in education and economy should continue to be given to the Malays. According to Mahathir, 'The reason why Malay students need scholarships to study overseas is because he finds that many Malay parents cannot afford to have a university education for their children'. He also explained that it is because Malay parents are primarily civil servants and wage

earners, unlike the Malaysian Chinese who are primarily in business (Naidu 2018). Indeed, during my fieldwork, it was rare to meet Malay students who were self-funded or sponsored by wealthy parents. In Appendix C, I have laid out the financial resources in my list of informants and only four out of the 30 students were self-funded.

Thus, education is perceived as one of the essential ways to render the Malays proud as a majority race that has a significant gap in poverty compared to the country's Chinese community. As Zerrin Salikutluk (2013: 7) said, 'The salience of hoping for socio-economic improvement can induce a strong belief in education as the key to upward mobility'. For these sponsored Malay students, the opportunity to study abroad gives them the hope that they can improve their social status and economic condition, secure a job and also gain cultural exposure. The only affordable way for them to study abroad is by attaining excellent academic results in national examinations – a crucial step which qualifies them to apply for government scholarship. It means that they, too, have to compete and gain excellent results in order to get the scholarship, just as Chinese and Indian students have to do. Besides achieving good results, these students also need to involve themselves in a range of extra co-curricular activities and leadership skills, which furthers their chances of being awarded a scholarship over and above their outstanding academic achievements. In the next section I demonstrate the efforts undertaken by these students in order to be awarded educational scholarships.

6.1.1 The Route to UK Higher Education Institutions

Many Malay students in my research regarded an education scholarship as a passport for them to study abroad. One example is the case of Aty, 23, an optometry student from Cardiff University. Both her parents were police officers in the suburban city of Penang and she was the youngest daughter of three siblings. One thing I found interesting about Aty's background was that all her siblings had graduated in optometry. The main reason why they chose this course was because the oldest sister had managed to improve their family's finances by setting up an optometry business. Her motivation to study abroad started when she saw her older brother – who studied in the UK on government scholarships – return from the work and achieve a stable source of employment and social respect. This shows that personal networks such as family or friends are essential in

shaping students' decisions to study abroad (Azmat *et al.* 2013; Collins 2008; King *et al.* 2011).

Since her brother's return home she told her mother about her desire to study abroad. According to Aty,

When I told my mum that I wanted to study abroad like my brother, the first thing she told me was that I must study hard. If I did well in the SPM (Malaysian national examination) I could get a scholarship and have the opportunity to study overseas like him.

From then on, she was motivated to study hard, attend tuition classes and be active in sports and co-curricular activities. The ultimate aim at that time was to get an excellent result in order to be in a competitive position to apply for a scholarship. She hoped that she could make her parents proud and improve their family economic situation and legacy in optometry. At the age of 16, with good results, she managed to go to boarding school. In the school, she met many excellent students from different backgrounds who shared the same vision.

After finishing secondary school, with an excellent result (9As) in the national examination, she applied for a scholarship and passed the interview. Later, she completed her A-levels in a local private college for two years with other scholarship recipients. She told me that throughout those two years of preparation, the students followed a severe and busy schedule, going to classes from morning to evening. The period was crucial for their futures because they had to ensure that they passed the exams which would enable them to study abroad. According to Aty:

During my A-levels, I had ten good friends who studied together with me. We did everything together, including doing revision together. Our hope at that time too was to make our family proud of us and provide them with a good life. However, two of our friends did not manage to come with us (to the UK) because of their poor results...and they are now continuing their degree in the local university.

The above quotation shows that Malays invest their individual and familial effort into achieving places in high-ranking universities with the long-term aim of winning a scholarship to study abroad. My Malay informants also believed that earning a

scholarship not only showed that they were smart and successful students, but that such scholarships are a source of social achievement, especially for the benefit of their family and the village community. When a rural or village Malay student managed to go to a local or overseas university, the villagers and school teachers in their area would see them as achievers and an inspiration for their children to study hard. For example, Ameera, 24, a medical student in Cardiff, told me:

Whenever I go home during the summer break, my school teacher always invites me to come over to school to give a motivational talk to the students. They see me as an example of a successful student because I get sponsored to study abroad.

Unlike Aty, Ameera came from a rural area in Kelantan. She was the eldest daughter of six siblings. Her father worked as a taxi driver and her mother as a housewife. As the eldest child in her family, Ameera felt responsible for improving her family's economic status. Her ambition to be a doctor made her study hard so that she could help her father to support her siblings. However, the route to success was more difficult because she lived in a rural area where there was a lack of educational facilities and support. According to Ameera,

It is not easy for a village girl like me to be where I am today (studying in the UK). In my village, I can see that there is a lot of potential among the children; they are not lazy or not smart in their studies, but the problem is that they need motivation, support and exposure to academics. Thus, we have to study harder than those who live in urban areas. *Alhamdulillah* (praise to God) with my good result in the SPM (Malaysia national examination), I was selected to enrol on a medical course in the UK through a JPA scholarship.

In Ameera's case, she pointed out how geographical factors and the characteristics of life in the rural areas where most Malays live is an obstacle to Malays' developments and achievements in the field of education. Although similar facilities have been provided in rural areas by the government, the best schools always have good assistants, good teachers and excellent facilities (Mahathir 1970). Another scholar (Roslan 2001) also argues that the reason why many Malays in rural areas have fewer opportunities to enter the upper classes is because of the different mediums of instruction in schools under colonial rule – i.e. most of the English-medium schools were located in urban areas and were attended by Chinese and Indian immigrant children. Many Malays in rural areas were educated in

government schools that used the Malay language and this held them back from entering business and professional fields, which prefer people educated in English.

Although Malays are given priority in terms of access to scholarships in education, these students still have to compete amongst themselves and prove that they are the best candidates and the deserving recipients of a scholarship. However, compared to Bayly's (2007) research, as shown earlier in this chapter, there is no evidence to show that the parents or students would use immoral ways such as bribery and corruption to attain scholarships. Instead, the students told me that the teachers and parents would encourage them to apply for as many scholarships as possible to increase their chances of studying abroad.

Besides, the characteristics demonstrated by these families to improve their social status and economic position through educational attainment also rejects the popular colonial-era stereotype held by Malays which depicts the latter as lazy and unambitious (Hirschman 1986). Findings also suggest that, besides demographic data such as academic records, ethnicity, parental education and occupation and personal links abroad, British colonial history has played an essential role in shaping the aspiration to study abroad that is such a prominent feature of life in the country (King *et al.* 2011). The next section explains the aspirations and diplomatic practices portrayed by these sponsored students and the efforts they make in order to achieve their goals.

6.2 Aspirations and Pressures of Student Life in Terms of Everyday Diplomacy

6.2.1 Aspirations of the Educational Attaché in Manchester

The aspirations of these students starts to shift in nature they come to the UK as sponsored students. In the UK, the students are expected by both their families and the Malaysian government sponsoring body and its officials to demonstrate their best qualities and characteristics and perform to their highest ability. The students also reported feeling that there was a need for them to prove that they were the most qualified candidates for the position in ways over and above having an excellent record of academic achievement. They learned that their educational aspirations and achievements overseas should consist of their contributions to God, the nation and the family.

On 15 October 2016, my informants invited me to attend the Education Malaysia Engagement Session in the student union hall of the University of Manchester. Three Malaysian students' organisations organised the event: the Malaysia Community of Old Trafford (MCOT), the Kelab UMNO Salford and Manchester (KUSMA) and the Malaysian Student's Society of Manchester (MSSM) in conjunction with the Manchester Students' Carnival. The event aimed to introduce the newly arrived Malaysian students in Manchester to the educational attaché and to explain to them the roles that are played by the education officers in helping to shape the students' experience of studying abroad. It also aimed to promote the Malaysian student organisations in Manchester. My appearance at this event was not only as a research student but also as a Malaysia Community School of Manchester (SKMM) teacher, who attended the event in order to promote teaching as a volunteering experience to the new students. I attended the event with two of my informants, Afiqa and Ainaa, both of whom were students at the University of Manchester and also worked as teaching assistants at SKMM. Afiqa and Ainaa shared their work experience and explained to those gathered what they had learned from SKMM. They did so in order to encourage new students to volunteer their participation. I will explain about the students' volunteering in SKMM in the aspirations for education section later in this chapter.

The event started at around 2.00 pm, and the audience mostly comprised first-year Malaysian students. The students and committee members wore formal clothes such as a blazer with black shoes. The ways these students presented themselves during this ceremony showed how they wanted to be seen by the Malaysian educational attaché – as a future leader or someone properly qualified to study abroad; this underscores the performative aspect of achievement in Malay students' lives as discussed above. This was obvious when Afiqa and Ainaa looked very conscious of their formal appearance, as they had to talk in front of the officers that day. The ceremony started with the national anthem, *Lagu Negaraku* and a *doa* or Quranic recitation. Besides the educational attaché, other chief guests for the day were officers from scholarship bodies, including the JPA and MARA. These people were in charge of the affairs of Malaysian sponsored students in the UK. In his speech, the officer, Mr Hazim, reminded students to inform him wherever they left Manchester, especially when travelling outside the UK; students were also advised to buy travel insurance for their protection in case of medical problems or trip

cancellations and interruptions, because there are many cases of accidents involving Malaysian students travelling abroad, he explained. He also shared his experiences of working as an educational attaché in Manchester, handling many instances relating to Malaysian students abroad.

The event became more serious when the Malaysian Embassy contacted the attaché to get further details or confirmation about the Malaysian students studying in the UK who were involved in accidents while travelling outside the UK. However, what I found interesting in the speeches that evening by Mr Hazim and other officers was when they raised their concerns about the numbers of Malay overseas graduates who still have a low proficiency in English when they returned home. He said that he hoped students would make friends with different groups of people in order to improve their English language skills.

Listening to Mr Hazim' and others' concerns about and aspirations for the English proficiency of Malay students led me to see the importance of the ethnographic approach to my research. It would be easy for us to say that these students had low English proficiency because they lived with Malays and did not speak English often. Yet we know little about the broader challenges they faced and efforts they invested in improving their English proficiency during the course of their everyday lives in the UK. It is quite striking to know that many of my Malay informants stated that they felt disappointed because of the slim opportunities available to them to make friends with local and European international students on their courses. This was the case for most of my informants, especially those studying Finance and Accounting in Manchester. In my interviews with them, the students stated that most of the international students on their course were Asian and mainly from China. Afia, 22, from Selangor, told me that she felt disappointed because she never thought this would be the case during her studies abroad,

I thought that I could speak more English when I studied here (Manchester). But it seems that it won't happen because most of my course mates are Malays and Chinese from China. And we only mingle among ourselves.

Due to the substantial numbers of Asian students on her course, Afia and her friends rarely had the chance to interact with local and other international students in English. When I asked her why she did not want to sit with other Asian students during the lecture she told

me that most of them feel comfortable sitting together in their own groups (for example, the Chinese students from China would all sit together, as would Malays) and the substantial number of them on the course made it seem unimportant for them to extend their friendship networks. Thus, to improve her English proficiency and to have non-Malays friends, Afia and her friends took the initiative of registering in different tutorial classes, participating in voluntary activities and attending foreign-language classes at the university. This strategy provided them with a greater opportunity to engage with other international students from different countries.

Another striking moment during my fieldwork was when Afia confessed to me her mixed feelings of joy and nervousness when talking to her English friends. The incident happened when we were attending the Malaysian night-market festival on campus. There were a lot of Malaysian dishes on offer and there were also large numbers of international students attending the festival. During the event, Afia introduced me to her new friends from the Spanish class she had started attending. She invited them to the event so that they could taste Malaysian cuisines. She also explained to them important aspects of Malaysian culture and food. As we were walking home, she said to me '*Kak Rina*, I felt nervous at the same time as being happy because that was the longest English conversation I have had with them'. This experience was bizarre for her as she is usually surrounded by Malay friends every day, even when she goes to lectures; it had been a struggle for her to meet with other international students on her course or even to chat with them. Her confession of her feelings after two years of studying in the UK made me realise the effort that students must put into establishing relations with their non-Malay peers.

This finding helps to explain why many Malaysian students could not practice English easily or returned home with low English proficiency from studying overseas. Far from reflecting a lack of willingness on the part of students to establish relations with English students, as intimated by the attaché, it reflected the nature of the university system in the UK. However, the case is different for students who study on science or literature courses, where most of them have a higher likelihood of interacting with a wider range of international students. For example, a biology student, Aini, 21, told me that she has to put more effort into starting a conversation with the local students because she is the only Malaysian on her course. From this situation, she came up with various ways of

approaching her course mates, although she found doing so stressful and difficult at first. According to Aini:

At first I was a bit offended because no one talked to me. Later, I understood that they were also facing the same problem as me which is they did not understand how to approach me. So, what I usually do is to start the conversation by greeting them – ‘How are you?’ – or talking about the weather or study.

Another speech during the evening event, by the MARA education officer, Mr Izlan, advised students to learn cultural values through, for example, getting to understand British culture, rules and taboos. At the same time, he emphasised that the students should maintain their Malay cultural values and be proud nationals abroad. The students were also advised to understand their responsibility to contribute to Malaysia and to always cultivate a patriotic spirit while living abroad. In other words, they should think of themselves as Malaysia’s student ambassadors or representatives, making it is essential for them to maintain a collectively good reputation and demonstrate correct moral behaviour.

Like Mr Hazim, this speaker also wanted the students to mix with groups other than Malaysians. In his speech, he encouraged students to utilise the Western education system fully and to explore the ways in which it was different from the Malaysian education system. As we saw, Malaysian educational officers in the UK had expressed some concerns and advice to the newly arrived Malaysian students. Problems such as a poor command of English among returnee Malay students, and the infrequency of their interactions with the local and international community, were the two main issues highlighted in their speech. Besides, they also stated their aspiration for Malaysian students to learn the local cultural values and Western education system at the same time as working hard to preserve their religion and Malay customs. What we can understand here is that there are many hopes and responsibilities that these students need to balance rather than simply getting a degree from an overseas institution. The aspirational speech is consistent with the four aspects of well-balanced citizenship in Malaysian Education Philosophy, that is:

To produce Malaysian citizens who are knowledgeable and competent, who possess high moral standards, and who are responsible and capable of

achieving a high level of personal wellbeing as well as being able to contribute to the harmony and betterment of the family, the society and the nation at large.

Hence, the next sections unpack the experiences of students as mini diplomats in achieving the aspirations above.

6.3 Students as Mini Diplomats

6.3.1 *Duit Rakyat* and Expectations

The Malay students with whom I conducted my research felt that being a sponsored student – whether privately or state-funded – was a huge responsibility to carry. In comparison to the Chinese students' migration in Fong's (2011) studies, the floating life for my Malay students is their struggle to meet the government and family expectations of sponsored students. The first thing these students realised when coming to the UK was they had to ensure that they demonstrated excellent of moral behaviour of the type advocated by their sponsors and also maintain an excellent academic track record every term. Second, while living abroad, they were not only representing their family, but also their religion and nation. Thus, they were expected to be responsible and capable of achieving a high level of personal wellbeing and to demonstrate excellent behaviour (*akhlaq*)³⁰ in everyday life such as wearing modest clothes and being trustworthy, respectful and tolerant – and most importantly, being able to contribute to the harmony and betterment of the family, the society and the nation at large.

A further essential aspect of Malay students' behaviour that I heard a great deal about during my fieldwork concerned their relationship to the financial allowance they received as a '*duit rakyat*' (the Malay term for the tax paid by Malaysian citizens to the government that is used to sponsor excellent students to study abroad). Interestingly, '*duit rakyat*' is used among my Malay student informants to remind each other of their responsibility and the hopes that their family and other Malaysians had in them.

For Afia, a 23-year-old from Selangor, living as a sponsorship student in the UK meant that she had a huge responsibility which was quite a burden. She told me that she had to

study hard for three years because she knew that the allowance she received was coming from the taxpayer, including her parents, in Malaysia. According to Afia,

It is not only a responsibility to a country, but also as the first daughter in my family to go abroad to study. I find it very difficult because they have high expectations of me [and because] I feel like I'm an ambassador.

The high expectations of her family and her responsibility to the country made her feel as though she was not just a student but also an ambassador. The situation became dangerous when the government and sponsorship officials in the UK raised several issues that addressed how students should utilise their education experience abroad. For these students, besides carrying the heavy 'burden' as sponsored students, they also have to deal with the idea of well-balanced citizenship in the context of a challenging and highly diverse Western educational environment. To achieve all these aspirations, state and socially sanctioned forms of good moral behaviour, faith and reputation needed to be constantly upheld and enacted in their daily lives. They also had to deal with many hurdles, especially cultural differences, in the new environment. This challenge was unavoidable as they needed to face every day, which required them to act diplomatically as international and sponsored students abroad.

6.3.2 Diplomatic and Religious Reputation

Previous ethnographic studies of international students have dealt with the 'floating life', temporality and intercultural adjustments, and it is quite striking that religion was absent in most students' lives (Fong 2011; Hansen 2015). In my study, as demonstrated in the previous chapters, religion had become the central part of the everyday lives of most Malay students. Besides getting a degree, these students ensured that they learned as much as they could about culture, language and, most importantly, how to handle their religion in diplomatic ways.

When the female Malay students first went to the UK, one of the particular things they were able to experience primarily in the Western landscape was the stigma towards Muslims following the various terrorist issues. For many Malay students, the route to getting a degree in life had a lot to do with their juggling the balance between education and religion. Despite their roles as sponsored students and mini ambassadors, the

undesirable Muslim stigma and being a student migrant influenced the ways in which they behaved in everyday life. During my interviews, many students presented themselves as mini ambassadors for both nation and religion when they were going to class or taking part in various social activities. Many students also shared with me their challenges in integrating with non-Muslim friends.

This, however, did not stop them from trying to learn and prepare themselves through several strategies regarding Islamic knowledge, Malaysian general information and current international issues. In term of the religious aspect, Aida, 24, an accounting student in Manchester, found that being the only Muslim in her class made her feel like a Muslim ambassador. Since she wore the *hijab*, she was easily recognisable by her classmates:

In my class, I am the only one who wears the *hijab*; otherwise they are mostly Chinese so my classmates can soon see if I don't go to class..... I should make an impact. I feel like an ambassador. Because everything I do they will think 'Oh Muslims are like this'.

Since she was the only Muslim in her class, many students asked her about Islam. Feeling responsible as a Muslim, Aida took the initiative to learn more about Islam by reading books and going to *usrah* to explain to her international friends about Islam. She also tried to find the simplest method to explain to them so that they could understand the concepts she was talking about. For example, Aida watched YouTube clips of Muslim scholars talking on simple *dakwah* skills for non-Muslims. To show her respect, she also asked them about their religion. This situation thus illustrates another example of objectification which I explained in Chapter 3. In this case, Aida portrayed herself as an open-minded person and adopted diplomatic skills when dealing with the issues of her faith. She also showed her efforts to help others simply to understand Islam. Aida's case tells us that the process of becoming an educated person not only happens in one way, whereby a student would have good knowledge of a specific course. Instead a person should well be equipped herself to explain things to others in the most straightforward way possible. This should also be carried out in the right diplomatic manner, showing respect, tolerance and open-minded behaviour, as contained in the concept of a well-balanced citizen which I discuss in this chapter.

However, while these students were passionate about upholding their reputation as mini ambassadors with others, they also forgot the political implications they might face due to their everyday modes of diplomacy. The next incident happened a week after the suicide bombing at Ariana Grande's concert in Manchester in May 2017. Coincidentally, it was the month of Ramadhan, and I went to Rusholme to meet my informants and see how things were with them. On the day I arrived, there was chaos as the three male Malaysian students whom I knew were detained by the UK police in connection with the suicide bombing. The police had raided the students' rented house as part of the investigation. However, the students were released the same day, as it was believed that the bomber, Salman Abedi, took advantage of their hospitality by using their address as a part of his plot. There was also a rumour saying that the boys knew the suspect at the mosque and through visiting their house and that is how he knew where the students lived. During my fieldwork, I used to go to the house in which these boys lived for intellectual discussions. These students would indeed often invite Malaysian students to come to their house for intellectual discourse on, for example, philosophical theories and were very committed to sharing their knowledge with other Malays and teaching them how to think critically.

Being themselves Malaysian Muslim students abroad, they did not expect that the hospitality they received and the people whom they met and knew as friends – especially other Muslims – could put them at risk. As a consequence, this incident gave a bad reputation to and political implications for them as sponsored students and most importantly as Malaysian Muslims. This example is essential as it demonstrates how being diplomatic in their everyday life also might put their scholarship status at risk and be an essential lesson for student migrants' lives (see Candea and Da Coll 2012 on the perils of hospitality between guest and host). Most importantly, they are trying their best in their everyday lives to be good Malaysian Muslim students and citizens. However, these students' altruistic behaviour – being helpful to strangers – as suggested by Homant (2010: 1119), 'may leave one vulner'.."

In my research, I also focus on the students who were not bothered by these responsibilities and diplomatic practices in their everyday lives. This is an important aspect because it provides the different dimensions and illustrates individual agency. For example, in Chapter 3, I provided the examples of two students (Nina and Fara) who

married British men and decided to raise their children in British style in the UK, and also a student who came to an agreement with her father to wear the *hijab* in exchange for being allowed to study in the UK. When she went to the UK, she kept her promise but surreptitiously went to heavy metal concerts at the weekend. Do these students really represent themselves as Malaysian Muslims and see themselves as mini ambassadors? In terms of the role as a sponsored student, the case might not have applied for Nina as she was sponsored by her parents. However, she was convinced that she had a strong faith as a Muslim and music was just a passion. The reason why she did not inform her parents about her musical activities was because she did not want to break the trust that her parents had in her. In this case, Nina still realised her duty as a daughter and decided to keep the ‘story’ to herself until she finished her studies and make her parents proud of her. Thus, this example shows the vague notion of aspiration between a student who wanted to be a singer and, at the same time, fulfil her parents’ wish to study accounting – which could offer her a stable career.

For Fara, as a sponsored student, she found that there was so much good in British culture compared to Malay culture and, for this reason, good moral behaviour could be interpreted in different ways – she knew what was good and bad from her migration experience. Thus, the notion of the mini diplomat might not have been taken seriously by her as she could decide which cultures she wanted to practice most in her daily life, including how she wanted her son to be raised:

I just like the way nursery, like, day-care staff, look after my son. It’s full of love and then, yeah, and then obviously they kind of teach him to be a British guy, you know, like the way they behave ... for example, if he’s being naughty then he has to go to the naughty corner – that’s so British.

Besides, the other reason why she did not feel obliged to contribute back to the home nation was because of her situation – she was married to a local person and there was high likelihood that she will stay in the UK. She also explained that she was free from any moral judgement while in the UK, especially from Malaysians. In this case, we can see that biographical change, such as her marriage to a British man, shifted her aspirations as a sponsored student (Scheibelhofer 2003). Thus, this section concludes that, although the practice of diplomacy was experienced by many of my informants it was, however, not representative of everyone, as there were those who did not feel it to be crucial in their

daily lives. In the next section, I analyse the aspirations of the female Malaysian students concerning their education and careers.

6.4 Students' Educational and Career Aspirations

6.4.1 Educational Aspirations

This section explores the aspirations of the female Malay Muslim students in my research. It documents these in terms of improving the Malaysia education system and becoming well-balanced citizens, thereby building on earlier sections of this chapter in which I emphasised the ways in which aspiration among Malay students reflected both their personal desires as well as the collectivist goal of the Malaysian nation-state. Besides promoting good *akhlaq* (behaviour) and diplomatic practices in everyday lives, it showed how female students also seek to cultivate a 'patriotic spirit' by engaging in a range of volunteering activities. Volunteering in the field of education was one of the major activities in which the students in this study were active. Most of the informants became volunteers because they were curious to know how school education in the UK operated, were keen to engage with the local community or meet new people as well as acquiring skills and work experience. As Badri (2015) argues, participating in volunteering activities also provided these students with useful skills, personal development and confidence in helping the community. From her research on the perceptions of and aspirations to social responsibility of Saudi youth, the results show that personal desire, loyalty to the acquisition of community spirit and of new skills and knowledge is the highest factor influencing for young people's participation in volunteer work (Badri 2015: 244). Thus, the volunteering by the female Malay informants in my own research shows that they were students with aspirations and not passive actors, because they enjoyed participating in activities which related to their future goal of contributing to God, nation and community (Quaglia and Cobb 1996).

During my fieldwork in Manchester, I was repeatedly struck by the efforts made by these Malay students, who invested their weekends in teaching the Malay child migrants at supplementary school. One example in my research was the Malay students' participation in the Malaysia Community School of Manchester (SKMM). Unlike those in Cardiff, the Malay students in Manchester had the opportunity to contribute to the life skills of

Malaysian children who lived abroad by teaching them the subjects that were not taught in the UK state-school syllabus – such as the Malay language, Islamic education and *Jawi* (the Arabic alphabet for writing Malay), Malaysian history and traditional cultures. An exchange of knowledge, culture and self-development occurred among them. Holdsworth (2010) argues that volunteering can develop students' sense of civic duty and responsibility. This was the case of Hafiza, 23, a student at the University of Manchester, who told me that her interest in being a volunteer at SKMM provided her with a platform from which to serve the Malay community abroad: 'You know, Ireena, I feel happy that I could teach the kids about Malaysia as some of them have never been there'. What is more, these students not only helped in the academic sense but also played an essential role in assisting the migrant children's religious life such as teaching the basic *Quran* and praying.³¹ I remember that there was also a Malay mother who drove five hours from Scotland every Saturday to send her children to this school. While I was having a conversation with her at the school one morning, she shared with me that the reason why she was willing to travel to this school every week was because she needed help to teach her children about Islam, and especially about praying. There were not many cities that had supplementary schools and she did not know anyone who could help her to do it.

I found being a teacher at the SKMM to be an excellent way of experiencing the difference between Malay children who had been raised in the UK and those who had spent their early years in a Malaysian environment. The headmistress of the school, Dr Azilah or *Kak Zi*, a permanent resident in the UK, shared a great deal of information and guidance with me about the UK education system and approaches to the student volunteers. Surprisingly, when discussing aspirations in education, many of my informants preferred to share their hopes for the Malaysian early childhood education system. Since most of the students in the research were having their first-degree experience in the UK, they could not compare their experience with the higher education system in Malaysia in any great detail. However, what they always emphasised in their educational aspirations was their personal experience of dealing with school children in the UK. Huda, 29, a postgraduate student in Manchester and also a teacher at SKMM shared her experience and what she learnt from the children.

One of the good things is that they (the children) are loud, and proactive in the class, which is lacking in our society, especially for kids in Malaysia. They

are brave to voice their opinions and ask many questions in the class. I hope we all could be like this in the class. ... The teachers here (in the UK) are also very open and welcome any opinions from students. In Malaysia, sometimes when we give our opinions, the teachers will condemn our answers.

A similar response was also provided by Aini, a biology student in Manchester who took the Leadership of Learning subject as an option on her course. As a task for the subject, she shared her experiences when doing a placement in a local primary school,

I got to teach the Year 6 and Year 2 students. Through the class activity, I found that they had been trained to think critically since they were small, such as doing inference exercises.³² These children were inquisitive when they did not understand something. It is not surprising that they are brave enough to ask questions in class and have a debate in the students' union. This is so unlike the ways we were taught in school, you know. I mean like...sometimes we were not brave enough and could not really ask more questions in class...and they (the teachers) always expected us to understand it as was.

From this description, we can see that the students also learned from the Malaysian and local children during the lessons, especially in terms of ideas about critical-thinking skills and the courage required to ask a question in the class. Huda, who hoped to work as a lecturer in a suburban area in Penang after her PhD, wanted to contribute to society by setting up a community learning centre for marginalised children, providing them with free tuition. Like SKMM, the university students nearby would assist the children with their studies and homework. She found that equality in education also should be given attention for students in suburban and rural areas: 'The students should have the best teacher, as in boarding school, to teach them'. For her, it was essential for the oldest child in a low-class family to have proper guidance on and motivation for his or her direction in life. Speaking about motivation and support, Aini told me her desire to engage more with non-governmental organisations to help school pupils in education by giving them motivation and guidance to apply for university and scholarships. As an example, she would also share her personal experiences as an overseas student.

From the above stories, we can see that overseas experiences such as volunteering and extra-university courses were instrumental in shaping the aspirations for the Malaysian education system. The students were then able to identify what was lacking in their home-country system and relate their own experiences in the UK with their personal learning experiences in Malaysia. Most importantly, they had the confidence and specific

aspirations to be well-balanced citizens. In the next section I demonstrate the career aspirations of optometry students in Cardiff.

6.4.2 *Career Aspirations*

At the end of my fieldwork, I spent my winter break with my informants in Scotland. The five-day trip was to visit their close friend, Hannah (24), who was doing pre-optometry preparation at an opticians in Edinburgh. Hannah was a cheerful lady who had graduated from Cardiff University. During our trip, we had a conversation and she told me about her course and the reason why she decided to return to the UK. After graduating, she spent a year working in Malaysia. However, it was quite a frustrating experience because she could not practice a great deal of what she had learnt in the UK. She found that the full eye-care routine was only available in hospitals but not in optometrists' practices in Malaysia. According to Hannah:

In optometry, I learned much about health care for the eyes. It is more than just checking the strength of the eyes and selling spectacles. When there is a patient, we do the full eye routine...and this was not happening in Malaysia. I did not learn much. The patient was a customer and we were selling spectacles rather than an eye-care service.

There are many elements lacking in eye-care in Malaysia. Most of the optometrists' practices in Malaysia do not focus on the full eye check as they do in the UK. She explained that:

In the UK, a customer needs to make an appointment for a full eye check-up to be prescribed spectacles or contact lenses. There are many procedures to be carried out before the customers are able to buy the spectacles or contact lenses. However, in Malaysia, an optometrist would either do an eye test, or recommend or take an order for the spectacles or contact lenses for the customer.

She also added that contact lenses in Malaysia are also available only in one standard size. While on her course, she learnt that customers need to have their eyes properly measured for contact lenses as there are many different sizes. The full eye check-up will determine which size is suitable for the patient.

From her training in the UK, she also discovered that those who went to the opticians for a full eye check up were treated as patients while, in Malaysia, the patient was a customer. For her, it was essential to do the whole eye routine because it could prevent someone from another illness that could be identified by doing the full eye test. As a UK optometry graduate, she and her Malaysian optometry friends hoped that they would be able to practice the full eye routine and educate customers about optical healthcare rather than just sell products in the opticians. Thus, she told me that her aspiration was to gain as much work experience in the UK as she could in the hope that she would be able to help others and implement British eye-care practice when she returned to Malaysia one day. Hannah's case tells us of the aspirations and concerns experienced by undergraduate students in Cardiff who were mainly there as Mara scholarship recipients.

In addition, the students also hope that the Malaysian government will pay greater attention to the *nilai kepakaran dalam kerjaya* (value of professionalism in a career). In this case, the optometry students were sponsored to become professional optometrists but, when they returned home, they found that the job scope and environment had devalued. As in the case above, an optometrist was only perceived as an optician – i.e. *seller* of spectacles – rather than an expert in eye-care itself. This also explains the importance of overseas students building careers and not just those activities which turn out to be market-driven.

To ensure that these students' volunteering and expertise were not wasted, Norshah, 29, President of the Malaysian community in Manchester and also a key informant in my research, suggested that the government and scholarship agencies should assign the scholarship student with an NGO or a government department before they leave the home country so that they could enhance their capacity for development. For example, a student who spends a lot of time educating children abroad as part of his or her training should belong to one of the educational associations in Malaysia such as Teach for Malaysia. Therefore, when the student returns home, s/he would be able to share their knowledge and cultural values with the respective organisations.

6.5 Conclusion

This chapter has documented and analysed the educational aspirations of female Malaysian Muslim students by focusing on the multidimensional aspect of their lives as scholarship holders, addressing in particular how they handle diplomatic practices in their everyday lives as Malaysian mini ambassadors overseas. This focus is essential because there is a lack of discussion on international students' experiences which focuses on the pressure placed upon scholarship holders by families and by the awarding bodies. The culture of educational migration and aspirations of Malay students today are heavily influenced by the legacy of British colonial-era racialisation; however, thanks to affirmative action policies, many Malays today have the opportunity to study abroad and improve their social standing in society. My findings show that the privileges in education for *Bumiputera* Malays has shaped the notion of achievement they hold and their attitude towards overseas education as well as their experiences abroad. As a result, many Malay parents encourage their children to perform well in school in order to win a scholarship, which they perceive as a way to improve their social and economic status. Besides, for the many Malays in my research, achieving an excellent result in national examinations also indicated that the student was hard-working and intelligent; this is important because it reinforces Malay collective self-pride in the face of colonially derived stereotypes of Malays as 'the lazy native'.

However, my findings show that, after these students succeed in their national examinations and move abroad to study in the UK on a government scholarship, they have to undergo a phase of learning how to *be* a scholarship student and understanding the new types of pressure this places upon them. Going to the UK is no longer seen as a route just to an overseas degree but, instead, is perceived as a space for them to prove their commitment to God, the nation and the family. This process has changed the idea of achievement and aspirations in their life. This shift in aspiration of the students I worked with began after their meeting with the educational attaché, which is when they realised the importance of their constantly showing their appreciation of the government's decision to invest in their studies. Students have been told about the government's main concerns and the frustration that arises among Malay returnee students – especially their low proficiency in English – which make it difficult for them to obtain competitive jobs

in Malaysia. They are expected to invest themselves with Western values at the same time as they preserve their religion and good *akhlaq*.

Thus, with all the expectations and uplifting aspirations of being educated abroad, they also come to recognise themselves as mini diplomats. In so doing, they undertake many beneficial activities during their leisure time in order to develop their diplomatic skills – reading more books on Islam and learning how to explain it to non-Muslims, for example. What I can conclude is that Malay students are active in multiple respects and across varying fields of daily life; this stands in contrast to a study of Chinese students in Denmark by Hansen (2015) which emphasises the ways in which the students found that living abroad was not a purposeful time and was, if anything, more relaxing than life at home. In addition, my research also demonstrates the ways in which the students are expected to demonstrate a ‘patriotic spirit’ while staying abroad and documents some of the key ways in which they enact this. The students in my study mostly spent every Saturday at the Malaysian supplementary school, teaching Malaysian migrant children. My research suggests that being a mini diplomat means not only promoting the relationship between different cultures but also contributing to nations abroad through their volunteering work. Hence, when these students study abroad, they meet many people and gain much confidence, knowledge and skills from a range of volunteer activities. They also voiced their concerns and hopes of achieving their career aspirations. From these experiences, they have the confidence to become well-balanced citizens with a good understanding of religion, tolerance and the faithful practice of *akhlaq* (excellent moral behaviour) in everyday life. However, this chapter argued that the practice of diplomacy among female Malay students is experienced by many students but not in a totalising fashion. Some of the students were determined to do things in their own way; their aspirations were influenced by biographical changes such as marriage, or type of sponsorship, as suggested by Scheibelhofer (2018).

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

In the conclusion, I summarise the thesis' main research findings and highlight the wider contributions it makes to the study of international student mobility. I also address its limitations and make suggestions for further research.

7.1 A Summary of the Key Findings and Contribution to Research

This thesis has explored the transnational trajectories of female Malaysian Muslim students, addressing most centrally their experiences as temporary migrants in the UK and the role played by their commitment to piety-minded forms of Islam. As I mentioned in the introduction, the research was initially inspired by my curiosity about why Malay parents were anxious about the emotionally unseating effects of piety movements on the lives of their daughters who travelled out of the country for higher education. Reflecting on the concerns of these parents led me to explore the experiences of female Malay students in the UK and the relationship they had with their religious thinking and identities. In order to address this complex question, I focused on two aspects of student life: the importance of social space and community relations to the production of transnational life, and the ways in which female Malaysian Muslim students sustain their social space and social networks. Over the course of my research, I began to recognise how far notions of citizenship sponsored by the Malay authorities and funding bodies, in addition to notions of piety-minded Islam, were also critical parts of the students' experiences in the UK. By immersing myself in and gathering rich ethnographic material about the everyday lives of these students I sought to fill a major gap in the literature on international students, much of which focuses on macro flows of students, rather than on their daily lives and experiences. As King and Raghuram (2013: 135) suggested, it is essential to have 'detailed ethnographic research with [various] types of student migrants ... to document their complex lives in the academic, social, cultural and economic realms'. Thus, my thesis argues that female Malay students' experiences are managed through an extraordinary range of institutions, rituals, practices, organisations and spaces in a manner that provides an opportunity both for students to think actively about their Muslim selfhood and for them to learn how to handle those forms of social and cultural

diversity with which they are not familiar. This argument is developed across the three themes of the thesis – religion, space and achievement – which I discuss in conclusion in the following sections.

However, before I proceed to the main points of this chapter, I would first like to share the limitations which I acknowledged while doing the research. Over the course of my fieldwork, I encountered a few limitations, especially when collecting the data and during the process of analysis. The first limitation was the duration of the fieldwork. As I mentioned in the introductory chapter, I spent a year on fieldwork – nine months in Manchester compared to three in Cardiff because there were many activities and events going on, particularly in Manchester, which required me to spend a substantial amount of time on data collection. However, the limitation I had was that, during the summer vacation in June, many students would go home to Malaysia for the holiday and *Eid* celebrations. Therefore, during these summer months, I spent much time transcribing my data and contacting my informants via the telephone while they were in Malaysia. In Manchester, I also had difficulty in interviewing postgraduate students for my research – just three PhD students – because most of them lived in different areas and were studying engineering and pure sciences. Thus, most of their time was spent in the laboratory which limited how much time I could observe them in terms of their (lack of) accessibility. One informant actually cancelled her interview at the last minute due to her busy schedule. This is the reason why I had many undergraduate informants in my research.

The second limitation I had was when I went to Cardiff at the end of October. Although I lived with a friend, I found that there were not many things going on which I could attend in order to collect some data. In Manchester, I usually referred to the Malaysian Community's Facebook Group to know about events and gatherings taking place. The students would also invite me to attend events with them. However, I found that this approach was not effective on the Cardiff Community's Facebook Group, because the population of Malaysian students there is not as great as in Manchester so there were not many events organised by Malaysian clubs or organisations. The situation became even more challenging because it was the beginning of term and many students were busy adjusting to their new timetables. It was difficult for me to find time when they were free for me to interview them and, without attending community social events, I was not able to meet any potential informants. Things did not go as smoothly as they did in

Manchester. To overcome this issue, I discussed the situation with my supervisors and we decided to use my findings in Manchester to reflect on and think about how I could make the process work in Cardiff too. Hence, I decided to document the everyday life of my friend and informant, a PhD student at the University of Cardiff. She later introduced to me her Malay friends who were also doing their PhDs. Fortunately, my findings in Cardiff offered balanced and dynamic data on my informants' demographics. In Cardiff, many of my PhD informants were studying in the social sciences, so it was easier for me to spend time with them in their offices and to observe and interview them.

A final limitation was the process of analysis. Since this study focuses on 30 female Malaysian Muslim students in Manchester and Cardiff, it is impossible to generalise the findings to all female Malaysian Muslim students in other cities in the UK. However, the knowledge and information gained during my ethnographic fieldwork should provide useful insights into understanding the everyday lives of female Malaysian Muslims studying abroad. Finally, the limitation I had when analysing the data was due to the cultural issues triggered by my positionality as an insider researcher. As much as I found my position as a Malaysian Muslim researcher was an advantage for me in obtaining my rich data, I also struggled to decide which data were important but were taken for granted and which to analyse or, as other scholars call it, 'making the familiar strange' (Dunne *et al.* 2005; Spindler and Spindler 1982). Thus, to ensure that I could make sense of the data, I had to stand back and adopt an ambiguous role by imagining myself as a non-'Malay' researcher and see things as an outsider (O'Reilly 2009).

7.1.1 *Islam and Piety*

Much research that focuses on Islamic piety movements tends to be restricted to mosque settings, the study of Islamic teachings and practices (especially prayer) and disciplines that offer little space for fun, leisure, pleasure and the display of individual creativity (Amran 2014; Frisk 2009; Mahmood 2005a). By having spent time with female Malay Muslim students in a range of contexts and spaces, my research challenges this dominant narrative. As I was doing my fieldwork in Manchester, the most significant activities in which these students were involved were organised forms of religious activity that can be classified as forming part of 'the piety movement'. As someone who had never participated in an Islamic study circle such as *usrah*, my assumption, at first, was that it

would take the form of an austere and formal class in Islamic education. However, after four months of participating in *usrah* with my informants, I found that such sessions were very engaging and that my research participants derived considerable pleasure from attending them. In *usrah*, students are not just learning about Islamic *hadiths*, and pondering the meaning of Quranic texts; they also shared any concerns they had about living as a Malay Muslim woman in the UK, as well as raising for discussion any questions they had relating to Islamic teachings and prescriptions. Most questions concerned the sociality and morality of Muslim women and specifically about meeting up with non-Muslim friends. Such sessions also focused on the general well-being of the students, encouraging them to balance their student lives by participating in games and sports, activities that were in themselves an important part of the *usrah* sessions. Such sessions, far from being austere and doctrinary, were indeed flexible: the relationship between the *naqibah* (instructor) and the *usrah* members was more like a sisterhood (*adik-kakak*) than a conventional Malay teacher–student (*cikgu-anak murid*) relationship. My ethnographic work in the *usrah* sessions led me to see that there was considerable space for fun, pleasure and leisure during the practice of *dakwah* and that a consideration of such aspects of the piety movement also nuances conventional anthropological understandings of it. *Usrah* gatherings also provided an important setting for the students to exchange cultural experiences with one another, as well as to benefit from emotional and spiritual support while living and studying away from home. In terms of discussions of transnational migration for education, my thesis demonstrates the importance of religious practice and sociality in helping students to contend with levels of loneliness and stress. Studies of female Malay students, and international students more generally, often call attention to their need for social support in case of loneliness (Ari and Harmata 2000; Sawir *et al.* 2007).

A further important aspect of my findings concerning the relationship between religion and international student mobility relates to the participation in Islamic organisations of the students with whom I worked. It is understandable that, in Malaysia, families are concerned by the ways in which migration could affect a person's religiosity or behaviour, especially in the case of those who have no experience of such mobility themselves. In my own case, I have heard many parents and friends ask why Malay Muslim students seemed to frequently return to Malaysia having adopted new religious practices and attitudes. In Chapter 3, for example, I illustrated the case of Masyitah, whose mother

wanted to know why participating in the piety movement was such an important aspect of her daughter's life in the UK. After interviewing, on multiple occasions, more than ten students during my fieldwork about their motivation for joining movements of Islamic piety, my findings suggest that, besides family influence, the students were influenced in making this choice by senior Malay students in the cities in which they studied. The Malaysian students' community in Manchester and Cardiff took the initiative to help new students by providing hospitality such as airport pick-ups and temporary accommodation on arrival. The newly arrived students were then introduced to Islamic organisations by senior students. Against this backdrop, students started to attend *usrah* sessions and this is how they became interested in the piety movement. It is important to stress, however, that the students' participation in such activities derived from their own willingness and none reported to me that they had felt compelled to join due to pressure exerted on them by the organisers (in fact, during the course of my research, I met and interacted with several students who were not interested in these movements). By attending the weekly *usrah* sessions, and other religious gatherings, the students told me that they had improved their inner *iman* (faith) and textual knowledge of Islam. Additionally, the weekly *usrah* session was perceived as a space to remind them of their duty as Muslims and to exchange their experiences of piety with other female Malay Muslims abroad. From my observations, senior student members played a critical role in ensuring the stable and durable nature of the impact that the piety movements had had among Malay students in the UK. This finding is important as it indicates that the trend for transnational piety movements among early Malay students on British campuses – which took place about 50 years ago – continues to this day, as I explained in Chapter 2. During the summer vacation in Malaysia, some of these students promote this piety organisation in a pre-departure camp for new students who will be leaving home to study in the UK. Hence, transnational social ties between Malaysian students in the host country and new students in the countries of origin are also important in shaping their ways of being pious Muslims.

7.1.2 *Religion and Space*

Space also plays a central role in sustaining the Malaysian student community abroad. I have analysed – throughout the thesis but especially in Chapters 4 and 5 – the ways in which the students fashion particular types of space in the context of migration. One of the ways in which Malay students fashion distinctively Malaysian spaces, I argue, is

through deploying reciprocity to create stable accommodation arrangements. With the help of the Malaysian community organisation, finding accommodation was negotiated with relative ease by Malay student in both Manchester and Cardiff. Moreover, through the use of social media (especially Facebook groups) new Malaysian students can quickly fill in the housing form provided by the Malaysian Community of Old Trafford (MCOT) in Manchester. This example demonstrates the transnational connections of students who invest time in assisting new students to adapt to the practicalities of life in the UK. As a gesture of reciprocity, the new students participate in and support the community organisations' activities, and also help to promote their rental property to future students. They also place emphasis on being 'excellent tenants' in order to sustain the collective reputation of Malay students.

However, space is not only important to the collective identities of Malay Muslim students; its use and negotiation also inflects their interpersonal relations, both with one another and with non-Malays – such as in Halina's case with a Pakistani landlord in Chapter 4. In particular, I have focused on how Malay women negotiate space with accordance with their religion, especially in terms of living with unrelated males (*mahram*) in mixed-gender housing. There are many studies of international students' cultural experiences yet, nevertheless, these often fail to critically address the ways in which students negotiate religious prescriptions concerning gender segregation and boundaries in mixed-gender spaces. My findings show that, as much as these students enjoy living together with non-Muslims, they also seek to accommodate in creative ways an ongoing commitment and adherence to Malay cultural norms and Islamic teachings.

Another way in which gendered constructions of space are important in my thesis concerns the students' perceptions of risk and security – pressing issues for Muslim women in the UK at the time of my research. I called attention, for example, to the establishment of a *Musyif* system (Neighbourhood Watch) among male Malay students. This activity aimed to ensure the safety of the Malaysian students, especially during winter season, a period during which crimes were perceived to spike in the residential areas in which many of them lived. The *Musyif* system was introduced to ensure that solo Malay students would be accompanied by an escort when returning home late from the campus. It was normal for many students in my research to work on campus until late

at night, something they perceived as increasing their likelihood of being affected by criminal activity.

The role of space in Malay students' lives in the UK was examined in more detail in Chapter 5 by means of a discussion of the everyday practices of food consumption and commensality among female Malay students. In addition to analysing the relationship between private and public space, however, I also brought into play a discussion of the importance of tastes, textures and aromas to student experiences and evaluations of the ethnic restaurants and co-ethnic eating places they regularly visited: different aspects of food played various roles in the construction of a spectrum of relationships and communities. This chapter also builds on the anthropological discussion of food and kinship – a key focus for which has, indeed, been South-East Asian societies in general and Malaysian societies in particular (Carsten 1995; Janowski and Kerlogue 2007; Karim 1995). Using the lens of transnational female Malaysian students in the UK, I analysed how the forms of relatedness that food and the act of cooking and eating together could play a dynamic role in creating. In Malay households, the kitchen is not only perceived as a place of unity and resistance to division (Carsten 1995), for student migrants but is also a site of warm sociality and conviviality. In the kitchen, the students seek to create harmonious friendships through the act of food preparation and cooking. Trust is also an important aspect of such friendship: by having a cooking rota, for example, students establish trust and tolerance in a household in which individuals are also under pressure in their studies.

Spending time in student kitchens also brought to my attention the importance of sub-national or regional identities for the Malay students in Manchester – important because they maintain these at the same time as seeking to live up to the aspirations of the Malay authorities for whom they act as Malay national ambassadors. Students were keen to share notable dishes from their place of origin with one another, demonstrating the importance of regional identity as well as being Muslim and Malay to student experiences of life outside the home country.

Food is also an important vehicle to understanding Malay relations with non-Malays and the forms of cultural exchange in which they participate. When analysing this theme, I engaged my findings with the notion of tastes, textures and aromas at ethnic restaurants,

as shown by Ray (2014) and Law (2001). My findings show that, besides loving the texture of the rice and the aroma of the grilled sea bass at the restaurant, their experiences were also shaped by their privileged treatment from the Afghan restaurant owner. Similarly, students also interacted with the settled Malaysian migrant community in Manchester over communal breakfasts at the *Kedai Kopi Rakyat* on Saturdays.

7.1.3 Education and Aspirations

A final analytical strand of this thesis which I wish to highlight in the conclusion concerns education and aspirations. During my fieldwork I became particularly interested in exploring the ways in which students handled their status as ‘sponsorship students’ and how they managed the call on them by Malay officials to act as Malaysian mini ambassadors during their time overseas. I argue that the aspirations to study abroad among female Malaysian Muslim students in the UK are fashioned on the historical context of the legacy of British colonial-era racialisation and on the affirmative action policies – such as educational scholarships for *Bumiputera* – of the postcolonial Malay nation-state. Interestingly, this study- abroad aspiration is part of a collective effort whereby parents and teachers give their full support to students to win the scholarship. My finding is similar to that of Bayly (2007), who also reported that the parents play a supportive role in their aspirations for their children’s educational attainment. This is driven by the idea that excellence in education is a social achievement that can improve the family’s socio-economic status as well as Malay pride.

However, the findings in my research show that, after these students win a scholarship, their aspirations and achievements also shifted. This was shaped by the idea of a well-balanced citizenship and their new role as sponsored students. They were told by their sponsoring body to present themselves as mini ambassadors while studying abroad. The idea of the well-balanced citizen which has, in the Malaysian national educational philosophy, encouraged these students in the UK to be knowledgeable and competent, to possess high moral standards and to always contribute to God, the nation and the community. It also comprises a commitment to Malay Islam, tolerance and the faithful practice of *akhlaq* (excellent moral behaviour) in everyday life. Besides being encouraged to conform to the above aspirations, the students are also reminded simultaneously to improve their English language proficiency and to do so by interacting more with the

locals. With these aspirations in mind and the challenging secular environment in the UK, the students invested their time and efforts by learning much about their religion, participating in volunteer activities and even registering in foreign-language classes. It is quite striking to know that these students' decision to take a foreign-language class was more to gain some English friends than to learn the language itself (which I illustrated in the case of Afia, who was frustrated with the mass of Asian rather than European students on her course). This case is important because it exposes the expectations and frustrations of international students in overseas higher education. The other aspect of this ethnographic research also reveals how these students feel about being sponsored students abroad. Their feelings of burden, and their anxiety to exceed their parents' and the nation's expectations are clearly expressed when they use the term '*duit rakyat*' (the tax paid which sponsors their studies) in everything they do as a reminder of the enormous responsibility they feel.

The students in my research also expressed their patriotism to their country of origin by doing volunteer work, especially in educational activities. My ethnographic findings have contributed to the discussion on international students' aspirations and loyalty by demonstrating the ways in which they are able to serve the home country while studying abroad. While many studies show the benefits for students of volunteering (Badri 2015; Barton *et al.* 2017; Holdsworth 2010), my own informants found that volunteering was an opportunity for them to serve their country. In my case, these students would teach the Malay language, history and Islamic education to Malaysian migrant children who lived in the UK. While these students claimed that they learnt much about the UK education system, they also shared with me their concerns about Malaysian education and career aspirations. With this useful information, contemporary research has suggested that the government and sponsoring agencies should assign the sponsored student to an NGO or public department before they leave to study abroad so that they have a channel or medium through which to voice their opinion. Although many students in my research practised diplomatic behaviour in their everyday lives – such as being a good citizen and *ummah* – there were also those who decided to do it in a different way, which might put their identity as a Malaysian Muslim at risk, as illustrated in Chapters 3 and 6. The one factor that led to the above situation was the biographical changes which they experienced in their migration lives (Scheibelhofer 2018). Thus, while being everyday diplomats is an important element in how many Malay students seek to conform to calls upon them to act

as well-balanced citizens, students also undergo changes in their identity during migration and seek to express these changes individually in meaningful ways.

7.2 Concluding remarks

I conclude that these students' everyday lives were concerned with how to maintain their religious and Malay identity in aspects of their relationships, food consumption, aspirations and space. From the key findings above, what I can say about my research is that it concerns women who choose both to wear the veil or *hijab* and go to *usrah* but also, at the same time, to chill out. For those who know nothing about these students' lives, it would be easy to assume that these female Malay Muslim students, when they go back to Malaysia, would share their negative experiences of Islamophobia in the UK with family and friends. Despite rising levels of hostility towards Muslims in the UK (Littler and Feldman 2015; Zempi and Awan 2016), due to which some of their friends were arrested, and with their status as sponsored students, they still chose to get out there, to learn things, travelling to Scotland, making new friends, trying new things and sharing the occasional risk.

My findings show that, while these students strived to be good Muslims, they were also keen to cultivate a rich and vibrant social life. They decided to go to *usrah* so they could find a '*halal*' solution to interacting efficiently with their non-Muslim friends. With the knowledge and sharing sessions during *usrah*, they also hoped to be able to answer questions and explain what Islam was to them. As Muslims, it would have been challenging and shaming if they had been unable to explain this when asked. The students believed that, by having a good understanding of and some knowledge about their religion, they could live a sociable and pleasurable life, rather than, as we might assume, one that was bounded by Islamic conviction. The students juggled both piety and a life full of meaning and sociability and, while doing so, were also faced with difficult circumstances, both in terms of their lives as students and as young adults adapting to life away from home.

Thus, the meaning of piety in the everyday lives of these Malaysian Muslim women in my research aligns with the findings of Amran (2014: 285) on Muslim women in Scotland which show that 'Piety means knowing how to live faithfully through public engagement

with the broader host communities, despite having encountered many challenging situations'. Hence, I argue that these Malay female students' experiences were managed through an extraordinary range of institutions, rituals, practices, organisations and spaces in a manner that provided the possibility both for them to think actively about their Muslim selfhood and to learn how to handle those forms of social and cultural diversity with which they were not familiar. This is why my research is essential because it is pushing back the single picture of the Muslim woman who can be pious but who can not have space for fun, leisure and sociability in relationships. What I am suggesting in my research is that this is not the case – they are pious but they are also making friends, challenging boundaries and travelling.

7.3 Recommendations for Future Research

It is hoped that this contemporary research will help build the readers' knowledge and understanding of Malaysian Muslim women's experiences in the UK. The ethnographic methods which I deployed in my thesis were successful in exploring the students' everyday life experiences. Thus, I suggest that further ethnographic research should be done in the future by exploring the lives of Malaysian students in other cities in the UK and Ireland. As this research was conducted in cities with a substantial number of Malaysian students, I suggest that it would be interesting and useful to explore their life experiences in cities which have a smaller Malaysian student population. This would provide other dimensions and challenges of students' experiences in term of their everyday lives as female Malaysian Muslim students. To overcome the limitations which I experienced during the summer vacation, the researcher could document transnational students' experiences of spending their summer vacation in Malaysia by visiting them there.

The second suggestion is to extend this research by exploring the notion of piety, and the morality of these religious female Malaysian students when they return to the home country. The findings could help to determine whether students maintain their piety and morality when back in Malaysia or whether they change the ways in which they behave, as though they were still in the UK. To make the research more concrete, I also suggest interviewing Malay parents in Malaysia on their perspectives of their children's piety movements abroad. Finally, in a contribution to the gender discussion, further research

could also explore the experiences of male Malaysian Muslim students, especially as my study has already managed to capture the experience of male Malay students being arrested due to the terrorist attack in Manchester. This could be an excellent platform for them from which to voice their migration and religious experiences as male Malay students abroad and to show what piety means to them.

Notes

1. *Mahram* is a person – man or woman – related to a particular individual through blood, marriage or breastfeeding, someone whom he or she is not permitted to marry, such as a father, nephew, uncle, etc.
2. ‘Transnationalism from below’ is a concept that expresses the way in which migrants relate to their country of origin in economic, cultural and political terms (Guarnizo and Smith 1998; Guarnizo *et al.* 2003; Portes 1996).
3. ‘Transnationalism from above’ or ‘external citizenship’, is the way in which the countries of origin take measures in order to channel the transnational activities of migrants.
4. On 9 August 1965, Singapore separated from Malaysia and become an independent and sovereign state due to the deep political and economic differences between the ruling parties of both countries.
5. Only in the 1920s did a majority of Malay parents begin to adopt the Western type of education and send their children to various types of school, including those run by Christian missionaries. Thus, it can be said that Malay children were exposed to the Western-oriented cultural environment in schools due to the nature of education during the colonial period (Ozay 2011).
6. Examinations were made compulsory, a central library was established, and an orderly system of administration was put in place.
7. The riot occurred the day after Malaysia’s general election in 1963 when the ruling party, the UMNO-led Alliance, lost many seats to the opposition. The opposition parties won by making racial attacks and using insulting words against Malays before the election and during the celebration of their victory in Kuala Lumpur. This triggered anger amongst the threatened Malays, and nearly 200 people were killed in the incident (Comber 2009).
8. Hasan al-Banna, a founder of the Muslim Brotherhood movement (*Al-Ikhwan al-muslimun*), has adopted the *usrah* system as one of the strategies of Islamic progress. The early implementation of *usrah* started during the Prophet Muhammad’s time as a method to deliver the Islamic message to early Muslim companions such as his family members, relatives, and close friends in the house of *al-Arqam ibn Abi Al-Arqam* in Makkah.

9. Fictive or *quasi* kinship terms are often used to denote relationships where the traditional rules of kin membership do not apply (see Reis and Spreacher 2009).
10. The term originates from the Arabic language, *Al -Muallafa Qulūbuhum*’ which means ‘those whose hearts are won over’ or ‘those hearts that need softening’. It is used to categorise people who are ready to embrace the Islamic religion and/or new Moslem converts. In Malaysia, all Malaysian-Chinese Muslims are classified as such regardless of whether or not they have just converted or are fourth- (or older-) generation Muslims.
11. There is a discussion on the terminological preference for revert or convert to Islam among the Chinese Muslim community in Penang by Pei-Chien Wu (2015). The Chinese-Muslim converts in Malaysia prefer the word revert rather than convert as it signifies that someone has returned to his or her original state (Pei-Chien Wu 2015).
12. The *Quran* and *Hadith* are the two primary sources of knowledge in *usrah* (Imam Nawawi 2001).
13. *Ta’aruf* is an ice-breaking session between the new members. It is the first principle of *usrah*, where the members will get to know each other in a warm and intimate way.
14. The other meaning of *usrah* is to support and help the individual to develop a better life by understanding and practising Islamic teaching and values (Nabisah *et al.* 2015). In some places, *usrah* is also called *halaqah* or study circle.
15. See Chapter 4 for an in-depth discussion of living with non-*Mahram*.
16. In Islam, marriage between first cousins is allowed. For more detail on this, refer to the *Quran*, *surat Al-Nisaa*’ (4:22-24). However, in Malay society, the practice of marriage between cousins is uncommon and somewhat frowned upon.
17. See Mandaville (2001) on transnational public spheres: information and communication technologies in the Muslim world.
18. Structures in the article refer to national, provincial and university policies as well as the resources and support provided by organisations and individuals directly to students in need.
19. Agents refer to international student housing issues, including NGOs working on housing issues, university administrators, faculty members, international students themselves and student organisations.
20. See *Quran Surah al Maidah* [5:3], *Surah al Baqarah* [2:173].

21. See *Quran*, *Surah Nisa* [4:43], *Surah Maida* [5:90], *Surah Maida* [5:91].
22. In Islam, *Salat al-Tawbah* is performed when someone indulges in sin accidentally or even intentionally but later realises her or his guilt. The *salat* is not obligatory but is one of the ways for a Muslim to ask for His forgiveness.
23. For more discussion on the complexity of emotions, refer to Andrew Beatty (2013).
24. Through the NEP programmes, the percentage of *Bumiputera* in the professional and technical category increased from 47.2 in 1970 to 63.2 in 2000. Meanwhile, the poverty rate for *Bumiputeras* decreased from 65.0 per cent in 1970 to 20.8 per cent in 1990 (Abhayaratne 2004).
25. In 2010, Vietnam was ranked as the world's top CIVETS (Colombia, Indonesia, Vietnam, Egypt, Turkey, South Africa) economy, which means the country that was renowned as the world's strongest emerging, fast-growth, on-commodity-dependent power after BRICs (Brazil, Russia, India, China) in terms of its globalised development potential.
26. The word widely used in Vietnam's mobilisation campaign to urge key groups such as workers or students to exceed established productivity and excellence norms (Bayly 2007).
27. The excessiveness of doing something that is perceived as good and moral regarding attainment marking that can cause harm.
28. During British colonisation, most of the English-medium schools were located in urban areas and were attended by the Chinese and Indians immigrants who lived there.
29. In producing the well-balanced Malaysian citizen in terms of knowledge and *akhlaq*, Islamic formal education in primary and secondary school has been taught as a platform to instil *akhlaq* self-regulation among Malaysian Muslim students (Shukor *et al.* 2013).
30. See the attempts of the Indonesian students to bring Indonesian migrants closer to social and religious activities in Taiwan in Melchert (2017).

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

List of informants

No.	Name	Age	Course/Year	City	Scholarship/ self/funded
1	Afia	23	Business and Accounting/2	Manchester	Petronas
2	Anisa	22	Business and Accounting/2	Manchester	Petronas
3	Afiqa	22	Business and Accounting/2	Manchester	Petronas
4	Ira	22	Business and Accounting/2	Manchester	Self-funded
5	Yasmin	22	Finance/3	Manchester	Petronas
6	Ayda	21	Finance/3	Manchester	Petronas
7	Nina	20	ACCA	Manchester	Self-funded
8	Masyitah	24	Pharmacy	Manchester	JPA
9	Jasmine	20	Landscape architecture/1	Manchester	UEM
10	Zara	29	Education/2/Phd	Manchester	KPM
11	Huda	28	Biology/2/Phd	Manchester	KPM
12	Haina	22	English and Literature/2	Manchester	MARA
13	Aini	21	Biology/1	Manchester	JPA
14	Fathin	23	TESL/3	Manchester	KPM
15	Ila	33	Business & Accounting/3/Phd	Manchester	KPM
16	Nat	22	Law/1	Manchester	JPA
17	Shah*	27	Engineering/3/PhD	Manchester	Yang di-Pertuan Agong
18	Hidayah	28	Media & communication/2/PhD	Cardiff	KPM
19	Zaty	23	Optometry/3	Cardiff	MARA
20	Bot	23	Optometry/3	Cardiff	MARA
21	Fara	29	Media & communication/3/PhD	Cardiff	MARA
22	Sakeena	23	Optometry/3	Cardiff	MARA
23	Ameerah	24	Medical/3	Cardiff	JPA
24	Husna	23	Law/3	Cardiff	JPA
25	Faezah	33	Chemistry/3/PhD	Cardiff	MARA
26	Shafiqah	29	Psychology/3/PhD	Cardiff	KPM
27	Suzanna	25	Psychology/3/PhD	Cardiff	KPM
28	Hannah	24	Optometry/MA	Cardiff	Self-funded
29	Najwa	22	Pharmacy /1	Cardiff	JPA
30	Aisyah	24	Physiotherapy/MA	Cardiff	Self-funded

*Key informant

APPENDIX B

Interview Questions

Experience of going to the UK

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. What was the idea behind your migration to the UK? What was your motivation for coming to the UK? Why study here, not Australia or New Zealand? How did you choose your university? Who supported your decision?
3. What were your expectations before coming here, and how do you find your life living here when compared to Malaysia? What did you feel before you came to the UK?
4. Did you face any difficulties when arriving in the UK? Was there anybody to help you on your arrival?
5. Could you describe your life as a daughter and a student in Malaysia? What is the difference between living in Malaysia and living in the UK?
6. What does it feel like being a female Malaysian Muslim student in the UK?
7. How do you deal with these emotions every day? Where is the best place which can offer you some comfort? What do you usually do to make you feel better?
8. What emotional experiences did you have while living in the UK, and how did you deal with them?

Everyday life as a female Malaysian student

1. Tell me how you deal with your daily life in the UK as a student migrant. Besides university, where do you usually go and why?
2. What kind of events/activities do you usually participate in while living in Manchester/Cardiff? Why do you choose to join them? How do you find these activities and people?
3. How is your relationship with your new friends in the UK? Are there any challenges you face when living or making friends with others?
4. How do you maintain your relationship with your family and friends in Malaysia? Are there any distractions you find while contacting them, and how do you solve this problem?

5. Are there any organisations you participate in while living here and if so, what position do you hold (if any) or what is your role in the organisation? How active are you in this organisation?

Migration and religion

1. How do you see yourself as a Malaysian Muslim while living in the UK and how do you deal with it?
2. What kind of new experience do you have as a female Malaysian Muslim student in the UK? As a Muslim woman, what do you learn about Islam when you come here?
3. How does religion help to shape your perspective about the migration experience? When is religion important in your life and how you practice it as a Muslim?
4. Do you participate in any piety movements? If yes, how? Could you share with me your piety movement experience?
5. What do you usually do when you have a question or are unsure about something regarding Islam? What kind of alternative do you use and refer to?

Migration and aspiration

1. How does being a scholarship student shape your everyday life in the UK?
2. How do you carry this role and how you feel about it (burden or blessing)?
3. As a scholarship student studying in the UK, what is the contribution you can make to your nation and how?
4. What do you think about the Malaysian education system? Based on your personal and academic experience, is there any suggestion you would like to make to improve it?
5. What do you want to achieve in your life? Could you tell me what achievement means to you?
6. What are your plans after graduating?
7. If you were given an opportunity to work in the UK, would you stay, or would you prefer to work in Malaysia?

APPENDIX C



PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

A STUDY OF FEMALE MALAYSIAN MUSLIM STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES IN THE UK

Assalamualaikum and Salam Sejahtera,

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide whether or not to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully.

My name is Ireena Nasiha Ibnu. I am a doctoral student in Migration Studies at the University of Sussex. This research aims to give a voice to students, as transnational migrants in the UK. This multi-sited ethnographic research will focus on the dynamics of transnational experience amongst student communities in different cities in the UK. This research will draw on an understanding of transnational migration as a space as experienced by Malaysian Muslim women. Transnational migration refers to a process whereby migrants simultaneously forge and sustain social relations between both the society in their country of origin and that of the country in which they currently reside (Glick Schiller *et al.* 1995; Basch *et al.* 1994; Faist 2000).

Putting the focus on female Malaysian Muslim students as the transnational migrants, this research will help to describe the real-life situations faced by female Malaysian Muslim students in the UK environment. In addition, this research is intended to represent the voice of Malaysian Muslim women, in challenging the stigma and negative views of students' experience in the UK which exist in the Malaysian community in Malaysia. This research will look into two elements of their experiences; personal life experience and group experience. The duration of fieldwork in this study is 12 months, focusing on

the city of Manchester and Cardiff.

The research has been approved through the University of Sussex ethical review process. All the information collected in this study will be kept strictly confidential. The University of Sussex has insurance in place to cover its legal liabilities in respect of this study. Please do not hesitate to contact me at i.ibnu@sussex.c.uk/ireena.ibnu@gmail.com if you have any enquiries regarding this study.

Thank you for taking the time to read the information sheet.

Best regards,

Ireena Ibnu

18th January 2016



CONSENT FORM

A STUDY OF FEMALE MALAYSIAN MUSLIM STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES IN THE UK

Project Approval Reference: ER/II42/1

I agree to take part in the above University of Sussex research project. I, the undersigned, confirm that (please tick box as appropriate):

1.	I have read and understood the information about the project, as provided in the Information Sheet dated 18 th January 2016.	
2.	I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project and my participation.	
3.	I voluntarily agree to participate in the project.	
4.	I understand I can withdraw at any time without giving reasons and that I will not be penalised for withdrawing nor will I be questioned on why I have withdrawn.	
5.	The procedures regarding confidentiality have been clearly explained (e.g. use of names, pseudonyms, anonymisation of data, etc.) to me.	
6.	If applicable, separate terms of consent for interviews, audio, video or other forms of data collection have been explained and provided to me.	
7.	The use of the data in research, publications, sharing and archiving has been explained to me.	
8.	I understand that other researchers will have access to this data only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the data and if they agree to the terms I have specified in this form.	
9.	Select only one of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I would like my name used and understand what I have said or written as part of this study will be used in reports, publications and other research outputs so that anything I have contributed to this project can be recognized. - I do not want my name to be used in this project. 	
10.	I, along with the Researcher, agree to sign and date this informed consent form.	

I consent to the processing of my personal information for the purposes of this research study. I understand that such information will be treated as strictly confidential and handled in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998.

Name:

Signature:

Date: