Using an ethnographic approach to understand the adjustment journey of international students at a university in England

Lorraine Brown, Bournemouth University

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Send correspondence to Lorraine Brown, Services Management, Bournemouth University, Poole, BH12 5BB, UK (lbrown@bournemouth.ac.uk).

Synopsis

This paper reports on findings from an ethnographic study of international student adjustment. It also recommends the use of ethnography as a way to research the experiences of tourists and migrants to build up a body of knowledge on the outcome of cross-cultural contact for these two groups. The aim of my ethnographic study was to capture the adjustment journey of a group of international postgraduate students at a university in the South of England. The ethnographic approach involved regular in-depth individual interviews with thirteen students of different nationalities and overt participant observation of the entire postgraduate cohort of 150 students. Research began on the first day of induction in September 2003 and ended in October 2004 upon completion and submission of the Masters dissertation. Students' experience of adjustment to academic and sociocultural life was therefore captured from arrival in the new country to the return home one full year later. This study finds that stress was at its height in the initial stage of the academic sojourn; the struggle to cope with the challenges of foreign language use and an unfamiliar academic and the sociocultural environment at a time when students were beset with homesickness and loneliness are the causes of this stress. An association was made between the passage of time and a gradual decrease in acculturative stress; however, this was not a generalizable process; there was not only fluctuation in experience across the student body but also in the individual's subjective sense of success across different aspects of life in the new country. This leads to a conceptualisation the adjustment journey as an unpredictable and dynamic process, which is experienced differently among sojourners, and fluctuates throughout the sojourn as a result of a host of individual, cultural and external factors. The relevance of this study to tourism scholars comes from drawing parallels between the long-stay tourist and the international student who represents an important segment of international travel. However, a gap in the literature exists on the impact of tourism on the tourist that this study helps to fill.

Conducting an ethnographic study

Ethnography is an interdisciplinary research approach (Bohannan 1969; Clifford 1986) that has a strong presence in social and cultural anthropology, sociology and social psychology as well as in applied areas like health and education (Hammersley 1992). Ethnography relates to anthropology (Spindler 1982), a term which derives from the Greek, and means the study of people (Bohannan 1969). The goal of anthropology is to describe and explain social behaviour and the perspectives of cultural members, with the ingrained principle of studying behaviour in a natural setting (Brewer 2000; Fielding 1993; Spradley 1979), necessitating close association with participants over a long period (Hammersley 1992). Field research involves the use of the participant observation technique which is common to ethnography (Fetterman 1998).

Culture is the central organizing concept of anthropology (Kroeber and Kluckhohn 1952; Spradley 1979). In fact, ethnography, which similarly derives from the Greek, means the writing of culture (Fetterman 1998). The focus on cultural patterns drew me to the choice of ethnography, as I was interested in the sub-culture students would create during their sojourn, as well as the widely recognised influence of cultural origin on their behaviour (Brewer 2000; Spindler 1982; Spradley 1979). I chose an ethnographic approach in order to make an in-depth study of the individual, subjective, experience of the move to a new culture at the same time as identifying the common patterns among this cohort of students.

The process of adjustment is a journey whose destination is unknown to sojourners at the outset. For this reason, the initial inductive approach of qualitative research was appropriate. Qualitative researchers usually enter the research process uncovering their assumptions and setting them aside; they do not begin with a theory, which they impose on informants, but with curiosity (Brewer 2000). They may begin fieldwork with a foreshadowed problem in mind, but an essential part of the research task is discovering what is significant: Wilson (1977) describes this as the anthropological research tradition of suspending preconceptions. Similarly, an examination of the changes wrought in tourists by their trip and in migrants by their immersion in a new living and working world of a new culture would also benefit from the openness associated with ethnography.

The product of ethnography is a mirror of a group under study, a detailed slice of life (Taylor 2002). Ethnographers need to present data from the emic (the students') perspective (Clifford 1983; Fetterman 1998; Spradley 1979;), following which they seek to explain behaviour, combining the view of the insider (the emic) with that of the outsider (the etic) to describe the social setting (Fetterman 1998; Wilcox 1982). Ethnography relates with a rejection of the principle that the researcher's view is paramount and advocates that the insider's view of society is equally if not more valuable than that of the outsider perspective of the researcher (Bourgeois 2002). Hence, Fetterman (1998) informs researchers to make their ethnography phenomenological, that is, to include the perspective of the "experiencing person" (Becker 1992). Indeed, the prioritisation of the emic viewpoint means that ethnography may answer the growing call for a research focus on the experiences of consumers of tourism and events. As successive studies by Morgan on a music festival (2006, 2009), a sports tour (2008) and restaurant interactions (Morgan, Watson, and Hemmington 2008) reveal, destination managers and marketers now need to understand the consumers' perspective on leisure experiences.

Anthropology at home

Relevant to this study is the distinction between anthropology, which entails research in alien cultures, and sociology, which involves studying at home, using anthropological approaches such as ethnography (Clifford 1986). In the latter case, researchers do not need to master an alien tongue to master and the culture of interest is partially known at the outset of study (van Maanen 1988). Both types of ethnography are adaptable by researchers into tourism and hospitality who may study international tourists in either the domestic or receiving country. On the other hand, they may study the tourism impacts on the local population through immersion in the natural setting of the community. In this research, the context of study is the South of England, home to the researcher. Burgess (1984) states that field researchers working in their own culture share familiarity with the society under study. This familiarity is not necessarily an advantage, as a common problem of conducting anthropology at home is 'making the familiar strange' (Spindler 1982). Striving to portray the setting from the perspective of international students was a challenge: as most anthropologists (e.g. Barley 1983) note, describing the exotic than the familiar is much simpler.

Choice of setting and sample

According to Brewer (2000), all ethnography involves case study research, which focuses on the particular but not necessarily at the expense of the general (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995). The case in this study is a university setting in a town in the south of England (population 165,370), chosen for its capacity to portray the experience of international students in British higher education (HE): the increasing recruitment of international students into HE makes the results of this study relevant to all those higher education institutions affected by this growing student population. Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) and Daymon and Holloway (2002) describe a *setting* as a named context in which phenomena occur that might be studied from any number of angles. Any physical setting can become the basis for research as long as the setting contains people engaging in activity (Spradley 1980).

The research problem and the setting are closely bound together and researchers should not underestimate the role of pragmatic considerations (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995). As the study's aim was to explore international student adjustment, the setting for this research was my department's Graduate School; the department offered direct access to and close involvement with a large group of international students. This context satisfies Spradley's (1980) recommended criteria in choice of setting: simplicity, accessibility, unobtrusiveness, and permissibleness.

Being my place of work as well as of research increased the possibilities for data collection. I had far better access to data than an outsider would obtain. Qualitative research denotes an orientation that focuses the study of social life in real, naturally occurring settings (Brewer 2000; Schatzman and Strauss 1973; Wilson 1977). This approach means that participants feel comfortable, and are natural and spontaneous, in as far as possible when they are being interviewed or observed; as Derrida (1976) states, the mere presence of a spectator is a violation, and may colour the behaviour of those observed (Fielding 1993). I was a participant observer, therefore my presence as a study support lecturer was not unsettling to students: I would be present whether engaging in observation or not. Examples of ethnographic research into natural tourism settings are Curtin's (2006) research into wildlife tourism and Gouthro's (2009) study of interactions at a heritage site.

Ethnographers mostly use purposive sampling, selecting a specific location and informants (Daymon and Holloway 2002; Williams 2003). All masters students in the Graduate School were observed over one academic year in a variety of situations, and I had opportunity over the year to interact with most students. For the interviewing aspect of the research, the study aims to find ten students who would be interviewed several times each over a twelve month period. The sample in qualitative research tends to be small as the focus is on deep exploration (Daymon and Holloway 2002), although, Hammersley (1992, p. 16) argues that doing research that identifies generic features is possible, "to find the general in the particular; a world in a grain of sand." Given the importance of personality in the subjective experience of life events, including adjustment (Berry 1994), it is acknowledged that a different sample of interviewees might have produced different findings. Whilst qualitative research does not intend to generalise its findings, this study nevertheless notes a repetition of patterns among participants that hints at some universality of experience.

Rationale for ethnographic research

Williams (2003) argues that judgment is necessary of all research on the basis of its relevance to practical concerns, producing information that has general relevance beyond local circumstances. Indeed, according to Brewer (2000), relevance is the main criterion by which to judge research findings. For ethnographers a clear rationale for research is necessary. The relevance of my study lies in the observation that the majority if not all British universities, and indeed HEI worldwide, are recruiting increasing numbers of international students. International education is a major export industry, with fierce competition among the key markets of the UK, Canada, New Zealand and Australia (Cushner and Karim 2004; Ryan and Carroll 2005). In the UK context, the number of international students soars, and their recruitment by British universities grows steadily (Leonard, Pelletier and Morley 2002): statistics (UKCISA 2009a) show that 15% of the total student population is made up of international students.

Income from international students plays an important role in the financial health of the higher education (HE) sector, representing almost a third of the total fees income for universities and HE colleges in the UK. The advent of full-cost fees means that most British HE institutions (HEI) are dependent on income from international students (Leonard et al. 2002). International students make an important economic contribution to the local community, and carry similar impacts on the destination to leisure tourists (Llewellyn-Smith & McCabe 2008; Ritchie, Cooper, and Carr 2003). Indeed, the travel by international students is significant; however, Llewellyn-Smith & McCabe (2008) note that this is an under-researched topic.

The experience of international students' adjustment to academic and sociocultural life in England is an important area of research, as international students are more likely to enjoy a positive experience if there is better understanding of the issues facing them, and if their unique needs arising from cultural dissonance are met (Ward 2001). Ryan and Carroll (2005) argue that responsible recruitment demands that adequate welfare provision is available to cater for the special needs of international students. A positive experience will result in positive word of mouth, which Goldblatt (2007) describes as the most common factor in purchase decision. The market for international students is increasingly competitive and HEI need to provide an optimum service in order to safeguard their future recruitment (UKCISA 2009b). An inside view of international students' adjustment journey will identify those areas of concern for students that HEI need to address.

The place of the literature in ethnographic research

In ethnography, researchers undertake an initial review of the literature to identify relevant theory and to pinpoint any gaps in the literature: they collect further literature as analyzis of primary data proceeds;, which is tied to the themes that emerge (Holloway and Wheeler 2009). At the outset of ethnographic research, the investigator has no clear idea of which literature to consult as they have not collected or analyzed data yet. Therefore this paper presents the bulk of the literature review with the main findings so that a dialogue with the literature can take place. The key theories underpinning this study on the adjustment process were: cultural dimensions, culture shock, and adjustment processes. Studies on international students were also relevant, as they identified topic and methodological gaps. The following sections identify the theoretical underpinning to this study, and identify the utility for tourism researchers.

Defining culture

Understanding culture was important to my study for two reasons: the aim of ethnography is the description of a group's way of life, its product is the writing of culture (e.g. Fetterman 1998), and culture is the tool that helps ethnographers to interpret behaviour (e.g. Spradley 1979; Brewer 2000). Furthermore, to the researcher could not comprehend the international student experience without a grasp of cultural differences, which inform the experience of transition (Hofstede 2001). More than a hundred definitions of the concept of culture exist in the social science literature, with differing definitions adopted by different academic disciplines (Gudykunst 1998; Jandt 2001; Smith 2000; Williams 1981): it was not my aim to cover in detail all of these definitions but to indicate which definition best fits my research.

Of significance for the study and for ethnographic methods is the adoption by anthropologists in the nineteenth century of the term "culture" to designate a distinctive way of life, with a new emphasis on lived experience, communication patterns and shared practices (Williams 1981). This new understanding went on to influence the emphasis in the modern concept of culture on the collectivity, as reflected in Hofstede's (1991, 2001) comprehensive body of work. The definition is also useful for the sociological study of settings on home terrain: Hofstede (2001) states that culture is a phenomenon collectively generated by people who share the same social environment and are mentally programmed in a way that distinguishes them from other social groups.

Culture transmission occurs from generation to generation through the process of socialisation, a concept that proved useful in explaining students' attachment to original cultural norms of behaviour, even when they declared a desire to change. Gudykunst (1998) socialisation as the conditioning and programming in the basic social processes of communication, providing children with an understanding of the world and culturally patterned ways of responding to it. There is recognition that culturally ingrained behaviour is slow to change, as shown in Hall's (1980) reference to cultural deprogramming as "the greatest separation feat of all" (p. 240).

Culture shock

A study of international student adjustment necessarily involves consideration of the literature on culture shock. Several researchers claim that using theories of culture to explain and understand attitudes and behaviour will become less relevant in the globalised world (see Bradley 2000; Featherstone 1995; Martin and Harrell 2004; Todres, 2002). Hofstede (2001, 2002) however argues that despite evidence of some change in individual countries, cultural divergence will remain, and differences may in fact be increasing: a growth in individualism among countries that have become richer is pointed out; similarly, instead of diminishing power distance, the process of globalisation is acting to widen the power gap.

Despite criticism that Hofstede's rigid framework doesn't take into account global change

(Cray and Mallory 1998; Mcsweeney 2000), its extensive use by theorists of and researchers into sojourner adjustment reflect the validity and relevance of Hofstede's framework of cultural dimensions. Meanwhile, in the absence of research into the adjustment experiences of tourists, Hottola (2004) argues that tourism academics must engage with the sojourner adjustment literature until a body of empirical and theoretically sophisticated work on the tourist adjustment experience is available.

A common premise in the current literature on transition is that most sojourners will experience some degree of stress following their immersion in a new culture; this is based on the notion of cultural difference between societies and on the move from a familiar to an alien environment (see, for example, Kim 2001; Ward, Bochner, and Furnham 2001), and indicates a rebuttal of claims for cultural homogenisation and decreasing cultural distinction. This raises the questions: to what extent do researchers into adjustment take into account theories of globalisation, and are theories of cultural homogenisation supported by empirical evidence? These are questions pertinent to researchers into international movements of people in a variety of disciplines, and it is a debate into which tourism academics must enter.

The early definitions of culture shock have retained their currency: culture shock is commonly defined as anxiety that results from losing the familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse, and their substitution by other cues that are strange (Hall 1959; Oberg 1960). There is a substantial body of work which reveals the initial stage of the sojourn to be a time of anxiety and communicative difficulty (Berry 1994; Kim 2001). The move to a new environment is a traumatic life event when sojourners must cope with substantial cultural change (Gudykunst 1998; Hofstede 2001; Kim 2001; Zajonc 1952). Among the many symptoms attributed to the generalised state of culture shock in the sojourner adjustment (including international students) literature are low self-esteem, low morale, social isolation, dissatisfaction with life, bitterness, homesickness, disorientation, anxiety, depression, role strain, identity confusion, stress, loneliness, self-doubt, hostility, distress, personality disintegration helplessness, irritability, fear and self-deprecation. These feelings have appeared over several years in many empirical studies of adjustment, which have identified several sources of strain, including weather and food differences, language prowess, accommodation and financial problems, loneliness, homesickness and academic difficulties.

A critical overview of the literature shows much dispute over the inevitability of the sojourner's encounter with culture shock. Advocates of the culture learning approach, such as Furnham and Bochner (1986), Ward et al. (2001) and Cushner and Karim (2004) argue that sojourners can manage stress and prepare for difficulties. Furthermore many theorists of adjustment such as Martin and Harrell (2004) and Gao and Gudykunst (2001) question the generalisability of the experience of culture shock: they prefer to view transition as a unique and subjectively-lived experience that cannot fit a prescriptive model of adjustment. As Madison (2006) observes, the sojourn is a uniquely subjective experience, influenced by a myriad of factors that a single model cannot capture. These include *cultural distance* (Redmond 2000; Ward et al. 2001), *personality* (Detweiler 1980; Gudykunst 1998; Gudykunst and Nishida 2001; Kim 2001), *preparedness for change* (Kim 2001; Stevenson 1991; Taylor 1994), and *social support* (Berry 1994; Ward et al. 2001). The severity and duration of the experience of culture shock is a function of environmental, cultural and individual differences (Furnham 1993; Kim 2001; Searle and Ward

1990; Ward and Chang 1997; Ward et al. 2001). The relevance to long-stay tourists is clear; Hottola (2004) calls for dedicated research into the tourist's encounter with new cultures, which is still deficient despite Furnham's similar exhortation in the Annals of Tourism Research in 1984. Meanwhile calls are growing for a qualitative approach that is uniquely able to uncover the personal and cultural change associated with transition (Cushner and Mahon 2003; Madison 2006; Ward 2001).

The process of adjustment

The move to a new culture requires a process of resocialisation that Gudykunst (1998) describes as a process of unlearning old social patterns. Synonymous with adaptation, adjustment also refers to the goodness of fit between the characteristics of a person and the properties of their environment (French, Rogers and Cobb. 1974). However, as Biddle (1979) notes in his theoretical work on role change, adjustment carries other connotations than adaptation, including flexibility and an ability to cope with the demands exerted by the environment. It therefore refers not just to the process of change that the new culture demands, but also to the outcome of this process: it is for this reason that I decided to adopt the term adjustment to describe the process of culture learning and individual change that occur during transition.

Researchers have elaborated and tested a variety of adjustment models, and quantitative research dominates the field of sojourner adjustment research. Madison (2006) argues that such models are one-dimensional and don't recognise the multifaceted nature of a person's life or personality differences. However, qualitative studies are slowly on the increase, capturing, according to Ward (2001), Cushner and Karim (2004) and Madison (2008), aspects of the experience of adjustment that quantitative studies have missed. In the same way that I use the metaphor 'journey', Madison (2008) evokes the noun 'process' to capture 'the lived intricacies, novelty and vast diversity of human interaction' which 'therefore offers no universal predictions.' (p. 6). Similarly, Thomas and Harrell (2004) plausibly argue that there are multiple curves over time, each representing one aspect of the sojourner's life: this is a non-linear and non-prescriptive view of the adjustment journey. Gao and Gudykunst (1990) and Gudykunst and Nishida (2001) relate such fluctuations in adjustment to varying levels in uncertainty and anxiety, which go up and down throughout the stay, influencing both well-being and adjustive approach.

The outcome of adjustment

In discussions of adjustment, the final outcome of the move to a new culture is a subject worthy of investigation by both researchers into the tourist and the sojourner experience; this is also an area that is of growing importance to researchers into economic migration. Many theorists claim that transition is an initially stress-inducing but ultimately enriching experience (Giddens 1991; Hall 1976; Hofstede 2001; Kim 2001). The cited benefits of the sojourn include: the development of *cultural complexity* (Detweiler 1980), *self-awareness* (Giddens 1991), *increased pliability and resilience* (Kim 2001; Ting-Toomey 1999), *intercultural competence* (Koester and Lustig 2003), *independence* (Martin and Harrell 2004), and *increased employability* (Ledwith and Seymour 2001). Such claims also apply to long-stay tourism, as a small but growing literature on the consequences of increased long-stay travel for both business and society shows. For example, studies of backpackers and of gap-year tourists (Noy 2003; O'Reilly 2006; Tucker 2005) found an increase in independence, tolerance and cross-cultural skills. As Hottola (2003) notes, tourists constitute the majority of contemporary exposure to intercultural contact; an analyzis of their experiences will provide an empirical evidence base and theoretical underpinning for the outcome of culture contact for tourists. Drawing conclusions solely from sojourner research, as among the many categories of sojourner, is insufficient, as high variance occurs in the purposes of travel and the types of infrastructure and superstructure. Personal and cultural change also features in a small but growing body of research into the adjustment experiences of economic migrants, particularly those from accession countries, whose labour is integral to the efficient running of many tourism and hospitality organizations (e.g. Janta and Ladkin 2009). A parallel exists between these types of sojourners and the academic stay that is under-explored. The international sojourn refers to temporary between-society contact for a duration of 6 months to 5 years (Hottola 2004; Jandt 2001): indeed, in their treatise of culture shock and transition, Ward et al. (2001) include tourists alongside migrants, business people, refugees and international students in their typology of sojourners. The sojourn is similar to a therapeutic time for self-discovery, for example, Madison (2006) writes of the opportunity for self-actualisation, whilst Hayes (2007) uses the term ‘becoming oneself’ to refer to the living of an authentic life that distance from familial and professional pressures associated with the home culture. As international travel for differing purposes increases, the implications of change in sojourners (including students, migrants and tourists) for the origin culture is of increasing relevance.

Studies of international education

Ethnographers commonly skim previous studies on their chosen topic, but take care not to conduct in-depth research that might colour their own data collection. In the current study, the researcher consulted studies on the international student experience. Indeed, accompanying the steady rise in the number of international students in global HE and the desire of HE institutions to attract more full fee-paying students, there has been a growth in such research, although there are shortcomings in the areas of methodology and theoretical sophistication, as Leonard et al. (2002) and Ward (2001) observe. Given the ease of access to international students as a research population, many researchers have used this group, who represent *just one* category of sojourner identified in the comprehensive treatise on culture shock produced by Ward et al. (2001), to test various models of adjustment, and to further understanding of what constitutes the international sojourn. Many of the findings from research conducted into students have relevance for researchers into tourism and hospitality, as the paper will show.

Of relevance to this study was the literature on academic needs and cultural differences: clearly, this body of work is not pertinent to those tourists whose purpose is not educational**.** An increasing recruitment of international students to western universities brings with it an increased focus on culturally different attitudes to learning. Cross-cultural differences in participation in class discussion have been studied by many researchers whose findings often point to a link between power distance and contribution to debate (see Cortazzi and Jin 1997; De Vita 2001; Gu 2005; Okorocha 1996a). Critical analyzis is also a focus of much attention by researchers into international education, with SE Asian students in particular often described as uncomfortable with critical exchange and contradiction (Cortazzi and Jin 1997; Durkin 2004; Gu 2005). Underpinning such studies is again Hofstede’s framework of cultural dimensions, with a high score on the dimension of power distance given as the explanation for the common clash between reproductive and problem-based learning. The relationship with academic authority, with tutors and supervisors, is also influenced by cross-cultural differences: Hofstede’s dimension of Power Distance is most often the explanatory factor (Ballard and Clanchy 1997; Bradley 2000; Channell 1990; Dickinson 1993; Rogers and Smith 1992; Thorstensson 2001). The literature on international education also cites the potential for curricular diversity (Altbach 1989; de Wit and Callan 1995; de Wit and Knight 1995; UKCOSA 2004; van der Wende 1996; Zuniga. Nagada and Sevig 2002). According to Ackers (1997), international students are an important educational resource, bringing fresh perspectives to higher education, and increasing the attractiveness of the curriculum for both international and domestic students who can learn about the globalised working environment even if they have not travelled extensively (van der Wende 1996). This is of course particularly relevant to those students on programmes that aim to prepare them for an international industry, such as tourism and hospitality management. In addition, there is the premise that the internationalised campus has the opportunity to bring cultural understanding between different ethnic groups (Greenaway and Tuck 1995; Knochenmus 1986; Leask 2005) and the opportunity for the professional development for academic staff who can learn about cultural diversity (Cortazzi and Jin 1997; Louie 2005). Similarly, tourists and industry practitioners can access through cross-cultural contact the opportunity for growth and development. However, thus far, empirical evidence does not sufficiently substantiate the potential for the development of intercultural competence (Cushner and Karim 2004; De Vita 2005; Louie 2005; Seymour 2002; Ward 2001;).

Friendship is a major contributor to emotional well-being and sojourner adjustment (Hamburg and Adams 1967; Kim 2001; Ward et al. 2001): this explains the interaction patterns of international students. In their friendship typology, Bochner , McLeod and Lin (1977) describe the bicultural bond as the most important of the three friendship bonds as contact between the host and sojourner facilitates cultural and linguistic competence. Many empirical studies of international students point to a desire for greater contact with host nationals who represent a route to developing greater communication competence (e.g. Kramsch 1993; UKCOSA 2004; Ward and Dana-Reuba 1999); however, a lack of host contact persists. The very few studies on the host perspective have found indifference and apathy to lie behind a reluctance to initiate contact with international students (Bradley 2000; Spencer-Rodgers 2001; Ward, Masgoret, Holmes, Cooper, Newton and Crabbe 2005).

Indeed, the most common network noted on the international campus is the monocultural bond; many researchers observe a ghetto pattern, including the early and oft-cited survey of 2500 students by Klineberg and Hull (1979), a smaller study of 36 students that is equally often referenced by Bochner et al. (1977) and subsequent studies by Dyal and Dyal (1981), Furnham and Bochner (1986), Esack (1993) and Bradley (2000). A third bond is the multicultural friendship network between students of different nationalities: Bochner et al. (1977) view this bond as the least important; furthermore, few researchers have investigated this network. Nevertheless, Gudykunst (1998) argues that multiculturalism is an important route to the acquisition of intercultural skills that will aid global understanding and increase employability among graduates (Cushner and Mahon 2002). Equally, studies of hospitality migrant workers have commented on the comfort to be obtained from the multicultural workforce (see Janta and Ladkin 2009), whilst among backpackers, a community of likeminded, international friends is often present (O'Reilly 2005).

Finally, researchers have long noted the difficulties experienced by international students in reaching sufficient *linguistic competence* as to master sociocultural and academic demands. Of particular use are the studies that discuss the emotional component of foreign language use, as this emerged strongly in my study: Kramsch (1993) identifies feelings of shame and inadequacy that speaking in the host language can provoke; Garza-Guerrero (1974) refers to the sense of grief that separation from the native language occasions; Kim (1988) cites the anxiety and panic that speaking a foreign language evokes to explain why sojourners resort to the native tongue; Hofstede (1991) and Pellegrino (2005) discuss the sense of infantility that making mistakes in spoken language provokes. The importance of good language skills is not only helpful in alleviating student distress but is also often linked by cross-cultural theorists with acceptance by the host community (Hofstede 2001; Kim 2001). This is clearly of relevance to the tourist and migrant experience whose access to the host culture increases in line with improvements in their grasp of the host language; for the mass tourist, English continues to be the lingua franca.

Identifying the gap in the literature

For all researchers, it is important to find the gap in the literature. Despite extensive research on international students, some gaps are evident. Few studies have examined:

- sex differences in adjustment despite the fact that women form a growing part of the international student population and often experience stress and conflict relating to the demands of their traditional role and their studies;
- the impact of parenthood on the experience of the international academic sojourn;
- the views of the domestic student population on the presence of international students;
- the impact on receiving institutions of internationalisation strategies;
- the role of food in the academic sojourn of international students;
- the importance of religion to student identity and interaction and the link between faith and racial abuse among international students in the UK;
- the incidence of racism experienced by the international student community;
- the impact of global politics on the experience of international student adjustment.

From a methodological perspective, there is a dearth of qualitative studies of adjustment; there are fewer ethnographic studies still. Most studies use questionnaires and/or interviews that look at students' experience retrospectively, or they capture only a snapshot of the experience, rather than tracking changes over time.

My inductive study could not hope to fill all of these gaps; however, it does document:

- the difficulties associated with being a single parent student;
- the link between faith and interaction and host receptivity;
- the impact of increasing international student recruitment on lecturers;
- the importance of food to identity and interaction;
- the impact of the macro on the micro setting;
- incidences of racism and the fear of aggression linked with alcohol abuse.

The parallels to be drawn between the living experiences of international students, migrant workers and long-stay tourists mean that my findings also fill some of the gaps in the tourism and hospitality literature.

Research Methodology

Researchers confront a host of research approaches when starting their study, the choice of which is a reflection of the subjectivity, culture and preferences of the researcher (Brewer 2000; Hofstede 2001). I adopted an ethnographic approach to investigate the international student adjustment journey, as it enabled me to conduct four in-depth one-to-one interviews with 13 postgraduate international students over one academic year (52 interviews altogether), as well as overt observation of the entire postgraduate body of 150 students (2003-4).

Research methods

Ethnographers usually use more than one method, given the advantages of multidimensional data (Mason 2002), including in this study participant observation, interviews and a diary of personal reflections, which all form part of the data. The use of triangulation within method is a source of ethnographic validity (Fetterman 1998), as data of different kinds can be systematically compared, to test the quality of information and to put the situation into perspective (Denzin and Lincoln 1998; Seale 1999). According to Hammersley and Atkinson (1995), trustworthiness also improves if different kinds of data lead to the same conclusion. Furthermore, by using participant observation and extensive interviewing over one academic year, I was able to gain an unparalleled insight into students' world that is typical of ethnography (Agar 1986; Fielding 1993; Gilbert 1993; Hammersley 1992; Spindler 1982).

Participant observation

Participant observation involves participating in the informants' social world, and reflecting on the products of that participation (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995; Mason 2002; O'Reilly 2005). By studying the adjustment process in students' natural setting, the university campus, it was possible to be spontaneous in terms of when I collected data outside the interview situation. This would be the case in ethnographic research into tourist behaviours if the researcher adopted the role of tourist, or if the researcher lived immersed in the local community if the aim was to investigate the host reaction to incoming tourists.

Participation ranges from spending some time in a group to full immersion (Spradley 1980). In this study, participation was 'complete', a term that refers to the highest level of involvement when ethnographers study a situation they are already participating in (ibid): I used my existing role to research a familiar setting, removing the problems of resocialisation, acceptance or misunderstanding (Brewer 2000). This can be obtained through joining an organization (Lugosi 2006, 2008, for example took a job in a bar to observe consumer interaction patterns), or taking part in an activity (Curtin 2006 joined two wildlife tours), as participant observers. Being fully immersed in the field enables researchers to move around in the location as they wish, without appearing unusual or intrusive, with access to opportunistic interviewing, as well as to spontaneous observation (Mason 2002). Observation can be overt or covert, depending on the topic and the field (Spradley 1979): as I was an overt participant observer; all those involved (staff and students) knew about the research, therefore I didn't need to hide my research identity. Some researchers opt to be covert however, depending on their topic and on the participants to be researched, for example, Morgan (2009) was a covert participant observer of a music festival.

Planning for field work takes time, especially for longer periods of data collection (Daymon and Holloway 2002), and the following questions were considered before my field work commenced; these may be useful to researchers:

- *When and for how long would I observe participants?*

In order to allow myself time to experience the ambience of the scene, and to permit observation of the repetition of patterns (Schatzman and Strauss 1973), I decided that observation would be on a daily, 9-5 basis (during the week) from the start of induction week.

- *Where would I observe participants; and whom should I observe?*

I decided to observe *all* of my department's international postgraduate students in various situations, taking advantage of naturally occurring groups and discussions (O'Reilly 2005): in the classroom, my office, the administration office, the corridor, the library, the coffee bar (indoor and outdoor), the canteen.

- *Will I note everything, or only those peculiarities that strike me?*

What researchers record will depend on the foreshadowed research problem (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995), but in this inductive study, I made no prediction of the topics of relevance to students, and therefore I noted down everything. As time went on, and I had undertaken preliminary analyzis, I adopted a more instinctive approach and noted whatever seemed relevant to me, practising selective sampling (Schatzman and Strauss 1973; Spradley 1980), which is shaped by the emergent themes (Potter 1996). Therefore data collection became more focused and less time-consuming as the field research proceeded. As O'Reilly (2005) advises, when opportunistic conversations occur, the ethnographer should ask questions on the spur of the moment. Therefore the skill of conversational management (Peshkin 1982) associated with interviewing was necessary in daily participant observation (which involved more than just *watching*), including, for example, listening carefully, and asking sensitive follow-up questions.

• *How often should I record my observations?*

Throughout my study, every working day provided an opportunity for the collection of data; the problem became how to find time to note down my observations. There was a tension between facilitating and participating in discussions and finding time to remember and record conversations. Sometimes, it was possible to make a quick note of key words: even though I was an overt observer, I didn't want to violate the scene too much by appearing too obtrusive. Usually, I hoped I would remember the event or conversation later on that day. I made certain to unload the observation experience as soon as possible to avoid the problems of memory recall (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995). Though it was challenging to find time to write up a full, expanded account (Spradley 1979) of what I had observed, on the occasions where I did not do so, I realised that I could not recall observations in their entirety. A discipline of daily writing (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995) and systematic recording tactics are vital then (Spradley 1979). Researchers therefore shouldn't underestimate the nature of the ethnographic task, the burden on time and energy.

Document analyzis

Documents that relate to the social world include photos, diaries and letters (Macdonald and Tipton 1993). As soon as the research project began in September, I asked interviewees to keep a diary, so that I might access feelings that they might not want to express face to face (Measor and Woods 1983). Unfortunately, all of the students told me that they would be too busy to keep a diary; indeed eliciting commitment to keeping a diary is a common problem as Dickinson and Robbins (2007) found in her research into travel choices. Instead they agreed that they would email me with their thoughts and observations on an ongoing, ad hoc basis. I also asked the rest of the cohort to email me with in such a way, and indeed the majority emailed me regularly on a variety of topics: this was a further useful source of data corroboration. Though not as in-depth as a personal diary would have been, the rapport created and sustained through email contact meant that I was able to access data that I would not have otherwise been privy to, particularly from those students who were not among those selected for interview. The slowly increasing use of netnographic studies of migrant adaptation and consumer experiences of eating out reflect the role of internet technologies in everyday life (see Janta and Ladkin 2009; Morgan and Watson 2009; Watson, Morgan, and Hemmington 2008).

The ethnographic interview

Unstructured interviews are most common in ethnography (Mason 2002; O'Reilly 2005), allowing participants a greater voice and minimising the influence of the interviewer (Denzin and Lincoln 1998; Hammersley and Atkinson 1995). Close engagement through in-depth interviewing permits access to peoples' feelings and perceptions (Brewer 2000; Denzin and Lincoln 1998), opening a window onto their emotional world that quantitative research is uniquely able to deliver. The depth and richness of qualitative data are a function of the ability to sensitively explore topics of importance with participants (Mason 2002). The flexibility and spontaneity associated with the in-depth interview (Mason 2002; Potter 1996) means that researchers can explore any avenue; the interview could and often did lead me in unexpected directions, depending on the interests and preoccupations of the participant. Whilst participant observation was invaluable to this research, it was only the interview situation that yielded an in-depth exploration of sensitive topics.

The ethnographic interview is responsive to situations and informants (O'Reilly 2005; Potter 1996), and for this reason, each interview with all thirteen students was unique, although there was some similarity of topics. It is important in the unstructured, ethnographic interview to ask questions that are open-ended, to get interviewees talking about a broad topic area, whilst remembering that the participant guides the content (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995; Spradley 1979). Spradley (1979) recommends the use of grand tour or experience questions in the opening ethnographic interview, followed by focused mini tour or example questions, depending on the interviewee's response. The interview approach becomes more directive, as the second interview follows up on topics from the first interview (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995; Spradley 1979). This is of relevance to ethnographic researchers conducting regular interviews and conversations over an extended period of time, but this will not apply to studies of sport tourism events of a fixed duration, such as the World Cup or the Olympic Games.

In order to make informants feel comfortable, the most important thing to do in the interview situation is to get them talking (Spradley 1979), using the interpersonal skills that are necessary in everyday social life (Brewer 2000), such as maintaining eye contact, adopting relaxed body language, showing an interest, and asking relevant follow-up questions (O'Reilly 2005). Indeed, the need to strike a relaxed pose is one of the stressful aspects of qualitative research (Mason 2002). As such, researchers should not underestimate the importance of self-preparation for the unfolding of emic data: the researcher has a central role in qualitative research, being the main 'instrument' (Brewer 2000; Hammersley 1983).

The research diary

Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) argue that ethnographers are part of the social world they study, the data they collect and interpret are a reflection of their own biases: this implies a need for a reflexive account of the research process (Seale 1999; Davies 1999). Keeping a research diary begins well before data collection and allows researchers to subject our research activities to rigorous analyzis (Peshkin 1982; Hammersley and Atkinson 1995). Thus my diary started upon topic and method selection. The diary allows ethnographers to refine their thinking, which is for Mason (2002) as important as reading and writing, and just as time-consuming. Besides, as I discovered, if researchers don't write memos to themselves (Glaser 1978), they may lose their thought as they move on to new writing. Finally, reflection is an important part of the analytic process; the final written report of the research will use excerpts from the diary to illuminate and interact with field data.

The informant-researcher relationship

The use of key informants with whom ethnographers work to produce a cultural description is central to ethnography (Fetterman 1998). In this research, the term informant refers to the 150 students I observed on a continual basis, and to those students I formally interviewed once every 3 months. In other contexts, it might refer to selected or to all members, depending on researcher access and aims. It is with the interviewees that I felt I had to establish rapport, defined by Spradley (1979) as a harmonious relationship between ethnographer and informant, as it is they who gave up their time and energy. As the research involved four interviews over 12 months, the rapport with interviewees had to be strong enough to ensure that they would be willing to engage in the research over and over again, representing, according to Spradley (1979), one of the challenges of ethnography. Trust develops over time (ibid), which was possible in a year-long field research. Brewer (2000) argues that the importance of the personal relationship makes qualitative research especially demanding in terms of time and energy. This was pertinent for me as my aim was to gain access to students' emotional world, which requires hard work on the part of the researcher to develop an atmosphere of security and confidentiality (Mason 2002). Hence, the field work phase of the research was an exhausting period, requiring personal investment into several long-term relationships. This may not be true of all settings, depending on the aim of research and the nature of emotional disclosure sought by the researcher.

Spradley (1979) warns that the ethnographer-informant relationship can be problematic when there are power differentials between the two. Students may see me as an outsider in respect of national and cultural origin, with a member of the host community. This was particularly noticeable when students recounted incidents of discrimination; they appeared nervous in case they offended me, and only relaxed when I showed sympathy with them. Any cultural outsider will face the problem of a possible withholding of information, whereas researching one's own culture or organization can raise the dilemma of power imbalances.

Duration of the ethnographic study

Anthropologists (e.g. Spradley 1980) and qualitative researchers (e.g. Potter 1996) often advise spending a year with a group: time enables relationships to develop, and permits the observation of detail and processes, rather than a static image captured at certain points (Brewer 2000; French et al. 1974; O'Reilly 2005; Potter 1996). Furthermore, cultural patterns have an incubation period, which takes time to develop and to study. In my case, a study of adjustment which does not last for the duration of the sojourn cannot hope to capture the experience from the arrival stage to the final outcome, unless the aim is to study only one aspect of the sojourn. However, this depends on the research aim and the nature of the setting and the activity contained therein. For example, the finite nature of the event would determine and constrain an ethnographic study of a music festival. Indeed, many ethnographic studies have been shorter than a year, with the implicit reduction in time and energy on the part of both researcher and participant, for example Curtin's study if wildlife tourists lasted only as long as the trips she joined.

Ethnographic analyzis

Analyzis is the process of bringing order to data, organizing undifferentiated comments and observations into patterns, categories and descriptive units, and looking for relationships between them (Brewer 2000; Fetterman 1998). As ethnography produces enormous amounts of data, which increases in proportion to the data collection duration, analyzis is therefore demanding (Fielding 1993). In addition, in ethnography, analyzis is not a distinct stage of research, but takes place throughout and after the field work stage (Brewer 2000; Hammersley and Atkinson 1995). The process is interactive that from the start guides interviews and observation (Denzin 1997; Schatzman and Strauss 1973). Whereas many researchers collect and analyze data in distinct stages, this twelve-month ethnography involved every aspect of research except for the literature review, which took place for the most part after the field work was complete: it was only then that the researcher established relationships between the primary and secondary data, as Hammersley

(1992) advises. It is important to remember however that duration varies and the amount of data the researcher collects and analyzes varies; having said that, all ethnographers need to prepare for the exhausting nature of fieldwork.

When analyzing data creating an analytic code is necessary; this stops the researcher from getting lost in the data (Mason 2002). There are many terms used in the methodology literature on ethnographic analyzis, but for this research I adopted the terms used by Spradley (1979): the sub-code, code and category. A code represents a distinct phenomenon the researcher notices in the text; the code carries a low level of inference (it must be close to concrete description). Once they have identified codes, researchers need to look for the main theme, that is, the core category, a cluster of codes with similar traits, asking themselves questions such as: is it central, does it recur, is it meaningful, does it have implications for theory? Coding is a laborious task, as it involves reading and rereading through notes and repeatedly listening to tapes and reading through transcripts until certain phrases occur repeatedly in the text and themes begin to emerge (Brewer 2000).

Nevertheless, as Potter (1996) observes, though time-consuming, ethnographic analyzis is not demanding in terms of technology: I used a codebook, created during analyzis of the first round of interview transcripts, which I updated as the data collection proceeded. Each round includes scrutinizing transcript revisions, with the aid of different color highlighter pens to identify recurring words. Codes and categories therefore emerge from the data, from the emic perspective, depending on how often they recur. At the end of the data collection period (September 2004), I began to analyze and organize interview and observational data into distinct sections, which reflect the major research categories (language, academic life, identity, food, interaction, changes in the self, culture shock). As O'Reilly (2005) points out, some codes can overlap different categories, for example, communal dining is a code that is relevant to interaction, identity and food

Writing ethnography

O'Reilly (2005) states that imposing a narrative helps to order the mass of ethnographic material, but the presentation of ethnography requires much care (Brewer 2000), and ethnographers need to cultivate their skills of writing (Atkinson 1990; Clifford 1986; Hammersley and Atkinson 1995; Marcus 1986). Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) offer a choice between: natural history; chronology; thematic organization; separation of narration and analyzis. In terms of writing style, Hammersley (1990) tells us that the most common mode of writing ethnography is realistic or naturalistic whereby the reader feels they are observing the scene. There is often an assumption of good faith that a similarly placed and well-trained participant observer would see and hear the same things as the researcher saw and heard (Van Maanen 1988). However, there is radical scepticism in the qualitative research community about the claim of any author to faithfully reconstruct social reality (Brewer 2000; Denzin 1991; Jackson 1989; Seale 1999). My solution to this conflict of opinion was to adopt a reflexive approach to the writing of a realist account of my research findings.

When writing ethnography, an important consideration is one of voice, which concerns the struggle to work out how to present both the author and the informant (Hertz 1997). Academics traditionally practice silent authorship, keeping their voice out of what they write, however, ethnographers and qualitative researchers increasingly advocate audible authorship (e.g. Brewer 2000; Charmaz and Mitchell 1997; Seale 1999). As this paper shows, I use the first person to point to my personal involvement in the field and consequent influence on the collection and analyzis of data. As a 2009 editorial of the 4* Annals of Tourism Research showed, the first person is increasingly common in research accounts, if it befits the methodology adopted. Meanwhile to give informants their voice, researchers advocate polyvocality (Clifford 1986; Denzin and Lincoln 1998; Tyler 1986; van Maanen 1988), which writers achieve through the extensive use of quotations which are the stuff of ethnography (Hammersley 1992), bringing a sense of immediacy and involvement in the field (Brewer 2000). This also fulfils the author's moral commitment to empower the silenced Other (Hollway and Jefferson 2000; Seale 1999).

Demonstrating trustworthiness in qualitative research

Reliability refers to the consistency, stability and repeatability of research findings, an invalid criterion in qualitative research as repeat questions will not yield identical responses and besides, social situations are not replicable (Brewer 2000). In the current study, it would be impossible to generate the same findings if another researcher conducted the study in the same conditions, not only because they would have different biases (Brewer 2000; O'Reilly 2005), but also because they would be studying different participants with different circumstances and personalities. Furthermore, data interpretation is a subjective undertaking, and according to Hollway and Jefferson (2000), an alternative explanation of events is usually available: even if the current findings were replicable, it is likely that their analyzis and interpretation would differ. This is of relevance to tourism research where the study of different tourists in the same setting could lead to different findings.

Generalisability, or external validity, is also likely to be irrelevant to ethnographic research, which tends to focus on a single case or small sample (Fielding 1993); there is a consequent reluctance to move to general classifications (Hammersley 1992). Nevertheless, ethnographers often feel that similar settings are likely to produce similar data (Evans 1983; Potter 1996), and that theory-based generalisation is possible, involving the transfer of theoretical concepts found from one situation to other settings and conditions (Daymon and Holloway 2002): thus the term transferability is preferable to generalisability. Hammersley (1992) describes this as theoretical inference, drawing conclusions from the features of local events, by identifying generic features. The findings from this research are transferable to other similar settings, that is, Higher Education institutions in the UK that recruit international postgraduate students, and also to similar actors, i.e. international postgraduates on a one-year intensive Masters programme.

Hammersley (1992) and Fetterman (1998) claim that the term validity differs among qualitative and quantitative researchers: in qualitative research, validity refers to trustworthiness; this means that the researcher presents the real world of participants and those studied recognise the social reality they have depicted (Brewer 2000; Bruyn 1966; Fetterman 1998). For this reason, member checks are valuable (Daymon and Holloway 2002), whereby the researcher shows the data from interviews or the summary of the data to informants for their comment (Brewer 2000; Cheater 1987; Stanley 1990). Researchers' willingness to present deviance from cultural patterns also establishes trustworthiness (Seale 1999).

Ethical considerations

The need and moral duty of researchers to protect participants in the research process is clear (see Spradley 1979; Williams 2003). According to Mason (2002), qualitative research raises specific ethical issues which researchers should anticipate in advance, so that they can take into account how their actions may affect participants.

Firstly, they should seek ethical approval to undertake the study (in this case, the University's Research Ethics Committee, and thereafter the main gatekeeper, the Head of School gave permission). When a gatekeeper provides access, researchers should adhere to the principle of obtaining informed consent from the participants (Brewer 2000; Spradley 1979). Accordingly, researchers must assure participants of confidentiality issues, their right to withdraw from the study, and the anonymity of data. Covert observation violates the principle of informed consent, therefore researchers must put careful thought into the decision of disclosure of identity. Both Lugosi (2006, 2008) and Curtin (2009) comment on the continuum between overt and covert status, and recommend that researchers reveal research aim and identity at such a time when they have established some trust and rapport, to avoid ostracisation by participants. As Brewer (2000) states, covert methods are defensible when access is likely to be closed, but in my case, there was no problem in gaining access, thus there was no need to be covert.

According to Williams (2003), being ethical is about achieving a balance between being an objective researcher and being a morally-bound citizen: social research should not create harm or distress even if the outcome may be beneficial to society. The research experience may be a disturbing one, as participants may experience uncalled for self-knowledge or unnecessary anxiety: researchers must make attempts to minimise disturbance, and take special care where participants are vulnerable (Brewer 2000). Indeed Mason (2002) states that the interview can feel like a therapeutic encounter, as was the case in my research when participants discussed personal and sensitive topics such as loneliness, discrimination and identity confusion. The same could be true of research looking at tourism and transformation or migrant workers' experiences of working and living in a new culture. Mason's (2002) note of caution about discussing personal matters which may distress them was a real concern for me, and tearfulness during interviews was common. For this reason, follow-up was important; I tried to alleviate any sense of exposure by following up with email contact, and being solicitous whenever I saw interviewees on campus. The questions remain: does research into delicate topics necessarily lead to harm to participants, and if so, how should researchers respond?

The research findings

Analyzis generated the following categories of research: culture shock, language anxiety, study stress, food shock, interaction patterns, identity change and personal/cultural transformation. This paper prioritises the latter category for discussion, the outcome of transition, and presents the model that I created from my findings. This will help other researchers to understand the impact of travel on tourists (there is a research gap) and of cross-cultural contact on various sojourning groups including migrants: this is a relevant topic to the contemporary globalised business world and to the tourism and hospitality industry in particular. Again, there is a dearth of literature on the experiences of migrants in tourism and hospitality.

The end of the journey

My study offers much evidence for the important link that Berry (1994) observes between interaction and outcome, but it also somewhat paradoxically portrays evolution in personal and intercultural perspectives as a universal feature of the final stage of the academic sojourn *regardless of interaction strategy*. My study offers an important understanding: distance from the origin culture is more significant than the location of the sojourn and the types of networks enjoyed in terms of effecting change in sojourners. Firstly, students commented on a development of cultural awareness and tolerance, lending support to Gudykunst's reference to the international sojourn as a major contributor to a reduction in world conflict. d'Amore (1988) repeats this claim for tourism, whilst O'Reilly's study (2006) found an association between backpacking and the development of a sense of common humanity. Motivation to broaden their education is common among backpackers who usually betray a desire to distance themselves from the mass tourist: the hallmarks of the long-stay tourist are openness, flexibility and tolerance (Muzaini 2006; O'Reilly 2006). Indeed, according to Bochner (1986), international education and tourism are the most powerful positive influences on world relations. Furthermore, MINTEL (2008) suggests that the global gap year market is set to increase significantly in coming years, with a trend for more flexible working practices allowing professionals to take extended leave and sabbaticals to embark on Round The World/backpacking trips. However, Litvin (1998) argues for a less idealistic treatment of the link between tourism and peace by researchers, arguing that tourism (including educational tourism) is a beneficiary rather than a generator of peace.

Secondly, prolonged absence from the home world led to changes in personal and cultural outlook. Adler (1975) states that the sojourn evolves from a confrontation with a new culture into an encounter with the self. In common with the sojourner adjustment literature, O'Reilly (2006) refers to the transformative potential of travel. Indeed, Vasiliki (2000), Tucker (2005) and Hottola (2004) state that tourism offers an opportunity not only for pleasure but also for self-exploration, as freedom from domestic constraints allows tourists to develop a stronger sense of self. Many researchers have claimed that sojourners undergo a journey of self-discovery as removal from the comfort of the familiar forces them to test and stretch their resourcefulness and to revise their self-understanding (Berry 1994; Kim 2001; Milstein 2005).

Hailed as a positive development, the changes in self that students witnessed were simultaneously an object of disquiet: the apprehension of returning students suggests that the adjustment journey is not over until they have negotiated re-entry, and the newly-cultivated self survives exposure to the origin culture. Imminent re-entry provoked anxiety, and yet there is a tendency to overlook the consequences of change for the returnee: Madison (2007) and Hayes (2007), for example, describe the sojourn as a therapeutic period of life-enhancing self-exploration, but their studies focused on 'voluntary migrants' whose return home was not imminent. This is an important finding for researchers into the tourist and economic migrant experience: the changes in sojourners can pose problems on re-entry, leading to maladaptation in the origin culture.

A model of adjustment

The aim of my research was to explore the adjustment process of a heterogeneous group of international postgraduate students at a university in the South of England. A holistic study of the entire adjustment journey, from arrival to departure has allowed me to build a model of adjustment. The constitution of the initial stage of the adjustment process (excitement or emotional disturbance) is the subject of some dispute in the literature on transition: my study found the initial stage of the sojourn to be a time of vulnerability and anxiety; stress was at its most intense at the beginning of the stay. This was the time when students experienced the symptoms of culture shock: homesickness, sleeplessness, tearfulness, loneliness, fear, disorientation, depression and worry characterised the first stage of the adjustment journey. This suggests a link between the move to a new environment and emotional and physical disturbance that many researchers have observed, to name a few, Furnham (1993), Ward et al. (2001) and Kim (2001). Culture shock was not a universal phenomenon however: the prevalence and intensity of emotional and sociocultural difficulties varied among students as a function of a host of factors, including motivation, personality, previous experience, pre-arrival preparation, interaction strategy and cultural similarity. The adjustment journey was a dynamic and fluctuating interaction between individual, cultural and external forces; it was a complex and multifaceted phenomenon.

The present study highlights the first stage as a time of upheaval, the response to which carried the power to influence the adjustment process, as the route to regaining a sense of equilibrium and to diminishing loneliness and thoughts of home was often at odds with the simultaneously consuming struggle to establish communicative competence in academic and everyday life. Interaction played a key, often conflicting, role: the alleviation of loneliness through segregated friendship groups was usually at the cost of linguistic and cultural learning. The privileged access to students' emotional reactions to English language use that the qualitative approach permitted led me to substantiate the argument put forward by Gudykunst and Nishida (2001) that sojourner adjustment is a function of the capacity to withstand the anxiety inherent in transition, and that the sojourner's reaction to stress in the early stage dictates the level of communicative competence reached during the sojourn. Indeed, by documenting the emotional highs and lows occasioned by cross-cultural communication, my study underlines the care that institutions need to show to international students from the outset, if integration between ethnic groups is their goal.

My study observed an association between the passage of time and a gradual decrease in acculturative stress that finds support in most if not all studies of adjustment. However, this was not a generalizable process as more prescriptive models may suggest; there was not only fluctuation in experience across the student body but also in the individual's subjective sense of success across different aspects of life in the new country. Research by Martin and Harrell (2004) and Madison (2007) support such variability in the adjustment process, which is a mutable and subjective process. The stress of academic life for example slowly decreased in line with the development of academic cultural competence; this suggests a correlation between emotional well-being and adjustment to the demands of the new surroundings that vindicates the culture learning approach to adjustment. However, feelings of homesickness and depression were more variable, indicating that psychological adjustment was less predictable, as noted by Ward and colleagues in their rationale for developing a model that incorporated variables affecting sociocultural and psychological adjustment. I conclude that adjustment is a continuum: sojourners may not only vary in their adjustment experience and outcome, but there may also be variation in the amount of fitness reached in each facet of life. Adjustment is therefore not a generic term that applies to the whole sojourn experience. I heed Madison's (2008, p. 9) comment that "adjustment experiences are more intricate than we could ever hope to capture in abstract models.". I believe that it is hard to capture the idiosyncratic nature of the adjustment journey, and I therefore refuse to offer a model that is applicable to *all* sojourners in *all* situations. I simply provide an articulation of adjustment as an initially painful and testing process, that sojourners experience varyingly depending on various factors, whose outcome is both positive and uncertain. Nevertheless, my study allows me to make the following observations:

- The move into a new sociocultural environment causes stress that is greatest upon arrival: this observation builds on work by Kim (1988, 2001) and Ward et al. (2001) which views the first stage as a time of stress;
- The symptoms of culture shock are evident in the initial stage, but there is variance in their experience and duration;
- Stress is caused by cultural distance, language problems, academic demands, loneliness, homesickness, identity confusion, personal difficulties and racial or religious discrimination: my study hereby builds upon previous work but offers new empirical evidence of bigotry as a source of stress;

- The capacity for the tolerance of stress drives the formation of mononational friendship networks, which are an impediment to a growth in linguistic and intercultural progression: my findings thus support work by Kim (2001) and Gudykunst and Nishida (2001), which places importance on the sojourner's coping abilities.
- Though there is generally a gradual lessening of stress, the unpredictability of life events can upset this calm: the qualitative approach offers a unique insight into just how debilitating such events can be, offering empirical support for Thomas and Harrell's (1994) observation that maladjustment can succeed adjustment;
- Researchers should not underestimate the impact of the larger political, economic and social context of both the home and host countries on the adjustment journey: my study makes an important addition to the adjustment literature by voicing students' anxiety over the link between their reception in England and their economic/national/religious status, and drawing parallels with the experience of migrants in larger society;
- The segregation approach is common, but this does not indicate a lack of respect or tolerance for other cultures: this represents a significant contribution to what we know about international student interaction outcomes, who universally acquire *some* intercultural competence, though it is greatest among those who adopt a multicultural approach to interaction;
- The adoption of adjustment strategies varies across different aspects of life in the new country, influencing both process and outcome, supporting Berry's (1994) claim of a link between interaction and change but the emphasis on variability supports claims that sojourners can be strategic in how they adjust (Blue 1993; Torbiorn 1994);
- The end-product of the international sojourn is a potentially life-enhancing challenge to old ways of thinking and behaving: my study thus offers the empirical evidence for such positive outcomes that Ward (2001) says is scarce;
- Apprehension over re-entry is a common feature during the last few months of the sojourn: this signals a need to follow up sojourners after re-entry; only then can researchers sustain widespread claims for a positive sojourn outcome.

The following figure presents a graphic illustration of how I made sense of the adjustment process. There is a deliberate suppression of prescribed time patterns, underlining the mostly unpredictable nature of the adjustment journey. However, there are *three* central components to the diagram, which reflect universal experience. The first denotes arrival; the first stage of the sojourn sees students beset by the disturbing feelings associated with culture shock. What follows is a struggle to hold onto an inner sense of competence; this has an important influence on the interaction strategy adopted by sojourners, which in turn impacts on the adjustive outcome (the important relationship between friendship patterns and outcome occupies a special place in the model). My study shows that language ability plays a major role in adjustment, thereby justifying the attention in empirical and theoretical studies of transition to the importance of good language skills for psychological adjustment and sociocultural competence (e.g. Brumfit 1993; Hofstede 2001; Kim 2001; Kramsch 1993; Scollon and Scollon 1995; Ward et al. 2001).

Despite the widespread elevation of emotional ease over sociocultural fitness, removal from the origin culture is sufficient to stimulate self-exploration, as the second central component to the diagram shows, which depicts the final stage of the sojourn as a universally positive development. Though the segregation approach limited adjustment to the host language and restricted cultural learning, it did not bar a new self-understanding that distance from the familiar can bring. My study therefore supports the oft-claimed transformative potential of the sojourn (Gudykunst 1998;

Hayes 2007; Milstein 2005) and offers the empirical evidence for the development of intercultural competence that Ward (2001) and Leask (2007) call for. The tip of the diagram represents the third aspect of universal experience, which refers us to apprehension over re-entry.

Figure 1 about here.

The above figure emphasises the role of interaction strategy in maximising cultural learning; indeed it places interaction at the centre of the adjustment experience. Like Bochner (1977) and Berry (1994), I place much emphasis on the implications of friendships among sojourners for the development of intercultural skills, vindicating the attribution of importance to companionship in the literature on transition. However, like many studies of international student friendships, I found that the segregation strategy, associated with positive outcomes for belonging and security and negative outcomes for language dexterity and intercultural competence, was the most common, followed by the multicultural strategy, which offered the best route to optimising language and culture learning. My study reveals a connection between transition and cultural learning that students considered to be irrevocable and life-changing irrespective of interaction strategy. This offers support for Gilroy's (2007) concept of conviviality, which suggests that ethnic groups can simultaneously retain their own language, customs and values and maintain a harmonious relationship with other groups; the segregation approach was not incompatible with intergroup acceptance and tolerance.

A positive change in self-perception was also universal: its driver was the adoption of unfamiliar behavioural routines. However, my study also offers a portrait of the anxiety surrounding the durability of such life-affirming change: indeed, the new self might be a source of torment rather than pleasure, as conformity pressure might dictate a return to the pre-sojourn self. As Cushner and Karim (2004) point out, it is possible that returnees might face the task of hiding their new self. Perhaps increased intercultural contact *will* increase the flexibility of the dominant culture (Brancato 2004), but researchers have not yet established this through empirical evidence.

Conclusion

In summary, this study shows that the international sojourn has the power to effect a growth in intercultural competence, as well as a shift in self-understanding, with long-term implications for personal and professional life. Transition offered the foundation for re-evaluation, for freedom from cultural and familial expectations and for self-discovery that routine tends to prohibit. It is logical to suggest that such change will also be common among long-stay tourists who are similarly displaced from both the origin culture and everyday routine.

The parallels between the international student, the long-stay tourist and the economic migrant are clear: all three feature in Ward et al.'s (2001) sojourner typology. The degree of change in the tourist is arguably a function of the purpose and duration of their trip: a shift in personal and cultural outlook is less likely in the mass and business tourist who often enjoys limited contact with and immersion into the local culture (Hottola 2004; Muzaini 2006). Ward et al. (2001) state that short-stay tourists are not usually committed to their new location, which Jandt (2001) explains by focusing on motivation: most tourists visit a country for a short period of time for such goals as relaxation and leisure; a sojourner on the other hand typically lives in a country for a longer period of time, with a specific and goal-oriented purpose, such as education or business, and is usually willing to adjust to some extent to local cultural norms (Gudykunst

1998). The economic migrant falls into this category; the duration of the sojourn is often unknown at the outset. In all categories, the prolonged absence from the home environment and exposure to new cultural norms and ways of behaving and relating can result in profound changes in cultural and personal outlook that have implications for the future of both the tourist and society, if we are to accept that a growth in intercultural competence is beneficial to global relations.

This paper argues that ethnography is uniquely placed to investigate the experiences of tourists and migrant workers in tourism and hospitality: the inductive approach means that data collection is a product and reflection of participants' concerns and this is important in a field in which the body of knowledge is nascent. Furthermore, as Morgan (2007) argues, managers of attractions and destinations now need to understand the viewpoint of the experiencing consumer: ethnography captures the emic view and its reliance on thick description ensures that a wealth of data is collected, enabling the researcher to address a range of research issues.

Suggestions for further research

This paper may encourage scholars to conduct research into the impact of long-stay tourism, especially as this represents a growing global phenomenon (MINTEL 2008; O'Reilly 2000). Researchers have long studied the impact of tourism on the destination and on residents; however they have paid much less attention to the process of change undergone by the tourist (Fletcher 2005; Hottola 2004). As Furnham (1984) and Hottola (2004) point out, the sojourner adjustment literature helps us to understand how tourism can act as a catalyst for change in the tourist's outlook and in their behaviour following their time away from the origin culture, but an understanding of the adjustment journey specific to the tourist is now necessary. Until then, Hottola (2004) argues that tourism academics must engage with the sojourner adjustment literature in order to find sophisticated theoretical discussions of the change brought by cross-cultural contact. Given that the signs are for growth in both tourism and international education (O'Reilly 2006; Ritchie, Cooper and Carr 2003; Ryan 2005), the potential contribution made by travel to world relations is a subject worthy of more research: there is so far only limited evidence that tourism improves international understanding (for example Askjellerud **2003;** Hampton 2007; Noy 2003; O'Reilly 2006), and the claim that this is a largely unsubstantiated inference remains (Hottola 2004; Ward et al. 2001).

Psychoanalytic and philosophical discussions of globalisation and selfhood reflect the currency of the focus on the link between displacement and change (see Hayes 2007; Madison 2006; Todres 2002). These writers use the term 'voluntary' or 'existential migration' to refer to extended trips abroad and employ psychoanalytic theory to understand the process of change among sojourners. Further ethnographic studies of sojourners other than international students will contribute to refining our understanding of how transition for various purposes engenders personal and cultural change, and of the implications of such change for the individual and for global relations.

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[pic]

Figure 1: A model showing the adjustment process

[FIX THE CROOKED LINES IN FIGURE 1 PLEASE]

Going home: unknown territory

Becoming different; evolving a new self

Maintaining cultural identity

Maintaining cultural identity

Undermining cultural identity

Minimising culture learning

Avoiding diversity

m

Avoiding the host language

Maximising culture learning

Meeting diversity

Finding a voice; achieving communicative competence

Restricting culture learning

Avoiding diversity

Avoiding the host language

Belonging nowhere: being marginalised

Confronting stress; choosing multiculturalism

Minimising stress; choosing segregation

The shock of arrival:
Coming to terms with speaking in English;
Meeting the challenge of academic life;
Fighting loneliness