



**DENTED IDENTITY: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY OF A TAMIL
WOMAN**

MARIA NESAM MURUGIAH

70298

**Bachelor of Social Sciences in Anthropology and Sociology with Honours
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WOMAN**

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degree of **Bachelor of Social Sciences in Anthropology and Sociology with
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Student name and matric number
MARIA NESAM MURUGIAH (70298)

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1 : INTRODUCTION	8
1.1 INTRODUCTION	8
1.2 BACKGROUND	3
1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT	4
1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS	5
1.5 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES	5
1.6 SCOPE OF STUDY	5
1.7 SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY	5
1.8 CONCLUSION	6
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW	8
2.1 INTRODUCTION	8
2.2 WRITINGS ON THE REFLEXIVE APPROACH	8
2.3 WRITINGS ON THE AUTOETHNOGRAPHY METHOD	9
2.4 THE TAMIL (INDIAN) COMMUNITY	10
2.5 CONCLUSION	12
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY	13
3.1 INTRODUCTION	13
3.2 THE REFLEXIVE APPROACH	13
3.3 AUTO-ETHNOGRAPHY METHOD	14
3.4 DATA COLLECTION	16
3.4.1 REFLEXIVE JOURNALING	16
3.4.2 INTERVIEWS	16
3.4.3 PHOTO AND OBJECT ELICITATION	17
3.5 DATA ANALYSIS	18
3.5.1 THEMATIC ANALYSIS	18
3.5.3 CASE STUDY	19
3.6 ETHICAL CONSIDERATION	19
3.7 CONCLUSION	20
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS & ANALYSIS	21
4.1 INTRODUCTION	21
4.1 SOCIOCULTURAL PROCESSES THAT HAVE SHAPED MY ETHNIC IDENTITY	21
4.1.1 “ARE YOU INDIAN OR CHRISTIAN?” - RELIGION	21
DIAGRAM 1	22
DIAGRAM 2	23
DIAGRAM 3	24
4.1.2 “MALAYSIAN FIRST?” - NATIONALITY	27
4.1.3 “MOTHER TONGUE-TIED” - LANGUAGE	30
4.2 AUTOETHNOGRAPHY AS A TOOL TO DEVELOP IDENTITY STUDIES AND ANTHROPOLOGICAL METHOD	32
4.3 CONCLUSION	34
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION	36
5.1 INTRODUCTION	36
5.2 SUMMARY	36
5.3 IMPLICATIONS	37
5.4 LIMITATIONS	38
5.5 RECOMMENDATIONS	39
5.6 CONCLUSION	40
REFERENCE	41
APPENDICES	45

CHAPTER 1 : INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This research is titled *Dented Identity: An Autoethnography of a Tamil Woman*. We may take identity for granted, but when properly reviewed and analysed, it is a very difficult concept on most circumstances. Many communities, usually of a shared ethnic or national origin, have been scattered around the world throughout history as a result of trade, colonisation, war, and labour migration, such as the Chinese, Arabic, Hispanic, Latin, African, and the most extensively dispersed of them, the Indians (people from the Indian country, not the Indian subcontinent). In this research, my main goal is to dissect the identity as someone part of this community of dispersed Indians using a non-traditional anthropological approach and method.

In the early education of an anthropologist, usually on an undergraduate level, we are taught various methodologies, methods and theories to understand the workings of a society or culture. We are introduced to the traditional concepts, theories and ideas that has been formulated, developed and tested over the span of multiple decades by the early pioneers of the field. One of the most significant methods borne out of the anthropological discipline is ethnography, a research procedure in which an anthropologist closely observes, documents, and participates in the daily life of another culture - an experience known as the fieldwork method – and subsequently publishes reports of this society, stressing each and every descriptive detail. Origins of ethnography are grounded in the concept of realism which entails that ethnography can and should aim to capture sociocultural structures, processes, and circumstances that exist outside of the researcher. Van Maanen (2011) states that the realist account of a culture—whether a civilization, an occupation, a community, an ethnic enclave, an organisation, or a select minority with mutual interests is by far the most prominent, familiar, frequent, popular, and recognised style of ethnographic writing. A single author often recounts the realism tale in an objective, third-person voice - only

illustrating in the text what individuals of the examined society say, do, and, presumably, think (Van Maanen, 2011). However, researching a community, structure or institution from the standpoint of a scientifically educated individual means that there is inadvertently a divide between the scientific community and those whom we study. Therefore, in recent years, positivist and objectivist social theory that has dominated the field of anthropology for decades now takes a backseat, giving rise to more reflexive thinking. Anthropologists are increasingly researching cultures that are much closer to home - both geographically and culturally. They are performing ethnographic fieldwork within their own communities, focusing on specific groups or institutions. For many current social anthropologists and sociologists, the 'otherness' of the concept of 'another culture' is not as strong as it was for previous generations of anthropologists.

Thus, adopting the reflexive approach when conducting a study is beneficial to researchers as it is an attempt to analyse one's own self in relation to their surroundings, beliefs and views. Often, when an anthropologist collect data from a community, they interpret the collected data and form a representation of that community - meaning the interpretation is informed and impacted by the author's own beliefs, prejudices and viewpoints, in other words, their positionality. Positionality is a term that describes a person's outlook and also the stance they choose about a research subject and its sociopolitical context (Holmes, 2020). Not only acknowledging but centering on the researcher's positionality is referred to as reflexivity. Many scholars have now evolved from traditional positivist thinking and are of the opinion that anthropological research highly benefits from the act of not only observing others but also observing oneself. Salzman (2002) quotes George Herbert Mead who says that reflexivity it is the "the turning-back of the experience of the individual upon himself, the whole social process is thus brought into the experiences of the individuals involved in it which then enables the individual to take the attitude of the other toward himself." Keeping true to Mead's words, I aimed to "turn back" the proverbial lens onto myself by dissecting and analysing the ways in which sociocultural forces in my environment has shaped my beliefs, ideas, personality, identity and position in a social structure. It seeked to answer what exactly are the social processes that had led the subject to become what or who they are today, taking into account identity markers such as gender/sexual identity, race,

religion, socioeconomic status and nationality in depth; deciding to what extent has these traits played a part in shaping the subject as an individual and researcher.

Therefore, in order to fully achieve my objectives and produce a rich, eloquent and meaningful piece of reflexive research, the main method I employed is the autoethnography method: an academic style of writing that is autobiographical in nature. It bases itself upon the evaluation or analysis of the author's personal reality, linking researcher insights to self-identity, cultural regulations and resources, patterns of communication, customs, premises, representations, norms, common practices, emotions, values, and macro-scale issues (Poulos, 2021). Writing an auto-ethnography is a worthy endeavour to “challenge traditional methods of conducting studies and representation of communities (Spry, 2001) and treats research as a socially-just and socially-conscious act (Adams & Holman Jones, 2008). In order to identify and explore the connections between oneself and humanity, the specific and the universal, and the private and the social, autoethnography uses in-depth and thorough self-reflection (Adams et al, 2015). As a student researcher, I wanted to start challenging traditional ideas of methods and methodology and highlighting the role of positionality in research while still in the early stages of my social science education. Beginning my journey as a researcher by first deeply examining my own place and position in a social structure has proven to be a worthy foundation for future fieldwork: how I view myself and my own beliefs, biases and viewpoints may and will affect how I research other communities.

1.2 BACKGROUND

We may take it for granted but when properly assessed and analysed, identity is on most occasions, a rather complex concept. Even more so when you are a part of the world's largest diaspora. Throughout history, many communities, usually from a common ethnic or national origin have been scattered across the world thanks to trade, colonialism, war and labour migration like the Chinese, Arabic, Hispanic, Latin, African people and the most widely dispersed of them all, the Indians (people from the Indian country, not the Indian subcontinent). People of Indian origin living outside of India, known as the Indian diaspora, all have a unique and specific experience formed by their historical and national context. For example, an Indian Malaysian

whose ancestors were brought over by British colonisers as labourers most probably would have a different sociocultural experience than an Indian American (an American citizen of Indian origin, not to be confused with a Native American) whose parents came to America as expatriates. With that being said, to what extent are our experiences different and what are the things that tie us together? The sociocultural approach refers to the idea that our interactions with society and social institutions form our cognitive function, which includes learning, behavior and knowledge acquisition. It's the perspective that cultural systems such as ethnicity, belief system, socioeconomic status or orientation shape the way you perceive and interact with the world. The essence of this research is to explore the sociocultural processes that have formed and impacted my ethnic identity, including my knowledge, experiences, values, beliefs and especially my personal culture or way of life.

1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT

In this research, I attempt to address two issues: a) in an effort to produce richer, more valuable anthropological data, I challenge traditional thinking of the field which focuses on positivist and objectivist theory as well as ethnographic realism - rather using the reflexive approach and platforming the use of personal narrative as valid and reliable data which speaks for the authenticity of the human experience, not aiming to pass off said data as the objective and factual truth, b) more often not, there is a cultural misalignment of ethnic, racial and national identity when a community is part of a diaspora (they are dispersed outside of their origin land or country due to different reasons). Scholars now distinguish between two types of diaspora: involuntary and voluntary. Forced diaspora is frequently caused by traumatic events such as warfare, expansion of territory, or slavery, as well as natural disasters such as starvation or prolonged drought. As a result, members of a forced diaspora frequently express sentiments of oppression, grief, and a longing to return to their hometown. A voluntary diaspora, on the other hand, is a group of individuals who leaves their homelands in quest of better quality of life, such as the large emigration from poor regions of Europe to the United States in the late 1800s (Longley, 2021). As part of the world's largest diaspora which is the Indian, I used the autoethnography method through the reflexive approach in order to dissect and analyse the Tamil-Indian-Malaysian identity through my own personal narratives.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In doing this research, I asked the questions;

- A) What are the sociocultural processes that have shaped my identity and how?
- B) How can my reflexive analysis benefit identity studies and the field of anthropology?

1.5 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Using the autoethnography method through the reflexive approach, the main objectives that this research hoped to achieve were:-

- A) To identify the sociocultural processes that have shaped my identity and how
- B) To understand the ways in which this research and analysis can benefit identity studies and the field of anthropology

1.6 SCOPE OF STUDY

Taking into account the finite amount time and resources I have to conceptualise and complete this research, it was paramount to limit the scope of study to the best of my abilities - focusing on the research questions I wish to answer and the research objectives I hope to achieve. While the main focus of this research will be centred around my ethnic identity, I also take into account other identity markers such as socioeconomic status, nationality and religion to explore how they have contributed in the shaping of my identity. Exploring diasporic identity, I examined my relationship to my ancestral heritage with regards to cultural proficiency including language, customs, norms, symbols, kinship relations, values, religion and habits.

1.7 SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

When taking reflexivity into consideration, it helps you as a researcher to examine your own relationship with the environment in which you are researching. When interviewing your respondents/informants and slowly forming an opinion about what they're saying, you may consider your own traits and pre-conceived ideas that shape

how you see others and how others see you. Being reflexive and examining one's own self as a future researcher can also help to diffuse power dynamics between researcher and the researched. A research project may be affected by how our informants perceive us and what information they may or may not be willing to share. Therefore, reflexivity or acknowledging their own position is one method where anthropologists might try to better understand, appreciate and respect the participants in their research. This project can also help a researcher to check their own biases. Though objectivity is an important sociological paradigm, it is unrealistic to expect a human researcher to remain completely neutral when undergoing a particular research. As such, reflexivity which examines one's own identity and their perceptions can help with providing ethical research that is; without trying to eliminate bias but to understand the extent of which their own traits influence their viewpoints. The more we understand ourselves and our relationship to the culture or society in which we live, the more we can work to improve things. This isn't to say that we should abandon our sense of self and others as individuals. Instead, we can observe how, for better or worse, the labels that cultures place on people impact their experiences as a member of a society.

1.8 CONCLUSION

To conclude, this research have turned out to be extremely meaningful and eloquent to me as the researcher. Providing valuable personal insights about ethnic identity from the view of the author themselves may change the course of how anthropology is carried out as a discipline in the modern future. Since there exists a significant gap in reflexive and/or autoethnographical research, I hope that this dissertation may provide and allow the space for it and others like it in the academic arena. More importantly, it has the potential to encourage and inspire more researchers, especially those from minority and oppressed groups such as women, people of colour, neurodivergent and non-conforming gender/sexuality groups to produce similar works of rich, articulate and eloquent narratives - contributing significantly to the field of anthropology and other social science disciplines.

Although the autoethnography method may prove to be highly beneficial to anthropology and the social sciences in general, it cannot be denied that like any other method and approach, its potentials are closely accompanied by issues and criticism.

For instance, Ellis et al (2011) highlights the fact that researchers do not exist in a vacuum. We live in communities with friends and family, partners and children, coworkers and students, and we work in universities and research institutes. As a result, when we perform and write research, we involve people in our work. These "relational ethics" are especially important for reflexive authors. They use personal experience to involve not just themselves, but also close, intimate individuals, in their work. Besides that, whether the accounts of the narrator and their interlocutors are reliable, valid and generalizable is also issue that one must take into consideration. Autoethnographers are frequently chastised for attempting to achieve the same goals as more conservative work in classic ethnography or the performing arts. Critics seek to hold autoethnography to the same standards as traditional ethnographies or autobiographical writing standards. Thus, autoethnography is attacked for being either too artistic and not scientific, or too scientific and not artistic enough. Ellis et al (2011) argues, stating that the most crucial questions for autoethnographers are: who is our audience, how is it affecting them, and how does it keep a reader engaged? I end by saying that if my research can impact at least one person for the better, I would've considered it a successful endeavour.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I explore and review previous literature on key concepts and methods related to my research. I first review past work on the questions of reflexivity in anthropology and some of the reflexive methods used by scholars, including auto-ethnography. It is crucial for my delve deeper into the methodology of my research, namely the reflexive approach and auto-ethnography method, in order to fully understand the potentials, issues and limitations they bring to the academic ecosystem. Then, I explore past research and writings surrounding the key concepts of my research; diaspora, ethnicity, nationality and identity.

2.2 WRITINGS ON THE REFLEXIVE APPROACH

In Burawoy's work depicting the ethnographic method of revisiting the site of a previous study, he talks about the idea of studying one's own self with relations to the field in which an anthropologist had conducted research. He says that following a four-decade growth that began in the 1950s, anthropologists today sweep the globe in droves. They originate not just in Western cities, but also in former colonies (Burawoy, 2003). They are becoming increasingly dubious of positive science, and they support Geertz's interpretive shift, which elevates culture as narrative and text. To Burawoy, the true challenge of revisiting an ethnography is to differentiate outside movements from the researcher's own fluctuating participation with that same world while realising that the two are not mutually exclusive. Traditionally, early anthropologists tended toward realism in their detailed ethnographic revisits to classic sites, focusing on the evolving characteristics of the world they examined and removing themselves from the narrative, whereas more recently, they have steered more towards a constructivist direction, in which the ethnographer becomes the central focus. Also critiquing realism is Lichterman (2017) who says that instead of emphasizing on relationships between their arguments and their social standing, ethnographers analyse how they worked out other people's meanings in the field in a more interpretive form of reflexivity. Within continual communication systems between researcher and researched, interpretive reflexivity evaluates social situations

and broadens the capacity to examine causal as well as interpretive assertions. Reflexivity conveys to the audience our understanding that knowledge is learned and imperfect, a concept that has long been accepted in ethnography, according to Lichterman.

Framing her methodology of choice around the idea of reflexive narrative, Lyle (2009) argues that one can allow their thoughts to flow and construct rich tapestries of memories through introspective procedures. By carefully and critically examining personal recollections, one can uncover not only the influences of the experiences recalled, but also attitudes and preconceptions that would otherwise go unnoticed. When examined through this perspective, narrative is more than a tool for gathering or disseminating data; it is the approach by which the researcher reveals the data through narrative. In questioning how best to present and address the power dynamics that comes with putting your own voice at the centre, Lyle (2009) considers the construction of an autoethnography. She quotes Ellis and Bochner who says that an autoethnography permits a double viewpoint; encouraging an outward viewscape of one's personal experience, i.e. the social and cultural aspects of one's lived experience, and secondly, promoting an inner look at the fragile self, which may oppose the cultural realm that surrounds it (Ellis & Bochner in Lyle, 2009).

2.3 WRITINGS ON THE AUTOETHNOGRAPHY METHOD

Diving further into the method of autoethnography, it would appear that many authors have provided eloquent accounts of it since the 1970s - though I am drawn primarily to the writings of Carolyn Ellis and her fellow researchers who argues that despite distinguishing between cultural insiders and outsiders and identifying ways in which a researcher's perspective might shape the study process and outcome, previous monographs on autoethnography has not overtly emphasised the inclusion and value of personal experience in research (Ellis et al, 2011). In 1991, Ellis had already made her case by saying that the first step in researching the combination of private and social life is to recognise introspection as a sociological technique that can allow access to private experiences, whether our own or that of others. In her paper, she defends introspection as a worthy social process and contends that it can yield interpretive resources from oneself and others that are beneficial for comprehending

the personal history of emotions. In her book *Heartful Ethnography*, Ellis (1999) sought to create an ethnography that included the researchers' vulnerable selves, feelings, bodies, and souls; produced poignant stories that give the impression of reality; celebrated concrete experience and intimate detail; and examined the way human condition is given meaning.

Writings on identity and diaspora can be found in abundance in the academic arena, though only a select few empowers personal voices and stories as a contribution to academic discourse on diaporic identity. In *Diaspora, Memory and Identity: A Search for Home*, editor Vijay Agnew along with fellow contributors offer valuable insights, helping readers to observe and understand the patterns and similarities between the different experiences of diasporic people in various ethnic and racial identities. They discuss how memories of the past construct our perception, assist us in navigating our environment and find new ways of “being and becoming” (Agnew, 2005). In her book detailing the relationship between geographical borders and identities in the Kelabit highlands, Dr Poline Bala (2002) uses her own voice together with those of the informants'. She depicts her own knowledge and stories of her community - filtering her reflections through an anthropological lens laden with personal feelings and open-minded examination of her material.

2.4 THE TAMIL (INDIAN) COMMUNITY

Thus, in order to examine the social and cultural processes of my own environment throughout my life, it is important to illustrate the history and formation of the Malaysian Indian people, the community of which I am part of. During the era of British colonialism in Malaya, people from India which was also under the Queen's administration began flocking to the country in the late 1800s to serve as contract labourers on plantations. Over the next few decades, more and more people arrived from various regions of India and Sri Lanka to work in security, railways, and clerical jobs (Kuppuswamy in Singh, 2013). At the time, Tamil speakers made up 77 percent of the overall Indian population in Malaya, thanks to labour recruitment from Tamil regions in Madras state and subsequent migration of other groups from same districts. Malayalees and Telugus, two other Dravidian language groups from South India, accounted for 7.4% and 4%, respectively, making South Indian Dravidians the vast

majority of Indians in Malaya. Malayalees and Telugus who lived in small minorities in the midst of huge numbers of Tamil speakers learned the language and marked the beginning of assimilation (Singh Sandhu & Mani, 2006). In their paper, *Indian Communities in Southeast Asia*, Singh Sandhu and Mani also states that around 70% of the migratory Indians were Hindus, adding to the sense of oneness, despite physical separation and sectarian conflicts. There were, however, considerable Christian minorities among them, as well as much more prominent Islamic scholars, who, while language and other cultural aspects drew them together, religion kept them apart.

Today in Malaysia, the term "Indian" refers to all people from the subcontinent, including Indians, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, and Sri Lankans. Malaysia has one of the world's largest groups of individuals of Indian descent outside of the subcontinent, with a population of around two million or around 7% of the total Malaysian population. The vast majority are of South Indian descent, mostly Tamil-speaking, with substantial numbers also speaking Telugu, Malayalam, Hindi, and Punjabi (Singh, 2013). According to Rajantheran et al (2012), Tamil is commonly spoken among the Tamil community, including by Telegus, Malayalees, and even Punjabis when dealing with Tamils. The Tamil language is also recognised by the government through media outlets such as Radio-TV Malaysia (RTM). Apart from electronic media, Tamil is widely used in print media, as seen by the growing number of Tamil publications such as Tamil Nesan, Malaysia Nanban, Makkal Osai, Thinakkural, and many weekly and monthly magazines.

The majority of the Tamil community is currently in their fourth or fifth generation. The third generation Indian perspectives in Malaysia were studied in a recent article by Wong and Lau (2016) to see whether they identify as Malaysian or Malaysian Indian. The goal is to learn how individuals handle and harmonize their ethnic identities with their national identities. Using a range of semi-structured interview questions, respondents describe the aspects of their ethnic identity that can be considered essential. While third generation respondents are conscious of their ethnic identity, they see themselves as Malaysians first and foremost, rather than focusing solely on their ethnicity. Though these types of studies focusing on ethnic minorities are highly welcomed and celebrated, I am of the opinion that there is hardly a need to distinguish whether or not one feels more tied to their ethnic identity

or national identity. In other words, I believe that one can be equally Indian and equally Malaysian at the same time - as diaporic individuals, our ethnic and national positions can be in harmony even if they are in misalignment. If Malaysian Indians choose to empower and accentuate their Indian identity, including its culture, nuances and struggles - it certainly would not make them any less patriotic than any other Malaysian.

2.5 CONCLUSION

Generally, I am of the belief that academic writings concerning diaspora, ethnic/national identity, and the Indian experience are slowly increasing and gaining more traction in the academic arena. However, this research which uses the reflexive approach and autoethnographic method has great potential to offer a unique perspective and fill in the significant gap in this particular area of study. Reviewing ample literature on the chosen approach and method has allowed me to further understand the theoretical dimensions and paradigms necessary so as to enable me to conduct this research in an ethically and socially responsible manner.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I discuss my primary methodology including approaches, methods and sub-methods used in this research. I explain the reflexive approach, the autoethnography method as well as supplementary methods for data collection that I used in order to construct a well-rounded, well-thought out and multidimensional autoethnography of significant substance and depth. In those supplementary methods, I will go into further detail regarding the data collecting with regards to time (schedule), space, medium, tools, interlocutors and ethical concerns. Definitely, I will also be discussing general ethical issues with relations to my overall methodology of choice and how I address these concerns.

3.2 THE REFLEXIVE APPROACH

In writing an auto-ethnography, the primary approach to tackle what is known as a personal narrative into the human experience is reflexivity. Used in many different disciplines within differing contexts, the core of reflexivity is described by Ruby (2016) as the ability of an entity to turn back upon itself, that is to merge the forms of a subject and an object together. In examining one's own self in the mirror and considering the mirror itself, the subject becomes its own object and vice versa. Qualitative research methods offer tremendously rich and raw data with direct reflections of people's insights - however, it comes at the cost of massive subjectivity and an open field to interpretation. As a qualitative researcher in anthropology, it is important not to fall down the rabbit hole of data, findings and the perspective of the Other without also examining one's own positionality in a social strata. When being reflexive while doing research, one would recognise that there is no way to approach a particular subject with a blank slate - free of preconceived biases, principles, past experiences, beliefs, values, attitudes and social position.

Thus, when the researcher addresses and engages with the subjectivity that their research often entails, what is then produced is a richer and fuller anthropological data that considers both sides of the proverbial mirror, benefitting all parties including the

researcher themselves, the community whose culture is being represented and the consumers of the research. In her essay, *Toward a Reflexive Anthropology*, Han (2021) ruminates on the idea of anthropologists deconstructing traditional ways of birthing and circulating ethnographic knowledge, rather striving for more accountable, responsible and ethical navigation of the discipline. I aimed to apply the reflexive approach as the central methodology in this dissertation, which is the introspection of what shaped my identity, particularly with regards to my race and ethnicity.

3.3 AUTO-ETHNOGRAPHY METHOD

In order to produce a richly articulate and eloquent piece of reflexive analysis, I engage with the autoethnography method as the primary tool for reflexivity. Being reflexive means that I not only acknowledge but engage with that unique insight by exploring it further and examining any biases or prejudices I might have in my conscious, unconscious or sub-conscious mind. In other words, I delve into the social and cultural processes that shaped my identity as it is today in order to become a more self-aware, cognizant and ethical researcher in the future. Therefore, an auto-ethnography serves as the best method to meet the objectives of this research: helping the researcher identify how the kinds of people we claim, or are perceived to be, influence interpretations of what we study and say about our topic by expanding and opening up a wider lens on the world, abandoning restrictive perceptions of what constitutes valuable and relevant research. Combining the principles of an autobiography and an ethnography, an auto-ethnography is a qualitative research method of conducting research that focuses on the analysis and systematic exploration of one's own self. Ellis (2011) best describes it as a technique of research and writing that aims to describe and analyse (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to comprehend cultural experience (ethno). In the 1980s, postmodernism thinking brought forth an era of questioning canonical forms of social science inquiry. Many scholars began to acknowledge the philosophical limitations of social science - realizing that human experiences were that of a deeply complex and intricate phenomenon which required a deeper insight. In pursuit of a more critical response to textbook beliefs about what research is and how it should be conducted, many of these academics turned to autoethnography. They wanted to focus on how to create purposeful, accessible, and poignant research that was based on personal narratives,

research that would alert readers to issues of identity complexities, silenced experiences, and forms of representation that deepen our capacity to empathise with people who are different from us. Delving in further, researchers began to see that various people have diverse assumptions about the world—a variety of ways of speaking, writing, valuing, and believing (Ellis, 2011). This diversity and variance come largely from how people are situated in a social setting - whether it is through their race, religion, gender, education, socioeconomic status, nationality, political views, sexuality and other identity markers. As a Tamil, Indian, heterosexual, cis-gendered, Catholic, liberal, Malaysian woman - how I view my subjects as an anthropologist may be completely different than that of other researchers, revealing my insight to be one that is unique.

Here, it is important to note that an autoethnography is not synonymous with an autobiography. Critics of the autoethnography method may assume that an autoethnographer is simply using the similar tenets of a novelist or an autobiographer. An autobiographer may think about producing a text that is visually appealing and evocative, as well as engaging readers and employing storytelling principles such as character, scene, and plot development. By identifying and filling a "gap" in existing, connected tales, an autobiography must also exhibit new perspectives on significant personal experiences or epiphanies. In what he calls to be his “Intellectual Biography”, Popper (2002) recounts crucial moments in his life, providing an account of ideas that has shaped his highly influential philosophy over the course of his lifetime. On the other hand, an ethnographer is concerned about providing an exhaustively rich description of a particular culture which aims to generate or detect patterns of cultural experience—repeated sentiments, stories, and happenings—as indicated by field notes, interviews, and/or artefacts, and it also helps insiders and outsiders comprehend the so-called culture in question.

3.4 DATA COLLECTION

In order to collect the exact and accurate kind of data needed for this autoethnographical research, I will be employing several key methods, namely reflexive journaling, interviews and photo/object elicitation.

3.4.1 REFLEXIVE JOURNALING

An effective way for me to properly mine for memories, epiphanies and significant past experience would be to start a reflexive diary or journal, where I record my entire thought process, including reflections and observations throughout the research. For Lincoln and Guba (1982), reflexive journaling serves as a meticulous auditing process in a research, aimed at improving reliability and reducing bias. Keeping a personal record of the research process, major decisions, and thoughts allows the researcher to benefit from the experience and better recall how things transpired. This is crucial as the whole point of an auto-ethnography is to take it upon ourselves to be our own main informant and use our personal narratives as data. I will be keeping this journal throughout my intended data collection period which is for 2 whole months, February and March 2022. To ensure maximum efficiency and recording, I intend to use a combination of physical and digital writing for my journaling process. The contents of this journal will include observations, epiphanies, childhood memories, end-of-day recaps as well as personal feelings and thoughts regarding my identity. To avoid straying off-course or getting too carried away with my journaling process, I will attempt to filter my recordings according to whether or not they are directly or indirectly related to my research questions and objectives.

3.4.2 INTERVIEWS

In interactive interviews, researchers and participants work together to explore issues that come up during conversation about certain topics. Interactive interviews are research activities. Interactional interviews, in compared to conventional one-on-one interviews with strangers, frequently comprise multiple sessions and take place in the context of forming and solidifying connections between respondents and investigators. I conducted interactive interview sessions with various family members and family friends in order to investigate or gain a deeper understanding of the

Malaysian Indian experience as well an outsider perspective towards myself as a Malaysian Indian woman. My key informants are my family members and friends, in other words, people who I consider know me well and can provide valuable insights as fellow members of my culture. I employed the use of semi-structured questions and informal conversations with English as my main language medium of communication. The instruments I will be using to conduct interviews are face-to-face and e-mail for those who are unable to meet with me physically. In order to make the most out of the interviewing process and flesh out deeper dialogue, I used photo elicitation, a technique to gain deeper and unique perspectives, also used in unlocking memories. As an ethical researcher, I made sure that all of my interviews are consensual and gain verbal consent from each of my interlocutors, also including clauses dealing with privacy such as usage or real names which will be up to the interlocutor's own discretion.

3.4.3 PHOTO AND OBJECT ELICITATION

Photo elicitation is the process of using pictures or other visuals to stimulate conversation during an interview in order to gather facts and information. Multiple levels of meaning may be identified as a result of this technique's ability to arouse strong feelings, memories, and thoughts (Glaw et al, 2017). I used my own childhood photos and other family photos in order to mine for memories either within myself or those whom I am interviewing such as family members and friends. Other than photographs, objects such as family heirlooms and cultural artifacts which includes traditional costumes, adornments, food, prayer materials, music, pop culture and other items revealed to be a worthy and beneficial "mine" that stores memories, family histories and traditions. For example, I reviewed childhood photos as well as several key objects relating to my ethnic identity such as the pottu, saree and Tamil language CDs. Moustaira (2011) states that cultural artefacts are memory prints, footprints of travel which can either be thick or thin. Even if they come from specific individuals, or are developed as a reaction to certain living conditions, cultural items, whether tangible or immaterial, have their beginning, or the cause for their being, in the life conditions of a society.