

## The familiar & strange 'Other' – A Portfolio Assessment of Intercultural Competence

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### Abstract

This study examines the (inter-)cultural experiences of female undergraduates attending a government-funded university in Dubai, the United Arab Emirates. The study examines written narrative data gathered from a sample of female Arabic-speaking students enrolled in the Colloquy Program at Zayed University (ZU). It reports important findings arrived at on the basis of deciphering written portfolios. Here, student written scripts are taken as mirrors of the socio-cultural world which shapes the participants' cultural awareness (CA) and intercultural competence (IC), in a context of English as a Second Language (ESL). In general, the findings revealed two broad types of feelings vis-à-vis 'others' who are sometimes perceived as 'familiar' and sometimes as 'strange'. The findings should be of interest to teachers of English as second/foreign language and to academics studying (inter)cultural issues.

*Keywords:* ESL, portfolios, intercultural competence, identity, otherness.