

**Researching Experience
in Global Higher Education**
A study of international business students in the UK

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Abstract

This thesis explores the experiences of international business studies students in the UK. Their experiences offer vital insights into important, contemporary socio-political processes, which crisscross international student mobility and the changing nature of global higher education. Such political transformations are driven and shaped by both neoliberal post-Fordist social organization, as well as an intensification of control over mobility. More specifically, this thesis suggests that the production and the policing of international students' experiences in the UK are shaped by the creation of diversified points of control, such as UK Visas and Immigration, international student recruitment agencies, the UK police, universities' international offices.

Inspired by and drawing on the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1987), Jacques Rancière (1999) and Frigga Haug (1987) this thesis seeks to surface and analyse minor processes of experiencing which evade the regulatory practices of these institutions. I have experimented with two different methodologies - interviews with international business studies students and a memory work collective with international students undertaking PhD research in business studies. The ten in-depth interviews which I conducted with students from diverse ethnic backgrounds gave me multiple insights into the complexity of the international student experience. However, the methodology of memory work has a more prominent role in this thesis, as it provided the possibility to collectively explore and re-work the collective's experiences. In doing that it uncovered moments of oppression as well as of resistance which usually remain hidden in clichéd accounts of experience.

The main themes that emerged from the responses of my participants were: a) the intensification of border controls: student visa restrictions, the threat of deportation and their anxieties around answering the meticulous questions posed by migration agents; and b) the discourse of employability: lifelong learning, the need for self-regulation and self-valorisation, as well as the problematic links between business studies and business in the 'real world' under the current precarious times. At the same time, the numerous tactics these students deploy in order to manoeuvre around and beyond these enclosures emerged during the very process of research as well as during the analysis of the empirical data. Some of these tactics are as follows: non-participation in prescribed tuition (seminars especially); creating informal

support networks; avoiding responding to or 'manipulating' migration agents; using business studies in unpredictable ways.

Through my research I seek to participate in the development of new readings of the international student experience, in order to start envisioning our experiences more broadly as active participators in the socio-political conditions which shape our everyday lives. Such new readings of the international student experience can enact new points of entry in both migration as well as labour studies.

Acknowledgments

When I was attending the writing workshops organised for PhD students from the School of Management (now Business School), I remember being told that when there is one author we should use 'I' and not 'we'. But every single time I wrote something like 'in this thesis, I suggest this or that', I always felt like I want to say 'we', meaning all these people, things, and situations that have helped me to arrive to this or that theoretical or methodological proposition. I would still like to use the term 'we' in this sense, in order to somehow keep with me during the very writing process of the thesis all the companions I had during this long journey. These companions made, the often lonely, tricky, and let's say it, stressful PhD journey, feel more like a joyful, funny, interesting, sweet and beautiful process. A process filled with adventures and new discoveries.

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Introduction

This thesis is about experience and how to research it. I turned my focus to experience because I have always felt that politics was immanent in minor, unnoticeable and often mundane everyday practices. Resistance, subversion, political and social transformation do not take place only on the streets, or through participation at the time of a big event. Politics, for me, was never something grand or spectacular. In his book *Why It's kicking Off Everywhere: The New Global Revolutions*, Paul Mason (2012) celebrates the unfolding of new mobilisations around the world; from Egypt to Greece and to Canada, and from the UK to Spain and to the United States. Mobilisations like these are without a doubt important and hopeful, and they are definitely a clear sign of the decline of representative politics. But has it ever really stopped 'kicking off', literally everywhere? Do people ever cease resisting, subverting and transforming themselves and the world around them, even when they are not overly vocal or intentional about it?

This does not mean that I consider everyday experiences of resistance as an atomistic matter and the personal responsibility of each individual. In this thesis experience is approached neither as personal, nor as an individual's possession. Rather, experience is analysed as interwoven in the social, political and institutional fabrications of everyday life, while never entirely enclosed by them (Haug, 1987). In other words, experience, taking place in the realm of the everyday, cannot but be entangled in the conditions which are shaped by the dominant forms of power; national governance, neoliberal political and economic imperatives and discourses, and institutional power on national, transnational and supranational levels. At the same time, experience is not approached as merely set within, fixed and limited by these conditions, or as a purely derivative of them.

'Travelling' through the experiences of my research participants, I came to see that even when they affirm the socio-political and institutional conditions which shape their lives, it does not mean that they agree with and accept what imprisons them; domination, regulation and policing. For, to affirm in such

contexts can also echo a Nietzschean type of affirmation; as affirming the liberating potentialities in any given situation, no matter how impossible the situation might seem in the present moment (Hoy, 2004). It involves looking for and creating openings in given, ostensibly solid, situations. Only during the process of experiencing can we practically and materially rework the conditions which are asphyxiating us, flee them, and even force them to move in different directions and to take new forms and shapes (Stephenson and Papadopoulos, 2006). For instance, when my research participants' experiences indicated their struggles with the normative patterns which transverse the whole international student aggregate – when they did not comfortably fit in them – they were simultaneously opening new avenues of experiencing – experiencing in a way that is not representable and not-yet named. This non-representable aspect of experience is not-yet measured, managed, regulated and policed, and hence is crucial for exploring the politics of everyday resistance to contemporary “societies of control” (Deleuze, 1992). However, this aspect of experience is not an additional experience on top of ‘normal’ everyday experiences. It can coexist very well with the representable parts of our experiences. But it remains quiet, invisible and unrecognised by all the national, transnational and supranational institutions interested in managing our experiences. That is exactly the reason why it cannot be captured and put to work for the reproduction of power. To put it differently, experience is not unitary, solid and easily traceable because actually experience is a process and a multiplicity, meaning that there are aspects of it which are slippery, creative and continuously changeable (Middleton and Brown, 2005). This means that it can ‘kick off’ everywhere, even when things seem terribly quiet.

Why the experiences of international business studies students?

Despite the complex and malleable nature of experience, representations of international students as “cash-cows” (Brophy and Tucker-Abramson, 2011, p. 12), and “rational, choice-exercising consumers”, often circulate in academic discourses (Sidhu and Dall’Alba, 2012, p. 415). At the same time, given the

centrality of the business schools inside the contemporary university (Dunne *et al.*, 2008), there is intensified concern about the experiences of international *business studies* students. The representation of international business studies students, and especially those who come from a middle class background, seem to stem from neoliberal discourses of employability and self-valorisation; that is, international students 'rationally' choose to study business-related subjects abroad as their primary, or even worse their only, concern is to successfully compete in the global market, through the acquirement of economic and social capital (Mitchell, 1997; Nonini and Ong, 1997; Brown and Hesketh, 2004; Sin, 2009; Waters, 2009; Brooks and Waters, 2011). These representations imply passivity amongst international students regarding the neoliberal post-Fordist capitalist transformations which have shaped the higher education aggregate especially over the last thirty years, as well as the controllability of their experiences by the regulatory institutions involved in these processes. Without affirming the controllability and predictability of international students, and in order to contextualise the debates around their experiences, this thesis begins (Chapter 1) by discussing those transformations which are involved in the production and the policing of diverse aspects of the contemporary, higher education aggregate.

Higher education has come to take a central position in neoliberal societies, due to the expansion of so-called knowledge economies – in which knowledge, technology and information, as well as soft skills, are produced and sold as with any other commodity, following the logic and the rules of the free market. This shifting role of higher education has been theorised by numerous scholars who are concerned with the risks of knowledge becoming commodified and marketised as with any other product, and in doing so losing much of its educational purposes, while the university keeps adopting more and more organisational characteristics from business (Tolofari, 2005; De Angelis and Harvie, 2006; Ross, 2009b; see also Brophy and Tucker-Abramson, 2011). As markets are increasingly and rapidly becoming more and more globalised, universities have been transformed into global universities, which

do not limit their business plans to within national borders. On the contrary, higher education institutions in the Global North have faithfully followed the model of multinational corporations, creating a global nexus of collaborations which serves their interests and their further global expansion (Ball, 2012). Agencies for international student recruitment, banks, higher educational institutions in the Global South, private, public, national and supranational organisations together form a well-established global higher education network, which follows the logic of the free market; global growth of business for profit-making purposes. The higher education services sector now has a global market worth of \$40 to \$50 billion (Ross, 2009b, p. 18). Amongst the Global North's higher education sector's most common strategies for expansion across the globe are; the founding of university branches in the Global South, distance learning courses, and of course the enrolment of international students in Global North universities. Given the vital and central importance of international students for the higher education institutions of the Global North – indeed, some UK Universities could not survive without them (Brooks and Waters, 2011) – there is a consequent increasing interest in the experiences of international students.

However, despite acknowledging the contexts and demands of the worrying transformations in higher education discussed above, in this thesis the experiences of international students are not analysed because such students have come to be vital stakeholders in the higher education business, and that as such we should all supposedly work on making their experiences as positive as possible. Instead I approach 'international students' as a *critical* institutional category which exemplifies the sustainment and the reproduction of the conditions of contemporary post-Fordist capitalism, through the exploitation of our subjectivities, experiences and mobility (Papadopoulos, Stephenson and Tsianos, 2008; Mezzadra, 2011). In other words, the case of international students is a paradigmatic one of life and labour transformations under the neoliberal post-Fordist capitalist regime in which knowledge societies do not simply flourish based on the expansion and the proliferation of

knowledge-related-products, but based on labour and life processes themselves. That is, the means of production have changed, not from machines to knowledge, but to the very mobility and subjectivities of people, to the relentless expansion of people's skills and creativity (Morini and Fumagalli, 2010).

The diagnosis of the effects of knowledge economies on higher education is important to take into account. Yet it is politically inadequate, insofar as it over-concentrates on "the commodification of education as an export product driven by the privatization of the higher education", while reducing international students to by-products of the neoliberal agenda (Robertson, 2013, p. 50). Given the transformations of capitalist production – from Fordism to post-Fordism – I propose to look at international students, not as rational consumers of higher education products and credentials, but as vital producers of the whole higher education aggregate. That is to say, the sustainment and the reproduction of the global university depends not simply on the production and the selling of knowledge products to students, but also on the production, managing and selling of their experiences as international students – as people on the move and as (potential) workers. Schuze (cited in Brinkmann, 2011, p. 57) has gone as far as to say that we do not live in knowledge societies but in "experience societies", in which even our most intimate experiences have not only become central commodities but have also been put to work to reproduce the conditions which sustain capitalist valorisation. At the same time, the global university simply cannot exist without the capacity of, and the desire for mobility of, international students – as well as those aspects of our subjectivities which can be put to work for its reproduction. Thus, I propose approaching international students as producers of the whole higher education aggregate – not only because, as some suggest, they participate in the production and reproduction of knowledge through their research, or because the research of PhD students and junior researchers and the labour of teaching assistants is frequently appropriated by more senior staff as well as the university itself (Bousquet, 2008; Ross, 2009b), but also because

certain aspects of their mobility, experiences and subjectivities are appropriated by the global university in order to be put to work for its reproduction.

To give a brief example which emerged from my research, the intensification of border controls makes it increasingly difficult for international students to stay in the UK after the end of their studies if they do not find a job on time. Simultaneously, there is an aggressive promotion of UK higher education studies, channelled through recruitment agencies in multiple countries around the globe. Thus, on the one hand, the mobility of international students is vital for UK higher education institutions, and on the other hand, parts of UK higher education institutions (e.g. university administrators, special tutors who teach students all about student visas) as well as parts of the UK government (the UK police, the UKVI, the Home Office) strategically participate in the regulation and policing of international students' mobility; controlling the who, when, and where as to allowing or denying the mobility of international students.

The main concern of this thesis is an exploration as to how social science, and especially social research, can interrupt this nasty appropriation. Can social research itself be a process of reclaiming our experiences, our subjectivities, our mobility? Can the way we research experience – without being disconnected from the conditions which shape it – shift the focus from the controllability of our subjectivities and of our migrations to potential openings such experiences create along the way? How does the previous research on international student mobility read the experiences of international students? – and what does this reading enact, both theoretically and practically? Can we read their experiences differently?

Chapter 1 initially briefly discusses the transformations of the contemporary university in response to the changing patterns and modes of neoliberal post-Fordist capitalist conditions, before proceeding to explore several previous research projects on international student experiences. What I found, is that despite the different disciplinary or theoretical entry point of each study (e.g. human geography, sociology, migration studies/ transnationalism

studies), much of the empirical research reads the experiences of international students through the lens of identity politics. While some studies managed to do justice to the heterogeneity of international student experiences, the analyses they developed did not escape the need for institutional representation of the diverse experiences and subjectivities of international students in relation/comparison to the local students and the host country (e.g. in the form of citizenship or the 'bridging' of cultural differences). Thus, the map drawn of international students by the research examples appears to be a traditional one insofar as it is a representational map, which filters out all the non-representable aspects of their experiences.

Given this situation, I begin by developing a theoretical analysis of identity politics which proceeds from acknowledging the academic, as well as the political value, of identity politics as a way to 'give voice' to people, and especially to neglected social groups and people "at the margins" (Clifford, 2000). I then move on to explain the intellectual and political problems emerging from the need for representation of marginalised experiences; the naturalisation of difference, overlooking the incommensurability between different groups, and the facilitation of their co-option inside the majoritarian modalities of life and politics (Papadopoulos, Stephenson and Tsianos, 2008; De Angelis, 2010). Having identified the main problems with identity politics, I close my only exclusively theoretical chapter with some poststructuralist propositions designed to help address and move beyond the focus on and role of identity politics in social research in general, and with regard to the case of international student experiences in particular.

Having raised and addressed epistemological and ontological questions about doing research – what kind of theoretical and methodological standpoints I will utilise to research experience, and what it is that these theories and methodologies can enact; how they intervene in the situation they address, and what kind of worlds they create – I move on to my long journey of empirics. The empirical part of the thesis is split into two parts; Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 deal with the methodology of interviews and the analysis of my

interview data respectively. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 concern the methodology of 'memory work'; Chapter 4 discusses relevant theory and Chapters 5 and 6 contain the analysis of my memory work data. Between the two parts there is one brief chapter – the *Intermezzo* – which outlines the passage from one methodology to the other, discussing the methodological limitations I encountered with interviewing, and my hopes as to addressing some of them through my utilisation of memory work.

For the sake of navigating the reader through the structure of this thesis, I will provide some further details as to the content of each empirical chapter. After I discuss my concerns about interviewing – mainly because it can individualise experience – and suggest possible ways to overcome them in Chapter 2, I move on, in Chapter 3 where I engage with my interviewees' experiences. The experiences of my ten interviewees suggest a threefold character as to the nature of these experiences. Firstly, I discuss the *plurality* of international student experience, as varying from being absolutely in tune with all the normative practices and discourses which underpin the universities of the Global North, to exposing the subtle racist practices which international students from the Global South encounter, and to the Chinese middle class' dreams to flee an oppressive nation state through the route of studying abroad. Secondly, I identify the *contradictory* character of experience here, the coexistence of experiences in tension in the same person; where parts of these experiences fit well with the majoritarian practices of the Global North university and other parts resist, betray or even entirely refuse these practices. Thirdly and finally, there is the *relational* character of experience; that is, the troublesome experiences of my interviewees did not indicate, so to speak, their 'me me me' personal struggles. Instead, they indicate struggles which emerge through multiple articulations and interactions with others' experiences, actions, practices, and expectations (from family members to university's agents to other international students) within the context of *control societies*, to borrow Deleuze's (1992) term once more.

In Chapter 4, where the methodology of memory work is explained, the inherently relational character of experience and further the importance of collectivising the very process of research when we explore experience becomes clearer. This is to say, memory work as developed by Haug (1987) and others, puts emphasis on both the collective production of our experiences – their social, political and institutional character – and on the collective remembering of our experiences; the collectivisation of memory. Through the formation of a memory work collective with four PhD international students, who I knew prior to the research, we started to collectively explore our international student experiences.

This time the research process generated much sharper data, that enabled us to clearly see the connections of the international student experience with broader socio-political transformations – in the politics of migration, labour and higher education, informed by the neoliberal, post-Fordist, capitalism and the politics of ‘policing’ (as analysed by the work of Rancière 1999). In this respect, Chapter 5 begins with the memory workers’ accounts of the intensification of control over international student migration. Our collective discussion of these experiences with control further developed through the remembering of tactics the memory workers deployed in order to skirt/cheat the controlling practices they encountered. From there the chapter moves on to even more imperceptible ways of actively participating in the Global North university, while refusing to be assimilated in and by it. Chapter 5 closes with a theoretical discussion of the Global North university’s position inside the post-Fordist capitalist arrangements of life and labour, and the lessons we can learn from an autonomist reading of the experiences, subjectivities and mobility of international students.

Chapter 6 focuses on business schools¹ and the experiences of both my interview participants and memory workers of being international students in business-related fields. Through the accounts of my research participants, I

¹ All my research participants were studying business related degrees. Although I briefly explained the main reason why I chose business studies already in the introduction, the more detailed reasons are outlined in Chapter 2.

formulate a response to some provocations of three CMS scholars – Fournier (2006), and Harney and Oswick (2006) – concerning business students. These CMS scholars appear to reduce business studies students to nothing more than potential labour, while the accounts of my participants indicated the complexity, the sensitivity and the specificities of their experiences – making it impossible to limit their experiences, subjectivities and mobility to a drive for ‘employability’.

More broadly, I would suggest that the unexpected, unpredictable and non-representable aspects of my research participants’ experiences provide merely useful starting points for further imaginings as to the socio-political potentialities which come with exceeding the controllability of our experiences.

Chapter 1

International students in global higher education: The context, previous research and theoretical propositions

This chapter covers three different, and yet interrelated areas regarding international students. In the first part, I briefly explore the emergence of the internationalisation of higher education the last thirty years. In the second part, I engage with previous studies on international students' experiences and I express my concerns regarding the prevalence of identity politics in most of them. In the third and last part of chapter 1, I develop some preliminary theoretical propositions for overcoming the analysis of international students' experiences which stems from identity politics.

1.1 The Global University: A very short introduction

Globalisation is a very complex process and an umbrella term associated with many heterogeneous and contradictory phenomena. Different conceptualizations of globalisation have mushroomed over the last two decades (Ong and Collier, 2005). Despite the ambiguity that characterises it, the so-called internationalisation of higher education (Brooks and Waters, 2011) or the rise of the global university (Ross, 2009b), is indeed related to processes of globalisation, or perhaps more accurately to a diversity of global assemblages. In other words, international student mobility is part of the complex articulations between education, economy and politics intersecting across continually shifting global processes that are shaped by late capitalist reforms (Ong and Collier, 2005). More specifically, the post-Fordist² neoliberal arrangements of capital and labour – under which the distinctions, between production and reproduction (Morini and Fumagalli, 2010), as well as those between high and low-skilled workers and between citizen workers and non-citizen workers, collapse (Neilson and Rossiter, 2008) – have created the conditions for our very subjectivities, experiences and mobility to become the

² I talk about post-Fordist capitalist configurations in more detail in chapter 5.

main fuel of contemporary capitalism (Mezzadra, 2011). The channelling of our subjectivities, experiences and mobility into providing the sustenance for capitalist production seems to be orchestrated, no longer by nation states alone or only through collaboration between the state and the market. For instance, in the case of higher education, one can see the intersections (often in tension or contradiction) of the interests of multiple players; national, and transnational institutions as well as supranational organisations, which strategically insert processes of “verticalisation” into higher education (Papadopoulos, Stephenson and Tsianos, 2008). In this thesis, I approach the processes of verticalisation as those mechanisms of regulation and control over various aspects of the international student mobility.

In particular, one of the first major investors in what has come to be called the internationalisation or globalisation of higher education is the World Bank, which in 1963 started “supporting the growth and diversification of tertiary education systems in developing countries and promoting essential policy reforms to make the sector more efficient, relevant, equitable, transparent, and responsive” (The World Bank, 2002, p. ix). The Bank’s interest in intervening in the educational systems in ‘developing’ countries in order to make them more efficient, relevant, equitable and so on, was such that “between 1990 and 2009 it lent over US\$7.64 billion for 337 education projects with tertiary education components in 106 countries” (World Bank Group 2010, cited in Globalization 101 n.d.). How though does the World Bank define an ‘efficient’, ‘relevant’ and ‘equitable’ educational system? What was the recommended agenda to be followed for this end? The policy agendas which the ‘developing’ countries were obliged to follow reflected a strongly neoliberal ethos designed to open the door for global capital’s unperturbed flows in and out of these countries; serving to simultaneously transform the state into the creator of the appropriate conditions to permit these capital flows to proceed without disruption (Brooks and Waters, 2011). In other words, an ‘efficient’, ‘relevant’ and ‘equitable’ educational system could be translated as that which is profitable and market-oriented.

To this end, the World Bank (n.d.) has built several partnerships with many other supranational organisations, as well as research institutions. These include: Boston College's Center for International Higher Education (CIHE); the State University of New York's campuses at Albany and at Buffalo which are notable centres for research on international tertiary education; other research institutes such as the Centre for Higher Education Policy Studies; as well as numerous organisations including the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA), United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and of course the World Trade Organization (WTO).

As a result of the Uruguay Round of Negotiations in 1995 the WTO and its General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) fostered amongst other things, the globalisation of higher education by encouraging universities to adopt market-driven and competitive attitudes. Despite objections to the transformation of higher education into a commodity governed by trade agreements similar to any other commercial product (Ross, 2009b), the WTO managed to set neoliberal standards by passing “a range of conditions under which global trade in education is to be pursued (such as transparency of rules, liberalization of markets and the development of rules for solving disputes), and countries that join the GATS process are required to make a commitment to the ongoing liberalization of trade through periodic negotiations” (Brooks and Waters, 2011, p. 24).

The common sentiments, exhibited by all these different institutions and organisations, towards education as a tool for economic development by globalising, privatising, commodifying and individualising it are not simply the result of global pressures or the threat of the current economic crisis. These practices served to institutionalise and expand, even further, the already established political economy called neoliberalism (Harvey, 2005; Rizvi cited in Brooks and Waters, 2011, p. 23). In other words, the transformations in higher education are neither simply inevitable ramifications of globalisation or economic crisis, nor the natural and unexpected implications of broader

historical changes. Instead, they are the effects of planned policies, such as GATS, which purposely contributed to the reformulation of higher education to accommodate to the needs of the unregulated, global economy.

At a European level, three years before GATS emerged, the 1992 Maastricht Treaty sealed the strong presence of Europe as firmly within the global and deregulated market arena. The child of the Maastricht Treaty is the 'European Higher Education Area' (EHEA) – implemented through the Bologna process, which started in 1999, as Europe's response to the emerging global HE market. To ensure that the European higher education system acquires a worldwide degree of attractiveness, the Bologna process has explicitly underlined the necessity for student and staff mobility. This has been one of the preconditions for the setting and materialisation of a series of common objectives and quality standards towards a homogenisation of European higher education (European Higher Education Area, 2007). The recent priorities of the Bologna process echo similar initiatives around higher education; such as international openness, lifelong learning, employability, quality assurance, and competition between HE providers (European Higher Education Area, 2009).

Even though the Bologna process theoretically aims to encourage student mobility within and into Europe, as well as the homogenisation of European education (I do not of course consider the homogenisation of European education as something positive), only the wealthiest regions with the most prestigious education systems are the key players. The UK in particular is one of the most popular student destinations worldwide. The 'Englishisation' of higher education further contributes to this end. This monolingual path has also been facilitated by the assistance of another business associated with higher education, namely English tests – such as the American Educational Testing Service (ETS), the International English Language Testing Service (IELTS) which is jointly managed by British and Australian public sector organizations, and the University of Cambridge's ESOL examinations (Brooks and Waters, 2011, p. 27). The British Council has also played a

pervasive role in the promotion of English language in higher education. Arguably, exploiting the postcolonial power of English, the British Council, keeps marketising UK degrees on the basis of the value of English language (Madge, Raghuram and Noxolo, 2009). One can see the slogans used on its website claiming the English language to be universally valuable, while the UK is depicted as the 'mother country' of this language (ibid.).

In fact, the higher education transformations as they have been briefly explored so far have both affected and have also been exploited by the UK. In 2006, an article with the title 'The brain business. How Europe uses and abuses its brainpower', was published in *The Economist* (Wooldridge, 2006). It highlights the interconnection between economic success and knowledge which made Europe desperately want to become the most "competitive knowledge-based economy in the world" (ibid.). Even more interestingly, the article explores the means of capturing economic growth based on knowledge, and lists three indicators of this growth. These are: "human capital endowment" (the imputed value of all the efforts that have gone into educating and training everyone in the country, including the lifelong training provided by companies etc.); "human capital utilisation" (in other words, employment, because it is pointless to train people if they cannot find a 'good' job); and "productivity" (how well a country uses the knowledge - which means how 'efficiently' trained/educated people work). Using these three indicators, one can 'measure' the knowledge-based economic performance of a country (ibid.). But what do these indicators actually mean in practice?

UK universities have undergone, and continue to undergo, several transformations in order to be 'competitive enough' in the global knowledge economy. Although some of these transformations began in the 1960s with the Robbins Report (1963), which encouraged closer links between education and industry, universities have undergone the most fundamental changes since the late 1970s and early 1980s (Tight, 2009, p. 69). The first wave of transformations coincided with the establishment of neoliberalism, which arose in Britain based on the economic rationale that it was the only way to tame the constant increase

of inflation, unemployment, imbalance of payments and slow/non-existent economic growth (Pollitt, 1993; Farnham and Horton, 1999; Horton and Farnham, 1999). One of Thatcher's key tactics to promote and normalise neoliberalism was the imposition of an entrepreneurial culture through the introduction of "surveillance, financial accountability, and productivity on to institutions, such as universities, that were ill suited to them" (Harvey, 2005, p. 61).

In the 1980s and early 1990s the Thatcher and Major governments expanded student numbers without providing corresponding investment in universities, deliberately driving down the 'unit cost' of higher education. They also attempted to impose a particular conceptualisation of 'efficiency', which entailed changes in governance to make universities more closely resemble "the business-school conception of a well-run commercial company"- although in the business world itself the wisdom of strictly top-down, chief executive led models has increasingly been questioned (Collini, 2012, p. 34).

This heritage had various ramifications across UK higher education, such as the introduction of the application of New Public Management (NPM) techniques (De Angelis and Harvie, 2008), and policies which encouraged the proliferation of managerialism, accountability and performance measurements (Tolofari, 2005). These assume that the public sector can learn from the private sector "despite contextual differences" (Metcalf and Richards, cited in Larbi, 1999, p. 1). In fact, the Jarratt Report (1985) fostered the full implementation of NPM in higher education.

Specifically, the Jarratt Report introduced an enterprise model for universities, which proposed the embracing of market logic, focusing more on efficiency and management. Vice Chancellors should, it argued, now function more like chief executives by being responsible for strategically leading and managing universities towards measurable efficiency. Indeed, "Jarratt suggested that the state should provide the funds necessary to meet the costs of reductions in university staff, urged universities to adopt strategic planning practices from private sector organizations, and paved the way for the

introduction of an increasingly management approach (...) the [Jarratt committee was also] one of the first bodies in the UK to refer to students as ‘the university’s customers’” (Tight, 2009, p. 137).

New Labour, under the leadership of Tony Blair, put education at the top of their political agenda. Education was to be the ultimate economic driver. The participation rate in higher education had been expanding, indeed it had doubled during the previous decade, and under Blair it continued to grow even faster, but without equivalent investments in universities, while the Dearing Report (1996) underlined the shift from public towards private sources, which led to more explicit and aggressive strategies for the privatisation of higher education. At the same time, the rhetoric of quality, efficiency and productivity, as well as market connections was further stressed (Tight, 2009, pp. 81–83). In other words, the main purpose of UK universities – to meet the needs of the economy – was encouraged through a series of specific and targeted policies, which at the same time policed academic institutions through the proliferation of managerialism and bureaucracy.

The effects on the academic world³ have been, and continue to be, profound. Within these ongoing processes and their consequences, this thesis specifically addresses the experiences of international students in UK universities. As has been previously mentioned, the UK has set clear and aggressive targets for the recruitment of international students since the 1990s. The income from tuition fees and living expenditure from international students has been estimated to boost the UK’s economy by an additional amount of £3.3 billion pounds a year (Newman, cited in Madge, Raghuram and Noxolo, 2009, p. 38). However, as the analysis of international students’ experiences in this thesis does not stem from an economic standpoint, I would like to now shift the focus to previous research which has taken their experiences as a point of departure and to explore what kind of complex

³ For more details of the transformations of the UK higher education as well as global higher education see the work of Shore and Wright, 2000; Lambert, 2003; De Angelis and Harvie, 2006; Gregg, 2008, 2009a, 2009b; Harney, 2010; Butler and Spoelstra, 2012, 2014; Parker, 2013.

articulations between their experiences, subjectivities and mobility emerge from these studies' findings.

1.2 International Students' Experiences

As discussed above, the contemporary university is becoming increasingly embedded in contemporary modes of capitalist production, and hence is becoming more and more global in nature. Offshore campuses, exchange programmes, international university consortia and student recruitment agencies are mushrooming around the globe. However, this thesis concentrates on international business studies students who study at UK higher education institutions, and their experiences throughout the international student journey. Thus, before I move to the empirical part of this thesis, I would like to engage with, and discuss, some aspects of the large body of research on the experiences of international students studying at different universities in the Global North.

Searching for books and articles which included empirical social research on international student experiences in my university's library I came across a great deal of work from various disciplines (human geography, migration studies, transnational studies, postcolonial studies). Much of this theorisation of the global university is attentive to the economic, as well as to the geopolitical, aspects of the internationalisation of higher education (e.g. Ross, 2009b; Brooks and Waters, 2011; Brophy and Tucker-Abramson, 2011) and its postcolonial dimensions (e.g. Rizvi, Lingard and Lavia, 2006; Madge, Raghuram and Noxolo, 2009). However, much of this research still seems to have its starting point in anthropological discussion of culture. Much of the research I explored, and which I discuss below, places a special emphasis on 'cultural differences'. I do not want to suggest that there are no cultural differences between home, EU and international students, or within and between these groups. However, the main problem which I have identified in this line of analysis is the reduction of cultural difference to (national, ethnic,

cultural, personal) identity. Such analysis, stemming from an identitarian⁴ conceptualisation of difference, fails to go beyond analogies, comparisons or homogenisation processes, as well as a focus on an instrumental ‘bridging’ among these differences and/or attempts to incorporate marginalised groups into the dominant one.

Furthermore, an interrelated problem that emerges from this line of thinking is that, despite the proliferation of literature and research in the field of transnationalism and the hopeful connotations that transnational thinking might carry for imagining a post-national and/or post-border future (Gunesch, 2004; Beck, 2006; Evergeti and Zontini, 2006; Khagram and Levitt, 2008; Gargano, 2009; Vertovec, 2009), it is still the case that a lot of research even in the field of transnationalism falls into the trap of “methodological nationalism” (Wimmer and Schiller, 2003).

That is, although the development of transnational studies has fundamentally contributed to the overcoming of the “naturalisation” of the nation state within sociology and especially in migration studies, there are still many cases where national territories and identities are the main focus of sociological and migration analysis (*ibid.*, p. 576). Indeed, as Nina Glick Schiller (2009, pp. 18–19) explains, the augmentation of control over mobility as well as the proliferation of arguments about the urgent importance of the integration and assimilation of migrants for the social cohesion of a society are relatively new tendencies, upon which migration studies has been built. During the period of globalisation and imperialism, between the 1880s and the 1920s, freedom of movement was not only celebrated but also highly facilitated by the abolition of passports and visas in European countries. The United States did not impose any restrictions over migration flows from Europe either, with passports or visas no longer required. The constant movement of people between countries was considered natural and certainly not threatening for the cohesion and/or the security of the receiving countries. However, governments

⁴ The problem with the identitarian conceptualisations of difference is explored in the following section of this chapter (1.3). In an attempt to open up alternative ways of analysing difference I engage with Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) concept of “becoming-minoritarian”.

gradually deployed notions of national unity and of the national economy, when ironically most of their 'national' wealth was generated abroad (e.g. from their colonial projects). National identities started being imposed on both natives and migrants of these states, causing ambivalent feelings⁵. This new approach to mobility marked the end of free, non-state, mobility flows and became the foundation of migration studies; insofar as migration studies became responsible for analysing movement flows between nation states. Given this, today the focus on nation state analysis still haunts migration studies, as well as social science in general.

1.2.1 Transnationalism and the experiences of international students

There is a great deal of research that explores international student mobility within a transnational framework. However, as suggested above, it often ends up contributing to the development of an analysis based on; cultural relativism, cultural tolerance, comparisons and analogies between education systems in the host and home countries, between senses of belonging here and there, the formation of various new identities (transnational, hybrid, fragmented and so on), as well as the motivations of international students to cross borders as grounded on processes of self-valorisation.

An example⁶ which sums up the above tendencies can be found in the article 'Temporary transnationals' (Weiss and Ford, 2011). In this article, international student mobility from Southeast Asia to Australia is theorised as based on three principles. Firstly, it is one way – internationalisation of

⁵ The development of nationalism in Europe has been thoroughly analysed by Benedict Anderson (1991). According to Anderson, nationalism in Europe started with industrial capitalism and the proliferation of print-capitalism; that is, capitalist entrepreneurs no longer printed their books exclusively in Latin (the official language which was spoken by limited sections of the population) but in vernacular languages (the dialects spoken by common people). By doing so, they started getting involved in the social construction of distinct nations and national identities – what Anderson called "imagined communities" (ibid.). Gradually, the interplay between technology (print), capitalism and language led to the elimination of local languages circulating in the public media and to the establishment of a set of standardised dominant languages. Given this, nationalism did not only create common imaginaries among hitherto diverse communities, it also created multiple hierarchies within each new 'imagined community' (ibid., pp. 45-45).

⁶ Further examples follow, in which I connect other studies to the range points made in the initial paragraph of this section.

knowledge from less developed countries to developed countries, which contributes to the understanding of cultural relativism, different forms and values. Secondly, the alignment of educational systems takes place in order to “facilitate cross-border labour force mobility in a multicultural but uniformly capitalist world”. Thirdly, there is an emphasis on “educationalism”, which is focused on exposing students and academics to different pedagogies and educational norms (Stier, cited in Weiss and Ford, 2011, p. 232). Based on this analysis of the internationalisation of higher education, Weiss and Ford interviewed international students (Indonesian, Malaysian and Singaporean) in an attempt to understand more about their ‘temporary transnational identities’ (which nationality and/or religion they identify with and how tolerant they are to students from different ethnic/religious backgrounds), the pull factors that make Australia the ideal higher educational hub, and interestingly as to whether they had been involved in any political activism during their studies in Australia.

As Weiss and Ford (ibid.) explain, their findings illustrate that the international student journey reinforces national attachments, rather than weakening them. The vast majority of their research participants tended to associate only with and feel closer to, their co-nationals – rather than constructing more complex attachments and multiple allegiances that go beyond this ‘safety net’. Hence, Weiss and Ford call these students “cosmopolitan-locals” (ibid., p. 231). The motivations that pushed their participants to study in Australia are all related to the discourse of employability. The final finding of the article, was that political activism amongst international students in Australia seems to be absent, especially when this is compared with engagement in political activism by local students or by these students in their home countries. This is partly because these students did not feel like citizens of Australia and partly because they were more focused on the “accumulation of capital” and “social prestige” via “flexibility” and “mobility” (ibid., p. 243).

Reducing transnationalism to such conceptualisations does not overcome methodological nationalism, and it definitely does not consider the reworking of the power of borders. That is to say, the sense of belongingness and the formation of identity does not cease to be approached as dependent on nationalism. Furthermore, the authors' consideration of the experiences of international students, appears to conceive of these as limited only to individualistic and self-entrepreneurial drives. Following the same line of thinking, the issue of political activism is also framed as taking place within the discourse of national attachment, which, if nothing else, prevents us from exploring political possibilities that emerge in terms conceived of as beyond the nation state.

Waters (2005), on the other hand, is more attentive to less easily traceable insights into international student experiences as transnational migrants. In particular, she is interested in exploring the role of the strict Chinese educational system in the formation of transnationalism between Hong Kong and Vancouver. Drawing on fieldwork conducted in Hong Kong and Vancouver between 2000 and 2003⁷, she argues that "a child's 'failure' in the local education system" drives many middle-class families to emigrate (*ibid.*, p. 367). In a later article Waters (2007) focuses on how this emigration can also lead to the development of an exclusive class of transnational professionals inside Canada. In both articles, most of the research participants emphasised the very high educational standards in Hong Kong, and the extreme competition, as well as the pressure they felt to 'succeed' (Waters, 2005, 2007). Hence, emigrating to a country with a respectable, and yet less stress-inducing educational system seemed the only way to reach their educational goals which they could not achieve back home. Interestingly, their migration journey came to be a transformative one, insofar as the more relaxed educational experience seemed to have a great effect across the wider spectrum of their everyday lives

⁷ In Vancouver, she held in-depth interviews with 50 immigrant/international students, mainly from Hong Kong, in post-secondary education. In Hong Kong, she conducted 23 in-depth interviews with those who returned from their studies in Canada to Hong Kong to begin working there. In both cases, the families followed the children (Waters, 2005).

– as they found more free time to socialise with friends and family (Waters, 2007). Through such finding, Waters (2005, p. 372) paints a more complex picture of the “motivations” that can “drive” young people (bringing their families along) to study abroad, as well as of their experiences beyond life on campus and beyond the rhetoric of employability.

1.2.2 Career prospects and self-entrepreneurialism

In contrast, Sin (2009) focuses on the expectations related only to the career prospects and social status of a group of Malaysian students studying in UK universities. Thus, her research questions were concentrated on the participants’ perceptions of a ‘good’ job and a “successful life”, and to what extent they viewed a degree from UK higher institution as facilitating fulfilment of their career goals (ibid., p. 289). Most of the research participants painted a very positive picture of their experiences in UK higher education. For instance, some claim to enjoy the different educational approach, as it provided them with greater responsibilities compared to the educational system they were used to. Others, more ‘typically’, underline the reputation of the UK higher institutions, especially the prestigious ones like Oxford, and the importance of this reputation in their country of origin. One of the participants explains:

“Everyone I feel in Malaysia is talented, motivated, brilliant but which school you choose to come from is so so important to be noticed ... that’s the main filter these companies have to look through on all the vast talent they have around the globe, so naturally, they will source from the top league of business schools ... employers in Malaysia would tend to look at where your degree comes from. First being, from UK, and then maybe, Australia and then next, Canadian, American degrees” (Celine, cited in Sin, 2009, p. 291).

Another theme emerging from Sin’s project concerns the relation between ‘good job’/income, respect and social status. According to her research findings, for the majority of her participants UK higher education is an

investment which will reward them and their family by giving them the key to opening the door to job opportunities and social status. Here is a representative example:

“A good job is something which gives you satisfaction, something which brings money and something which gives you some face in the community like you won’t be ashamed to tell somebody your job ... I want money, lots of money, so that I can give good impressions to other people.

What kind of impressions do you think you will get when you have lots of money?

People really respect you. Your saying will be heard ... Money will determine your status, money will state that you are there, but I think it doesn’t matter to bring happiness because if I have money and keep it, then maybe I will fear that it’ll be lost some day.” (Murni, cited in Sin, 2009, p. 292)

Sin’s article concludes by drawing the attention of the players in the UK international higher education market to the high expectations of international students, ‘warning’ them about the significance of making sure of the quality of facilities, teaching, and every other service provided for international students.

Along similar lines a study, on ERASMUS students and hence on European students, also suggests that economic and career enhancement apparently overshadow anything else that comes with studying abroad on the ERASMUS programme. According to Papatsiba (2005, p. 183), despite the political and institutional attempts to reinforce a feeling of “an enlarged Europe, enriching national identities with the desired European dimension”, students are almost exclusively interested in maintaining their national identities and in self-valorisation.

1.2.3 Intercultural experiences of international students

Just as Sin's (2009) article concludes by drawing the attention of UK higher education institutions to the high expectations of international students and the importance of meeting their needs, other studies have argued for a smoother incorporation of international students into the local culture. This is to say, global universities should not simply enable, but also promote, a cultural cohesion inside as well as beyond the university campus.

In particular, focusing on the UK, Ramachandran (2011) suggests that the economic benefits international students bring with them, for the university as well as the national economy, should be explicitly communicated, in order to highlight the significance of their successful involvement in the student community. Ramachandran points to the challenges international students face, which are not limited to within the university walls but also exist with regard to their wider environments and the country as a whole. In the UK, for instance, the 'drinking culture' can cause various problems for international students who do not drink, usually due to cultural and religious reasons. Because alcohol works as a medium which relates students to each other, international students can easily feel excluded. In other cases, international students decide to follow this expected cultural practice, and as a consequence become distracted from their academic goals. Hence, universities should provide international students with professional help and counsellors who are prepared to deal with all kinds of sensitive issues and problems related to cultural differences. Overall, universities should provide a welcoming environment through using all the services they have in order to make international students feel at home, while at the same time they should aim to facilitate "bridging between cross-cultural differences" (ibid., p. 215).

Other global education hubs, like Australia, have also been concerned with the satisfaction of international students. Burdett and Crossman (2012), using the Universities Quality Agency's (AUQA) reports as secondary data, draw the attention of Australian universities to the "AUQA findings and recommendations for required action [which] send powerful messages to guide

university priorities, practices and strategies in pursuit of quality enhancement in relation to student engagement" (ibid., p. 207). Once again, universities are being held responsible for shaping the experiences of international students through encouraging social and cultural integration and dealing with their experiences in a "holistic way" (ibid., p. 213). In a search for solutions, other research focuses on how university structures (accommodation provision, course provision, and student union clubs and societies) can facilitate the integration and adjustment of international students, creating opportunities for intercultural interactions (Coles and Swami, 2012).

In contrast to the studies presented above, Montgomery and McDowell (2009) have approached the difficulties of international students in overcoming cultural barriers from a completely different angle. Conducting research with international students who study in the UK, these researchers explain that international students are not less able to adopt the 'UK culture', they are just not interested in doing so – as they feel their cultures do not lack anything when compared to that of the UK. Montgomery and McDowell open up for scrutiny the following typical comments on international students – "they don't contribute to discussions" and "they are reserved in class" - implying that they feel inferior, or that they are ignorant (ibid., p. 455). Moreover, they question the assumption that one of the attractive factors for international students choosing to study in the UK is the desire to experience a "high quality culture". The authors explore the absence of intercultural interaction in terms other than a perceived problem with regard to international students (ibid., p. 455). Rather, they propose that international students do not seem to be willing to interact with UK students, as they find it easier and more enjoyable to build more meaningful bonds with other international students – through creating alternative social networks and forming strong international communities through which they help and support each other (ibid., pp. 458-462).

Montgomery and McDowell's findings seem to challenge the common expectations of higher education institutions for cultural bridging. However, they still approach experience as a personal matter, as well as conceiving of it

as being bound to identity and the self. A book authored by Montgomery (2010) was published a year later, also focusing on the international student experience, and once more identity and self were as much core themes as themes of friendship and community support. In other words, although these two publications do not emphasise the need for incorporation of international students and for socio-cultural cohesion inside the global university, neither do go beyond the perception of culture as the creator of a certain type of identity and a specific sense of selfhood.

1.2.4 Culture, Identity and Well-Being

The intercultural experiences of international students have often been blamed for the 'shaking up' of their identities, which can even lead to psychological damage and the loss of well-being. For instance, Luzio-Lockett (1998) calls this problem the "squeezing effect". According to the author, international students are called upon to 'squeeze' their identities "in pre-established set of rules or conventions" such as speaking in a certain language, adapting to different perceptions of academic performance or experiencing different learning practices (ibid., p. 210). The consequence of such experiences can be so damaging to their identity, that according to Luzio-Lockett, they should be addressed by professionals within the university – such as mental health counsellors (ibid., p. 209). Another study has shown that international students, instead of squeezing or managing their identities, have a sense of entirely losing their identity or having their identities fragmented (Grimshaw and Sears, 2008). According to these authors, such fragmentation or the sense of losing one's identity can cause a confused sense of belonging, insecurity and intense feelings of anxiety.

Relatedly, the well-being of international students has also been explored by Russell, Rosenthal and Thomson (2010). Their research was conducted with international students studying in Melbourne and demonstrates that "the international student experience commonly challenges a person's sense of well-being" (ibid., p. 236). Once again language issues,

cultural shock, homesickness, lack of communication with people with different lifestyles, unfamiliar pedagogical approaches, financial issues and a sense of a lost identity are suggested as causes of psychological damage. Similar findings are presented by two other studies, one explored the experiences of Asian doctoral students in the US (Sato and Hodge, 2009), and focused on the University of Toledo where the percentage of international students is only 10% (Sherry, Thomas and Chui, 2010). In both cases, international students found comfort in the company of their co-nationals, avoiding interaction with students from different ethnic backgrounds in order to protect themselves from feelings of a lost identity.

“The limits of interculturality” – as indicated in the title of the article – have also been explored by Schweisfurth and Gu (2009). Along similar lines to the previous authors, they draw attention to the problems international students deal with due to cultural differences, and the effect these differences have on their identity. In a later article by the same authors (Gu, Schweisfurth and Day, 2010) the focus is once again on the psychological burden caused by intercultural experiences. This time though they focus more on identity as something which can be negotiated and freely chosen, according to the cultural tolerance of each individual student. As such, the emphasis is on how international students try to overcome any language, social, interaction, personal and academic obstacles. In other words, according to Gu, Schweisfurth and Day's (ibid., p. 20) research findings, the students themselves are responsible for manoeuvring amidst all the new challenging experiences towards a “successful reconfiguration of their identity.” Tristan, a participant from Trinidad, explains:

“But at the end of the day, your experience depends mostly on you. What you put in, you get back out, and so I would advise any fresher, or any person living away or thinking of going away to study: ... Keep an open mind, try new things, and be friendly. You have nothing to lose, and everything to gain ... I actually have had the most amazing experience over the past couple of years. I’ve seen and done things I

would never have dreamt of, and I know I have made the most important decision of my life to come to England” (cited in Gu, Schweisfurth and Day, 2010, pp. 20–21).

Approaching their work from a postcolonial perspective, Gunawardena and Wilson (2012) also conducted research, with international students from the Indian subcontinent who studied at Australian universities, in order to explore the dynamics between those students’ culture and the local culture. The authors engage with the work of postcolonial theory (e.g. Edward Said and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak) in order to discuss the dominance of western modes of knowledge production inside Anglophone universities, and hence the marginalisation of any other mode of knowledge production, including those which international students may carry with them. Despite their vital contribution to the overcoming of an ahistorical analysis of the establishment of the local (western) culture as the only legitimate one, the authors do not go beyond demands for better or more equal representation⁸ of international students. As they particularly mention, they found out that there is a lack of representation of the “history”, “culture” and “voice” of those students who come from the Indian subcontinent (ibid., p. 196). Hence, the mission of their research project is to find ways to represent the voice of this group of students.

1.2.5 International students as migrant workers

Two groups of international students which seems to draw less attention – at least in the studies presented so far – are that of those who work during their studies, as well as those who use their studies abroad as the first step to permanent residency in the host country. In these cases, the boundaries between migrant, worker and student, as well as between low and high skilled migrant-worker and citizen and non-citizen, start becoming blurry – adding dimensions to the experiences of international students which can go beyond questions concerning career, interculturality, well-being and identity. Below, I

⁸ The issues of demands for representation and identity politics are explored in the following section (1.3).

discuss three studies which bring more complex insights to the discussion around the experiences on international students' studying at Australian universities, while connecting them with broader issues concerning the new divisions of labour, as well as with the current politics of migration.

In particular, Nyland *et al.* (2009) begin their analysis by suggesting that previous studies on international student-workers reduce this experience, either to a statistical overview of how many students work during their studies, or to concerns about work-study balance and its possible implications for the well-being of students. As such, for Nyland *et al.* (2009) it is important to shift the focus towards the exploitation of international students by Australian employers. After presenting a series of examples that illustrate their participants' experiences with exploitative employers, they call on Australian universities to take action against the exploitation of international student-workers and to stand with them when it comes to the protection of their employment rights. Furthermore, they ask for the recognition of international students as being equally vulnerable workers as women, young people and other migrants – and hence suggest their inclusion into official public debates about employment exploitation.

When teaching academic English to international students in Australia, Shanthi Robertson (2013) also started caring about the positions of international students in the public domain. She became particularly concerned about the struggles of her students, not only because many of them worked during their studies, but also because most of her students were studying in Australia in order to apply for Permanent Residency (PR). She conducted ethnographic research, in which she spent time and talked with many international students about their experiences with work during their studies, as well as with their transnational migration journey.

As Robertson explains, the findings of her research revealed the heterogeneity of these migration processes and experiences, challenging the common and reductive representations of international students-workers-migrants, as either elite professionals or as “exploited ‘back-door migrants’”

(ibid., p. 6). As she points out, it is not only the media and/or the state that contribute to the shaping of such representations, but “to a certain extent the academic discourse too” (ibid.). Robertson’s research manages to illuminate the diversity of her participants’ stories. For example:

“I spoke to Chinese mothers who had been saying goodnight to their young children on Skype for over three years; young Scandinavian men with advanced degrees and perfect English who could not find work on their bridging visas and so volunteered for invasive, but well-paid, clinical trials at Melbourne hospitals to keep them afloat until their residency was approved; a Japanese musician who struggled through a hairdressing qualification so he could stay in Australia and keep gigging with his band. I also spoke with a dynamic professional couple, with one partner who had already gained PR. They had folders on their kitchen table piled high with paperwork: photos, emails, statutory declarations, every birthday card they had ever sent each other. These were to document their relationship, so that they could obtain a partner visa. There were people working illegally in restaurants and factories and people working in high positions in some of Melbourne’s most prestigious companies. A qualitative approach has, I hope, allowed some of this diversity of experience to become apparent in my discussions of student-migrants as transnational subjects and of their relationship to the state” (ibid., p. 7).

According to Robertson, the relation between these student-migrants and the state is twofold. Firstly, these flexible migrants-workers are “crafted by state desires for the flexible accumulation of labour”, which creates opportunities for migration as well as opportunities for exploitation and precarity (ibid., p. 159). Secondly, the everyday lives of the student-migrants, as well as their mobility, are moulded by all the agents involved in migration. For example:

“They spoke about the Department of Immigration, about their migration agents and lawyers, about the shifting of national priority occupations lists, about how many points they needed for a successful

PR application and what they had to do to obtain these points. They talked about health checks, English-language tests, skills assessments, evidence of funds, police clearances: their bodies, capabilities, relationships and bank accounts laid bare to the scrutiny of the immigration regime. They spoke about waiting, about uncertainty, about strategizing their lives and choices and re-strategizing as the immigration regime constantly changed around them" (ibid., p. 8).

This sociological description of the effects that the state's regulations have on the organisation of the everyday life and mobility of those flexible-precarious students-migrants-workers is not only relevant but vital. It is vital insofar as it inaugurates a more socio-political analysis of international students' experiences through situating them within current global migration flows, as well as the proliferation and intensification of exploitation and policing over these flows. Nevertheless, this line of analysis sheds light on only one aspect of migration movements – the one inextricably connected to the nation state, and demands for citizen rights and representation. Robertson treats this type of migration as transnational: "student-migrants [are] transnational actors whose lives and identities are implicitly embedded within ongoing relationships to multiple nation states" (ibid., p. 10). However, her approach to transnationalism once again falls into the trap of methodological nationalism, as described by Wimmer and Schiller (2003). Simply put, Robertson's (2013) book challenges the unification of international students as well as alluding to the porosity of migration categories, yet the heterogeneity which emerges from the empirical data is not analysed in a way that can question the controllability of migration.

Taking as a point of departure a violent attack⁹ against an Indian student who was working as a taxi driver in Melbourne, and the massive protest which

⁹ "At 0300 hours on 29 April 2008 in the Melbourne suburb of Clifton Hill, 23-year-old Jalvinder Singh was stabbed four times in the chest. The incident occurred in his workplace, a yellow cab. He was working as a driver to support his studies as an international student in hospitality management at the Carrick Institute of Education, one of the many private colleges for Vocational and Educational Training established in Australia's cities over the past decade. This was not the first attack upon an Indian taxi driver in Melbourne. On 8 August 2006, Rajneesh

this event sparked, Neilson (2009) also tries to do justice to the multiplicity of subjectivities and experiences that emerge from the collapse of both the old labour divisions as well as that between non-citizen and citizen. Furthermore, he suggests that such protests indicate the rise of new forms of political organisation, which cannot be fitted neatly into older conceptions as to forms of political organisations such as trade unions or political parties, exactly because the borderlines between high and low skilled workers and between migrants and citizens have become increasingly blurry. As Neilson remarks, the protest was created out of a “political mosaic”; Indian taxi drivers – many of them also students – various political groups and individual activists came together and “paralysed the whole city” (ibid., p. 426).

Although Neilson (2009) underlines the importance of such a protest insofar as it unites many different vulnerable groups against exploitation without unifying them into one homogeneous category, at the same time – like Robertson (2013) – he chooses not to abandon an analysis developed through the concept of citizenship. Both studies attempt to challenge monolithic approaches to citizenship – Robertson discusses dual citizenships and flexible citizens, while Neilson discusses the fragmentation of citizenship itself. But neither comment on alternative routes and possibilities – the ones which go unnoticed – that many migrants (including international students) take in order to evade controllability over their mobility. Neither author talks, for instance, about those international students who try to stay in the host country without taking a citizenship-related route, or about those who do not wish citizenship. They do not even seem to focus on how the complex and multiple experiences of those students-migrants – who might be in the process of acquiring citizenship rights – can indicate that everyday experience still exceeds the merely institutional processes ¹⁰.

Joga, a student from Hyderabad undertaking a Masters of Accounting at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, was killed when an assailant tried to hijack his cab by pushing him out of the moving vehicle”. However, the attack which took place in 2008 triggered a huge protest, which drew global attention (Neilson, 2009, pp. 425–426).

¹⁰ These are some of the tactics of resistance that emerged from my research data, which I analyse in chapters 5 and 6.

Drawing on the above, what follows is a summary of the central limitations I have encountered with some of the existing research into international students' experiences (before I move on to make some preliminary propositions as to addressing and overcoming them) are:

- *Experience* is approached as *personal*. That is, experience can be possessed and fully understood by an individual. This also means that by talking with a research participant about their personal experiences, a researcher can have access to their *authentic inner voice*.
- Some studies approach international students as exclusively driven by their *self-entrepreneurial interests*, as related to *employability* and *social-economic capital*.
- International students are sometimes *psychologised*, based on their negative and/or positive experiences. Extensive analysis on the damaged *well-being* of international students due to their *new fragmented and/or lost identities* can be found in some of the research articles discussed.
- As a consequence of these previous three points, it appears that the *subjectivities* of international student are often analysed in a *de-socialised* and *a-historical* manner, insofar as they appear as mere expressions of the *inner self* and of the personal drives of each individual.
- At an *institutional level*, international student *experiences* are approached as if they can be *pre-decided*, *organised*, *managed* and *manufactured on demand*. The conclusion drawn is that universities should deploy certain strategies which work towards the production of a more *trouble-free international student experience*, if they want to continue attracting international students.
- When the study of international students is approached through the lens of *migration* (usually transnational migration), the analysis of their experiences is often limited to a discussion of cultural differences between them and the local students. In other studies, the transnational

migrants' relation to the *state* and *state representation* (in terms of citizenship) is the main line of analysis. In both cases, difference is bound to identity politics.

Throughout this thesis, my research participants' accounts as well as the theories and methodologies which I engage with offer alternative analytical paths for understanding experience in general, and that of international students' in particular. Needless to say, each participant's account, each theoretical and methodological suggestion, also suggest (not necessarily directly) responses to many of the limitations mentioned above. It is important to draw attention to the fact that my research and thesis was by no means designed as merely a response to the previous research on international students' experiences, that I have discussed above. Although I had developed a preliminary draft, in which some of the studies mentioned above were discussed prior to the empirical part of my research, some of the studies' weaknesses became apparent to me during the unfolding of my research as well as during the data analysis. Further, my research findings only offer speculative and open-ended readings of the international student experience and not clear cut answers as to who international students are and what their experiences really are in the global university. Before moving to the empirical part of the thesis, in the following section I provide some initial theoretical propositions intended to provide lenses through which one might read the international student experience. In particular, I discuss identity politics, as I believe this to be the dominant approach underlying most of the research examples mentioned above. The centrality of cultural differences, the need to bridge them and/or incorporate the international student group into the local one, the demands for rights and representation from the state and/or from the global university, and the need to give voice to international students can all be viewed as falling within a concept and category that has come to be central in political and academic discourse since the rise of the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s; namely, that of identity politics.

1.3 Taking identity politics seriously

Why is identity politics so problematic? What is the problem with supporting and protecting different groups? James Clifford (2000, p. 95) argues that we should take identity politics seriously, and in fact, expresses his worries concerning the recent assaults on and backlash against identity politics from both the political right and the left, as well as from poststructuralists. For instance, the left blames identity politics for the splintering of a common politics of resistance, while poststructuralists consider identity as an essentialist basis for analysis *per se* – one that can only lead to categorisations, dualisms and divisions. Given these contexts, Clifford (ibid.) invites the reader to approach identity as not essentialist *par excellence* (although it has been often poorly theorised in just such a manner). In fact, many cultural theorists (e.g. Stuart Hall), postcolonial theorists (e.g. Homi Bhabha) and queer-feminist theorists (e.g. Judith Butler) have dedicated their work to making visible the exclusion, racism and exploitation of minority groups – and doing so without theorising identities as unitary and fixed. Neither do these theorists separate or prioritise one oppressed form of identity over another (e.g. they do not suggest combatting inequality and oppression through firstly fighting for race equality as an ethnic group and then as workers, or even worse through fighting for race equality as an ethnic group against workers from a different ethnic background) (Gilbert, 2008).

In a similar manner, Clifford (2000) also wants to underline that cultural theorists who take the politics of identity seriously, and as their point of departure in order to talk about minorities, consider the processes of identification as grounded on ambivalence, constant negotiation, as well as both connection and disconnection. Further, he suggests that disciplines which have their epistemological and political grounding in identity (e.g. cultural anthropology) have contributed to radical interventions through attributing special attention on and value to “people at the margins: relatively powerless, non-literate or differently literate communities whose particular stories are left out of national and global histories” (ibid., p. 103). In other words, according to

Clifford, identity politics provides a useful valuing of claims for different identifications, which are nonetheless conceived of as not linear or without contradictions, and yet that are both distinct from, and often necessarily oppositional to, dominant modes of identification.

Clifford's (ibid.) observations and arguments provide powerful reminders for all those opposed to identity politics of its significant role in the vocalisation of marginalised groups. However, for a set of interrelated reasons, scepticism, as to whether identity politics is the most appropriate, sufficient and liberating route to inform resistance to and subversion of majoritarian dominant representations and practices, is also legitimate. Identity politics pays special attention to people at the margins – to those who do not explicitly 'fit' into dominant systems – and Clifford (ibid.) indeed very hopefully suggests that "a disposition to perceive and value difference can also be understood not as a reification of otherness but as an awareness of *excess*, of the unwoven and the discrepant in every dominant system, the 'constitutive outside' of even the most hegemonic social or ideological formations" (ibid., p. 103, emphasis added). Despite *excess* being a useful term for conceptualising that which cannot be captured by power, excess is not necessarily explicit, intentional, clear, teleological and outside of the dominant system (Papadopoulos, Stephenson and Tsianos, 2008). So, what happens to those that ostensibly 'fit' but where aspects of them do not? What happens when some parts of our subjectivities and our experiences are strategically digested by the dominant conditions of representation, but other parts – or even smaller aspects of these digested parts – resist, subvert, 'sabotage' and escape domination? Governmentality studies¹¹, drawing on Foucault's (2008) concept of *biopolitics*, have meticulously analysed the penetration of power across ever more aspects of our lives, even with regard to those who live at the margins. This suggests that placing the potential promise of thinking in terms of excess, exclusively in terms of the constitutive outside, is no longer the most fruitful way to theorise excess. In fact, the main danger with identity politics is when its political claims

¹¹ For a detailed analysis of governmentality studies see Chapter 3.

become claims for the incorporation of difference – different modes of existence, different subjectivities, different mobilities, different experiences – within the social compromise. This re-inserts even those hitherto constitutive outsides in the constitutive insides (Papadopoulos, Stephenson and Tsianos, 2008). Thus, the paradox with this type of claim for equality among differences – “unity-in-difference” – is the creation and/or the legitimization of newly imposed divisions, hierarchies and categorisations (Gilbert, 2008, p. 57).

At the same time as recognising these issues, it would be terribly problematic to dismiss or underestimate the importance of direct political fights against exploitation, oppression, racism, homophobia and so on, which have taken and do take the form of identity politics. In some cases, claims for recognition of equal rights from the state (e.g. for gay couples to have the right to adopt children) provide the only obvious, the fastest, and perhaps the least complicated or the least painful, route for achieving them. To take an example from the studies mentioned in section (1.2.5), the protest which took place in the streets of Melbourne after the violent attack against the Indian, taxi-driver international student is a powerful reclaiming of the city by people who live there and who want to live safely. Different political groups came together in solidarity with the Indian international students and taxi drivers. However, the problems with identity politics begins when these kinds of reclaiming become theorised as mere fights over institutional representation. At that moment the voices of these protesters cease to be seen as directed towards other oppressed groups – in order to unite with them and create alternative political routes, and instead become directed to the national, transnational and supranational institutions – which want to make profit out of these claims by further incorporating, regulating and exploiting them. As Robertson’s (2013) research indicates, the fight for Permanent Residency (PR) that many international students engage in in Australia is a process full of bureaucracy, testing, taxonomies, payments, and years of waiting in order to get an institutional signature that gives them the legal right to live in the country. In the meantime, migration lawyers and agents make profit out of this claim for mobility by

assisting student migrants with the complex and demanding application processes. Given the strict control over migration orchestrated by regulatory agencies like Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) and Department of Immigration, Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA) in Australia, social scientists like Robertson have understandably focused their research on the effects of these regulations on the lives of student-migrants. That is to say, social scientists often trace the steps that student-migrants take in order to be fully incorporated in the host nation state. However, if social science paid greater attention to the non-teleological, intentional and well-calculated everyday actions of resistance to state control, it could arguably serve to create space for the proliferation of incommensurable differences (incommensurable modes of existence; incommensurable subjectivities, experiences and mobility) rather than for well-managed and well-incorporated differences.

To this end, I propose an exploration of how poststructural theory conceptualises difference and how this might help social scientists to rework their conceptual tools of difference, and especially to rethink and rework the approaches to difference which emerge from identity politics.

1.4 Difference as the starting point versus Difference as the ending point, or, Poststructuralism versus Identity Politics

Poststructuralists advocate the incommensurability of difference, instead of approaching difference as a form of identity politics. According to Hoy (2004, p. 4), in order to start deconstructing the controllability of difference, one should start by asking “how identities were produced in the first place”. What kind of historical, social, political and institutional processes and practices contributed to the establishment of certain national, sexual, gender (etc.) identities? What do these categorisations and the characteristics which they carry with them do to those who are supposed to belong within them? Do those who supposedly belong to one or more categories identify with these categories? What are the points of tension between the established representations of a certain category and the non-representable aspects of the subjectivities and experiences of those

who supposedly belong to these categories? Can processes of intentional and/or unintentional dis-identification be grounds for resistance against the incorporation of difference into established categorisations, divisions and hierarchies?

Once identities are theorised in a less de-socialised and a-historical way, the intimate relation between resistance and power becomes more obvious – as mentioned previously there is no longer a clear outside (Hoy, 2004). However, according to poststructuralist theory, what makes this point pivotal is that although there is no clear distinction between power and resistance, resistance's profound connection to power does not disable it from escaping power. To put it differently, resistance is not a mere response to power although it is constrained by it. Poststructuralists take as a point of departure the concrete situation in which both power and resistance co-exist, but then move beyond this opposition. They do not approach resistance as 'saying no', or to put it in Nietzschean terminology as purely reactive to power – rather as affirmative and creative. A poststructuralist resistance 'says yes' to change; it is experimental, saying yes to openings it creates along the way (ibid., pp. 6-9). As such, "[u]nlike resignation, resistance can lead to hope – that is, to an openness to the indefinite possibility that things could be different, even if one does not know exactly how" (ibid., p. 10). In other words, a poststructuralist perspective does not deny identity and its powerful effects on subjectivity, and yet it is an analytical lens through which one can focus on all the minor processes of dis-identification which can otherwise be too easily dismissed or obscured.

According to Hoy (2004, p. 21), one could say that when Deleuze wrote his book on Nietzsche in 1962, he marked a new mode of thinking and a new mode of writing philosophy. What is interesting for this research, are these new modes of thinking and specifically, of conceptualising difference. According to Deleuze (1994), philosophy for a very long time has subjugated difference to the four cornerstones of reason; identity, analogy, resemblance and opposition. Deleuze (ibid.) develops a theory of difference as existing prior to any identification. As such, names and categories advocated by the principle of

representation are also challenged. Common-senseism becomes irrelevant to difference and what is taken for granted is disrupted. This is to say, difference ceases to be solidified in comparisons and analogies. As such, Deleuze's (1994, p. 174) conceptualisation of difference opens the door to "chao-errancy" which spoils the predictable normalcy of representationalism which wants difference as its object. Deleuze invites us to approach difference as concerning open-ended processes – as concerning transformative and creative forces which connect with and /or give space for other transformative forces to emerge – and *not as fixed destinations*. This line of thought, I suggest, is politically important, as it allows us to at least begin imagining differences as in no need of institutional representations which can serve to legitimate concrete boundaries around them.

Creativity, transformability and open-endedness as an antidote to representationalism is a theme that runs through most of Deleuze (and Guattari's) work. Utilising these insights, I propose to analyse the experiences of marginalisation and exclusion of difference through Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) concept of *becoming-minoritarian*. As they suggest, the main difference between minorities and majorities is that majorities (those who fit in well and do not express any points of tension with the established forms of power) are fixed, homogeneous and lacking any sense of plasticity. Minorities are in a constant process of becoming – "a potential, created and creative becoming" (ibid., p. 106). As such, while there is not such a thing as becoming majoritarian – because majority is fixed – the concept of minorities refers to a continuous variation or diversification which exceeds "the representative threshold of the majoritarian standard" (ibid., p. 106).

However, constant diversification does not lead to endless separate differences and modes of existing in the world as one would have expected (Papadopoulos, Stephenson and Tsianos, 2008). On the contrary, various modalities and differences are only points of departure and elements which have the potentiality to fabricate a collective change, but which are not the affirmation of any of the elements which build it. In other words, when looking

at difference through the lens of becoming-minoritarian, difference is never the end point, insofar as end points are only the affirmation of fixed territories, fixed identifications, and in effect fixed differences – which can all over again be co-opted by the majority.

The Deleuzian and Guattarian (1987) proposition of minorities also adds new, and more speculative, dimensions to actions of resistance. In particular, it sheds light on those resistances which are less noticeable or prominent; which are quieter, less intentional and less teleological. Despite the significance of ‘loud’ and well-calculated actions of resistance like the protests in Melbourne, previously discussed, it is also important to have at our disposal methodological and analytical tools which can help us theorise those modes of resistance which are almost imperceptible and on-going, and yet have revolutionary potential. These everyday actions of resistance tend to be unpredictable and occur beyond the obvious desires of marked territorialisation around minority groups. To put it differently, it concerns bringing together various minoritarian elements, rather than whole minorities. As Deleuze and Guattari (1987, p. 106) explain: “It is certainly not by using a minor language as a dialect, by regionalizing or ghettoizing, that one becomes revolutionary; rather, by using a number of minority elements, by connecting, conjugating them, one invents a specific, unforeseen, autonomous becoming”. Everyday resistance is not about negating everything which dominates us, but about affirming whatever openings one finds and creates in any given situation. Such affirmation does not indicate “acceptance” or “compliance, but an affirmation of hope (Hoy, 2004, p. 24).

Throughout this chapter, I have engaged with aspects of the existing research on international students’ experiences. Drawing on a range of different disciplines and fields, various studies have diagnosed much of the complexity which characterises international student experiences. However, the conceptual suggestions of Deleuze and Guattari (1987) about minorities go beyond diagnosis of a situation. As Stengers (2008, p. 53) suggests, even diagnosis can add new dimensions to a situation, and some of the dimensions added by the

studies in international students' experiences are of particular interest with regard to this research and thesis. Nevertheless,

“the problem with diagnosis is that it easily leads to forgetting about the unintended repercussions of one's theory. Dramatizing the question of efficacy means that the theorizing craft needs creative (not reflexive) accountability, which dares to speculate about what may come into existence because of the theoretical intervention, and which eventually dares to create a lure for new possibilities that add to the interest of a situation and transform the way it is addressed” (ibid.).

In the chapters that follow, I discuss the two methodological approaches I experimented with (interviews and memory work), as well as analyse the research data collected during the empirical part of the PhD journey. I will argue that my participants' accounts, as well as the theoretical and methodological propositions I engaged with, taken together contribute interesting new methodological as well as theoretical interventions to readings and understandings of international students' experiences, that serve to challenge the dominant standpoint of identity politics.

Chapter 2

Experimenting with interviewing

The most popular and appealing method for conducting social science research is interviews (Alvesson and Deetz, 2000, p. 70; Kvale, 2007, p. 8; Kvale and Brinkmann, 2008; Cassell, 2009, p. 500). Qualitative research is usually compared and contrasted with quantitative research methodology. Qualitative interviews, varying from the very structured to the unstructured, have become the alternative to quantitative routes, and something of a panacea, for social scientists. Often they deploy interviews as their main qualitative method, with the hope of giving voice to research participants. This is intended to allow them to explain how they think, feel, experience, and understand certain situations, while at the same time avoiding the imposition by the researcher of their own perceptions on to their research participants (Alvesson and Deetz, 2000). In other words, in qualitative interviews the research interviewees are invited to intentionally and/or unintentionally mould the very process of the interview, as active participants, instead of being treated as passive research objects (King, 2004). Unstructured and 'in depth' interviews especially, have been traditionally viewed as being able to capture "the genuine experiences" of research interviewees (Alvesson and Deetz, 2000, p. 72), "offering the opportunity for an authentic gaze into the soul of another" (Atkinson and Silverman, cited in Cassell, 2009, p. 500).

Qualitative interviews are generally regarded as building a genuine relationship between interviewers and interviewees, and hence viewed as more likely to provide richer data (ibid.). Interviews are not conducted in a vacuum, but instead are always influenced and shaped by the social and political contexts within which they take place. And, as such, normative accounts can easily be reproduced during the interview, as interviewees may try to sense what the interviewer expects to hear in a specific social situation. Even when it is the case that a "genuine relationship" has been built, and interviewees at least try to "speak their minds" without attempting to satisfy the interviewer, there is always a level of contingency as to what can and cannot trigger

knowledge-producing potential; for instance, being influenced by “what he or she has read in a newspaper just before the interview” (Alvesson and Deetz, 2000, p. 72,74).

Focus group interviews are considered to be potentially useful alternatives to individual interviews, allowing a more social and dialogic perspective to develop through the research process itself. As such, compared to individual interviews, they can provide the researcher with totally different insights into participants’ views on a topic or their lived experiences, as they involve communications with the other participants, rather than simply describing them to an interviewer (Cronin, 2008). Focus groups are arguably able to capture interactions *amongst* people who share certain experiences; reflecting how one’s view triggers discussion or challenges others’ views. Moreover, focus groups can reveal what appears to be, for the majority of the participants, the most important aspects of the topic and why they consider them to be so (Bryman, 2008). As Tonkiss (2004, p. 198) suggests, they “capture the inherently interactive and communicative nature of social action and social meanings, in ways that are inaccessible to research methods that take the individual as their basic unit of analysis”.

This does not mean that the self-oriented approach to experience disappears and that the ability of individuals to interpret their experiences is refused, but the opposite. The discussion within the focus group is another attempt to give a “meaningful” interpretation of participants’ lived experiences (Earthy and Cronin, 2008, p. 421). Importantly, categorisations which serve to constrain the experiences and the subjectivities of the research participants are by no means challenged or questioned through utilising focus groups as a method, *per se*. For instance, in the case of international students, we need to ask what the – very much institutionally produced – category called ‘international students’ does to them? How does it affect them? Furthermore, the role of the researcher as the facilitator of the discussion is almost exclusively instrumental. In a focus group the researcher is expected to facilitate the discussion and regulate the intensity of interaction (Cronin, 2008). This role

precludes the researcher from being an active part of the research process, when actually being explicitly active would serve to blur the distinctions between researchers and researched, and through doing so allow them to re-discover their experiences together.

In summary, although talking with people about their experiences and everyday lives, be that individually or in groups, can undoubtedly be valuable, we should equally appreciate the weaknesses and limits, discussed above, that come with such a reliance (almost to the point of obsession) on interviews for qualitative research, arguably another sign of the contemporary emphasis on the self. In other words, the 'interview culture' can be viewed as reproducing normative representations of the self as the core of the subjectivity through which we 'experience' life (Atkinson and Silverman, cited in Brinkmann, 2011, p. 57). Exhaustive conversations concerning ourselves, our experiences and our stories, that constantly circulate in the media, mainly for commercial purposes, reinforce the orientation to self – the individualisation – central to the nature of capitalist society (Brinkmann, 2011). Experience itself has even become a new commercial product. From "museums [which] are becoming feel-it, touch-it experiential theme parks, [and] the appeal of biographies, reality TV, talk shows, trauma [to] travel experience", experience is manufactured, promoted and sold, as with any other commodity (Stephenson and Papadopoulos, 2006, p. xiv).

Given the above, is it possible to research experience without contributing to what has been called the "interview society" (Atkinson and Silverman in Brinkmann, 2011, p. 57) and the "experience society" (Schuze in Brinkmann, 2011, p. 57)? To put it differently, how can this reinforcement and reproduction of capitalist society – that is founded on the individual and their experiences, as supported through a methodology primarily focused on interviews as the favoured method of qualitative research – be methodologically disrupted? How can experience be methodologically approached in a manner that might liberate the subjectivity from the self, and question the assumption of self-knowledge? Can interviews be deployed

without merely 'giving voice' to each international student's 'special case' or personal story, but instead 'giving voice' to the conditions and the tensions that contribute to the creation of the category of 'international students' and the wider international student aggregate?

Firmly believing in the political importance of research, and despite my doubts as to whether it is possible to overcome the limitations of interviews, I experimented with interviewing for this research project – in order to 'witness' what the actual process of such forms of research can do to the subject of study. In other words, it was of interest to me to become part of the interview process, and to feel the dynamics which this research method enables and disables during the unfolding of the research.

I wondered whether a researcher can avoid the clichéd set of questions and answers which tend to direct the focus of research interviews on to easily and readily narrativized aspects of experience during an interview. Is it possible to use interviews while avoiding the immersion of a research project in rational explications? Can an interviewer gain access to the more complex and messy aspects and hence insights of the international student experience? Can interviewees talk about their experiences without reducing their subjectivity to an ahistorical and de-socialised category? Or as John (2004, p. 4) puts it "(...) the problem is not so much the standard research methods themselves, but the normativities that are attached to them in discourses about method". For Law the normativities attached to most social science methodological approaches limit our research to the need for generalizability, certainty and stability, preventing partiality, messiness, slipperiness, unpredictability and multiplicity from emerging (ibid.). Thus, all the questions raised above come down to one main question: can we remake a normative method like interviews? Can the political and theoretical stance of the researcher contribute to the remaking of this particular research method?

The two concepts of 'experience' and 'subjectivity' run throughout my thesis. As such, considering the above questions has proven to be a real struggle for me, as the ways in which I deploy the concepts of subjectivity and

experience are crucial to the political importance of this research project. This means that during the different stages of this project I have located myself – as a researcher – as oriented by a critical analysis and framing of the concepts of experience and subjectivity. This is to say I understand them as able to initiate socio-political changes through the introduction of novel and creative modalities of existence, instead of functioning purely as mirrors of current social, political, economic and institutional enclosures. However, as I have explained in chapter 1, I do not mean to imply that our experiences and our subjectivities are independent from the enclosures which exist in a given situation. They are related to the constraints of a given situation, but are not identical to them. As such, the thesis in general, and the interview part of my research in particular, are underpinned by an empiricism that is close to meeting a Whiteheadian definition as described by Stenner (2008, p. 94): “[...] it is not just about describing more or less accurately some matter of fact, but about finding the conditions under which some-thing new is invented and enters into the world”. This means that our subjective experiences do not merely reflect how we make our ways in life individually, but how we re-work the conditions within which these experiences unfold. In that sense, starting with experience in this project means trying to follow the non-linear, but rather ambiguous and complex paths of multiple becomings. Subjectivity, is not approached as being about the concrete stories one can tell about oneself and the ways in which one came to be a subject of a particular kind. Nevertheless, the discussion of our experiences can powerfully expose the various socio-political controlling mechanisms which constrain our experiences and aim to capture our subjectivities.

I think my interviewees’ accounts clearly illustrate this ‘bipolar’ nature of experience; able to reveal that our subjectivities can be controlled, yet at the same time that even within this controllability “the human being is capable of what Whitehead calls outrageous novelty” (Stenner, 2008, p. 105). Of course there were cases where my interviewees’ accounts of their experiences did not make it easy to imagine the emergence of a multiplicity of ways of living, as

they seemed to fit too well into majoritarian modes of subjectification. In fact, especially during the unfolding of the data collection, I sometimes found it hard to understand whether my interviewees struggled with the established dominant systems which transverse the international student assemblage, or if they confirmed them, or if they just used them in order to create something new – or even if they actively ignored them. Most of the time, their experiences seemed to stem from all four of these possible relations to power, and everything that comes in between, before and beyond that.

Given the above, I approached my data in *wonder*, instead of looking for truth; that is, I think of the data in terms of “an experiment with order and disorder, in which provisional taxonomies are formed, but are always subject to change and metamorphosis, as new connections spark...”. Doing so removed, to a certain extent, the power and certainty from me as the researcher who knows in advance the subject of research (MacLure, 2013, p. 181). Putting it simply, I would say that I followed an inductive analysis of data; that is the theory had more the role of amplifier of connections between broader (socio-political) questions and concrete situations described in the empirical data (Brown and Reavey, 2013). Analysing data in this way made space to explore experiences of international students with my participants, instead of imposing whatever initial presumptions and passions triggered my interest in this topic, while simultaneously creating new reasons to be passionate about it.

2.1 Collecting Data

Living and studying for my PhD in the UK made it easy to come into contact with international students from all backgrounds, studying different subjects and at different stages of their studies (Bachelors, Master’s or PhD). However, for a variety of reasons, I decided – together with my supervisors – to focus my research only on international students studying for business related degrees. Although I initially resisted the idea of narrowing down my research into the experiences of international students to only the experiences of international business students, I could not overlook some very interesting facts that were

'calling' for research dedicated to this group. First of all, sometimes numbers do matter – and they very clearly illustrate the preference of most international students is for business related degrees over any other subject (OECD, 2016). Secondly, it appears to be a particular and intensified concern regarding the subjectivities of business students, which usually stems from negative perceptions of them (some of these perhaps well justified) and which are produced by some critical management scholars. Examples include Fournier (2006), and Harney and Oswick (2006) – and I further analyse the work of these scholars in chapter 6. Another provocation, were the negative comments I so often heard from many friends and colleagues of mine who teach business students. I frequently found myself involved in conversations during which business students, and especially international ones, were caricatured as nothing more than neoliberal subjects interested only in making a lot of money through becoming managers of big companies. Particularly after my own experiences with teaching business students, I found these statements problematic. Needless to say, I also encountered business students – international and domestic – who said to me during our first seminar that they did indeed decide to study this subject because of their desires to become managers and make money. However, I also encountered many other business students who had absolutely no idea why they were studying business, or that seemed too confused to respond, or that were even just totally uninterested in responding to me. At the end of the day, I simply felt that the classroom was not the right place to explore their subjectivities. Thus, instead of passing easy judgments on them, yet without overlooking the concerns of the critical scholars mentioned above, I undertook research to explore their experiences. I should underline, at this point, that my direct contribution to the debate concerning business students is not presented until chapter 6, which is the last data analysis chapter of this thesis. There I combine some of the interview data with some of the memory work data as they inform each other in a complementary manner. Other aspects of the relation of international students to business studies and the tensions that build them can be found in several

places across the thesis. The interview analysis chapter (3) begins to consider the complexity and diversity underlying the students' connection to business studies (especially section 3.1).

Having decided to focus on international students enrolled in business related subjects, I was able to access some of my participants through one of my supervisor's networks, as well as through my own networks. In the first case, my supervisor contacted several colleagues of hers who teach business related subjects at a Bachelor's level in UK higher education institutions, asking them to circulate an email explaining my research and the need for participants. In the latter case, I contacted postgraduate students by means of a mass email, sent by a senior member of academic staff at another UK higher education institution. There were also two unexpected occasions which led to two further interviews. I was walking on one of the campuses where I conducted some of the interviews and one of my participants came up to me in order to introduce me to a friend of hers who was interested in participating in my research. On the spot we scheduled an appointment for the coming week. The other unexpected interview was Ivana's interview. She had finished her PhD six months prior to our meeting and she had already found a job as a lecturer in a UK higher education institution. I was introduced to her through a very good friend of mine, as they had been friends previously in their shared country of origin. It was actually entirely my friend's idea to interview Ivana as she thought she would be an ideal participant, given that she had already spent many years in UK higher education and hence possessed a wide range of experiences as an international student.

Despite the support of my supervisor, her colleagues, the senior member of staff and my friends, I did not manage to conduct more than twelve in depth interviews, from which I only used 10. There are multiple explanations for the limited amount of interviews I conducted. Firstly, there were many students interested in participating in my research who were not 'officially' classified as international students but as EU students. In fact, one of the twelve interviews I conducted was with a student from France. I decided to proceed with the

interview as he only told me that he came from France when we met for the interview, and because he seemed very enthusiastic about it. Unfortunately, in the end I had to leave his interview out of the data analysis. Secondly, due to issues of practicality and feasibility we decided to recruit participants from only one area in the UK, to facilitate arranging meetings with students – who were often busy and stressed. Nonetheless, our meetings were postponed or cancelled several times. The time that I could dedicate to the interview fieldwork was limited due to the need to develop the second part of my research, in which I deployed an alternate methodology – memory work. The whole process, from the first email to the last interview, lasted approximately six months. A month before I finished the collection of the interview data I had already started forming the memory work collective.

The interviews took place either on campuses' cafes or in universities' seminar rooms, and each interview lasted approximately one and a half hours. For the sake of confidentiality all the names used are pseudonyms. Thus, the ten interviews which I have analysed in this thesis are all with international students (non-Europeans and not from the European Economic Area) who study business related degrees at different levels (Bachelor, Master's and PhD).

More specifically, Ching-Lan, Chu-Hua, Bao-Yu, Dao and Chen are all from China and were all doing a Master's degree, except for Chu-Hua who was completing her Bachelor's degree at the time of the interview. Ivana comes from Russia and as I explained above she was already working as a lecturer when I interviewed her. Jawad is from Pakistan and he was studying for his Master's degree. Varun is from India and he was doing an MBA. Narumi is of mixed heritage (her mother is from an Asian country and her father from a western European country), and she was in the last year of her Bachelor's degree when I interviewed her.

I also need to emphasise that I did not select my participants on the basis of ethnicity, religion, age, gender, or any other criteria apart from their being international students in the area of business studies. There are multiple reasons why I did not have more specific criteria; I did not want to target

particular ethnic, gender, age groups because, first of all, institutionally all international students are homogenised as falling within this one category, and one of my intentions was to explore the effects of this institutionalisation of international students on their experiences and subjectivities. Secondly, I wanted to let the more specific struggles of international students related to ethnicity, gender or whatever else emerge during the process of research, instead of presuming which particular points of tension were relevant. To explain my position further, I think it suffices to briefly mention an example from my data; half-way through our interview, Jawad started talking to me about his experiences with racist practices inside the campus and beyond. More importantly, Jawad connected his experiences to that of all Global South international students, making it clear that it would be overly reductionist, as well as at risk of aligning my research to identity politics, to focus only on one, let's say, ethnic group. In fact, it would splinter the common struggles which most international students deal with, imposing further divisions on top of the already institutionally imposed divisions; for example, some international students need to register with the police and some not – on the basis of their country of origin. At the same time, there were cases, as happened with my Chinese participants, where I found *a point of connection* amongst them; they all came from the Chinese middle class and for a variety of reasons this was very important to them. As such, I ended up analysing the international student experiences of these four Chinese participants together, while foregrounding their middle class backgrounds as central to our discussion. This is not to say that my four Chinese participants form a homogeneous group but that they shared a common point of struggle due to their middle class background.

Chapter 3

Yielding to my data

*It remains important today to reflectively cultivate
more partial and cautious propositions of
observation that nonetheless grapple with “big”
questions.*

(Ong and Collier, 2005, p. 17)

*In other words, instead of deducing concrete
phenomena from universals, or instead of starting
with universals as an obligatory grid of
intelligibility for certain concrete practices, I would
like to start with these concrete practices and, as it
were, pass these universals through the grid of these
practices.*

(Foucault, 2008, p. 3)

The experiences of my interviewees provided multiple entry points for discovering the different institutional modalities of the Global North university and the diverse ways in which international students relate to them. As such, by following the experiences of two of my participants – Varun and Narumi (and a small portion of my interview with a third one, Ivana) – I begin this chapter by exploring some of the unproblematic relationships between international students and the Global North university; that is, the experiences of the two participants who do not seem to pose questions of the dominant neoliberal discourses and practices which transverse the Global North university. Given these contexts, I deploy some of the ideas developed in the field of governmentality studies in an attempt to speculate on possible explanations for such affirmation of the normative modalities of the Global North university. By the end of the first part of my analysis I have developed

my concerns with governmentality studies and move on to the more complicated relationships between international students and the whole Global North university aggregate. Again, yielding to my data, I followed the paths created by the experiences of Jawad, whose account was rich enough to provide a whole section (3.2). Talking about his experience of several racist practices on the campus and beyond, and connecting them to broader problems of various levels of discrimination against all non-Global North international students and workers, led my analysis to the nature of multicultural politics inside the university as well as in UK society and the UK labour market. In the concluding part of this chapter (3.3), having heard the accounts of my Chinese middle class participants of the socio-political situation in China, my analysis of the international students' experiences incorporates some of the socio-political and labour enclosures orchestrated by the Chinese state. Both the experiences of my interviewees as well as engagement with relevant literature has helped me make some preliminary propositions which, I suggest, can enact alternative readings, to those limited to individual socio-economic betterment, of Chinese middle class international student mobility.

3.1 Studying Abroad: Eliminating elusiveness and ambivalence

In the first section of the analysis I discuss some of my participants endeavouring to offer me rational and coherent explanations for 'choosing' to study abroad. Employability, failure to secure a place in universities back home, the promotion of UK educational institutions by recruitment agencies in their home country, the 'trust' many big companies around the globe have in UK university graduates, and the pressure of their social environment, are some of the most frequent and immediate interpretations they give for their decision to study in the UK. Young peoples' concerns about employability and/or agencies' aggressive promotion of UK higher education indeed shape, to a certain extent, international student mobility with regard to the UK. However, in this part of the interview analysis, I am interested in discussing the interviews during which international student experiences were approached as

linear narratives. This is to say, that their international student experiences seemed to be affirmative of some of the contingent conditions involved in international student mobility. Some of my interviewees did not mention any sort of struggle, or any points of tension, with any of the established and majoritarian patterns and practices which cross and shape the whole international student aggregate.

The tendency of some international students to ensure that they illustrated to me that they could have chosen differently, but that their original decision was only logical given the specific historical moment and with the considerations that had to be weighed in deciding whether to come to the UK to study, could be looked at through the lens of governmentality studies. The central point in governmentality¹² theory is that subjectivity has ceased to be controlled by an external and centralised force of power, but emerges from a manifold and diverse assemblage of technologies which have been internalised; moulding our desires about what kind of people we would like to become (Rose, 1989, p. 217). In other words, governmentality studies place an emphasis on how subjectivity is constructed within a web of power relations, helping to inform an analysis of institutions' involvement in the production of certain modes of subjectification (ibid.).

An example of such a sophisticated technology of power would be the aggressive promotion of UK educational institutions by the recruitment agencies which operate in other countries, for instance in China. Although it is important to understand the institutional aspect of the internationalisation of higher education, it is even more revealing to be led to that understanding from an engagement with the experiences of those international students who affirm the effects of these institutional practices on them. More specifically, the feelings of the international students unfolded while they were talking about these agencies, providing me with deeper and less obviously traceable insights as to the intersections between institutions and subjectivity. For example, while

¹² The neologism 'governmentality' was introduced by Foucault during his lectures at the Collège de France in Paris (Gordon, 1991).

Ching Lan was explaining to me the many language problems Chinese students face during their studies abroad, I asked her why, with these problems in mind, it was that so many of them chose to study abroad. She blamed the agencies. As she explained:

Ching Lan: I think for the first reason it's because of the system thing. What I mean by system is you know in China there's [this] kind of agencies?

Me: Yeah.

Ching Lan: In charge of the application things, they will only express you, they will only let you know it is really good and it's worthy to go there but they don't, they don't tell any disadvantages or pitfalls or the bad things about this. They will say 'okay, it's okay, it's fine. A lot of students, a lot of your colleagues are already there. You're doing fine, you're doing well. You go there, I'll introduce you to some of the friends and you will make friends to them'. So, I think it's kind of information block during that time.

In this account, agencies do not only work as a medium responsible for the facilitation of the interconnection between UK educational institutions and Chinese citizens' private interests, but possess a far more powerful and latent role. They are there to assuage and shape the psychological needs of their potential clients through using almost 'therapeutic language', through using reassuring and encouraging phrases like those Ching Lan described: "They will say 'okay, it's okay, it's fine. A lot of students, a lot of your colleagues are already there. You're doing fine, you're doing well'". Following the line of thinking foregrounded in governmentality studies and the ideas of Foucault (1979) on pastoral power, it can be argued that these reassuring phrases are not genuine gestures of care by the agency towards the prospective international students. Rather, the use of therapeutic language is a kind of pastoral care which aims to change international students' feelings of fear to more comfortable ones, while in effect also suppressing any reasonable doubts and

ambivalences that international students have concerning their prospective studies abroad. In other words, this kind of friendly language is deployed by the agencies in a deterministic fashion. That is to say, the caring-sounding language is deployed by the agencies in order to facilitate the production of specific outcomes, namely the perpetuation of international student mobility (to the UK in this particular example) for the sake of profit. The agencies, in doing so, do not of course use any sort of physical force or blackmail in order to convince students to go for studies abroad, but as Ching Lan foregrounds they claim to be 'caring' and capable enough to provide a network of support for them; "'You go there, I'll introduce you to some of the friends and you will make friends to them'". As such, it seems that the agencies focus on attempting to create warm and comfortable feelings about studying abroad, which also means that they conceal any information which would make prospective international students doubt their decision to go abroad; there is a deliberate "information block", as Ching Lan mentioned. A central reason that this technology of power is so efficient and effective, is that it is organised by means of a logic focused on the manufacture of friends not the creation of enemies; friends who will then voluntarily accept and cooperate with the established patterns and power relations of any given situation. The objective and consequence of utilising this kind of pastoral power is an avoidance of the creation of tensions, through the creation of well-incorporated supporters.

In relation to the last point, Nikolas Rose (1989) suggests that the spread of psychotherapeutic language across many different domains of life, instead of being limited to the consultation room, is another example of the focus on the self. The placement of the self at the centre of subjectivity is not a historical accident but an essential component of the neoliberal technologies for control over subjectivity. This constant, obsessive attention to our well-being and self-realisation, with the aid of self-management books and/or every kind of psychological expert, is fertile ground for individualism to blossom, serving well the self-fulfilling prophecy of neoliberalism; that the individual should take all responsibilities from the 'shoulders' of the state and through self-

management, self-regulation and an entrepreneurial spirit should deal with their social problems on their own. That is why James Buchanan and Gordon Tullock (1962) have emphasised the point that when we talk about economics we inevitably talk about politics, insofar as the way the economic realm is organised goes hand in hand with how the state is organised – and in neoliberal times the state is organised through the legitimisation of the self-sufficient individual, capable of taking full control and responsibility over their life.

However, this project is specifically about the experiences of international students and not about self-sufficient citizens of specific post-welfare neoliberal nation states¹³. As such, in what follows I continue to discuss those interviews during which some of my participants from different parts of the world consider the international student journey, and other issues related to studies abroad such as career prospects, as exclusively individual matters. This signals that “the neoliberalisation of life” operates on a global scale, traversing national territories and contributing to the creation of new global socio-political conditions, which are not merely national but not merely transnational either (I discuss the creation of these new conditions in Chapters 5 and 6) (Papadopoulos, Stephenson and Tsianos, 2008, p. 112).

3.1.1 “Managing is the art of life”: Varun’s interview

Ching Lan seemed aware of having been affected on an emotional level by the agency’s caring-sounding language, yet her subjectivity is not confined by such technologies of power. That is to say, Ching Lan affirmed the efficacy of such sophisticated technologies of power, but did not accept them. In fact, the rest of her interview is full of very interesting and surprising insights into her international student journey experiences; a journey full of struggles and discontinuities as Ching Lan in various situations, partially yet actively, resisted the capturing of her subjectivity. I will return to her interview in

¹³ Although it is important to mention that more and more nation states adopt a neoliberal political economy, this project is not intended or designed to explore the effects of neoliberal imperatives on individual nation states.

section 3.3.5 of this chapter, and in chapter 6 (sections 6.1 and 6.2.3). However, there were other interviewees who appeared to genuinely believe in, and identify with certain types of subjectivity produced within and by the conditions formed by neoliberal technologies of power. Specifically, Narumi and Varun seemed to believe in the idea of self-management as being the ultimate way of living in today's world.

Varun was especially and explicitly ecstatic about management in general and about self-management in particular. In fact, before his studies in the UK, he completed two distance learning courses, on self-management and crisis management. At the time of the interview he was studying for an MBA in the UK. Right from the start of our interview I was aware that Varun cared a lot about being able to have control over any given situation. One of the first things he asked me was whether I could give a copy of the recorded interview to him, and how many minutes he had to answer each of my questions. Even more interestingly, during the process of as well as during the analysis of the interview, it became clear that for him control was associated with choice. The more he felt that there was regulation and control over a process, seemed to be directly linked by him to the possession of choice, to more specific and clearer choices. Thus, for Varun, control seems not to be a way of creating new possibilities but rather something which enables him to reach his predetermined work and life goals. For instance, coming to the UK to study at this specific university and for this specific degree was the result of a very well thought out process which included months of research and preparation. These are some of his remarks:

After I finalised the country, *now it's my choice to choose the university* or the place in the UK which I would like to go, and that again took a research of about 2-3 months in researching the UK based university and which place in the UK according to different parameters and criteria. And I took the following things into consideration in terms of the cities/culture, a little bit ... cost of living was there but that was my last consideration; proximity towards London, job prospects after

that and the development of our own personal life and so on [...]¹⁴

There was also a map that went along which is not just a satellite map. It was almost a three dimensional view just as if you were taking a photograph from a helicopter. So, that gave a clear view of the university and I was even able to visualise the size of the university, how it's going to be, and obviously it looked a little larger than I visualised [it], but those were the things and that's how it looked. And what I expected was satisfied over here, maybe a little mismatch was there but almost all the information I had collected made me like I wanted to have a global exposure with a variety of student[s] and an opportunity to contribute my skill set... (emphasis added).

As evoked by the interview extract Varun did not leave anything to chance. To be able to control every single detail – how far the university would be from London, which job opportunities will be available to him after the end of his studies, and even possessing a helicopter view of the university – gave him a feeling of freedom of choice. He could choose to say 'yes' or 'no' to any of the UK based universities depending on what they had to offer him – as an individual and as a potential worker. However, the logic that brings control and individual choice into a causal relation here, also makes management and especially self-management an important aspect of living.

The rise of the self-managed and self-entrepreneurial individual who believes in a liberal conception as to freedom of choice clearly provides an example of the power of neoliberal governmentalities as they have been described by governmentality scholars (Burchell, Gordon and Miller, 1991; Rose, 1996). However, this does not imply that initiative, responsibility, enterprise or even management are neoliberal ideals *per se*. As Stuart Hall (1988, p. 4) comments with regard to Thatcherism, things become explicitly problematic and explicitly neoliberal when capitalist values of enterprise have

¹⁴ [...] is used to indicate to the reader that I have redacted words from the interview extract. While ... is used in order to indicate when my participants are pausing.

penetrated in every part of life, and when everything in life becomes measured by and translated into “value for money.”

Varun’s comments also seem to indicate a connection between having a strong faith in self-management and subscribing to neoliberal imperatives. Because Varun mentioned several times at the beginning of our interview that he wanted to add certain values to his life by studying abroad, and because he shared with me that he is a spiritual person (he practises meditation and yoga), I asked him what exactly he meant when he uses the word ‘value’. He responded as follows:

What I feel first is personal values, so usually the good qualities and stuff which we have within; it’s the first set of values because that is what is going to add value to the company or the organisation that we serve, and that’s going to get transferred into the organisation’s value and that gets the different form of maybe money or the brand that we call – it’s the brand value that people can Google or whatever it is. So, breaking it down again, value comes from the internal personal values, which I work very much to develop, also through spirituality, the personal internal values. So, I feel that is the inside out approach, even the course I’m also focusing how I’m justifying my personal values and how I should stand for it at any point of life and so on.

When Varun initially mentioned his love for yoga I expected to witness a contradiction between the idea of self-management and self-development as described by governmentality studies, and the kind of self-discipline and self-development taught in meditation and yoga¹⁵ classes. However, his concept of

¹⁵ This project is not about yoga and I am by no means an expert in yoga, and of course yoga can be taught in many different ways, but as a yoga practitioner myself I would like to briefly explain why I expected a contradiction between the self-management as described by governmentality studies and the kind of ‘self-discipline’ one learns through yoga and meditation. First of all, I can very well imagine how the idea of inwardness – as Varun described it “the inside out approach” – can be associated with yoga, insofar as in many yoga classes one also learns how to train body and mind to focus on the present moment, without allowing any negative internal or external distractions to affect one’s inner peace. Given this, I can also imagine that such training can be interpreted as a training in liberal individualism insofar as the turn inside one’s self could very well mean that one does not relate with or care

spirituality seems to connect well with neoliberal ideals. As he outlined, training his personal values in part through spirituality (for him this was through yoga and meditation) could be channelled into “serving” a business and, as such, be translated into “value for money” or “brand value”. As such spirituality and neoliberal ideals, to my surprise, were not contradictory terms for him. Not that I did not expect that neoliberalism could accommodate itself to any set of spiritual ideals and make them work for its reproduction. However, I was surprised by how spirituality – which is clearly a very big and important part of Varun’s life – seemed, to be embodied by him in such a neoliberal fashion. Even when I asked him if he liked doing other ‘fun’ things in his spare time, things that have nothing to do with studies and career goals, he told me that whatever social activity he does is chosen on the basis of self-development:

I spend my time with activities which I feel that will contribute to my future and contribute to my development, and as well as the fun involved as well [...] Entertainment is a part of life but not the most important one. Management is the most important one. Management is the art of life.

The extract above seems to affirm the power of the neoliberal logic that self-knowledge, self-management and self-invention are necessary skills, or perhaps as Varun would put it, the necessary values in order for a self-sufficient subject to make rational decisions about which kind of experiences would be worth having and which kind of experiences would be better avoided (Rose, 1996). In other words, Varun’s words seem to affirm governmentality theorists’ suggestions that neoliberal government cannot function without its main source of fuel – the self (Burchell, Gordon and Miller, 1991; Rose, 1996).

about the social and political apparatuses which contribute to the organisation of everyday life. However, in my experience, yoga as a practice is about the exact opposite; it is about the training of one’s senses to connect and relate to one’s body, the bodies of others and the natural environment. It does train one’s body to be at peace but only through the reminder that everybody is materially part of everything. In that sense, the training of one’s body to be at peace and calm is a material gesture of care and love which creates (inter)relations among species and not opportunistic individuals who exclusively care about their self-enhancement.

The self has come to be imagined as if it were a gravitational force, which holds an individual together as a unified entity. The self should not be split, contradictory, paradoxical, malleable – but rather united, rational, logical, controlled, and yet also flexible and ready to responsibly adjust to any situation when this is necessary for survival or development. As a result, in neoliberal times the source of potential happiness appears to be located within our very selves. The turn to the self represents a welcoming of neoliberal individualism as the only obvious way to be free; to be free to choose who we are, who we want to become and how we want to live (Stephenson and Papadopoulos, 2006). Nikolas Rose (1989) has even argued that in neoliberal times we are ‘obliged to be free’. However, although freedom usually carries hopeful and revolutionary connotations, governmentality studies underline the emergence of a new perception of freedom as individualistic and opportunistic; a freedom which ought to be cultivated by each individual for their own happiness.

Varun’s experiences are not the only experiences brought out in my interview data, that can be analysed from a governmentality standpoint. My first interviewee, Narumi, also did not mention any point of tension or struggle with neoliberal ideals of self-knowledge, self-entrepreneurship and self-management.

3.1.2 Interviewing Narumi

Narumi, a student of mixed Asian and Western Europe heritage, who was studying for her second Bachelor’s degree in the UK at the time of the interview, explained to me that for her it all concerns knowing what exactly you want to do, being good at it and making the right decisions. Throughout her interview, Narumi continued to place considerable emphasis on her potential career, which she hoped would be enhanced by the degree she was studying for in the UK. She dreams of becoming a “respectable” manager (her term) in a prestigious industry, as she had to drop her previous dream of being a psychologist, due to her parents’ disagreement:

Me: So, if you would be a manager, for which kind of company? What kind of industry?

Narumi: Emmm... it has to be an industry that already has a certain status but I would also like that it would be a business that would be successful because of my contribution. So, airline industry would be great! Hotel industry maybe... But airline industry would be the best. I love the strategies that you have to think of in order to attract customers to use your airlines and not others etc...

Me: I have the feeling that for you, success is really important. How do you understand success?

Narumi: For my friend who got a baby recently, for her success is to be a good mother... for me this is not success. For me is graduating, go to uni, make some money in order to bring up a family and give to these children everything that they possibly want and especially need... Like my parents managed to do ... emmm... Have a successful career, respectable position... and looking back in life and not having any regrets.

Me: Do you have any regrets?

Narumi: At the moment no.

Me: What do you mean by respectable position?

Narumi: A position that you are not invisible in a company; that your opinion is important. I want to be the person that, if there is a problem in the company, people will say "ok we need to ask HER". I like to have the responsibility.

Me: But if you have a very busy life, then how do you imagine your personal life? You mentioned that you want children. How do you think you can balance intense career with children"?

Narumi: I have a boyfriend for 4 years now. It is a very serious relationship. Emm but I can emmm.... his parents are extremely busy. They only see each other when they come back at 10pm So, they have, I would say, respectable jobs. They have... they have the financial earnings, they know how to live... life to the fullest and emmm... it still works really well. So, emm.... It all depends on what you are willing to sacrifice.

[....] So, I think it's feasible ... If other people have managed to accomplish it... Even when we lived in [a different Asian country] with my mother and my sister and my father was working in [the Western country he comes from], he used to come every other week to and stay with us for the weekend. For my mum was hard... but they are still married... for over 30 years now... So, it works for them... Everything depends on the person. It all depends on you. It all depends on what you want and go for it.

What came over clearly during Narumi's interview was her apparent feeling of control, a control over herself, and hence over her life. Even when she seemed at times obviously confused about her decisions, she would pause in order to take the time to return to her rational self and provide a quick and clear answer. Consequently, I also found it very difficult to take time to think and perhaps ask different questions which could have potentially given me different insights. Even when I tried to challenge her over her 'rational' decision to study business rather than psychology – her dream career as she claimed at the beginning of the interview – she very quickly told me that it was in her own interests not choose psychology in the end; "I had to respect my parents' decision. They think that it would be harmful for my well-being to listen to other people's problems". For Narumi, this reason makes sense and is good enough to prevent her from following her passion. She believes that she ought to be logical and only consider her career and her personal development, within realistic parameters. It is not coincidental that she kept putting emphasis on self-guided happiness; "Everything depends on the person. It all depends on you. It all depends on what you want and go for it". Social, political, and

economic conditions and relations, which she inevitably finds herself in, were not even mentioned as an afterthought. Self-knowledge, self-empowerment and self-regulation seemed to come first and be placed above everything else. Given this, Narumi seems to fully embrace the notion of a liberal and de-socialised subjectivity based on her invention of a self that becomes confident and empowered through her own individual and calculated career successes. She seems to feel that she is independent from any socio-political structures of power. Narumi's words suggest a conception of autonomy that emerges without any struggle with any sort of (external) power. Everything appears to take place inside her – within her inner self. As Rose (1996) suggests, we have become the psychologists and the judges of our selves through the daily practice of self-actualisation and self-realisation, enacted by ourselves on ourselves.

Ivana, another interviewee of mine who comes from Russia, who was completing her PhD when I interviewed her, also mentioned the term self-realisation several times during our conversation. According to her, her studies abroad were not simply related to better career prospects, but to self-realisation. Studying abroad helped her to reach a better understanding of her true self – who she really is and what exactly she wants from her life, both in terms of career and in terms of lifestyle. In her observations international student experiences are, once again, disconnected from the socio-political processes which produce them. Experiences are once more turned inwards, and are expressed outwardly only as an expression of this supposedly authentic, unique and coherent self.

My central concern with the interviews, just discussed above, is that they do not indicate the presence of any contradictions, any malleability, or any paradoxes in the way people view their experiences. The interviewees fail to question any of the various normative discourses which support and sustain international student mobility. The neoliberal discourses and practices of individualism, employability, entrepreneurialism and self-management all seem to be taken for granted and are voluntarily embraced. Even the attempt to

conceptualise, through the theoretical lens of governmentality studies, the absence of any struggle with accepting and identifying with some of the socio-political norms embedded in the international student aggregate, is problematic. It is problematic in two fundamental ways. Firstly, although governmentality studies bring to light the ways in which processes and modes of subjectification are limited by the specific socio-political terrain they unfold within, they do not tell us what we can do in order to escape normative modes of subjectification – e.g. neoliberal modes of subjectification (Papadopoulos, Stephenson and Tsianos, 2008). Secondly, they do not illuminate the existence of different processes and modes of subjectification, which can be enacted intentionally and/or unintentionally, and which can so often coexist with the more normative subjectification modes – even when we talk about the same subjectivity. In other words, the analytical tools provided by the governmentality approach are not sufficient for mobilising those modes of existence which can be partial, contradictory, or paradoxical, and hence are able to create fractures in the established socio-political structures which organise our everyday lives.

Thus, even though the interview data discussed so far did not trigger an analysis of international student experiences that moved beyond talking about the self, this does not mean that experiences are nothing more than empirical proof of self-regulation, or that interviewing is an invitation to talk about experience in a psychologistic and individualistic fashion *per se*. In fact, the next part of this chapter is constituted by interview data which evokes the immersion of international student experiences in the socio-political apparatuses which produce them, and also in the tensions and struggles which are at stake when international students intentionally and/or unintentionally challenge them, question them or even sarcastically laugh at them. In the third, and last part of this chapter, my Chinese interviewees talk about their studies abroad as representing a hope for change and a potential escape from life closures orchestrated by the Chinese government. Their experiences indicate that the international student journey is not at all a well-calculated enterprise

which can valorise their already coherent subjectivity, but rather a venture with no clear target or pre-decided ending point. I would argue, that even Varun and Narumi's apparent need for calculation reveals that the ways in which subjectivity is materialised within the social realm are complex, malleable, unpredictable, incoherent and at times even completely random.

3.2 Studying Abroad: Bringing out the contradictions

In this section I discuss the interview with Jawad, who is from Pakistan. I feel that his interview is particularly rich, and hence it needs an entire section to itself in order to be thickly analysed. The analysis unfolds around a specific event which took place during his studies for a Master's degree in a UK higher education institution. Jawad wanted to work part-time in the library of the university, but his application seemed to be repeatedly ignored. So he decided to experiment with sending a new application in which all his personal information (name and country of origin) would indicate that he was British. As he expected, soon after he sent his application, he received a call inviting him for a job interview.

Jawad only 'confessed' to his little experiment when we were more than half-way through the interview. At the beginning of the interview he appeared careful and hesitant with me, and spent time trying to confirm his enthusiasm for the multicultural/hybrid university. It was very interesting to witness the unfolding of the interview, as Jawad's relation to his international student experiences followed a spiralling course. That is, his experiences of the global university were constantly reformed every time he added another memory to our discussion, and every time he included another memory he moved a bit further away from his initial interpretation of his experiences. It seemed as if he was constantly re-remembering what he experienced.

3.2.1 Jawad's Interview

Jawad started by listing the reasons that he came to study in a UK university, instead of studying in Pakistan. First and foremost, for him studying abroad

seemed a worthwhile experience as it provided a unique opportunity to be exposed to a different environment, different cultures, and a more multicultural/hybrid lifestyle in general. In particular, he stated that “for me studying abroad gives you this global perspective that you can’t have if you stay back home. Of course parents also play a role, they push you know [to study abroad], but it is the multicultural thing here which makes it a really unique experience for me”. However, the more comfortable Jawad seemed to feel, the more he started ‘sapping’ his own initial enthusiasm about the ‘multicultural’ university. Half-way through our interview, Jawad started expressing his doubts about “the global and multicultural perspective thing”. He started looking at me as if he was weighing me up – in order to make sure that what he was about to say would not cause him any trouble – and then he said that he was very disappointed by the ‘multicultural’ university. I asked him why he said this, and although it took him a while to decide whether or not he should trust me and share the following pieces of information, once he started sharing them he seemed really happy and relieved.

Jawad: ...when I was looking for a job, temporary part-time work here, and if you go into the city centre and you want to work in somewhere like [name of a company] or something, because like they don’t give preference to you... They give preference to the local guy. Okay, fine. And a couple of my friends are working but they are working somehow on illegal terms because they are illegal in the sense like they are being paid less and they are not [treated] like a person.

Me: Yeah, they exploit them.

Jawad: Exploit them. The person who has been paying will pay them under and that person, he’s not actually mentioning them on his tax return [...] They are not offering a legal contract...and “Okay, fine, if he’s not putting me on a contract but that’s his business, I need to work, I need to... I’m doing my 20 hours and that’s it. Why should I work more?” But people are doing it. And when it comes to proper

legal work Okay, I've been looking in the university [...] I know that if I get in a job like it's not going to be anything much improving my skills and my competency of financing but it's just interaction with other people, you interact with them, you learn the whole experience just to be with them... you sit with them, talk with them, just be a part of them. And when you're applying for like in the library, for part-time work... even for a silent patrol and stuff like that, and you keep on applying with your name you never get a call. Okay, fine, there is a friend of mine, she's from Canada, and she applied and she got it. I was like, "Okay, fine, come, see my application, is it alright or is any problem with that?" And she said, "Oh no, no, there's nothing wrong. Apply again." And I did it again, I did once, twice, thrice. And I even like went to them and asked them, "Okay, fine, what's the problem? I can't understand. I'm... I'm like... I can't say I'm over-qualified or stuff like that but I am... But, come on, it's like four months now and I keep on applying and applying, even in the finance department even for basic stuff. What's the problem? And then I did a different thing, I just changed my name on my CV and I got a call. I got a call but I can't go, I can't go. I can't go but I got a call!

Me: Perhaps you should go [laughs].

Jawad: I changed my CV. My city's name. I just kept on mentioning [a name of a company] and like [another name of a company], they're multinationals, they can't know [if] it is in Pakistan or not. I changed my degree and I changed my school name and stuff like that. Just deleted them. I just put them a simple CV.

Me: What kind of name did you put?

Jawad: Just Jonathan Brown or something, English name, something like that. How they're going to know?

Me: [Laughs] That's smart.

The forms of exploitation that Jawad's friends experienced echo the cases of employment exploitation from research discussed in chapter 1. Robertson

(2013), Neilson (2009), and Nyland *et al.* (2009) emphasise that many international students (in Australia) fall into the category of vulnerable workers – exploitable, flexible, often working under illegal terms and conditions. Given this, although Jawad does not explicitly talk about his own or his friends' student status, the example he provides confirms this blurring of migration categories. Although international students have a legal right to work up to 20 hours a week during term time (UKCISA, 2016), as Jawad mentions, many employers do not hesitate to exceed the amount of hours legally allowed, in this manner increasing their profits through tax avoidance. Thus, student status does not necessarily stop employers from exploiting international students – same with other categories of migrants who are perhaps more obviously vulnerable (e.g. illegal migrants). I will return to the blurring of migration categories in more detail in chapter 5.

Jawad's experience with trying to find work at the library of the university where he was studying adds a whole new dimension, which is not nearly as visible, to considerations of international students as workers. Jawad was not openly refused work in the library and he was not exploited as his friends were (the ones who worked under illegal terms in the city), and yet he felt – even before his experiment with changing his name – that he was being discriminated against. His friend from Canada got a call for an interview immediately after she submitted her first job application, while he applied several times without receiving any response to his applications. Although there was an absence of any verbal, written, physical or even symbolic expression of discrimination, he felt discriminated against on the ground of race. He felt like a “Paki”, so he “had to change his name”.

Jawad: I didn't see it coming. They just take the money, [and] they don't give anything back. [Laughing]... But no, it's not... Like I'm just saying that they are not allowing... like they are not opening up opportunities for everyone, a lot of them, and *sometimes make you feel like you're a Paki* so you'll have to change your name. [Laughing] [...]
So there's going to be like... I just got a glimpse here. So that's very

much what's happening in the market as well [thinking about what it is coming after the end of his studies] (emphasis added).

Towards the end of these comments Jawad is thinking about what is coming after the end of his studies. And he guessed correctly, as racist practices in the labour market in the Global North are not at all uncommon. Empirical research has shown myriad examples of such racism, especially against ethnic minorities (e.g. Riach and Rich, cited in Midtbøen 2015, p. 208). Equally, changing one's name in order to be more socially and institutionally included is not exceptional either, on the contrary, it is quite common. For instance, Bursell (2012) conducted research on a name-changing strategy that many Middle Eastern immigrants living in Sweden have deployed in order to be more easily included in Swedish social and institutional life. The research concluded that those who chose to permanently change their name to a more Swedish one were attempting to be more 'pragmatically' assimilated into Swedish society and its labour market. In other words, changing their name means that they can retain their ethnic identity in their private lives, while making it easier to 'assimilate' in public settings. Thus, the 'name-changers' do not desire to become 'like Swedish people' but to "pass in specific situations when they interact with majority group members" (ibid., p. 483).

Although Jawad felt racially discriminated against and the decision to change his name, even only temporarily, proved effective enough (as his application was finally taken seriously), his case is an especially slippery one. That is to say, there are no clear distinctions between minorities and majorities inside the university and no clear borderlines between inclusion and exclusion. In fact, Jawad initially expected to neither belong to a minority group of students nor to a majority group of students. He expected to become part of a multicultural university that had moved beyond divisions and hierarchies. Jawad felt further confused because, as he mentioned, UK universities put so much effort into attracting international students – yet he came to notice that international students' large numbers inside the 'diverse' campus did not translate into equal access to, for instance, employment, compared with the

cases of EU and home students or indeed international students who came from Global North countries, like his Canadian friend. He continued:

And you can see like... I don't know, but look at the university, there are more than 70% to 80% Chinese students. Agreed? And the rest of like 15% to 20% European students and very few English people, UK nationals. Go into departments and go into library, just check the employment ratio, is it the same? How many Chinese you find in the library working... Don't say they're not applying. They're definitely applying as well. Who don't want some extra money like working for two or three hours a day for £7 to £8 per hour? And just putting books on the shelf and just standing there. It's not a big deal, anyone can do it. You can see yourself... I just keep on looking at people who work in the uni, so I keep on asking where they come from. [I] only found one Indian student.

[...] If you go into the finance department or where they employ temporary jobs, go into the careers office, how many Asians you find there? None. Why? You can't say that they're all dumb, so why you are discriminating?

Jawad found it striking that despite the considerable number of international students studying at the university, they were implicitly being treated in an exclusionary way. Ambiguous examples of exclusion are not limited to employment – they can be found inside the classroom, too. For instance, Jawad was very annoyed when the university lecturers did not take into account the presence of all these international students, often using western or even exclusively UK-related examples in order to explain something.

Arguably, this kind of slippery experience exemplifies the embeddedness of new practices of racism in multiculturalism and the collapse of clear demarcations between inclusivity and exclusivity. Simply put, Twenty First century practices of racism can no longer be adequately analysed without also analysing the politics of multiculturalism (Pitcher, 2009). This is to say, cultural/social diversity and racism are not mutually exclusive terms considering the manner in which they operate inside contemporary

multicultural societies. On the contrary, multiculturalism has come to be the main mechanism which has transformed the nature of racism, through its production and legitimisation of new, subtler, and yet no less pervasive, forms of racism. In fact, as Puwar (2004, p. 137) suggests, it has led to a situation in which it has become exceptionally difficult to even describe a racist practice as racist – and to confront it as such. This is because liberal discourses surrounding cultural and racial differences – in which racism is viewed as a passé concept due to it being accepted that multicultural societies have been built on the grounds of tolerance, social cohesion and inclusiveness – have become integral to culturally diverse organisations, even when racism is at the same time “endemic” within them. It might sound paradoxical, and it was indeed confusing for Jawad, but the institutional ‘hunger’ for valorising diversity (cultural, gender, racial, religious and so on), has not led to the decline of racism, but only its constant reconstruction¹⁶ and its further legitimisation (Balibar and Wallerstein, 1991; Sharma and Sharma, 2003; Puwar, 2004).

The valorisation of diversity means, as explained in chapter 1, that diversity has come to be productive for capitalism (Gilbert, 2008), and hence capitalist markets and organisations actively contribute to the promotion of a pluralistic and liberal approach to difference, but without abandoning processes of division, hierarchy and classification (Hardt and Negri, 2000; Pitcher, 2009).

It was this double process, which blends together various practices and degrees of inclusion and exclusion, that made Jawad oscillate between feeling confused and feeling sure about what had happened. Jawad’s struggle to

¹⁶ I need to underline, at this point, that the proliferation of new subtler practices of racism does not mean the obsolescence of the old binary forms of racism in which inclusion-exclusion are clearly defined. The two versions of racism can co-exist very well and even serve to reinforce each other. There are indeed many cases of explicitly racist acts against international students (particularly Muslim international students), especially after 9/11. For example, the racist episodes which occurred at Idaho University in the United States in 2016. Many Muslim international students faced anti-Muslim harassment, including receiving humiliating written messages on their vehicles, being called names on the streets of the city or on the campus, and so on. For more details, see Glum (2015). There is also empirical research which explores and discusses more explicitly racist episodes against international students, without dismissing the more implicit ones (Bonazzo and Wong, 2007; Lee, 2007; Brown and Aktas, 2012; Brown and Jones, 2013; Tsouroufli, 2015).

directly approach the failure to respond to his application as a racist act, is an illustration of that confusion. Initially he tried for four months to apply for different jobs at the university before changing his name in the applications. But even when he received the call for a job interview (the person who called thought that the person on the line was someone called Jonathan Brown and not Jawad), he could not explicitly accuse the university as employers of being racists. He knew very well that they would never have admitted that the dismissal of his application was on racist grounds. As he said:

Jawad: I don't know how I should call it. I would not call it racism or I would I call it racism? ... Like what should I call it? Like they have some preferences and priorities which are not the same... Like, I don't know if you agree or not but they do give preference to... Okay, fine, the UK national let's say has the right, fine, he can get a job, in his country, but why Europeans? You're coming from a different country¹⁷ I'm coming [from] a different country... why? Why discrimination just for me, why not for you?

Me: Exactly.

Jawad: And there are all tests and all screening for me, why not for you? And I have to pay more. And ok, the visa thing is tricky... migration problem and stuff. But why all me and not you?

The irony here is three-fold: a) liberal and pluralistic approaches to difference, which prevail in multicultural societies and institutions, still make use of modern versions of racism – normalisation and neutralisation of distinct boundaries around different groups for the security and stability of national belonging (Pitcher, 2009); b) there is one majoritarian group which is still organised around whiteness (as well as, I would argue, masculinity and heteronormativity) (Puwar, 2004); c) the socio-political project of multiculturalism utilises even the “stigmata of otherness” (e.g. skin colour)

¹⁷ Here Jawad pointed at me because I had told him I was Greek and therefore an EU national.

(Balibar and Wallerstein, 1991, p. 18) through channelling them to serve capitalist production. This is to say, the stigmata of otherness have been valorised, commodified and sexualised (think of the western need for the “exotic other” (Sharma and Sharma, 2003, p. 308)). In effect, the politics of multiculturalism creates an intricate assemblage of discourses and representations of the stigmata of otherness, which leaves little space for the racialised others to take, for instance, their skin colour as a material starting point for creating multiple paths towards more radical, more disruptive and more collective modalities of difference. For instance, consider the political importance behind the slogan ‘Black Power’. Simply put, multiculturalism enacts processes which contribute to the capturing of the very subjectivities and experiences of those who do not comfortably fit within the majority.

The impact of these functions of multiculturalism also seem to be present in Jawad’s case. He is welcome in the global/multicultural university (he can even find food on campus from his home country), but his job application was ignored until he changed his name to Jonathan Brown. Until then, he could not even prove to himself the basis on which his application was ignored; was his CV not good enough, or was his name an indicator of a specific accent or skin colour or a lower level of ability with the English language? He spent time discovering the number of international students that were employed by the university (he found only one), and yet he still could not manage to bring together the experiences of all the other international students who presumably have applied for a job at the university and who’s their applications have must be also ignored. In other words, the multicultural university brings together different groups but keeps them at a “proper distance” (Sharma and Sharma, 2003, p. 306) from each other, exactly because it utilises the liberal approach to difference effectively.¹⁸ As Puwar (2004, p. 139) explains, “the labour involved

¹⁸ I will return to the ways the university regulates and polices differences between international students while inventing and imposing new divisions among them in chapter 5. At this point I will only mention that the university’s deployment of a double process of unifying international students, while at the same time stratifying them, making it in that sense often difficult for international students themselves to collectivise their experiences and use

in trying to get recognition of racism within institutions that think they are beyond race can't be overestimated." In fact, even when Jawad could understand that the university library had ignored his application because of what his name and his home address indicated, he still could not do much about it. Who could he have shared his experience of having sent a job application with fake personal details with? When I asked him why he did not complain to anyone about it, he said to me:

Because when I have shared this thing with my aunt and my uncle who live in London, and my aunt is basically from... she's UK born and she's more English really. So I just asked them and she said, "You stupid guy, you did an offence, if they know... It's a bad thing, you should never do it, and you should not go in there."

Thus, Jawad did not disclose his little experiment to anyone else apart from his family, a few friends and myself. Racist experiences like Jawad's often remain a common secret (Puwar, 2004), and his experiment, which proved the university's promotion of the type of multiculturalism discussed in this chapter, could not be widely disseminated¹⁹ because it would be too risky. But still, his experiment becomes an unsettling practice for the politics of multiculturalism, once it is looked at through Jawad's approach. What I mean is, Jawad's humour and sarcasm, present throughout our interview, fascinated me. The fact that he was laughing and joking about the situation are signs that Jawad's subjectivity and his experiences cannot be fully captured by the discourses, practices and representations which sustain the politics of multiculturalism.

them against unfair university practices, came up again and again during the research process; especially during the memory work research process.

¹⁹ Of course, choosing to participate in my research – although Jawad did not explicitly mention it – was a safer (due to anonymity) way to 'break' the silence and let his experience possibly impact on other people's experiences. In fact, at the end of our interview, he asked me if I would use his interview in my thesis – and when I said yes, he asked me again not to use his real name, but said he would be happy to read my thesis once it was published.

3.2.2 Experimenting, collectivising and laughing as an antidote to multicultural racism

Jawad never represented himself as a victim, or used dramatic language to describe the situation, or how bad it actually made him feel. Equally important, is that he did not limit our conversation to his personal experience. From the beginning Jawad talked about all international students as marginalised in different ways. For example, he referred to some of his friends who were working in the city under exploitative conditions, the very small number of international students who work on campus, and the unfamiliarity of most international students with the academic discourses used by lecturers. Even though anyone would feel frustrated listening to Jawad's insights, this did not stop him making fun of the situation. He found it especially pleasing to receive a call for an interview after he had changed his name, as it made the university look like a caricature of itself. He managed to sarcastically mock the divisions which hierarchise students. In his fake application Jawad only altered details that he thought made him be seen as an international student; name, country of origin and any CV information which could reveal that he was born overseas. These little CV alterations were enough to represent him to the potential employer as a non-international student, and it worked. He received a call. Although this fictional character could only be temporary in nature, and he was not actually able to get the job, it gave Jawad a feeling of happiness. He kept emphasising "I got a call" rather than "I cannot go [to the interview]", as it was very joyful for him to be able to strip the university of its superficiality. Of course he was hurt to realise that multiculturalism in the Global North university means nothing but a limited inclusion of the Global South²⁰. However, he still refused to view himself as a victim. He kept having very insightful understandings of the marginalisation of the Global South, but

²⁰ Jawad did not make use of the term 'Global South', but each time he referred to marginalised international students, he talked about Asian students (Chinese, Indian, Pakistani). He also mentioned that his friend from Canada (also an international student but coming from the Global North, as well as being Anglophone) received an immediate positive answer to her job application, while Jawad's application was ignored.

without making it appear as something tragic which prevents people from taking any action. For him action did not mean staying in the UK to fight for equal participation in the Global North's labour market. On the contrary, Jawad refused to waste time trying to look for a job in the UK at the conclusion of his studies, as he was very well aware of most UK companies' preference for only employing 'genius' non-British brains. In his exact words:

Unless you are very genius, which I am not, or unless you are like very super like extraordinary person, then you can impress a big company [...] And [also] because of the economic and migration situation small businesses are not even in a position to hire me because they have to go through some extra costs and stuff like that, like report stuff to the home office and stuff. Like maybe if an employer has to employ me he probably has to give justification to the Home Office, but why they bother, they won't want to bother, only a multinational and big company, they can hire [people from overseas]. So, no chance [laughs].

Thus, Jawad did not view going back to Pakistan as representing a personal failure nor as lack of ambition, but as a choice to reject participation in a labour market and country in which he did not feel welcome. I suggest that his stance, does not indicate naivety or passivity, but a quiet yet direct response to the capturing mechanisms of multiculturalism embedded in UK higher education institutions, its labour market and the wider socio-political realm. He used laughter as an antidote to the overcodification of his experiences – what Deleuze has called “revolutionary joy” (Hoy, 2004, p. 30) – and he managed to connect his experiences to the divisions imposed upon higher education students, while managing at the same time not to let his entire subjectivity and body of experiences be subjugated by them. At the end of our interview, I asked him if he wanted to add anything else. He, again very funnily, said: “I think I have mentioned all... I have criticised too much, I think. Let's move on now [laughs].”

In the next section, I analyse the experiences of my Chinese interview participants. From this section of the interview process emerged a very different view of the global university – as being a very promising route of escape from the conservative Chinese state. The contemporary Global North university does not cease to be considered as an institution of hierarchies and divisions. Nevertheless, in the following section, the post-national hopes inherent in any sort of migration, even if it is of a temporary kind, makes it – especially for the younger Chinese generation – an unstable, contingent and speculative exit from the political and social conditions and trajectory of the Chinese nation state.

3.3 When the Chinese middle class studies abroad: Following the microhistories of everyday life

*The problem we face is therefore this: there will be
no beginning of
history without the middle class, nor will there be
one with the middle class (ie with the system that
reproduces laboring (sic) subjectivity as middle
class).*

(De Angelis, 2010, p. 968)

Although the number of international student' enrolments at UK higher educational institutions has increased exponentially over the last decade, most reporting on this reveal disproportionate geographical patterns. East Asia, especially Hong Kong, China, South Korea, Singapore and Malaysia, is the number one state of origin of international students studying at Global North universities (Brooks and Waters, 2011). This specificity of the global university has unsurprisingly drawn the attention of academics, who have developed different approaches to the subject. Without oversimplifying this tendency, and

taking into account the complex dynamics which encourage international students from certain regions to study abroad, I am using my interviewees experience as an entry point to enable me to tease out some of the issues which shape the mobility of East Asian – and specifically Chinese – students with regard to UK universities.

Despite the fact that I deliberately avoided asking explicitly about the socio-economic background of my participants, it seemed to be of great importance to them. In fact, one of the most commonly reoccurring themes across the interviews I conducted, that was brought up specifically by the interviewees themselves, was that of being middle class. Taking as my focus only the Chinese students who took part in the research (although my participant from Vietnam – An – shared several common characteristics with those from China), I would say that, while these Chinese international students were by no means a homogeneous group, each one not only came from a middle class background but expressed a strong desire to talk about what it means to be middle class in China. Indeed, the confidence of my Chinese participants in the power of this emerging middle class became a factor influencing the direction of my data analysis.

China's transformation "from a relatively poor, developing nation to a middle-class country" is one of the most rapid transformations historically (Li, 2010, p. 3). However, as most of my participants explained to me, in China there is a stitching together of the older with the more contemporary social, political and economic practices and forms of organisation, generating a Chinese modernity and a Chinese middle class full of contradictions, ironies, ambiguities and tensions.

Such fuzziness of the making of the middle class is not an exclusive characteristic of the Chinese case though. A group of critical historians have authored a volume in which they explored the creation of the middle class in non-western societies. In the introductory remarks, the editors of the volume underline exactly this, the inherently contradictory and often paradoxical nature of middle class (Lopez and Weinstein, 2012). Following a similar line of

thinking to these authors, would suggest that viewing the middle class as having a paradoxical character as an exceptional case – is a viewpoint grounded on a common assumption that there is an authentic and uncomplicated (white, male) version of the middle class. An assumption, the evidence for which, can be only found within European and American borders. Moreover, along with this assumption tends to come a belief that the rest of the world is longing to adopt this pure and hegemonic middle class ‘patent’. Creating an additional link, as the middle class is intertwined with processes of modernisation, Lopez and Weinstein (ibid.), invite us to develop a new conceptualisation of modernity, in contrast with the ‘original’ modernity of the west. This suggests that we need to embrace and explore the inherent contradictions of modernity itself. However, this invitation begs the question – how can we form new conceptualisations of modernity, as well as of the middle class, in different parts of the world? Lopez and Weinstein’s (ibid., p. 21) answer is, that instead of focusing on grand historical narratives – usually “Eurocentric, imperialistic, masculinistic, and exclusionary” – that we should search for and explore the “microhistories” of everyday life; that we should follow the material experiences of the middle class in each geographical location:

“Critical historical work over the last two decades has developed sophisticated analytical perspectives that privilege microhistories of everyday life to explore how a variety of historical actors elaborated, experienced, and responded to various forms of domination at different moments in time” (ibid., p. 21).

My interviewees unexpectedly provided me with exactly this kind of valuable insight. The micro/minor experiences they discussed with me did justice to the work of critical historians by illuminating precisely these contradictions of the Chinese middle class. Even more interestingly, my participants – while expressing honestly and directly their feelings about the current political and economic reforms in their country, and with the use of a rather simple

vocabulary – even questioned the common historical representations of the middle class, as a “passive political force”, or even one that is completely “politically apathetic” (ibid., p. 16). For instance, Dao genuinely believes that specific parts of middle class are the only hope for change in China, as they do not agree with the Chinese socio-political arrangements of life and labour. For him, the increase in emigration among the Chinese middle class – including through the route of studying abroad – is a symptom, as well as a way to openly disagree with and refuse to be assimilated by, a nation state which is suffocating, oppressive and controlling. Similar feelings concerning the Chinese nation state were expressed by Chen. Interestingly, he told me that for many young middle class Chinese people, the degree from abroad is a way to “buy fairness” in a very unfair society. In what follows below I begin with the analysis of his interview.

3.3.1 “With this degree we buy fairness”!

Chen studied for his first Bachelor’s degree in China, his second in the UK, and at the time of the interview he was studying for a Master’s degree in the UK. Chen’s interview was mainly focused around his feelings concerning the social and political system of China and its effects on everyday life. He was nervous about the interview, so I told him that we were just going to have a friendly chat and that there were no right or wrong answers. He then said to me that it was not easy to explain the situation in his country to me. He kept telling me that it was not like here, and as such that I would struggle to understand. “In China everything is complicated”. He had mixed feelings about China. On the one hand, he did not want to give up on China, while on the other hand, he was very disappointed with the socio-political situation there. For instance, when it was time to study for his first Bachelor’s degree everybody was pushing him to study abroad, but he did not want to. He did not want to ‘abandon’ China. He did not understand why he should study in another country. However, by the time he finished this first degree, he felt suffocated. He believed that there were no career prospects if one was not part of the state

apparatus, and that further he would not have sufficient income to buy products that were increasingly expensive. These realisations persuaded him that he should attempt to study for a degree abroad. In the following extracts I present some of Chen's thoughts, as well as some of the examples he used in order to explain to me the "unfairness" (his words) of Chinese society. His account of this unfairness evokes the formation of hierarchies grounded in social, economic, political, and institutional disparities amongst different groups in the Chinese society.

Chen: [...] [There is] an unbalanced development in China.

Me: What do you mean when you say 'unbalanced'?

Chen: Some people are very rich; some people are poor, and because of the politics. We have a government who will protect the rich people. If they break the law they will be protected. [...]

In the extract above, Chen illuminates the connections between economic and socio-political disparities, as well as the issue of legal favouritism. In the following extract, he uses examples that explicitly show the central role of the state in the orchestration of those social divisions:

Chen: Yes, in China the people are becoming cold-hearted because they are afraid.

Me: They are afraid of what?

Chen: There is no welfare state like in your country²¹. And [there is] too much oppression. In China there is too much unfair[ness]. The governors in government – the power is not gravitating to the people. It is grabbed by the governors. That is a big problem. Here in the UK before they do anything the governors should think about it as to whether the citizens, the people will be satisfied with it, but not in

²¹ He means the UK – although I am not from the UK.

China. They can do whatever they want. And, if people speak the truth, maybe they are missing the next day.

For example, in China the provinces are larger than the cities. If somebody in the city does something bad, the leader of the city does some bad things to one of its citizens, the citizen wants to go to the leader of the province to get some fairness, but he may be stopped by the leader of the city. The leader of the city will maybe use the policemen to watch them all day long. If they do something, they are arrested. There is too much control.

Controlling practices, such as intense policing and violence, seem to be the tools deployed for the sustaining of both hierarchies and the state. In the extracts below Chen summarises the effects of the socio-political situation on everyday life in China. He believes that the option of studying abroad appears to be one possible way to have access to some degree of fairness career-wise. However, he does not know exactly how this will materialise in practice. He expressed contradictory feelings concerning returning to China. Though at least he is secure and happy in knowing that he has family and friends who will support him. Nonetheless he is worried about the issue of growing competition amongst Chinese people. His hopes for fairness seem to be placed with other people – in people who care about the country and not about gaining power.

Chen: Something is wrong with China lately. A lot of people are turning bad. Nobody cares about other people any more. The old people are scared for their lives. They have to have money for illness. Everybody runs. Too much competition. The family, it's not important any more. I don't know why. It's about the housing thing. Everybody saves money. Emmm... and still the connections, you know. The connections to find job are important. To know people. If you haven't a lot of power, people in government, you need to have qualifications. That's why degree from here is fairness.

Me: That's interesting. I never thought about it like this.

Chen: So yes, with this degree we buy fairness. We, not too rich, not too poor, we buy fairness here. In China you cannot have fairness. You need both power and a lot of money to buy fairness in China. There are some so rich people in China. Their children from the moment they are born by their mother, they can do whatever they want. They are protected by the government. They can break the law. Nothing they can't do.

Me: So, what are you going to do with this degree?

Chen: It's hard to predict my future life. I imagine a life in China but it will not be so bad because I have some nice friends and my family. I have a lot of cousins who are working in Shanghai and Beijing, the big cities. So, I can go anywhere I want to go. They are established there. They have their own families so it's not so hard to live there, but the problem is just among people. I think this cannot be worse but it also cannot be better in a short period. Also there are some who love the country, who love the people, whose heart is full of love. I think they can save the country! My heart is also full of love. I try to influence people around me. I don't know... Eventually, I want to start a small business perhaps. I don't know exactly what yet.

Chen was aware that finding a job with his degree was not going to be straightforward, and that the Chinese state still controls most of the industries. However, possessing the degree did seem to hold out potential for providing him with alternative choices to merely being assimilated back into the politics of China. Chen did not know though how exactly those who returned with degrees from abroad could go about cultivating the changes they desired to see in the everyday life of China. For him to eventually make the decision to do this, especially taking into consideration his initial resistance to the idea of studying abroad, appeared to involve considerable anguish in terms of having to abandon his nation state, to achieve a form of fairness by gaining a degree from abroad which could potentially be channelled into alternative routes of working and living. Thus, it appears that attempting to buy fairness through gaining such a degree does not mean that there is a linear connection between

the degree and finding a 'good' job in China. It only involves 'buying' possibilities – which while they hold out the potential for hope, they also involve potential risks. It does not mean that Chen achieves fairness, in the sense that he exchanges money for equal opportunities. Chen seems to want to cultivate a very different form of opportunity.

This is to say, for him education is not simply about gaining the credentials which will help him to successfully compete, and eventually climb higher up the social ladder. His account is more concerned with the everyday struggles of the Chinese people to deal with the combination of accelerating competition, intense marketisation and state policing. He would like, if he could, to not have to become an active part of these processes and practices, in the sense that he would not have to reproduce them. This seemed to be his struggle – and it was still very much ongoing when I interviewed him. As such, education in Chen's case is not merely about individual betterment.

Education has often been analysed (most famously by Bourdieu, 1986) as one of the most common middle class²² routes to social and economic betterment. As De Angelis (2010, p. 962) suggests, it is betterment "through individual effort" (such as through education) that is what is distinctive about the middle, and not a middle level income. In any case the middle class is financially (and socially) very heterogeneous. Betterment through individual effort and the need for social and economic order are, according to the same author, the two "pillars which allow the survival and reproduction of the middle class", and which inevitably sustain and reproduce the mechanisms which have formed the middle class; the capitalist market and state policing (ibid.). In other words, competition, consumerism and wage disparities within the middle class circulate around ideas of betterment. In this sense, the middle class both forms as well as being formed by the capitalist market. The need for political representation of the middle class (in the form of identity politics), along with social and economic stability (even if the cost of this is an increase in

²² Later in the current section I discuss some research on East Asian middle class international students in particular, which also follows this line of analysis.

state policing) are the consequences of a middle class' need for order. Both these factors are cornerstones of the middle class – betterment and order – serve to normalise and reproduce divisions and hierarchies, including within the middle class itself (ibid.).

What happens though to those middle class subjectivities which oscillate between affirming the norms which build the class itself and resisting, going beyond, or betraying them? Chen seemed to swing in just such a manner – as did Dao, who I discuss below. What kind of theoretical analysis can help us to explore and understand the experiences of those, such as these Chinese middle class students, who *do* follow the contemporary clichéd middle class norm – studies abroad – yet, at the same time, at least exclusively do not think of it in terms of being an individual effort at betterment, but rather as a way to create ruptures in the social and political order of China (the representative politics, the state policing, the corruption etc.)? As De Angelis (2010, p. 954) explains, this is the “conundrum faced by those [middle class subjectivities] who seek alternatives”. Through Dao's interview and through literature on the emergence of the Chinese middle class, I explore some of the possible answers to the above questions.

3.3.2 The many middle classes of China

Dao is also from China, and at the time of the interview he was studying in the UK for a Master's degree in Finance. Although he studied for his first degree in China, he decided to study for his Master's degree abroad because, as he said to me; “the constantly accelerating competition in China pushes people to go abroad”. When I asked him to unpack this for me, he said that I needed to understand the socio-political contexts of China, and only then would I understand why he believes in the middle class:

Look, in China the political situation is not like here. In China, there is only one party and [my] country is conservative and also capitalist. In China you need connections to find a good job. It's all [about] networking. If you haven't connections, people you know, there is no

job opportunities. The only party we have does whatever it wants;
there is corruption.

As Dao explained, and commentators such as Dickson (2010) seem to agree with him, the Communist Party of China (CPC) exercises intense control over both public and private sectors, while at the same time using the private sector in order to achieve desirable rapid economic growth in the country as well as for maintaining its own power. The CPC, a supposedly ideologically Marxist party, aggressively promoted the expansion of the private sector and the capitalist economic organisation of the country. Yet, the private sector was by no means released from the tight control of the state. In order to retain its control over the private sector, the CPC invited private entrepreneurs into the party. In effect, the private sector is completely intertwined with the state, to the extent that private entrepreneurs who do not want to accept the 'blessings' of the state are pushed to the margins of the business world (Wang, 2009).

For Dao, this conservative environment is not just about economics, but about politics and about everyday life. According to him, it is particularly young middle class Chinese people who suffer from the lack of social and political space. Their disagreement with the government's practices was also expressed through the "Ningbo protest" in 2012. The protest was mainly organised by microbloggers who spread information about the government's plans to proceed to an expansion of a petrochemical plant that would be operated by a subsidiary of state-run oil giant Sinopec (Larson, 2012).

For Dao that protest was a sign that the middle class were actively against the current socio-political situation where the state's yearning for economic growth works at the expense of the environment and the health of Chinese people. At the same time, he chooses not to participate in any of the protests which take place in China, because he does not think that the government listens to people and their demands. "People cannot speak", he says, "they just have no speech". The following extract clearly shows his

disappointment with the government, while considering the middle class as the only hope for change:

We need a cultural revolution [...] [The government], they just don't care about people. They just want the vote. *But people try to change their lives. The middle class can change things.* The upper class support[s] the government and the poor they cannot even raise those questions cause they don't have opportunities for education. They live in a narrow social environment, so they don't have the opportunity to question. So, it is mainly the middle class of China that tries to find opportunities abroad. It has become the middle class common sense. *The upper class wants to retain the status quo.* They control the money, the law, everything. They do whatever they want. The upper class often is old [...] In total you are not free. It is a totalitarian culture and social environment (emphasis added).

In this interview extract, Dao makes two very interesting points. The first point is that he does not consider those parts of the society which want to sustain the current socio-political order as middle class, he considers them as upper-class. The second point is that the middle class is not going to bring about change by explicitly confronting the government (e.g. in the form of protests), rather, that change will emerge from the processes and practices middle class people engage in, in order to transform their lives. As Dao says, "people try to change their lives" and "the middle class can change things". Emigration, be that through the route of studying abroad or not, is a way for Chinese people to change their lives.

As with Chen's case, Dao does not seem to reduce life change to economic/career betterment. Escaping the state's controlling practices is also transformative. In this sense, emigration (through studying abroad in Dao's case) is a gesture of freedom, as well as a practical way to direct one's life away from the enclosures of a specific nation state. The following interview extract seems to exemplify this double function of emigration, in which studying abroad is considered as potentially a route leading to such an escape.

Dao: So, a lot of Chinese people prefer to migrate, to escape [...] Most of the Chinese students who come here, we are middle class. We don't have a lot of money but we have enough money to come to the UK to study. And if we don't have connections, we need to come to the UK to study.

Me: And by studying here, you think that you can have better opportunities when you go to China?

Dao: I have to go back cause I haven't visa²³. But yes you know I hope I will find a better job back in China with this degree, make some money and then go somewhere else, maybe the States, Australia or Canada. This is the Chinese middle class dream. Now it is the common sense.

I suggest that aspects of the middle class practices, experiences and subjectivities will be co-opted by the Chinese government as well as by capital, including those practices, experiences and subjectivities related to studying abroad, while other aspects will perhaps spark socio-political changes related to mobility and labour. Such changes cannot be predicted and straightforwardly calculated in advance though. As Dao's interview extracts evoke, studying abroad initiates a form of escape through emigration, without though knowing in advance the end of this journey and the transformations which this might trigger.

In this sense, the two main points made by Dao – that the middle class can change things while transforming the concrete situations which asphyxiate it, and that those who fit well in the majoritarian part of the Chinese society are not middle class – intersect through the use of migration as an escape route. This is to say, Dao's escape is a way to dis-identify with the Chinese majority – those who support the government in order to secure their position in both representative politics and the market.

²³ Dao means that there are no more post-study work visas for international students in the UK.

Needless to say, significant parts of the Chinese middle class also support the government. In fact, the expansion and the promotion of the private sector produced a middle class which is constituted mainly by businessmen/women – the so-called ‘red capitalists’ (Dickson, 2010; Li, 2010). This middle class is an active participant in the representative political arena, as it wants things to stay the same for the sake of social and economic stability, even if this is at the expense of social and political freedom. So, why does Dao refuse to acknowledge this part of the Chinese society as being middle class? I suggest that he speaks of *the minority-middle classes*. This became clearer to me when he told me that “everything passes through the top managers of the real estate” and that middle-class people cannot really afford the exceptionally high house prices. This comment led me to explore a bit further the role of the real estate sector in China. As I explain in more detail in the following paragraphs, this sector aggressively contributes to the formation and the shaping of the different parts of the Chinese middle class – even physically organising them in distinct gated communities.

3.3.3 From *Danwei* to post-welfare representations

In terms of background;²⁴ I would say that from 1958 until 1977, China’s housing system allocation was closely associated with one’s employment, as a part of the welfare state. *Danwei*, as this housing system is called, excluded the possibility of private housing construction. At the same time, the Chinese population was distributed inside cities according to their workplace. However, during the period 1978-1997 housing reform experiments were initiated. The encouragement of private ownership and the sale of public housing to private residents was initially endorsed by Deng Xiaoping. By 2004 the *danwei* housing system belonged entirely to history, and the promotion of

²⁴ The reason why I include this information here is in order to very briefly discuss – not only the inherent diversity of the Chinese middle class – but also the strategically imposed divisions and hierarchies, and the effects of these on everyday life for middle class minorities. I, by no means, try to make an evaluation of China or to pass judgment on the Chinese government. Needless to say, China is a very complex society and the analysis of it is far beyond my thesis’ scope.

mortgages to help the middle class to buy relatively affordable houses became the norm. In the period 2005 to the present, the prices of the houses skyrocketed due to the aggressive marketisation of real estate, creating serious social problems in Chinese society (Yanyun Mang, 2010, pp. 179–187).

In effect, the new house reforms contributed to a rearrangement of society and to social stratification. In order to really understand the wide ranging nature of the impact that the marketisation of the real estate sector had upon Chinese people's lives, we need, according to Tomba (2010), to concentrate on local experiences. Despite the benefits some parts of the middle class enjoyed due to the housing reforms, the marketisation of real estate in several cities became "a territorial marker" and the creator of middle class minority groups – such as migrants, young people, and lawyers who fight against state corruption (ibid., p. 194). The following quote paradigmatically demonstrates the dramatic effect of the changes in housing policies:

"Whereas in Beijing housing subsidization was a strategy to produce wealth among middle-income earners, in Shenyang the idea of a middle class created value for assets that the state already controlled. This production of value is made possible by a system that deems educated, wealthy, and successful citizens as a measure of civilization and modernization, as opposed to "backward" migrants and "stubborn" workers. Developers convert inhospitable or highly polluted areas into what they term middle-class paradises, while the local media call the new residents pioneers in the development and conversion of dilapidated parts of the city and the government cooperates in the promotion by, for example, calling Shenyang a "forest city" (ibid., pp. 201-202).

The words of Tomba (2010) echo Dao, when he said that everything passes through the top managers of the real estate sector. This sector pre-decides and constructs lifestyles in the re-created urban areas (filled with sanitised, expensive and extravagant housing complexes), instead of there being a product of the needs and desires of the communities who live in the cities. In

other words, the real estate sector aggressively contributes to the formation and the shaping of the different parts of the Chinese middle class, to the extent of doing so through physically organising them within the city. Even more worryingly, the intense policing of these housing complexes limits the space for the development of alternative lifestyles. Urban organisation is effectively policed by the private real estate companies, and as such, serves to marginalise considerable parts of the population. Young people, migrants, and the working class are stigmatised, as not suitable to belong to the 'tasteful' middle class, and hence they are forced to live in impoverished areas. Furthermore, the whole aggregate of the privatisation of housing enables the government to allocate the policing of Chinese population to several private sector agents (e.g. real estate developers, management companies, security guards, and internet providers). Consequently, the splintering of the Chinese population into *gated communities* was not only achieved through physical territorialisations around neighbourhoods, but also through the pervasive policing of the marginalised parts of the city compared to the more upmarket ones. For instance, in the privileged urban communities, even violation of the one child policy gets overlooked, while in the marginalised areas the agents of the state never turn a blind eye to any violation of the law (ibid., pp. 206-209, emphasis added).

Although, in terms of income and education, they belong to the (let us say) more privileged part of the middle class, Chen and Dao, seem to identify more with the minority parts of the middle class, insofar as they want to situate themselves outside of the state's regulation. They are not protected by legal favouritism, they have no connections which can guarantee them job opportunities, and they do not believe in representative politics – and hence they do not participate as members of the majoritarian middle class.

At the beginning of this section, I suggested I would locate theoretical propositions which can accommodate those middle-class people who do not comfortably fit within the majoritarian middle class – whose subjectivities oscillate between reproducing some of the clichéd middle class modes of living and problematising the existing socio-political organisation based on policing

and corruption as well as on hierarchies and divisions. Simply put, through which theoretical lens can we view minorities as something other than potential majorities? I suggest that Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) concept of 'becoming-minoritarian' (as discussed in chapter 1) can provide such imaginaries.

3.3.4 When people escape, the state polices

If representative politics means policing, as Rancière (1999) argues, then the Chinese state – as Dao and Chen's interviews, as well as the literature previously explored indicate – is a paradigmatic case of a state controlling all aspects of society in the name of politics. The Chinese state exercises its power through splintering and then managing society in terms of pre-decided parts, while allocating specific and limited space to each of them. The state actively promotes the production of the middle class – yet some of the middle class manage to escape from this pre-determined plan for them. They escape, either because they are not native Chinese, or because they are too young, or because they explicitly disagree with the state (e.g. a great number of lawyers explicitly disagree with the state). In response to this escape, these sections of the middle class which do not 'fit' are designated as minorities and are even more intensively policed. However, minorities can still be included in the representative political arena, as long as they aspire to one day become part of the majority – to climb up the social and economic ladder in order to gain equal access to the benefits that the majority enjoys. As I mentioned earlier, for De Angelis (2010), the promises of betterment and order are the two pillars which sustain and reproduce the middle class and which inevitably sustain the hierarchies within the middle class itself. In effect, this very commitment to a potentially better future once one manages – after a journey of individual effort – to enter the 'dream majority' prevents minorities from seeking and creating alternative life possibilities, beyond representative politics and its policing (ibid.).

However, as Deleuze and Guattari (1987, p. 106) suggest a minority cannot become the majority, not because it is not capable of doing so, but

because there is no such a thing as “becoming” majority, insofar as majority is not created by a process but is constituted as a stable monolithic homogeneous system. Minority, on the other hand has a twofold nature; minority as “sub-systems” and as “becoming-minority process” (ibid., p. 106). That is to say, the middle class is composed of diverse minority elements – and it is in a constant process of transformation. These two qualities of ‘minority’, are where the real promise of minority can be located; a promise pregnant with creative alternatives that go beyond an identity politics perspective on minority groups (as was discussed in chapter 1). In other words, the idea that minorities by entering the majority, becoming powerful, and from that position fabricating a socio-political change, seems only to lead to an aggravation of the conditions which sustain hierarchies within the middle class itself, as well as across wider society. Only by refusing representative politics altogether, and liberating themselves from desiring to become the majority, can minorities bring about change. This transition, from desiring to become the majority to desiring to become minority, can be a process of liberation, and hence fertile ground for the flourishing of a multiplicity of ways of living and experiencing differently. Once more, I suggest that the accounts of Dao and Chen invite us to look at the international student experience from this more complex and more hopeful perspective and not as reduced to individual efforts to become compatible with the middle-class majority.

3.3.5 Recalibrating the problem: the representations of the Chinese student mobility

My Chinese participants²⁵ also talked about the tensions which exist between Chinese parents and their children. The children’s dreams are not always aligned with those of their parents’. Despite this, my participants’ accounts indicate that many Chinese parents plan their children’s futures very carefully – especially when it comes to education and career choices. As Dao told me:

²⁵ There are three more participants – two of them will be discussed soon: Ching Lan and Bao you. The other I discuss only in chapter 6: Chu-Hua.

“In China from childhood until now [until they become adults] they [children] follow the opinion of other people. You know that in China children need to follow what their parents tell them to do? [...] I find this restricting for the mind”.

Chen mentioned the extensive pressure, increasingly placed on their children – from a very young age – by Chinese parents, to become ‘highly’ educated:

In China now so many parents begin to teach their own children when they are very young – even when they cannot talk. They begin to teach them, to want them to know more. To want them to get better grades, better marks than other students. I don’t think it’s a good way to teach children.

Bao-Yu and Ching-Lan²⁶, also expressed their struggles with having to please their parents without at the same time having to abandon their dreams. Their parents belong to the middle class in China and, as with many other Chinese parents, wanted their daughters to study business related degrees so that they could have a career that would guarantee them social status and economic stability. As Ching-Lan explained to me, this is important for the social status of the whole family:

Ching-Lan: He or she [the child] got an offer from this like famous, most famous university in China in business or accounting. They feel very proud of you [of their child] despite they don’t care, really [about] the kid, really, [whether] he or she really wants to do that or not. It means much to them because they will compare with others.

²⁶ I have analysed these interviews in greater detail in chapter 6 – which is on international students who study business related degrees. I decided that they fit better with the topic of chapter 6. However, in the current chapter I narrate some parts of these interviews in my own words and analyse them from a different perspective than the one which I utilise in chapter 6. The two different dimensions of their interviews – presented in the current chapter and in chapter 6 – are not alien to each other and the connections between them will be made clear in the conclusion of the memory work chapters.

Me: With other parents?

Ching-Lan: Yes.

Ching-Lan wanted to study arts and Bao-Yu Chinese linguistics. In fact, despite her parents' pressure to study accounting, after she finished high school Bao-Yu studied teaching Chinese as a foreign language at Bachelor's level. However, at the time of our interview she was doing her Master's degree in a business related subject. The reason she gave me was that after she finished her Bachelor's she found her dream to "introduce the Chinese language and history to the world" unrealistic, as in order to do so she would have to study for a Master's degree and then a PhD in Chinese linguistics. This would mean many more years of studying (especially as in China the degree duration is longer than in the UK). Bao-Yu wanted to be financially independent from her family and to start building a family of her own. Thus, she decided to work for a company focusing on Chinese education so that she could follow her career dreams, without having to study for many more years. She then came to the UK to study a business-related degree, as this could help her to quickly achieve the qualifications she needs in order to combine her studies in Chinese language with business. Studying business abroad was, for Bao-Yu, a way to both become independent from her parents as well as a way to find a job that is related to her passion for Chinese languages and history.

Ching-Lan, on the other hand, initially followed her parents' desire for her to study business related degrees. At the time of the interview, she was doing her second Master's in the UK. After she completed her Bachelor's degree in China she came to the UK to study for her first Master's, before returning to China where she started working in a bank. While she had never liked studying anything that had to do with business, she hated her work in the bank even more strongly. So, in order to escape her work in China, she decided to persuade her parents that she needed further business training. In effect, studying for a second Master's degree was a way for her to stay away from the pressure of her parents, as well as away from a career that she found entirely

uninteresting: “I don’t want to waste more time in a bank or in any other business work. I want to do something it is more meaningful”. Her intention, at the time of the interview, was to stay in academia in the UK. A year after our interview, Ching-Lan enrolled for a PhD in an UK university.

I suggest that Ching-Lan and Bao-Yu’s accounts, like Dao and Chen’s previously, indicate the multiplicity of Chinese middle class modalities, experiences and desires – as well as adding new dimensions to considerations with regard to the international student mobility of the Chinese middle class. In particular, the cases of Bao-Yu and Ching-Lan relate to studies which consider the international student mobility of Asian students (from Southeast and East Asia) to be grounded in the insistence of middle class’ parents’ that their children would be hard working and highly educated, so that the family as a whole can achieve social distinction in terms of the dominant global capitalist paradigm (Mitchell, 1997; Nonini and Ong, 1997; Brown and Hesketh, 2004; Sin, 2009; Waters, 2009; see Brooks and Waters, 2011). Although many of these studies seem to have considered the everyday dilemmas, struggles, anxieties and hopes of Asian middle class families, arising due to the new life and labour conditions emerging from the globalisation of capitalism, I suggest some of them overly focus on one dimension of the Asian student mobility – the one informed by Bourdieu’s (1986) theory on the different forms of capital (social, cultural, economic and institutional). All the studies mentioned above have rightly identified that more Asian students than ever before study abroad, that most of them study business related degrees and science, and that many of them come from a middle-class background. In other words, I by no means propose that these works lack validity or importance. On the contrary they provide many constructive descriptions of changes that have occurred, in both global and local realms, and their effects on people’s everyday lives. However, the Bourdieusian paradigm – that middle class families seek social and economic capital, and that education is the road to these objectives – seems to prevent other dimensions and other insights from illuminating the analysis of the international student experiences of the Asian middle class. Simply put,

following the Bourdieusian type of analysis means that these studies run the risk of unifying the experiences of Chinese middle class international students, while trapping their subjectivities in fixed representations; as middle class subjectivities which aspire to be self-actualised through acquiring social and economic capital.

Thus, I suggest that, in contrast, the fragmented experiences and microhistories of Bao-Yu, Dao, Chen and Ching-Lan evoke the multiplicity of Chinese middle class experiences, desires and practices. Making such multiplicity the entry point for the analysis of their international student experiences, means that it becomes easier to approach them in a manner that is open to all their contradictions, open-endedness and messiness – instead of looking at them as well-calculated investments, mainly related to social and economic betterment. Dao and Chen's efforts to explain to me the idiosyncrasies and the specificities of the social and political context of China was intended to help me understand that the main available exit from the oppressive nation state, involves the negation of the enclosures that exist in the Chinese labour regime. Thus, in their case studying abroad, either as a road to eventual emigration or as a possible way to find a job without having to rely on the state, evoke their efforts to evade control. Ching-Lan and Bao-Yu provided me with examples of how differently the older generation and the younger generation experience being middle class. Through their examples, one can see the tensions which contribute to influencing the route of studying abroad as a common middle class practice. For the parents, it can be a way to secure, for their children and for the whole family social and economic status. While for the children it can provide an escape from the pressures of having to fit into the middle class social standards of their parents²⁷. Ching-Lan's story is a paradigmatic case of this.

²⁷ The tensions between the younger middle class and the older middle class in China have been extensively explored by Lin and Sin (2009). Briefly put, the authors underline alternative political channels – like cyber activism – followed by the young generation of the middle class, while it explicitly ignores normative political routes. The older generation has called these youngsters the “strawberry generation” and the “lost or crashed generation” because it is well-presented (well-dressed, energetic, literate and modern) but composed of weak and

3.4 Conclusion

This chapter began with the interview data in which international student experiences appear to be uncomplicated and smooth as long as they are affirmative to normative patterns – formed by neoliberal discourses and practices – that crisscross the whole international student aggregate. In fact, during the data analysis, it appeared clear to me that Narumi and Varun's international student experiences emerged through their unproblematic relationship with individualism, liberalism, entrepreneurialism and self-government. In that sense, there was little, if any space, left to explore those parts and aspects of international student experiences that open up for scrutiny the institutional representations of the experiences of international students. As Varun mentioned, his initial expectations of studying abroad were met, inasmuch as due to his calculating everything in advance: the ranking of the university was good enough; the city looked like the videos he had seen prior to his departure from his country; the employability chances seemed as optimal as represented on the universities' websites. So, it seemed that as long as he worked hard, he would be able to have a good – or in Narumi's words a 'successful' – career and life.

Conversely, Jawad's experiences appeared to be in contradiction with the promises of the Global North university. Despite his, initially hopeful expectations that studying in a multicultural university would mean entering an institution beyond discrimination, his experiences of applying for a job on campus as well as the experiences of his friends (also international students) who were working under exploitative terms, expose the prevalence of divisions and hierarchies inside the global university, as well as in the UK labour market more broadly. Jawad's refusal to overly focus on his own experiences, thereby reducing them to a personal narrative, as well as his refusal to push himself into a country and a labour regime at the conclusion of his studies (which

irresponsible workers and self-centered individuals (*ibid.*, p. 232). Lin and Sin's work is focused on the resistance of this young generation to being absorbed into the political and social norms of the majoritarian middle class.

include only what they need from Global South, excluding the rest), serves to simultaneously create multiple fractures. He refuses both the institutional representations of international student experiences – the representations of the Global North university – and those of the UK’s multicultural politics. Breaking down this triple-layered fracture, the collectivisation of Jawad’s international student experiences shifted the focus of the analysis of international student experiences away from the neoliberal discourses of individualism and self-entrepreneurialism, and instead served to connect them to the problems of the social, political, and institutional structures that comprise the Global North university. That is to say, Jawad managed to simultaneously talk about his subjective experiences not as expressions of his inner self and his exclusively personal responsibilities over his own life and future (as was the case of Narumi and Varun), but as linked to social, political and institutional enclosures. Most importantly, Jawad – very joyfully – did not reduce his subjectivity and his experiences to those dictated by the university and the UK labour regime’s controlling mechanisms. He freed himself, not by trying harder to become a part of the Global North, but by not attempting to do so – in fact, by ignoring the limited and limiting possibilities of working in the UK at the conclusion of his studies.

Perhaps ironically then, Bao-Yu, Chen, Ching-Lan and Dao (my Chinese participants), viewed their presence in the Global North – temporary or not – as a possible way to free themselves from the socio-political and labour enclosures of China, as well as the pressure of their parents. The uneasy feelings that my four Chinese participants shared, about the intense state control and especially about the territorialisation mechanisms over labour, can help us explore the international student journey as a material act intended to initiate an escape. As Dao suggested, many middle class Chinese people try to change their lives and as such this is why he believes they can change China. That is to say, the eruption of socio-political changes can unexpectedly and unintentionally occur when people do not comfortably fit in the majoritarian modalities of a given situation. The multiplicity of the Chinese middle class experiences and their

everyday struggles create diversified lenses through which we can read the international student mobility of the Chinese middle class, as more than a derivative of clichéd middle class dreams for social and economic distinction.

Thus, international students' expectations are shaped through various sources prior to the beginning of their student journey; universities' websites, maps, videos, recruitment agencies and so on, create a patchwork image of studying in the UK and of specific UK higher education institutions. However, as some of my interviewees' experiences evoked, the international student journey concerns continuous discovery and experimentation. As explained in chapter 1, despite the efforts of UK universities to manufacture and promote certain types of international student experience, the actual experiences of international students are in a process of constant and ongoing construction and re-working. In fact, international students' experiences with all their multiplicity, contradictions, paradoxes and asymmetries, cannot pre-exist the international student journey. In other words, experiences cannot be external to the situations which build them. Approaching experience as conceived of in this manner, also means that processes of experiencing are processes of deconstruction of the pre-made fixed experiences and representations designed by the university, as well as a reclaiming of the aspects of experiences which are excessive to them. In other words, some of my participants' accounts do not simply add new experiences on top of the commonly represented ones, they rework them and push them in different directions. The experiences of my interviewees in experimenting with the pretentiousness of institutional inclusivity of difference inside the multicultural university, or studying abroad in order to initiate a process aimed at emigration away from an oppressive state, are not annexes to the 'normal' international student experiences, they are the neglected aspects of their experiences – the too messy, the speculative and the without-guarantees aspects.

Intermezzo

Stretching experience between methodologies: From Interviews to Memory Work

Hopefully, it is already apparent, that this research and thesis on international students, is intended not only as research into their experiences, but also as research on how to research experience itself. The exploration of international students' experiences could not but be connected to the exploration of different methodologies, as well. In fact, during the unfolding of this research, it became obvious to me that politics, theory, and methodological approach can be productively intertwined. Thus, in this, 'in-between' chapter, I first discuss the limitations I encountered with researching experience through interviews. Then I make some preliminary connections with memory work (the other methodology I deployed), in order to provide the reader with some initial understandings as to the reasons that I thought memory work could help me research experience, by overcoming some of the limitations posed by interviews as a method.

As with any other research method, interviews have methodological pitfalls which we should not shy away from, but face and acknowledge for what they are, and what they do to the process and the subject of research. Thus, I would start by suggesting that the most significant limitation I found was related to the short time I could spend with each interviewee. First of all, in a very short period of time, usually the interviewer and the interviewee map various topics of discussion, running the risk of mapping them in a shallow and flattening way. Given that, the interview data cannot be partial and situated enough. For instance, from my experience²⁸ with interviewing, I felt that mainly during the transcription of the data and data analysis, where I could take time and consider things more slowly, I was able to carefully listen to what the interviewees said and what they did not say, as well as noticing

²⁸ Perhaps some the problems I encountered with interviews have to do with my personal limitations, due to my lack of experience with interviewing. Thus, I am by no means attempting to generalise, the limitations I talk about in this chapter, to all cases of interviewing.

what topics should have been further explored. When I first began to analyse the interview data I often felt the urge to contact my interviewees again and schedule one more interview, in which we could return to discuss a topic in greater depth. Unfortunately, I could not do that because I did not have time to conduct two interviews with all of them, and because I had not previously informed them about this possibility. To provide an example of this problem; Jawad gave me many hints about the porosity of migration categories and that international students also drift in and out of different migration categories. This point was only implicitly made during our interview, and thus it would be placing too much weight on my interpretations of this to provide a very detailed analysis of the porosity of migration categories in relation to international student experiences. However, this does not mean that it is not important to make links between migration politics and international student mobility. As a matter of fact, during the other research journey (memory work) which I and my participants/co-researchers followed, the porosity of migration categories became a central point of analysis – as the conditions of the research process allowed it to more fully emerge (see chapter 5).

In addition, the very limited time a researcher spends with each interviewee creates a much clearer distinction between the researcher and the researched, despite any efforts to move beyond this. Especially in cases like mine, where I did not meet any of my interviewees prior to our interviews, and then only met them for a very short period of time, the boundaries between us were more rigid; that is, my participants seemed to be very clear as to who was the researcher and who was the researched. In relation to that, both during the interviewing process as well as during the data analysis, I questioned myself repeatedly regarding how my interviewees perceived me. Did they see me as another agent of the university who would expect certain answers from them? Perhaps, in some cases, approaching me as if I were someone from the university that was finally interested in listening to their experiences made them feel happy to talk as much as they did about so many different aspects of their experiences. On the other hand, there were interviews during which I felt

like that the overly rigid boundaries between us made them hesitant to speak to me, let's say openly, about their experiences; they appeared to be very wary of me. For instance, when Jawad was hesitating to disclose that he sent a fake application to the library, I had very little time to find the right balance between making him feel that it was ok to tell me, while avoiding 'pushing' him in a direction that he did not want to go in. If we had not managed to find a way to connect at this point, a way that made him feel 'safe' to disclose how he felt about being racially discriminated against, I would not have had the opportunity to explore this aspect of his international student experiences with him.

Most importantly, I would like to underline that the time frame of research is also influenced by the way in which the researcher conceptualises experience. I suggest that a longer time frame would have been more compatible with the way I conceptualise experience in this project; that is, as I have already mentioned in chapters 2 and 3 and as I will explain further in chapter 4, I do not approach experience as being "contained" inside the individual, nor our memory as some sort of "vessel" which can "preserve" or "store up" our fixed experiences of past events (Middleton and Brown, 2005, p. 224). Brown and Middleton (2005), engaging with the work of Bergson, develop a conceptualisation of experience which is sensitive to duration and change. I am very sympathetic with this conceptualisation, as it offers an analysis of experience that does not solidify it either within in us, or as fixed to a set time of our past. Instead, according to Brown and Middleton (*ibid.*), our experiences continuously change as they pass through multiple aggregates. Given this, our experiences and their meanings can be unlimitedly re-worked.

I noticed that when the research participants have little time to talk about their experiences they are more inclined to provide the interviewer with as complete and comprehensive interpretations of these experiences as they can. I have three suggested scenarios as to why this happens. The first one, is that they simply find it more appropriate to turn any messiness there is in their experiences into a concrete narrative, in order for the interviewer to be able to

follow their story. The second, is related to the fixed meanings we usually attribute to our experiences and the resistance we have to re-visiting and re-working them. Given this, only having a limited amount of time does not help the researcher to devise ways to overcome this initial resistance. Relatedly, the third hypothesis, has to do with noticing that even when my interviewees gave different versions of their experiences during their interview, we were still not able to bring all these versions together and make them the basis for delving further together into the multiplicity of their experiences. Only during the data analysis, had I the time to tease out and foreground the messiness and multiplicity of their experiences – something we could not achieve during the interview process.

Linking such understandings of memory to the way we recollect our experiences, I would say that my interviewees only possessed the one chance to remember their experiences. As I will explain in detail in chapter 4, through the memory work collective process I came to realise – together with my co-memory workers – that we can remember and re-remember our experiences multiple times and every time it is going to be, at least a little bit, different. For instance, a very nice example from the memory work collective, which shows the importance of having time to remember and re-remember concerns one of the memory workers (Natalie). After having outlined, in most of our sessions, one version of why she wanted to leave her home country for good through the route of studying abroad, at one of our final meetings she remembered that her body felt asphyxiated due to the idea of staying in her country and having to work in a business environment. This is to say, it was only after months of discussing her experiences that she remembered or stopped forgetting how she had embodied certain experiences and what this embodiment enabled.

Furthermore, during memory work, the adding of new dimensions and layers to the ‘same’ experiences was facilitated by the collective nature of the research. First of all, different versions of one aspect of the international student experience – let’s say experiences with student visas – effortlessly emerged, from the first moment of discussing this together, simply because each memory

worker brought different insights to our discussion. As memory work offers fertile ground for research and analysis to become a “collective process”, the commonalities among international students’ experiences and the common tensions around them could be discussed and analysed during the very process of research (Haug, 1987, p. 36). However, in the case of interviews, the commonalities among international students’ experiences, could only be knitted together during the data analysis. Even when some of these issues arose, as in the case of Jawad, who spoke about other international students being discriminated against, or as in the case of my Chinese middle class participants who also expressed common struggles, the opportunity does not exist to come together collectively to co-discuss and co-analyse these experiences. This illustrates a serious limitation of one-to-one interviews, as they fail to appropriately take account of, the manner in which (individual or collective) and the settings through which, our memories are enacted as aspects of how we remember our experiences. That is, the very process of triggering memories of our experiences can alter the perception of these experiences (Middleton and Brown, 2005).

Thus, as I explained in chapter 2, during the interview part of my research I continued to follow an empirical approach, aligned to Whiteheadian process philosophy, as I am committed to taking an inductive approach to research, as well as appreciating “the unfinished, relational and emergent character of experience” (Brown *et al.*, 2011, p. 512). I have explained in this chapter, why my experiences with interviewing make me feel that this method is not the ideal one for letting the unfinished, relational and emergent character of experience emerge. Putting it differently, when utilising interviews as a method, the researcher can only retrospectively – during the data analysis – tease out these characteristics of experience. Given this, my research experiences also led to my feeling that the greater the gap between researcher and researched that exists, the greater the danger of letting my own perceptions about the subject of research overwhelm the analysis. Although the advantages of researching experience with the help of memory work will become clearer in

the next chapter, I would briefly say here – that during the memory work I had the chance to make clear my position to the other memory workers and to talk about my attachments to the subject, giving them space to develop their own positions to the subject, as well as to agree and disagree with me; in short, to be part of the analysis. Putting it very simply, the fact that we knew each other prior to the beginning of the research, and the long time we spent together during the process of research, helped us to connect and build a trust that enabled us to collectively discover the malleability of our experiences and to explore them as such. Memory work is not viewed as a panacea to the problems of researching experience but merely as another way of engaging with it.

Chapter 4

The Methodology of Memory Work

Throughout this thesis different ways of working with experience and subjectivity are explored. In the current chapter, the methodology of memory work, as I deployed it in an attempt to re-work the interconnections between subjectivity and experience through a collective approach to how we remember past experiences, is explained. Through doing so, interpretations of experience and subjectivity bound up with psychology²⁹ and with social science more generally, are contested, insofar as the “value of individualism has become the norm” within these academic fields (Henriques *et al.*, 1998, p. 10).

This does not mean, however, that subjectivity and experience are – *per se* – the wrong concepts, for a social researcher to utilise, if their intention is to ‘shake’ the privileging of individualism. Although it might be difficult to imagine how experience can be disassociated by the individual, the methodology of memory work proves the hesitation towards or even the total mistrust in experience unnecessary. For instance, let us for a moment open up for scrutiny Joan Scott’s (1993) valid argument that experience can be a dangerous conceptual tool, as it is all too easily treated as the most authentic evidence of how people live and how people are, without looking at the socio-political production of their experiences. According to Scott (1993), social scientists, and especially historians of difference, use experience as the individual’s truest account of how they have lived their lives as different

²⁹ Henriques *et al.* wrote the first edition of their book in 1984 in which they set the foundations of a critique against traditional psychology and the notion of the unitary, rational subject. Psychology has changed since the first edition of the *Changing the Subject* (see the development of critical psychology since the 1980s up to now or the multiple feminist approaches to psychology). However, in the forward of the 1998 edition, Henriques *et al.*, invite us to notice that the unitary, rational subject still prevails in social sciences because of the dualisms between “social and cognitive, content and process, the intentionality of agents and determination by structures, the subject as constituted or constitutive” (ibid., p. ix). Importantly, the main argument of the authors is that those dualisms “function at the heart of psychology” (ibid., x), and that is the reason why, we should focus on re-working psychology, if we want to move social science away from individualism. Ten years later, a community of critical and social psychologists as well as other social scientists came together to continue the reworking and re-thinking of new approaches to psychology, and its main concern: the production of subjectivity and its relation to experience (Blackman *et al.*, 2008).

people (e.g. women/men, heterosexual/ homosexual) compared to the 'normal majority'. Scott (1993) suggests that such a focus on experience serves to essentialise identity and to reproduce, instead of questioning, the established categories of representation (e.g. women/men, heterosexual/ homosexual), and hence should not be taken as a point of departure for researching and conceptualising difference. None the less, Scott's mistrust of experience is not sufficient to prevent her from acknowledging its significance as a conceptual lens through which one can analyse everyday life. Given this, a focus on experience should not be altogether abandoned, but rather reworked in order to capture the processes that underlie the production of identities, instead of taking them for granted (*ibid.*, pp. 397-415).

Memory work provides those engaged in social and psychological research with tools which enable the exploration and analysis of experience "without positing experience as foundational to subjectivity or identity" (Stephenson and Kippax, 2007, p. 126). In other words, memory work is very clearly situated in favour of utilising the concept of experience. It involves an act of reclaiming experience insofar as, through it, experience is analysed collectively. That is, memory work's integral contribution is the collective analysis of experience – which means that during the very process of research, experience is not approached as being an individual's possession, but as socio-politically produced. Memory work is a feminist political methodology which questions the immunity of experience to the historical era it belongs to. Given this, the methodological tools offered by memory work can help social research to go beyond the common, a-historical and a-political interpretations of experience as nothing other than an expression of what is going on inside the psyche of the individual. Thus, it arguably disrupts the nourishment of methodological individualism (which also fuels socio-political individualism) that is so embedded in humanist theory and research. Working in a group that shares a common understanding of experience as socio-politically produced, memory workers try to remember, re-remember and re-work their experiences regarding a certain topic (e.g. female sexualisation) collectively. Moreover,

memory workers seek to mobilise those forces of resistance inherent in our experiences, and which are arguably able to disrupt normative modes of existence (ibid.). This is to say, during the memory work process, memory workers are invited to especially turn their focus to those moments when they resisted conforming with normative and expected modes of living in a given situation.

Hence, research into international student experiences could benefit from this approach of a memory work journey, during which the collective acts as “a generator of de-individualization” (Deleuze and Guattari, 2000, p. xiv, introduction by Foucault). That is to say, memory work facilitates the exploration of experience in all its collective and diversified nature. To put it differently, experiences are politically, economically, and institutionally produced, and yet there are always and already unpredictable challenges to their apparent institutional, political and scientific fixity. Hence, situating experience in its context does not mean its capture by social and political norms, but the opposite. This research precisely tries to avoid the reproduction of such norms by treating experience not as fixed and thus congealed into norms or in the hands of the individual, but as always pliable and open to collective reconsideration and rework. Given this, the methodology of memory work is clearly and directly situated politically – insofar as it invites memory workers to explore how their experiences intervene in the socio-political conditions which shape our everyday lives, instead of representing experience as merely formed by such conditions (Stephenson and Papadopoulos, 2006, pp. 50–52).

4.1 The starting point of Memory-Work

What we need is imagination.

(Haug, 1987, p. 71)

Memory-work was initiated in the 1980s, by a group of German, Marxist, feminists (Andresen, Büinz-Elfferding, Haug, Hauser, Lang, Laudan, Lüdenabbbm Neur, Nemitz, Neihoff, Prinz, Rätzzel, Scheu and Thomas) in an attempt to research women's sexualisation by taking experience as a point of departure from mainstream social scientific research, which draws superficial boundaries between the objects and the subjects of research. In other words, the distinction between researchers and researched was challenged, creating a different understanding of experience which is more "collective and co-operative in nature", instead of considering it as the individual's property (Haug, 1987, p. 35). Furthermore, subjectivity itself is approached as potentially free from fixed, expected and controllable norms informed by current socio-political conditions. Instead, contradictions are fully acknowledged and embraced (ibid., p. 40).

However, deciding to look beyond given understandings of women's sexualisation – or of international students and their experiences – is one thing. To actually *go* beyond, challenge and potentially overcome the taken for granted assumptions about women or about international students is a different story. How does one research experience in all its messiness, contradiction and flexibility? As Haug (1987) explains, regarding her collective's research on women's sexualisation, "we found much that was necessary to change: language, perception, logic, emotions. We had to re-evaluate, to question what we had always taken for granted" (ibid., p. 39). Even more importantly, this re-evaluation of experiences is not purely retrospective. It is also a call to remember, or to re-remember, all those times that the taken-for-granted was resisted even during the very process of the reproduction of social norms (ibid., p. 35). In other words, the resistance and acceptance of

social norms exist in a complex relation to each other, often making it difficult to entirely and clearly separate them.

Furthermore, memory work, brings another dimension to the researching of experience; namely that of memory. How we remember needs to be questioned also. Briefly, the methodology of memory work allows space for researching our experiences through remembering them in a non-deterministic and autobiographical way. This is to say, memory work offers the opportunity to free our subjectivities from the notion of the unitary coherent subject, which has come to be like this, or like that, because of an accumulated series of fixed experiences (Stephenson and Kippax, 2007). More specifically, practising the methodology of memory work includes the consideration of memories as existing through a restless process of re-shaping through sharing with others, instead of them being considered as self-representational. As such, the notion of memory as an individual's recollection of a past event, which is clear, fixed, and related to a certain temporality, is challenged. Social and critical psychologists have called this approach to memory '*social remembering*'; which means that people in their everyday lives do not cease to "construct the past as a situated interactional accomplishment, rather than a cognitive operation" (Brown and Reavey, 2013, p. 58; also see Middleton and Brown, 2005; Middleton and Edwards, 1990).

As such, instead of our subjectivity being built or based on once and for all solid, unchangeable memories, which an individual can fully grasp and reflect upon, remembering is understood as a collective process which is always ongoing. That is to say, the way we conceptualise memory speaks directly to our "commitment to a relational and non-individualistic subjectivity" (Taylor, cited in Campbell, 2008, p. 46). Furthermore, the fact that our memories usually correspond to the demands of normative needs and expectations is not denied, yet it is simultaneously challenged insofar as determinism and causality are intentionally excluded from the practice of memory work. Thus, to collectively remember, re-remember and re-experience is an attempt to directly speak to and about the politics of memory and

experience, as it concerns the construction of new conceptualisations of both memory and experience (Campbell, 2008).

4.2 How Memory Work works

Attempting to avoid the usual methodological hurdles which tend to reproduce self-identitarian approaches to experience, Haug (1987) and others developed a set of practices which de-centralise the self as placed at the core of experience. In this approach, the members of a memory work collective co-decide to write about a memory of a particular topic, describing the circumstances as to what took place, but without attempting to give any interpretation. This arguably offers the opportunity to re-visit our experiences differently and to question our previous self-identitarian understandings – as well as our memories of them. The use of the third person (she/he), instead of the first (I), is another means to facilitate this disconnection between self and experience. Although these steps should be flexibly applied and by no means rigidly followed, the basic sequence of memory work proceeds as follows:

1. Write a memory
 2. of a particular episode, action or event
 3. in the third person
 4. in as much detail as is possible, including even ‘inconsequential’ or trivial detail (it may be helpful to think of a key image, sound, taste, smell, touch)
 5. but without importing interpretation, explanation or biography
- (adapted from Crawford *et al.*, cited in (Stephenson and Papadopoulos, 2006, p. 58).

After a memory has been re-visited on paper, the group gathers again in order to discuss the written memories:

1. Each person expresses opinions and ideas about each memory in turn, and
2. looks for similarities and differences between the memories, and links between the memories where their relationships with each other are not immediately apparent. Each person should, in particular, question those aspects of the events which are not readily understandable, but she or he should (try) not (to) resort to autobiography or biography³⁰.
3. Each person identifies clichés, generalisations, contradictions, cultural imperatives, metaphors in the memories etc., and
4. discusses relevant theories, and popular conceptions, sayings and images concerning the topic.
5. Finally, each person examines what is not written in the memories (but what might have been expected to be), and
6. rewrites the memories (individually)

(The steps above are adapted from Stephenson and Papadopoulos, 2006, p. 59).

As such, memory work is not just an invitation to experiment with experience and/or to approach experience as an experiment, but is an attempt to experiment with experiencing our recollections of our experiences in a collective and non-representational way. Thus, it could be argued that memory work does not even “recognise” or identify with any representation; instead it is constantly experimenting with itself and it is always open to rediscovering

³⁰ The biographical mode of recollecting our experiences can lead to the reproduction of a linear and concrete story of ourselves, preventing us from exploring the more “contingent” and “malleable” aspects of our experiences (Stephenson and Kippax, 2007, p. 126).

itself anew. Memory work is, itself, an experience not subordinated to its own methodological identity. Memory work is not being proposed as a solution to the problem of experience, rather as one constructive way of engaging with it.

Furthermore, for Haug (1987) remembering, or re-remembering, or learning how to remember some of our experiences in this way creates the space to re-evaluate them, understand them in the historical context within which they have been produced, and hence de-naturalise them. In memory work, we do not simply write our memories down, rather we are literally called on to re-write them, leaving few things the same at the end of the research process. Haug (1987) suggests, that during the writing and the discussion of our memories we come to realise the “radically limited” choices we have previously had to conceive of our experience differently than we did. In fact, it is arguably precisely this realisation that can free us from merely responding in terms that conform with what it is expected of us to experience (*ibid.*, p. 43,58).

Returning the discussion to my research, – for international students, how they are supposed to experience the university is almost already pre-decided for them. The range of institutional choices they have been not only prefigured by the various parties involved in the entire international student aggregate – as some of my interviewee’s accounts have shown so far and as the accounts of the memory workers will show in the following chapters – but also ‘radically limited’. The very fact that they are institutionally categorised as international students has practical implications for them. All the ‘special services’ devised and provided for them aim to solidify their experiences, as well as their subjectivities, within certain pre-decided structures. In other words, international students are invited to identify themselves with what has come to be called ‘the international student experience’, instead of being permitted the space to form and arrive at their own understandings, conceptualisations, feelings, and practices of experiencing the Global North university – as non-homogeneous international students.

Relatedly, Brown *et al.* (2011), when researching embodied experience through the deployment of memory work, also encountered to overcome the

pressures to comply with the expected norms of experiencing in certain situations. For instance, what they discovered through researching the “experience” of the luminarium³¹ was a “shared anxiety... about not being able to properly “experience” the luminarium” (ibid., p. 503). This is not only an example of a common anxiety regarding pressures to experience what we are supposed to experience, but also the difficulty of communicating the complexity of embodied experience without limiting this to the use of simple and stereotypical linguistic themes. The possible exit from this linguistic trap, suggested by Haug (1987, p. 72), was to incorporate smells, noises, sounds, and colours in written memories in order to bring them closer to the embodied aspects of experience. However, Brown *et al.* (2011) found that the incorporation of sensations is equally, if not even more, problematic. That is, as their main objective concerned how to research embodied experience, the incorporation of senses in the written memories was not enough to solve the issue of how the very process of analysis (of the memories) can be more embodied in order to do justice to the complexity that characterises embodied experience. In other words, it was difficult to distinguish between researching embodied experience and researching how to research embodied experience. According to these authors, this problem concerning conceptualisation cannot merely be solved by including a wider range of our senses in our written recollections. Given this, they suggest the creation of “concepts along the way”; beginning with the concrete and moving towards the abstract (ibid., p. 512). Starting from the concrete and moving towards more abstract conceptualisations of experience is not always easy, but it is one way to research experience without imposing theory on the research which does not emerge from the data. In other words, concepts should be deployed in order to “illuminate *specific concrete experiences* instead of generalising the matter at hand to a *general type of experiences*” (ibid., p. 511, emphasis added).

³¹ A luminarium “consists of a series of large inter-connected tent-like chambers. These are made out of taut, inflated fabric which, when seen from the inside and illuminated only by daylight, radiates vivid colours of red, blue, green, and yellow” (Brown *et al.*, 2011, p. 501).

Indeed, the positivistic epistemological legacy of the obsession with generalisability has been reworked by many academics interested in researching experience. For Haug (1987), the usefulness of thinking in terms of the generalisability of experience lies in the fact that experiences carry the social, historical and political conditions of the production of those experiences and, by re-visiting them, we shed light on these very aspects of their socio-political production, as well as on any interruptions and ruptures in the processes of their production. This is not to say that all experiences of, for instance, international students are the same, but that different experiences can potentially offer indications of the particular social-political conditions which produce them. Brown *et al.* (2011) similarly suggest that research should begin from the concreteness of experience and that it is then for the memory work collective to co-decide what does or does not connect different experiences together.

Before I conclude this chapter by providing the reader with a brief summary of our experience with using memory work in this project, I want to pose and explore one last question about the methodology of memory work which has troubled me since I began experimenting with it.

4.3 Does memory work belong in the field of discursive psychology?

Discursive psychology is a field with multiple branches, though I would suggest that the two main commonalities among all the different forms and shapes discursive psychology can take are the focus on everyday life and a more inductive approach to research. This is to say, according to discursive psychologists, psychology should not be imprisoned in the ivory tower of academic theory, but should explore how psychological concepts are used in everyday social interactions – during simple everyday conversations (for more details see (Edwards and Potter, 1992). Thus, because discursive psychology is such a diverse field and can take the form of discourse analysis, conversation analysis, socio-linguistics and so on, I am not confident enough (given that I am not a psychologist myself, let alone a discursive one) to say that memory work

fits entirely within the field of discursive psychology. However, it certainly resonates with many aspects of it.

Despite the fact that Haug (1987) and her colleagues do not use the term 'discursive', like discursive psychology they do seem to deal with the discursive construction of experience (Harden and Willig, cited in Stephenson and Kippax, 2007, p. 127). This is to say, discourse is contained in everyday life not simply as language, but also as a set of socio-political practices, which shape and give certain meanings to our experiences (Hall, 1992). In fact, during their exploration of female sexualisation, Haug (1987) and others make the connection between applied language and discourse. As such, they suggest that the language we use should be problematised, as it is a particularly solid and solidifying material, and hence very difficult to work and rework. Instead of language being a malleable material through which we can rework the production of our experiences and our subjectivities, language from our school days (or even earlier) keeps imposing fixed and dominant discourses of femininity (/ masculinity) on us.

Interestingly however, Haug (1987) and her colleagues go beyond the effects that language and discourse have on our lived experiences. For them, it is far more important and far more interesting to speak and write about our experiences, not simply in order to expose that our experiences are in part discursively constructed, but so as to collectively remember how our experiences evoke all the points of tension with such discourses, as well as our attempts to rework them. Thus, instead of being passively subjected to them, we struggle with them – and it is this realization that serves to indicate our active participation in their formation. For instance, what can international student experiences say about the discourses that support the global university? What are the struggles of international students with them? What do their experiences say about discourses related to migration politics, such as border securitisation or neoliberal discourses like employability? Memory work invites us to start with experience, and not with discourses or socio-political structures, in order to explore, for example with regard to international

students, not how they passively internalise normative modes of existence but how they struggle with them how they resist them and how they appropriate them.

Furthermore, Haug (1987) and her colleagues offer another way to approach and explore experience as something more than the by-product of discourses and structures. By paying particular attention to those aspects of our experiences which appear meaningless – the unnamed or the not-yet-named, the absences, the silences and most importantly to the contradictions and the ruptures in our stories – memory work creates the space to witness that which escapes the predictability and controllability of experience. In other words, during memory work a space can be constructed which helps the quieter, the open-ended, the more imperceptible, and hence the non-representable aspects of our experiences to emerge.

4.4 Our experience with memory work

As the reason our memory work collective was formed was for the purpose of generating data for my doctoral thesis, this meant that I had to be the one with a specific research plan in mind during the memory work sessions, as well as the only one of the collective that would write the final analysis of the data – for this thesis. As I do not officially belong to the category ‘international students’ (I am an EU student), I did not take part in the writing of memories but only in the discussions that followed. So, for instance, while I could not write about my memories concerning my student visa application (as I did not need a student visa in order to study in the UK), I did feel that I could contribute to the collective discussion of such experiences when I felt I had something useful to say. Given this, my role in the memory work collective was a bit unconventional. Despite being ‘the main researcher’, I kept feeling that I needed to maintain a balance between keeping our discussions on track with regard to my research project and simply contributing to the discussion through articulating my experiences of participating in the global university. Another challenge for me was that I had already completed the interview

section of my research before we started the memory work sessions, which meant that frequently I had to decide if I should share some of the interviewees' experiences with the memory workers when they appeared to be relevant to the discussions we were having. What I finally decided to do, was share what my interviewees had said to me, only when I felt I needed to do so in order to challenge fixed ideas of the memory workers. For instance, one of the memory workers – Sunny – kept representing herself as a unique case of an Asian international student. As we did not have any other Asian memory worker in our collective, I decided to tell her that during the interviews with other Asian international students I had discovered many cases similar to hers. In other words, my main goal and main challenge was to keep an appropriate balance between being the main researcher and the only writer of this project, and letting myself also become immersed in and surprised by the collective process of remembering and reworking the collectives' international student experience.

As such, although it would have been very interesting to fully co-research and co-write this project and despite the very important analysis which was taking place during our memory work sessions, it would be impossible to do so as we were all doctoral candidates at the time. Thus, although we dedicated our final session to discussing our experiences with doing memory work – aspects of which are presented in section 6.3 – given my particular position in the memory work collective and the nature of a doctoral thesis, at this point I would like to briefly articulate what I feel memory work contributed to this project.

The combination of: a) the written memories followed by a long discussion of them in a non-personal way (to the extent possible); b) the long term commitment of exploring one topic that was directly relevant to the memory workers from different perspectives; c) beginning from an exploration of each given situation rather than from structures and discourses; and d) the pre-existing connections between the memory workers as well as those that emerged from the process, served to create the space to reclaim the non-

representable aspects of our experiences. Of course, this does not mean the total absence of times at which we intentionally and/or unintentionally represented our experiences in the most clichéd of ways. However, I do feel there was a productivity in this struggle to find ways of expressing our problematic relations with the representations of our experiences and with all the systems that serve to produce and re-produce them, while at the same time creating cracks in these representations through which the 'light' of messiness, contradiction, elasticity, complexity and unpredictability could pass through.

Our experiences ceased to be unchangeable events stuck somewhere in the past but became active malleable materials to work with. As such, memory work liberated our subjectivities and introduced us to the beauty of metamorphosis. More specifically, the process of memory work, by creating a collective space and by stretching the time of research, helped us to re-discover experience as a verb and not as a noun.

I also noticed that whenever we tried to interpret or explain our experiences in a personal way, we found ourselves trapped in an endless cycle of possible explanations as to why and how something happened this or that way. In contrast, the moments when we treated experience, not as the voice of the inner self of each memory worker, but as being capable of giving voice to those aspects of our positions in the world that are still unfolding, are half formed, are in-between, are still in progress, are struggles and points of tension, then our experiences started 'moving' and 'breathing' again, revealing their plasticity.

Furthermore, starting with our experiences also meant starting from a given situation, which helped us to begin by asking "the questions the situation demands" (Stengers, 2008, p. 44). This is by no means an a-historical or apolitical analysis of experience, but one which deals with much more focused questions which speak to and are able to articulate much broader socio-political problems. To provide a brief example, in the next chapter the analysis of the memory work data begins with the discussion of Andromeda's memory, as triggered by the cue *Student Visa*. Andromeda's written memory concerns a

very specific situation; she had just arrived at an airport in the UK with her student visa in hand, and yet she ended up being further examined in a 'special room', because she did not have with her the medical certificate to prove that she was not carrying any dangerous 'exotic' disease. Thus, starting from this specific situation, allowed us to begin discussing together, the many interrelated issues that crisscross the whole international student aggregate – such as the porosity of migration categories, the intense border control related to the fragmentation of borders, the strategic segmentation of international students into distinct manageable categories, and so on.

In the next two chapters selected written accounts and extracts, as well as selected parts of our conversations, are presented and analysed. I have attempted to include as many different aspects of our conversations as possible, in order to illustrate to the reader, the messiness of the process, and the back and forth that was involved in a process of both representing our experiences and creating ruptures in those representations. However, many interesting parts of both the written accounts as well as of our conversations are not presented or discussed, due to the limitation of space and time. For instance, although we experimented with re-writing our memories at the end of every session, and although it would be interesting for the reader to see the difference between the initial accounts and the reconstructed ones, I did not include any of the re-written memories in the analysis chapters. As mentioned previously, I needed to be selective, and as the second set of written accounts did not add much to the analysis which had already been made during our collective conversation, they were left out.

The final point I want to emphasise before I move to the next chapter, is that in some cases my analysis of the data cannot but be entangled with the preliminary analysis (sometimes amateur and less conceptualised, and sometimes more theoretical and conceptualised) which took place during the unfolding of the research. I think this made the analysis 'thicker' and hence stronger, rather than weaker – as once again, when the analysis itself becomes an aspect of the collective's discussions it can serve to illuminate the situations

which the members of the collective are involved in, in ways that make them immediately more relevant, not just for themselves, but more widely as to the topics under discussion.

Chapter 5

Exploring International Student Experiences with the Help of Memory Work

The memory workers were Andromeda, Sunny, Natalie, Bob, Nick and myself (the names used are pseudonyms chosen by them). Nick was with us only for the first session, as he had to go away to engage in his fieldwork soon after the beginning of our memory work journey. We realised, during our first session, that it would be better if he did not join us for further sessions, as it would not have made sense to have him join us via video conference software like Skype given the nature of memory work methodology; the long hours of discussion, the need to read each other's written memories, the long commitment to the project and so on – while Nick had to work long hours on collecting data for his own research project. All the memory workers were international students, studying at a Business School in the UK for a PhD. We were all friends prior to forming the memory work collective. The formation of the memory work collective was straightforward. I sent an email to potential participants, including a few other PhD student friends of mine (who fell into the category international students) and these were the five that responded positively to my email. All our meetings took place in a pub (during non-busy hours) and all our sessions were recorded, with their permission. Our meetings took place every two weeks over a six-month period. There were times when we had to skip a meeting due to members of the collective having other pressing priorities, and there were also times when we could not all be present. Overall though, there was a consistent commitment to the project and a lot of enthusiasm.

To begin our first meeting I introduced them to the methodology of memory work, as Frigga Haug (1987) describes it, and we decided to loosely follow her methodological steps and see where they led us. The first cue I suggested was *Applying to Study Abroad*. We immediately began to explore this cue, in order to understand how the memory work method, works in practice. As the first session was intended in many respects as a trial run, I have only used a few parts from it in the conclusion of the memory work chapters. I

already had in mind several themes that I hoped we would address during our sessions, that were related to covering the research questions I had formulated prior to beginning my data collection. However, as memory work concerns doing research collectively, we also co-decided several of the cues that we worked with. The first cue that all the memory workers were especially keen on discussing was *Student Visa*.

In the first memory work session proper then, which I discuss extensively in sections 5.1.1, 5.1.2 and 5.1.3, the cue of *Student Visa* led our conversation to the memory workers' experiences related to their student migration status. Briefly, throughout these sections the discussion was around the double-edged porosity of all migration categories. This includes porosity as created and manipulated on demand by the national and transnational institutions which are involved in the regulation of global migration flows, and the inherent porosity of all migration movements when they are approached – from a more autonomist perspective on migration – as gestures of freedom. More specifically, the experiences of the memory workers with encountering some of the agents of migration control (e.g. police officers on campus, and UK Visa and Immigration (UKVI) officers), as well with their attempts to get around these controlling practices over international student mobility, created the grounds for further analysis of their experiences in relation to broader issues with regard to contemporary migration politics. The aspects of migration politics discussed in these sections were: a) the fragmentation, as well as the intensification and proliferation, of borders and border control; b) the homogenisation and simultaneous splintering of migrant groups as a control strategy; c) the specific temporality of borders, which can vary or change suddenly – due to policing strategies intended to work against free mobility; and d) the anxieties and hopes shared by most migrants.

As discussed in section 5.2, Natalie's account took the discussion of student migration another step further by disconnecting her migration journey from any aspirations concerning gaining citizenship of the country – approaching, as such, something closer to an autonomist point of view. In

particular, Natalie remembered that for her, being able to study abroad was initially an escape from her home country and the socio-political situation there. She wanted to study abroad in order to eventually remain in the UK and become a UK citizen. Interestingly though, over the time and course of her migration journey her subjectivity altered to no longer be in this way attached to any nation state or any citizenship rights.

Having discussed representable aspects of the memory workers' experiences (such as, their selective inclusion in the global university through the limited incorporation of their mobility) as well as non-representable aspects of their experiences (such as, the creation of ruptures in the controlling practices throughout their student migration journey), section 5.3 moves to explore less perceptible practices of escape. In particular, the cue *Learning in the Classroom as an International Student* triggered a discussion around the active, and yet imperceptible participation of international students in the production of the international student experience in a global university where certain western pedagogical and intellectual modes of knowledge production have been historically established. Arguably, the accounts and the examples of the memory workers indicate that such imperceptible practices (for instance, remaining silent in the classroom) are material actions of subversion, which can potentially even undo the global university's attempts to include them through selectively excluding the intellectual and pedagogical experiences international students carry with them.

The concluding part of this chapter (5.4) moves on from the memory workers' insights into representational strategies with respect to international student experiences and into the reclaiming of the non-representable aspects of their experiences, in order to situate international student migration within the current post-Fordist capitalist social organisation. That is to say, contemporary capitalist production primarily feeds into the exploitation of experience, subjectivity and mobility – and international students' mobility, subjectivities and experiences are no exception in this respect. None the less, by approaching the struggles of the memory workers discussed throughout this chapter from

an autonomist point of view (e.g. Hardt and Negri, 2000), I conclude by emphasising the impossibility of reducing the experiences, subjectivities and mobility of international students merely to capitalist valorisation.

5.1 *Student Visa as a cue*

5.1.1 Mutations of Migration Categories

At the conclusion of our first meeting I asked the memory workers to suggest the cue for our next session. They all immediately expressed an interest in exploring the cue *Student Visa* together. Andromeda, Natalie, Sunny and Bob had memories of the student visa as related to a multiplicity of practices, which take different forms and shapes according to the specific situations and contexts they take place within. Although discussions around the student visa could have begun by considering the UK government's initiatives to impose looser or tighter regulations regarding post-study work visas, or the amount of hours international students are permitted to work during their studies, or controls against visa fraud, the process of memory work instead enabled us to begin discussing the diverse experiences, struggles, processes and minor practices associated with student visa/status and the memory workers' specific turbulent relations with control. Following the logic outlined in Chapter 4 – starting with concrete experience instead of overreaching discourses or structures – the point of departure for our discussions became the everyday experiences of the memory workers, instead of the state's attempts to control them. The following account comes from Andromeda. In this written memory, she describes, not the application for her student visa but her arrival as an international student at a UK airport, bringing with her all the necessary documents apart from a medical certificate:

Andromeda arrived in the UK after an 11-hour flight from [an African country]. She had not much time to prepare for this arrival so she was very stressed. As she arrived at the airport, she had to queue up in order to go through the border agency folks. That 2-hour long queue exhausted her. A few months before, she had travelled to the UK from France and waiting to

go through was not that daunting. She remembers how irritated and disappointed she was when she saw the immigration officers were treating some students before her. They were not used to the accent and were asking the officers to repeat what they were saying [and] the officers were laughing. The daunting process was not over. When her turn came, she was told she should have gone through a medical test prior to coming to the UK. Given this had not be[en] done, she was not allowed to go through. Instead, she had to have the test done at the airport itself. She was accompanied in a strange room, had to wait again with other worried-looking people. After this process, Andromeda realised she had missed her coach to [City X], had no bankcard on her, only cash. All she could do is asking [from the same country as her]-looking girl to buy her the ticket with her card and she'd give her the cash [...] Andromeda waited two more hours before her midnight coach would come. She remembered how exhausted, sad and anxious she was: Courses were to start the next day.

After reading the above memory, all the memory workers rushed to ask Andromeda why she chose to talk about this memory and not another one that was more 'directly' connected to the topic of student visas. Andromeda explained that, for her, that specific part of the process was of special significance, as it had been totally unexpected:

Andromeda: Yeah, I had everything prepared...all the documents and everything and they could have said no to my visa application but they didn't. So, I was confident that this is it. "Now, they cannot really find something to stop me from entering the country". Plus, noticing the level of the English of the other students, I was, you know, "OK I can speak better English than them, so I will be fine". But then, I go there and the officer asks me for the medical certificate and I had no idea about it. So, I was led to a room where I stayed for two hours, [and was] examined there.

Sunny: Yeah, I know what you mean. I haven't never been in the room, but once my mum did. She came to visit me and she couldn't speak English at all, you know, so I heard my name, calling me from the speakers to go and to find her in that room. And they didn't even allow her to call me, or anything.

Andromeda: Yeah, but the thing is that when you have a student visa you feel that you are more privileged. For instance, when I was waiting in the queue with the rest of the non-EU people, I was feeling quite confident. And then all of a sudden I felt like an illegal immigrant; I felt dirty. I had to go to the room to be examined. And after this horrific process was done, I felt even more lost and anxious. I was *in* the country but I had no English bank account to buy a bus ticket. I had to recognise this girl [from the same country as me] who was nice enough to buy the ticket for me (her emphasis).

The collective discussion proceeded along similar lines. Initially, all the memory workers agreed that having a student status provides you with the illusion of security, insofar it makes you feel “clean” and “innocent” compared to other non-EU migrants. As the memory workers specifically mentioned, although the student visa draws a distinct line between EU and non-EU students, at the same time it draws another line between non-EU students and other non-EU migrants, whether they come to the UK legally or illegally.

In these distinctions between migration statuses drawn and discussed by the memory workers, I see an evocation of three interrelated dimensions exposing the stratifying nature of migration politics. Firstly, the meticulous divisions and sub-divisions of those on the move; EU and non-EU migrants, legal and illegal migrants, high-skilled and low-skilled migrants, coming from countries perceived and labelled as ‘terrorist’ or ‘non-terrorist’ – especially after 9/11 (Giroux, 2005) and the more recent ‘terrorist’ attacks in Paris and Brussels – as well as the whole discourse of securitisation which supports these divisions – to name only some of the endless explicit and implicit categorisations of migrants, let alone asylum seekers and refugees. Secondly, the blurriness and the porosity of these demarcations are brought out, through for instance Andromeda’s feelings of drifting in and out of different migration categories: “when I was waiting in the queue with the rest of the non-EU people, I was feeling quite confident. And then all of a sudden I felt like an illegal immigrant; I felt dirty – I had to go to the room to be examined”.

Thirdly, I also perceive a manipulation of the inherent blurriness of migration categories and/or the creation of new blurry categorisations by the migrants themselves, in order to escape an asphyxiating situation or in order to secure their position according to any given situation. Examples include Andromeda and Natalie's confident feelings about possessing better chances of passing through airport control without trouble due to their possession of advanced English skills, compared to some of the other non-EU migrants or even other non-EU international students.

Before I move to a more detailed theoretical analysis of these dimensions, I would like to continue exploring our discussions, as Andromeda, Bob, Natalie and Sunny began to discuss more and more of their everyday experiences of being an international student inside a higher education institution and a country which kept reminding them as to the restricted temporality and the easily altered nature of their migration status, as well as their experiences of manoeuvring around these blockages. As such, the analysis of the broader aspects of migration politics as well as the struggles and the tactics of those on the move, was further enabled by the collective exploration of the memory workers' experiences.

5.1.2 Training you into being an 'international student' and the Periodic Reminders

Andromeda's written account concerned a very specific event of a type that the other memory workers did not really experience. Yet, it served to spark many diverse memories related to similar attempts at regulation over international students' mobility. More specifically, the memory workers brought some of their day-to-day encounters with the UKVI, police officers, administrators and even special university tutors responsible for 'teaching' international students about student visas, into the discussion. These, rather arbitrary, gatekeepers make international students feel like they are dependent on them. I call them arbitrary because as the experiences of the memory workers indicate, the way

gatekeeping works can change from case to case and/or from time to time; be performed in unexpected and unpredictable ways; and even feel completely random and unjustified. Even more importantly, our discussion revealed the everyday tactics deployed by international students in an attempt to 'pass' through these 'gates'. Their tactics vary, from rehearsing answers to the questions they expect to be asked, to lying, being cynical, sarcastic, or even pretending to be dumb.

Andromeda: Sometimes you have rehearsed the answers so many times that you go there and answer questions that they didn't even ask. And they are like "But I didn't ask that question". And you say, "I am sorry, I am tired. I had a very long flight".

Sunny: I know, I know exactly what you mean. But once, one specific migration officer at the airport ask my boyfriend if he has a specific number that all student [who study that particular subject] have. And he didn't have it written down somewhere or anything. But the officer said that we will not be allowed in the country if we don't show them this specific number. So, he started checking on the internet, on his mobile, and the internet was so slow... but in the end he found it. We were both sweating there. This question was totally unexpected!

[I] also remember when, I went to the police to register. You know, the police officer who comes into the campus for international students. It was a woman and I remember that she never ever smiled, and always demanding so many documents. So, I was scared of her. That's why I just tried to smile a lot to her and if I didn't have some of the documents she asked for, I was playing the stupid: "Oh I am sorry, I didn't know".

Andromeda: That's funny! But seriously now, having to pass through all these procedures makes you feel like an alien. It is really a constant reminder that you are a foreigner, an alien. Sometimes having a student status makes you feel like, I don't know, like an elite alien, like... like a 'V.I.P. alien' [a lot of laughter], and other times you feel as illegal as it gets.

Sunny: That is the thing; all these questions from these people make you feel that you are not welcome here. I remember, when I came here to study, in one of the first weeks, there was a visa workshop but it was overlapping with one of our modules. So, I went to library to ask them if there is another workshop cause I can't attend this one. But the woman told me that there is not, and she strongly recommend me to attend the workshop instead of going to our module. *She said that the visa workshop is much more important for my future here compare to a single module* (emphasis added).

The memory workers referred to these encounters with the police, migration officers and university tutors as *periodic reminders* of the fact that they were international students, and hence only temporarily 'welcome' in the UK. In fact, international students are still included in net migration statistics. UK universities, along with numerous campaigning bodies, participated in heated debates around the exclusion of international students from net migration figures, in 2015 (SI News: Independent News for International Students, 2015). Nevertheless, the UK government, and specifically the Home Office secretary Teresa May³², not only enforced tighter regulations on international student visas³³, but also refused to omit international students from their drive to lower net migration numbers (ibid.).

Verbalising the implicit and explicit hostility against international students, during the unfolding of our discussion, triggered many more embodied feelings of anger, unfairness, humiliation and disappointment – especially when compared to the more moderate feelings expressed in the written accounts³⁴. For example:

Bob: This is a big problem. You gave me a visa to study here...

³² In 2015 Teresa May was still the Home Office Secretary.

³³ Including tougher English tests. I will return to the more controversial regulations concerning international student mobility, imposed by Teresa May, later in this chapter (in section 5.1.3).

³⁴ Apart from Andromeda's account, all the other written accounts concerned the visa application process and anxieties surrounding it.

Andromeda: Yes, let me live! LET ME LIVE [pretending to shout]!

Bob: Exactly! Every time they check on you, it works like an electric fence. You know that you are free to move only within certain parameters. They teach you, they train you, that the moment you go close to the borders, you will get an electroshock.

In other words, these accounts expose the fact that coming from outside the EU, or possessing different cultural habits, does not make these memory workers feel much like international students. Micro practices of surveillance frame them as, and attempts to shape them into, the homogenising institutional category 'international students'. Even more worryingly, although international students are strategically homogenised on the basis of their non-EU migration status, they are further subdivided into smaller distinct groups depending on whether they come from countries in the Global North or from specific countries in the Global South. As Bob's account indicates, coming from a country in the Global North places you in a 'more privileged' international student sub-category (as there is no need to register with the police), than those international students who come from certain countries in the Global South:

For me, to be honest with you, coming from the US, it was not so difficult. That's why my [written] memory was not as traumatic as Sunny's or Andromeda's. I mean being from the U.S. you *obviously* don't need to go to the police. But when I read the information sent from the university, I thought I might also need to go to the police. I remembered that I was wondering why I should go to the police. And then I just tried to rationalize it as another bureaucratic step I have to pass. But then when I came here and I found out I don't need to go to the police, I felt relieved to be honest with you (emphasis added).

Bob's comment is particularly interesting as he begins from the normalised assumption that coming from the U.S., you "obviously" do not need to register – yet soon after he reveals his ambivalence and confusion concerning police registration. At the beginning of his account, he seemed to rush to distinguish his situation from Sunny and Andromeda's – but this distinction was made online in retrospect. That is to say, to not register with the police when one comes from the U.S. only became normalised for him after his UK higher education institution made it clear that he did not need to register for this reason. He initially believed that he also needed to register as he was an international student. Bob also mentioned that he found the whole police registration policy obscure, so tried to rationalise it as merely another step in the process. Of course, he did not deny his relief when he found out the good news.

5.1.3 The segmentation of mobility

The periodic reminders, that the memory workers talked about, work as multiple points of control by means of their continuous splintering of international students into smaller and smaller groups, such as those who need to register with the police³⁵ and those who do not, those who need to bring a medical certificate with them to the UK and those who do not. Given this, they are simultaneously homogenised and heterogenised – as based on differences imposed on them by institutional power, not based on differences they already have carried with them³⁶. In other words, all these categorisations serve to

³⁵ If an international student comes from one of the following countries she/he needs to register with the police; Afghanistan, Algeria, Argentina, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Belarus, Bolivia, Brazil, China, Colombia, Cuba, Egypt, Georgia, Hong Kong, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Libya, Moldova, Morocco, North Korea, Oman, Palestine, Peru, Qatar, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Tajikistan, Tunisia, Turkey, Turkmenistan, United Arab Emirates, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Yemen, – and also if they are stateless or using a non-national travel document. (Gov.uk website, 2015, see <https://www.gov.uk/register-with-the-police>)

³⁶ There are many more subcategories which we did not talk about and which draw an even clearer demarcation line between Global North and Global South countries; for instance, international students from Switzerland have the same rights as EU students although Switzerland belongs neither to the EU nor to the EEA. There is also a financial stratification of potential international students; those students who cannot prove in advance that they have

create new divisions amongst higher education students in general, and amongst international students in particular – at the same time as there are so many attempts to ‘facilitate’ the overcoming of differences (cultural, habitual) between international students’, and home and EU students. As has been extensively explored in chapter 1, there is a long list of literature with respect to international students which is full of suggestions as to how to ‘create bridges between different worlds’ inside, as well as beyond, the university campus (e.g. Ramachandran, 2011; Burdett and Crossman, 2012, p. 213; Coles and Swami, 2012).

However, this double process of homogenising international students into one very broad category, while simultaneously creating manageable distinct groups is not as contradictory as it might sound. Both, the homogenisation as well as the selective segmentation serve to fuel controllability over the *mobility* of international students. The *homogenisation* of international students *encourages international student mobility* from all over the world to the UK,³⁷ while *the divisions and subdivisions* become the *safeguards* as to *which kind* and *which degree* of mobility is allowed, and *when* and *where* this can take place.

Needless to say, it is not only international students’ mobility that is regulated and controlled through segmentation. The memory workers’ experiences merely confirm what we already know to be practices of nation states over many years; the strategic production of different classifications of migrants and their statuses in order to turn them into easily manageable subjects (Anderson, Sharma and Wright, 2009; Anderson, 2010). However, the case of international students evokes the existence of an additional dimension

enough money already in their bank accounts to support them for their studies in the UK cannot even apply for a student visa (Gov.uk website, 2015, see <https://www.gov.uk/tier-4-general-visa>). In addition, there are many more implicit differentiations among international students, as indicated by Jawad’s case – when he applied for a job in the university library but was repeatedly rejected. This continued to happen until he changed his name to an English one on the application form and only then received a call about the job. In the meantime, a friend of his from Canada, studying the same course as him, had applied for the same job and received a call immediately following her first application.

³⁷ Of course this means only international students who have the financial means to support themselves during their stay in the UK and at the same time contribute to the UK’s economy.

to the already established mechanisms of control. Arguably, the accounts of the memory workers expose the fragmentation of contemporary borders, which appear, disappear and reappear as needed for the constant retaining of control over the autonomy of mobility – not only on a national level, but also on a transnational level (Papadopoulos, Stephenson and Tsianos, 2008). Nation states themselves have been segmented and parts of them participate in establishing new and old modes of control over migration flows. For instance, UK universities, the Home Office, the UK police, the UKVI, the migration offices located at the UK airports, are parts of the UK nation state which have an active role in the controllability of global migration movements, as the discussion so far has shown.

In most cases borders are no longer flat walls which control migration flows at the nation-state level through absolute exclusion or very strictly regulated inclusion of specific groups – e.g. the case of legal guest workers (Mezzadra and Neilson, 2013). Contemporary borders constantly proliferate, by becoming increasingly sophisticated. As the example of international students illustrates, borders are simultaneously selectively inclusive and brutally exclusive through encouraging, and at the same time intervening in and dividing, migration flows. Furthermore, the clear-cut distinction between the exclusivity and the inclusivity of borders becomes more complicated due to their temporal nature. That is to say, borders are not only regulators of space but also regulators of time and as such influence the speed, “the velocity”, of migrants’ movements (*ibid.*, p. 132). For instance, during our student visa session, Natalie told us that she was very worried about her partner because he was getting very close to the end of his PhD without having found a job or a postdoctoral research opportunity. This means that he will most probably need to return to the country he came from immediately after he concludes his studies, as the UK’s post-study work visa was abolished in 2012. Natalie’s partner felt very upset as after having spent so much time and money as an

international student in the UK, he was now going to be 'kicked out' of the country³⁸.

Adding another layer, I would say that Andromeda's initial written memory and the feelings it provoked illuminated one more aspect of, and another function of, fragmented temporal borders; the blurriness and the porosity of the boundaries of migration categories. To put it differently, in spite of the memory workers' initial perceptions of their migration status as a solidly safe and privileged category of migrant, they all agreed that being an international student and having a student visa does not necessarily prevent international students from sharing common experiences with other migrant groups. All the memory workers shared common anxieties with migrants whose free movement appears to be dependent on state power and/or certain national and transnational institutions. Andromeda, Bob and Sunny's words presented a few pages previously concerned exactly these feelings as to not being welcome in the country.

Bob: Exactly! Every time they check on you, it works like an electric fence. You know that you are free to move only within certain parameters. They teach you, they train you, that the moment you go close to the borders, you will get 'an electroshock'.

The accounts of the memory workers show how the fragmentation and the temporality of borders also affect the level of porosity of different migration categories. This is to say, according to where and when the borders are thinner or thicker, the 'skin' around the migration categories becomes more or less porous, and such shifts can be slow or rapid. For instance, one moment Andromeda was waiting in an airport queue as an international student ready and confident to pass through airport security control without any hassle, and the next moment she was feeling like an illegal migrant ready to be sent home;

³⁸ Her partner did indeed have to leave the UK after he completed his PhD as he had not managed to find a job or a postdoctoral research, while Natalie moved to another North European country after she was accepted as a postdoctoral researcher by one of the universities there.

“And then all of a sudden I felt like an illegal immigrant; I felt dirty-I had to go to the room to be examined”. When she was finally allowed into the country, she felt even more confused; “And after this horrific process was done, I felt even more lost and anxious. I was IN the country but I had no English bank account to buy a bus ticket”.

The fear and the anxiety expressed in Andromeda’s memory, as well as through the words of the rest of the memory work collective, seem to signal another aspect of today’s politics of migration grounded on the “deportation regime” (De Genova and Peutz, 2010). Engaging with the work of De Genova’s and Peutz’s (2010) work on deportability (see also De Genova, 2005) Mezzadra and Neilson (2013, pp. 142) discuss in detail and stretch the point that “various degrees of illegalization” affect the lives and the everyday experiences of all people on the move despite their migration status. The double threat of illegalization and deportability “hangs over the heads not only of refugees and asylum seekers” but over the heads of most migrants as the vast majority of migration statuses are designed to be fragile in contemporary configurations of migration flows (ibid., p. 145). The intense feelings of anxiety, fear and frustration described by the memory workers (e.g. Sunny’s comments “We were both sweating there”; “I was so scared for her [meaning her mum]”), powerfully show how the threat of illegalization and potential deportability become embodied experiences, no matter how unlikely is the scenario to be deported in the end. Furthermore, thinking once more with Mezzadra and Neilson (2013) the police station, the room in which Andromeda and Sunny’s mother were kept, and myriad other physical and virtual spaces could be understood as temporary detention spaces. During this temporality, their freedom of mobility was suddenly questioned and put on hold without any warning or much explanation. I repeat one final time the example provided by Sunny, because I suggest it exemplifies exactly these threat-discourses which spread fear amongst migrants while sustaining policing over migration movements:

I remember, when I came here to study, in one of the first weeks, there was a visa workshop but it was overlapping with one of our modules. So, I went to library to ask them if there is another workshop cause I can't attend this one. But the woman told me that there is not, and *she strongly recommend me* to attend the workshop instead of going to our module. *She said that the visa workshop is much more important for my future here compare to a single module* (emphasis added).

Ivana³⁹ also shared her anxieties and the uncertainty she feels about her presence in the UK

Me: Did you have to go to the police station when you came here in order to register?

Ivana: I didn't. I have to register with the police, but I did it in the university because they come two or three days in the beginning.

Me: How do you feel about that?

Ivana: I don't like it because I always feel ... I don't feel good about that. I would not say as a criminal or something, but it feels like they're really warning you and they really want you to leave. Yeah, because they always ... when I registered with the police ... not now, last time was different when I had a job permit ... work permit, but before it always had a feeling that, "Are you leaving? Are you sure? Are you for sure leaving? So when you finish you're definitely leaving, yeah?" And it makes you understand that they don't want you in this country. *That gives you a very straightforward feeling that you better don't do something wrong and you better leave soon, but ...* and not to reveal a lot of information, so you just give straightforward answers and no details where you got the money from or the scholarship or not, just ... yes, I'm leaving (emphasis added).

³⁹ To reiterate, Ivana is an interviewee of mine who was introduced to me by Natalie. She had spent many years in the UK as both a Master's and PhD student, and she had just begun working as a lecturer at the same UK university where she had studied for her PhD.

But of course, threats in order to be effective and successfully lead to a further intensification of policing do not always remain threats – they need sometimes to be acted upon. In August 2012, the then UK Border Agency (UKBA), now the UKVI, revoked London Metropolitan University's licence to sponsor overseas students "after the UKBA's investigations suggested student attendance was not being monitored and many international students had no right to be there" (BBC News, 2 December 2013). As a result, great levels of anxiety and uncertainty spread among international students, with 153 of them specifically "advised to leave the UK or apply for another immigration category" (ibid.). Although the Home Office, which took over the duties of the UKBA, returned London Metropolitan University's licence in April 2013 – with a 12-month probation period – the efficiency of such intense measures of policing was proven. Theresa May (then the Home Secretary), in her attempt to control immigration flows to the UK, also targeted international students – using the same rhetoric as that deployed when the London Metropolitan licence was revoked; of the government's 'honest' fight against those 'student-visa abusers' who attempt to cheat the system by over-staying in the UK (Alderman, 2015). Thus, since 2015, UK universities have been required to adhere to a new and stricter agenda of attendance management procedures. Although the new regulations put exceptional pressure on administrative staff and affect *all* higher education students – as they need to provide evidence of their attendance much more regularly than before (via physical or virtual presence) – the new scheme is especially relevant to international students, as a condition of their student visa is evidence of their full engagement in their programme of study during term-time. If an international student fails to regularly provide evidence of their attendance, the university is under even more pressure to notify UKVI about such supposedly non-fully-engaged international students.⁴⁰ So once again, international students' migration status

⁴⁰ For more information about the new attendance management regulations see: <https://www2.le.ac.uk/offices/sas2/attendance-management>.

is proven to be as fragile as the status of other migrants', with the threat of deportability hanging over their heads too.

However, as with all other migrants (Papadopoulos, Stephenson and Tsianos, 2008), international students also know how to manipulate the grey areas between legality and illegality or, as Glenn (2011, p. 12) calls it, "liminal legality". Her study of undocumented immigrant college students in the U.S. is liminal legality *par excellence*. My international student participants also constantly created ways to utilise fragmentised borders. As previously mentioned, the memory workers developed certain tactics in order to pass through the multiple points of control which regulate and police their mobility. For instance, Sunny sometimes pretends to be stupid: "I was playing the stupid: "Oh I am sorry, I didn't know", and Andromeda prefers the intense rehearsing of answers to expected questions (e.g. during the police registration), while Natalie thinks that plain lying always does the trick:

I know, all these stupid questions, "how long are you planning to stay? What do you want to do after you finish?" Mmm... actually I am not planning to leave the country at all. I came here to study in order to stay here. But of course, you say "yeah yeah I am planning to leave the country as soon as I finish my studies". You just need to say what they like to hear.

In fact, Natalie told us that studying abroad was for her a way to escape from her home country and settle in the UK. She did not just want to study abroad but to migrate. Natalie's statement alluded to her desire to move, to be mobile and cross borders – but not merely as a response to controls over her mobility. In other words, the tactics developed by people on the move, like those above, mentioned by the memory workers, do of course represent a response to controlling practices against free mobility. However, the desire to be mobile is not a response to the imposition of such controls; rather, it is the other way around. The imposition of control is a response to the desires of people to be mobile (Papadopoulos, Stephenson and Tsianos, 2008).

As we did not have sufficient time to explore Natalie's escape⁴¹ in too much detail during our *Student Visa* session, we decided to continue this conversation at our next meeting. Our next cue was *Feeling Homesick*. The memory workers collectively chose this cue but only two of them, as well as myself, were able to attend the session – Natalie and Sunny.

5.2 *Feeling Homesick* as a cue: Roots and Routes

Natalie: ...for me it was the escape first and foremost, and it didn't have the idea of going back or perhaps going back only in a very distant future. But also the very pragmatic kind of perspective of settling and becoming a citizen of a normal country... something like that [...] And even if I would go back and do something there, this status of being citizen of a normal country could keep me protected in a way, which it is probably not the case, of course, it wouldn't matter so much, to be honest but into some extent, I thought...So, initially I had this kind of fixation on that... Now, I think it is changing to be honest... *now I feel that the connection is closer to the place I come from than before and also I thought I could not see any ways of living there or existing there [...]* But when I feel I want to go back after living here is not for finding a good job and shit, but because of the *spaces* I couldn't see they exist before but now I can see myself creating or being involved in. *But before when I was there, I was more focused or exposed to very specific things and now that I have been here I can see that I can find more options there that I never imagined before.* So, they could have never been visible to me before. And that's why there is more and more connection when I go back (emphasis added).

The *Feeling Homesick* cue provided a fresh angle to the discussion we were in the middle of when our previous meeting ended. Partly because we were fewer number and partly because the cue triggered many different feelings, both Natalie and Sunny remembered many more details about the constant shifts in their plans throughout the migration process. Surprisingly enough, the cue did

⁴¹ Natalie talked a bit more about her escape in the *Student Visa* session but as she raised some issues around precarity which are more relevant to the next chapter, I have presented this specific part of our discussion in section 6.2.3. The discussion around her escape, which was more closely connected to the topic of migration, is discussed in this section.

not so much trigger feelings of nostalgia and sadness, but rather more of a sense of gradual change in Sunny and Natalie's subjectivities which enabled them to embrace and/or create alternative ways to live and connect to the world than through relating to one specific nation state. Thus, their migration journeys were not presented as linear but were filled with interruptions and contradictions.

For instance, as the extract above evokes, Natalie's migration journey ceased to be the one big escape from her home country and became instead a multiplicity of small, intentional as well as unintentional, escapes. However, these escapes were not escapes from one place to another one; they were not physical dislocations but dislocations and relocations of her subjectivity. Actually, Natalie no longer wished to escape from her home country, and the UK had ceased to seem an ideal place to live. As she explained, she started looking at her home country through a new lens; a lens through which it was no longer a unified place, but a multiplicity of spaces. She specifically said, that as long as she was living in her country of origin, it was not easy for her to notice all the spaces which enable alternative ways of existing, as she was so exposed to, and influenced by, normative ways of living.

Furthermore, during her very migration journey, Natalie's "fixation" with "becoming a citizen of a normal country" – meaning, in this case, the UK – slowly started to be dismantled. She explained to us that, before she came to the UK, her home country seemed to her as a very conservative country full of corruption. Most of the people appeared to her economically driven, caring only for their personal survival. Given that, she thought that becoming a UK citizen could help open up more possibilities in her life, instead of her becoming trapped in the social and political system of her country.

However, the UK was not as Natalie imagined it. This was particularly true during the four years that she had been living in the UK prior to our memory work taking place – there had been continuous policy changes with regard to international student mobility. Natalie, both in our earlier memory work session and in the one under discussion here, expressed her

disappointment about the continual increase in the number of restrictions being imposed by the UK government. Although in some other memory work sessions⁴² she expressed more optimistic feelings about migrating to the UK following her studies here, during the current session she expressed that she almost feels “trapped inside her international student status” (Natalie’s words). The combination of the UK’s monitoring of international students and the abolition of the post-study work visa made her see the UK as no more special than any other nation state. As such, having a UK citizenship was no longer something to be desired. In fact, escape through mobility was again Natalie’s answer to the limitations she saw in terms of belonging to any one nation state and possessing any citizenship. She had already found a post-doctorate position in another North European country. Despite this, Natalie – as if she wanted to remind herself – mentioned how many interesting spaces and communities she had been involved in during her staying in the UK, and how important and hopeful these experiences were, in comparison with the controlling practices of the state.

As such, Natalie during both the *Student Visa* and the *Feeling Homesick* sections seemed to veer between representing her plans as closely connected to policy changes regarding her international student status, and trying to make sense of how her migration journey had contributed to the transformation of her subjectivity. Her subjectivity does not fit, if it ever did, within any national identity. Her desire for UK citizenship has been replaced by her choice to experiment with different modes of existence and belongingness. A belongingness in communities which transverse and exceed national territorialisations.

Thus, while in the *Student Visa* section I highlighted the segmentation of mobility, and hence the aspect of porosity of migration categories as manipulated by national and transnational forms of domination, Natalie’s account evoked an even more interesting aspect of the porosity of migration

⁴² I will return to Natalie’s expressions of her positive feelings about migrating to the UK in the next chapter.

categories; the porosity and the blurriness among migrations when they are viewed and experienced from the perspective of autonomy of migration. This is to say, there is a commonality amongst migration movements: the shared yearnings and shared struggles to be mobile, and not for institutional representation. To put it differently, Natalie realised that the very migration journey itself, was not so much a journey between physical locations and a chasing after citizenship rights, but a continuous, and yet non-linear, movement among situated spaces and communities, which enable different, new and possibly better ways of living. In this sense, to approach the mobility of international students from an autonomous standpoint means to retrain our senses to perceive migration movements as being both before and beyond control and institutional representation (Martignoni and Papadopoulos, 2014). This is not to say that migration movements are not constrained by monitoring, controlling and policing practices, but that they do not exist because of these practices. On the contrary, monitoring, controlling and policing exists because of migration movements (Papadopoulos, Stephenson and Tsianos, 2008). Needless to say, such an autonomous perspective does not provide any justification for the policing of migration, but rather works an invitation to stop reproducing analyses of migration movements only through the lens of that which is captured, incorporated, exploited and controlled. That kind of mere reproduction of the controllability of migration flows can only serve to facilitate and strengthen the elimination of all the non-representable aspects and experiences of migration, legitimising the controlling practices of all institutions involved in the regulation of mobility.

Thus, I suggest that the memory work sessions discussed so far have evoked both controlling practices over the mobility of international students through the double process of homogenising them into one category while splitting them into distinct manageable groups, as well as international students' desires to evade control and be freely mobile. Although some of the memory workers' tactics and struggles, to manoeuvre around the monitoring practices exercised against them, have already been discussed – in the next

section I analyse some of the even more imperceptible everyday tactics they deploy in order to deal with the more implicit and subtle attempts to capture their international student experiences by selectively integrating them into the global university. More specifically, the cue *Learning in the Classroom as an International Student* triggered a discussion around the active participation of memory workers in the production of their experiences as international students, through the deployment of passive resistance tactics.

5.3 *Learning in the Classroom as an International Student* as a cue: Invisibly active

*We must never look only on the tip of the iceberg:
the institutionalized forms, or the word of the
people, the way in which they speak, supposing that,
as soon as they aren't saying anything, they aren't
acting. On the contrary, it is the interpretation of
the silences that interests me: to seize the silences,
the refusals and the flight as something active.*

(Moulier Boutang, 2001, p. 227)

So far, my analysis of the memory work data has alluded to some of the social, political and institutional conditions under which international student experiences are formed. At the same time, the collective discussions allowed the memory workers to explore the ways in which they have intentionally and/or unintentionally contributed to the reproduction of those conditions, as well as to challenging them. During the session *Learning in the classroom as an International Student*, Natalie's written memory triggered a discussion around how international students sometimes challenge the hegemonic structures of learning, which are established in the UK classrooms, by being 'actively silent:

*Natalie was at a seminar, which was taking place just a couple of weeks since
they started her masters. Paul, the teacher who was teaching the module [X]*

was addressing the class with a question that he wanted us to reflect on out loud. "They're always asking us to say what we think" – Natalie thought. "And these are the same people who would usually say something!" Although it was not that the discussion was at a very high class academic level, and Paul was trying to make everyone comfortable to speak, Natalie was silent. It's not that she couldn't reflect immediately on what was discussed, and it's not that she wasn't following the discussion, but somehow she chose not to speak. It's not that she was afraid either [...] Natalie was very present in the seminar, but silently present, rather than voicing it out.

Surprisingly enough, all the memory workers shared similar feelings about being actively silent. Sunny, Natalie and Andromeda come from a background where it is not a common practice to ask students to constantly participate in class discussions. Even Bob, who was more used to being asked to participate than the rest of us, also often preferred to remain quiet. Furthermore, we all agreed that not talking enough in the class makes you feel like you are considered stupid and/or disengaged when compared with home and EU students – who tend to participate in classes more verbally, most of the time. Some studies rationalise this tendency through focusing on the difficulties some international students face comprehending the language or accent used by the lecturer (e.g. Gunawardena and Wilson, 2012). Interestingly, English is the *first* language of two of the memory workers; Andromeda is bilingual and Bob has spent most of his life in an Anglophone country. Equally, Natalie is virtually fluent in English. In fact, only Sunny expressed a lack of confidence in her English skills when she first arrived in the UK, though the main focus of her written memory was on her limited familiarity with western authors, as well as with the forms of assessment that were required. Therefore, for the memory workers, being 'actively silent' seemed to be a means of contributing to the production of their international student experience without following dominant pedagogical expectations.

I have not presented and discussed this data in the interview chapter (3), as it was not particularly relevant to the rest of the analysis, however many of my interviewees also mentioned their uncomfortable feelings with respect to

learning under these standardised pedagogical conditions. Although some of them appreciated their lecturers' efforts to engage them in discussion, they actually preferred to discuss and co-learn with their classmates after the class, as they did not feel like participating in the classroom in the ways which the UK higher education system expects.

Even more interestingly, during our conversation Sunny mentioned another form of passive resistance that many Asian students use, which is directly related to their unfamiliarity with the western curriculum as well as western forms of assessment. Instead of focusing on the information sent by their universities' International Offices concerning the UK higher education experience, they have chosen to create their own online forums where both new and former students exchange experiences of studying in the UK. What sparked controversy amongst the memory workers was a specific practice which takes place in the online forum; some of the Asian students also sell and buy notes, assignments and dissertations there:

Sunny: But I was really wondering though, and I would like to know, how come and those offers [of experience] go to this direction rather [than] other directions... Not towards the studies but rather they chose to focus on finding accommodation, life information, taking you around the city... life experience... After you have accepted the offer, all the information comes from the International Office is about life experience. And I am really wondering why.

Natalie: Yeah the International Office feels like they have the expertise and the competence to tell you everything about the student experiences/student life...

Sunny: Yeah, I have the feeling they think is their job to provide you [with] life experience, that kind of thing. So they tell you how [you] should live in the UK rather than how to study in the UK.

But for [Asian] people, 'cause [Asian] people care more about the studies, they just want to finish their degree. So, because we don't

have a lot of information from the uni, we have the online forums. So, we go online and get info from students who have already studied here. And there is another very normalised thing that not a lot [of] people know about. [Asian] students who finish their studies here, they sell all the materials to new students, all the notes, the assignments they have wrote... So, if you have got a distinction, then your package will [be] worth more than £200! Something like that... 'cause one of my roommates finished with distinction, so her package was very expensive! So, if you go to this forum in September, after the people finish their dissertation, they begin to sell to new students, and they put advertisements... and new students really appreciate this sort of thing.

Bob: And why is that a problem? How is it different from a textbook or even a book?

Andromeda: Because you need to write your notes from your own perspective.

Bob: Yes, but still you can read others' notes and still interpret them in your own way; same with assignments. I think it's excellent!

Andromeda: And yes, but then there is the problem of plagiarism.

Sunny: I think this happens when people pay somebody else to write their essays and not because of selling. But in any case this is not the point. The point is that you can always find a way to go around...

Andromeda: Yes, but they don't get anything from the education like this. You only get the credentials...

Sunny: Yes, but you know, they are scared about the completely different system... you don't know...

Andromeda: Yes, but [it's] the same for Natalie and for myself. It is the same. We don't know. And still... but I can see your point and I appreciate it... but for me it is cheating... I am sorry...

Natalie: It is cheating...

Bob: But you don't understand that no matter which system, when you create a system, people would try to beat the system... Andromeda, you have to believe in a system, and you, Andromeda, believe in the education system but some others don't and they don't mind to cheat...

Andromeda suggests that what is taking place in the online forum is nothing beyond straight out cheating, while Sunny very passionately tries to convince her that for some international students this is the only way to participate in a university with alien to them intellectual and pedagogical modalities. In defence of Andromeda, Bob reminds everybody that Andromeda has faith in this institutionalised form of education and its official parameters with regard to the learning process, and that this is why she considers these online forum practices as nothing but cheating and representing a mere desire for credentials. Needless to say, it is not only Asian students in particular, or international students in general, that 'cheat' in this manner. Many higher education students, from all backgrounds, cheat. But it seems that Andromeda risks dismissing the point which Sunny is trying to make. Sunny does not talk about cases of lazy and spoiled students who cheat because they do not want to be bothered writing an assignment themselves; there will undoubtedly be cases of this nature, where the forum is used for purely cheating in such a manner. Instead Sunny foregrounds the feelings of anxiety and fear of many Asian students when they realise that the 'international' university they are studying at appears to prevent and neglect any attempt of hybridisation and co-production of knowledge. I will come back to this in more details in the next pages. Sunny seems to invite us to read the utilisation of the online forums in this way.

Sunny's reading of the online forums as well as the previous part of our conversation about being actively silent in class (when being verbal is one of

the key educational norms of the UK university), relate to the findings of previous research projects into the experiences of international students, and their struggles to participate in Global North universities. One project from the field of social geography is particularly interesting and relevant to the current discussion. Madge, Raghuram and Noxolo (2009, p. 42), in an attempt to “make visible” the often “silenced presence” of international students in UK higher education institutions, take as a point of departure postcolonial theory. Analysing international student experiences from a postcolonial perspective means refusing to believe in blaming and othering international students as incapable of being fully and properly integrated in the UK universities. In other words, Madge, Raghuram, and Noxolo’s (2009) work tries to shift the focus away from arguments which situate the problem as concerning the inability of international students to properly follow the dominant rules of the university, or the university’s failed attempts to properly incorporate them. Rather, the problem lies in the fact that multiple global voices and their claims are often silenced, refused and co-opted by the university – and even by some academics whose modes of resistance to the university’s exclusionary practices do not ally with those of international students. That is to say, despite the fact that many academics are interested in taking the side of international students, they fail to recognise, understand, appreciate and ally with some of the international students’ resistance practices.

Although their theoretical analysis contains many interesting and important points like that made above, the extracts from the interviews with international students presented in Madge, Raghuram, and Noxolo’s (2009, p. 41) article only concern examples where international students express a stripping of “their agency” to participate in “the shaping of their experiences, the pedagogies and even the marketing policies of HE”, as well examples of some of their ‘desperate’ efforts to reclaim their agency by maintaining their “confidence” and “pushing themselves up” inside the classroom. To put it differently, these interviewees’ experiences concern intentionally trying to make themselves more visible. This is in contrast to the accounts of the memory

workers in my research, which evoke their efforts to make themselves more *invisible*.

Stretching the points of the memory workers, and especially the one made by Sunny, a bit further, I would argue that these imperceptible practices of being actively silent, as well as the practices which take place in the online forums, indicate neither an inability to properly participate in the normative modes of the UK higher education nor a lack of agency that can create alternative experiences of participation. And, they by no means indicate the participation of memory workers in the shaping of their international student experiences through 'pushing themselves up'. On the contrary, I suggest that the practices and tactics discussed so far are quiet forms of resistance to being 'properly' incorporated and hence to absorbing and being absorbed by higher education institutions, on the part of some of the international students. In other words, the memory workers accounts seem to concern the reclamation of the non-representable aspects of their international student experiences, rather than an attempt to mould their agency to fit properly within the university. The non-representable aspects of their experiences are not measurable, manageable and capable of being fitted within specific marked territories, and hence they cannot be co-opted by the university.

To put it differently, the issue of segmentation analysed in the previous sections (5.1.2 and 5.1.3) as well as the politics of multiculturalism in Britain discussed in chapter 3 (section 3.2), are again relevant. In sections 5.1.2 and 5.1.3, I talked about international students' inclusion in both the UK and the global university through the segmentation of their mobility; the policing of when and where someone or some groups can be mobile or cannot be mobile. As such, my analysis has already proposed that talking about inclusion without also talking about exclusion has become impossible. Following a similar line of analysis, Jawad's experiences of a very subtle, and yet pervasive form of institutional racism – explored in Chapter 3 – have been connected to the liberal mode of Britain's multicultural politics, where the welcoming of (managed) diversity can coexist with numerous, and indeed protean practices of racism.

In the current section, another aspect of segmentation appears to have been added to the list. In this case, international students from all over the world can be included in the same classes along with home and European students – but the different intellectual and pedagogical experiences they carry with them need to be excluded. In fact, Jawad did briefly mention the feelings of exclusion and dismissal he often experiences inside the classroom, especially when lecturers make use of UK, or broadly speaking western related examples in order to explain something regarding to the lecture. But the memory workers, and in particular Sunny, seem to concentrate more on the way the learning process is considered inside the classroom as well as the ways it is measured – through the degree of verbal participation and through the form of assignments. As sunny mentioned in one of the extracts above, international student offices focus only on informing international students about the everyday life experiences an international student can have in the UK, as if they assume that international students will anyway adopt the UK system's educational mode. This is the kind of tension that appears to be indicated in Sunny's account; the different lifestyles of international students seem to be taken into account by UK higher education institutions – even if it is in a superficial way – while, at the same time, educational cohesion seems to be expected, despite the different pedagogical practices and modalities of learning international students might bring with them.

This double process of inclusion-exclusion is arguably the fuel for global universities. As Puwar and Sharma (2009, p. 46) suggest, the fight against exclusion and eurocentrism should not be reduced merely to a naïve pluralisation of knowledge in terms of its content (including, in the curriculum, more minority/'third world'/ 'developing' world concepts, authors and materials) and definitely not to "identity politics" which claim "cultural authenticity on behalf of racialized groups". This would only nurture the Global North university's hunger for selectively segmented multiculturalism. As Puwar and Sharma (2009, p. 46) point out:

“It is hardly surprising that neoliberal education is embracing cultural difference for an ever-expanding multicultural capitalism. Certain kinds of (acceptable) fragmented subjectivities are at the very heart of a new culture-knowledge economy.”

As such, to produce non-Eurocentric knowledge inside the university means first of all understanding the material effects of knowledge as “mobilizing unruly connections and ways of becoming otherwise”, and appreciating that from this starting point the classroom should become a space where “antagonistic exchanges and *incommensurable* points of view and knowledges” can be encouraged and explored (ibid., p. 46, emphasis added).

In fact, the accounts of the memory workers in the *Learning in the Classroom as an International Student* session seem to address exactly this problem of the specific modalities of knowledge production rather than the content of knowledge, although Sunny did briefly refer to the lack of familiarity of many Asian students with recommended bibliographies, which in my view is an interrelated problem. The example of the online forums, in particular, reveals almost a cynicism with regard to the modalities of knowledge which are supported by the global university – modalities that do not provide space for incommensurable worlds to meet and relate. Exploring the possibilities of a “radical multicultural curriculum”, Sharma (2004, p. 114) suggests that adopting a radical multicultural curriculum, directly means the overcoming of the foundations of the Eurocentric liberal education: a) the project of Enlightenment, and its rationalistic and universalising approach to education; and b) the neoliberalisation of higher education that “increasingly demands a packaged curriculum often defined by rationalistic learning outcomes”. Furthermore, if we do want to experiment with a radical perspective to multicultural curriculum and approach the “aporia” of cultural differences with care, then we should acknowledge that “a multicultural context conceives that the unknowable or the unrepresentable is as significant as what we do know or can represent in the curriculum” (ibid., p. 114). In other words, creating a caring space inside the classroom where different situated

knowledges can come into contact does not mean to pre-decide and pre-determine how and at which moment this relation will emerge; it means that the classroom needs to become a space in which the relation of different knowledges is co-created along the way and its continuously reworked (ibid., p. 114).

Bringing my own experience, of being a teaching assistant in a UK higher education institution, to bear on the analysis I would like to suggest that even when individual academics would like to contribute to the exploration of radical possibilities of a multicultural classroom, I feel that the way the teaching is organised inside the UK higher education institutions does not provide the time and space to do so. The modules are hectic, the number of students too big, the content of what we teach too specific, the assessment of students pre-determined, and even the very physical space of the classroom does not create many possibilities for relating, but mostly for keeping knowledges *a-part*.

Furthermore, wherever a student sits in relation to these, they are expected to perform their allocated roles and follow, sustain and reproduce the standardised, normalised and normalising forms of assessment (strict deadlines, exams, assignments, marks) as well as the monolithic pedagogy of verbal participation. What this also means is that anything that is not included in and which is excessive to their allocated roles is dismissed – yet these aspects are capable of contributing to a reconfiguration of the relationships emerging within the global university. The online forums are arguably a collective response – asymmetrically formulated and not pre-supposed – from the side of a part of the international student community to the higher education institution’s invitation to participate only through a form of selective inclusion.

Nonetheless, Andromeda is not only worried that the online forums are a reflection of some international students’ desire for credentials – indeed one might argue that a focus on gaining credentials is symptomatic of what the contemporary university has come to be all about. For her, the online forums are especially disturbing because the students who participate in purchasing coursework from others on the forum “cheat”; which in other words means

they depart from the, (supposedly equal for all students), duties and responsibilities of their allocated roles in UK higher education institutions. She feels almost personally offended because she is also an international student who struggles to align herself with the UK's intellectual and pedagogical practices, and yet she has managed to be incorporated inside the majoritarian student community. In other words, Andromeda seems frustrated because she has worked hard in order to follow the UK's educational 'rules' and she has managed with much effort to 'succeed' according to the UK's educational standards, while in her eyes, these Asian students deliberately flout the 'rules' of the university.

If we follow the Puwar's (2004) line of thinking it is not at all surprising to consider being silent in the classroom as representing failure and some of the activities taking place in online forum as pure cheating. As she explains, most of the non-white (and the female) participants of any western institution carry "the burden of representation" – of being seen as incompetent compared to the "normal" or "ordinary members" (ibid., p. 145). This is why these participants need to try much harder, to prove wrong such predictions of their failure and the initial "element of doubt" about them (ibid.). A very recent example of the burden of representation that international students carry can be found in the case of Middle Eastern students at Idaho State university. Saul (2016) wrote a news article in the *New York Times* with the very telling title 'The Mideast Came to Idaho State. It Wasn't the Best Fit'. In the article Saul mentions that most foreign students have a big problem with plagiarism as they cannot cope with the academic standards of United States' universities. However, one Middle Eastern student is quoted saying that most Middle Eastern students suffer from representations through which they are all perceived:

"Ali Alheid, 22, a mechanical engineering major from Kuwait, complained that the university had painted all of them with a broad brush. "They caught 20 or 30 students cheating," he said. "Because of that, they treat us like cheaters." Professors and proctors have

sometimes prohibited bathroom breaks during exams and looked between students' legs for hidden cellphones." (Saul, 2016)

This level of surveillance makes many of these Middle Eastern students want to leave their studies in the United States. Puwar (2004, p. 145) has called this high level of suspicion about non-White (and female) members of western institutions "Super-Surveillance".

On this specific occasion, Andromeda seems to identify with this kind of representation of international students on two levels: a) she is defensive of the 'normal' student community, as she feels that she has managed to become a part of it, by trying indeed very hard; b) she considers those Asian students who utilise the online forum for purchasing assignments, notes etc., simply incapable of 'properly' participating in the UK university. However, without attempting to downplay Andromeda's views and departing from Sunny's account, I suggest a more political reading of the online forum activities.

As such, thinking with Rancière (1999), I would suggest that online forums are an enunciation of a set of international students' experiences – experiences of students who would position themselves as in contradiction with the modes of their universities' inclusion. For Rancière (1999, p. 28) the representative form of politics, like the politics of selective inclusion which takes place within the global university, is not actually politics but policing, insofar as it is reduced to the "distribution of places and roles" as well as to "the legitimisation of this distribution." According to Rancière (1999), politics emerges when specific groups which have been ascribed a specific part through the mechanisms of policing make visible both those policing mechanisms and their controlling effects, and at the same time illuminate the political potentialities which arise every time a social group dis-identifies with the "who" should be (the name) and "what" should or should not do (its functions). These are the moments when it becomes simultaneously obvious that certain parts do not have a part other than the one that is allocated to them by institutions and they start interrupting this policing. Thus, nothing is

political *per se* (a strike, a protest, the personal); political acts emerge only when social groups discard their obviousness and naturalness by refusing their allocated part and creating “a multiple that was not given in the police constitution” (ibid., p. 36).

However, this is not say that politics emerge when a social group “becomes aware of itself”, finds its unique voice and aspires to extend its functions and rights within the majoritarian social realm (ibid., p. 40). Politics is about “the meeting of incommensurable worlds”, which does not depend upon a pre-supposed and carefully calculated set of strategies (ibid., p. 42). Police-politics operate based on predetermined strategies, and not the politics which contributes one way or another to the shifting and reconfiguration of the normalising policing conditions in a given situation. Non-police politics is immanent in experience: it starts with empirics and experimentation. This is to say, politics beyond the realm of policing is inherent in and flows from experience, as it is rooted in the directly lived and sensed.

Connecting Rancière’s (1999) analysis of politics with the case of international students, I suggest that remaining silent or creating a collective platform where the norms of the university can be ‘betrayed’ makes visible the impossibility of reducing international students to mere representations. In Rancière’s terms, this is a political act. Stretching this point further, the online forums seem to me to be both quiet rebellions and cynical laughter at the university’s hypocritical and banal politics of inclusion, which simultaneously contribute to the re-claiming of the non-representable aspects of international students’ experiences. One could ask though; why not boycott the global university altogether? Why do those international students continue their studies in the UK or indeed come to the UK in the first place? Rancière’s (1999) view of politics is not a politics of the outside. For him, the enactment of politics is grounded precisely in the meeting of, and relationships between worlds – between those with a part and those with no part – and exactly at the moment when those with no part participate in the majoritarian community, but not as would be expected by institutions. In this tension is where politics begins.

Given this, having no part inside the majority is threatening to the majority, and not to those without a part (Papadopoulos, Stephenson and Tsianos, 2008). That is the reason why incorporation to the point of absorption is the ultimate strategy of any sophisticated policing system of domination. For instance, as I have already mentioned, for international students to be allowed the degree of mobility which has been allocated to them by the institutions which sustain the manageability and policing of international student mobility, international students need to participate one way or another and follow the rules set by the UK government and the university. Every time international students start sabotaging their visa statuses by staying longer in the country or flying to another country in order to settle there – be that temporarily or permanently, then they begin to become a threat to the various ‘policemen’ of free mobility. In other words, social groups’ subscription to their allocated roles, rights, functions and experiences, is vital to the survival and perpetuation of the national and transnational institutions. Individuals and groups need to believe in the representations of them, and to this end there is a constant production and reproduction of roles, functions and experiences endlessly circulated in the social realm, creating ready-made lenses through which all that can be seen is these representations.

In the next section, beginning with another account of Sunny’s and at the same time connecting with what has already been explored in the previous sections, I talk about the global university’s involvement in the production of such representations. Furthermore, I make theoretical connections with some of the authors involved in the Edu-factory collective; the “Edu-factory collective is a transnational mailing list centred around university transformations, knowledge production and forms of conflict [...] in which nearly 500 activists, students and researchers the world over have taken part from the beginning” (The Edu-Factory Collective, 2009). More specifically, members of the collective think together, either through the collective production of publications or through formal and informal meetings about the transformations of the contemporary university, and through doing so develop vital practices and

concepts that challenge the neoliberal underpinnings of today's higher education institutions. The central proposition in this section is, that the memory work materials discussed so far, as well as parts of the Edu-factory collective's analysis of the university, contribute to a shifting of the very terms of analysis of international students. Due to post-Fordist social organisation, international students are less in need of the global university than they are vital for its reproduction. The global university does not simply need international students' money, but also the exploitation of aspects of their subjectivities, mobility and experiences. However, through engaging once more with a specific perspective from autonomist thinking, I turn the focus to not only that which is exploited, but also to that which cannot be captured by the policing institutions which criss-cross international students' experiences and mobility and which aim to regulate and control them in order to sustain and diffuse their power across ever more aspects of international students' everyday lives. In other words, international students' subjectivities, mobility and experiences are not one and the same with capital, although they are constrained by it.

5.4 The Knowledge Factory

[...] if we follow Deleuze and Guattari's proposal to deal with capitalism as a capture apparatus, we may also slow down and hesitate. The question around an event of capture is always the question of what the capture process depended upon and exploited.

(Stengers, 2008, p. 55)

Practices like those identified by Sunny that take place in the online forums, do not fit within the representations of international student experience offered by the university, and hence the universities need them to remain marginalised through the stigmatisation of those involved as lazy, spoiled international students. In fact, the "'othering' of international students as the 'problem

group' (needing to integrate more, needing to improve language skills etc.), with HE being heralded as providing the solution (through offering language services, or improved induction etc.) still remains as the main line of analysis when international students 'fail' to meet the UK's academic standards (Madge, Raghuram and Noxolo, 2009, p. 42). Thus, as Sunny underlined, practices like the online forums remain a common secret, while the university itself strategically produces, selects and circulates only international student practices which can fuel its reproduction.

For instance, Sunny once again brought into our discussion a very relevant example of a UK university's⁴³ explicit attempts to produce and circulate representations of international student experiences that secure its position within the global market of international student mobility. She remembered that when she was an undergraduate student, one of her lecturers gave a task to all international students in her class to create a poster that would present the international student experience through pictures. The best poster would win a prize. The lecturer provided guidance by suggesting that they take pictures of themselves in some of the beautiful university spaces, as well as in the city (in pubs, supermarkets, shops as well as in front of lakes etc.), adding short comments under every picture. Although Sunny initially thought that the poster was only for the class competition, a year later, she discovered that it was used on the university's website as a marketing tool to attract other international students:

The uni used our posters in their website the next year as marketing for attracting more international students. They didn't even ask us! They wrote that it is our work – other international students' work – that international students choose [this university] because [it] is fantastic! And here, their presentation is the evidence. When I realised that they used us like that, I was very angry! I felt they used my free labour to marketise their uni!

⁴³ She studied for her Bachelor's degree at this university.

Thus, selected aspects of these international students' experiences, or to put it better almost on demand manufactured experiences, as well as their free labour, was exploited by the university's marketers.

However, for a more political – rather than a sociological – analysis of this form of exploitation, that connects with all the issues that have so far been discussed, I suggest examining it through the central proposition of the Edu-factory Collective. The Edu-factory Collective⁴⁴ experiments with the idea that what was once the factory is now the university. According to the Collective, although this analogy cannot be a sufficient analytical tool insofar as the Fordist factory was historically determined, and hence very different from the contemporary university, the centrality of knowledge as both commodity and resource as well as the immediate links between the contemporary university and recent transformations of capital, production and labour are unquestionable.

More specifically, beginning with the significant changes in capitalist production between the 1960s and the 1980s and analysing them through both autonomist as well as post-Fordist accounts, the members of the Edu-factory Collective (2009) attempt to explore the new intensified forms of exploitation and capture of the production of knowledge, as well as the new potentialities for escape and autonomous organisation of it.

Before I move on to a more detailed analysis of some of the Collective's insights, I would like to very briefly explain the differences between (although they do overlap) post-Fordist and autonomist accounts. Workerism, or *operaismo* (as it was named during the 1960s) or Autonomism (as it came to be

⁴⁴ The proposition that we should entertain the idea that the contemporary university has come to be what was once the factory appears in the introduction of their book, which is authored by all the members of the Edu-factory Collective – while the various chapters of the book have been authored by different members of the collective. As such, I would like to point out that I am engaging, throughout the thesis, with the work of some of the Collective's members – as well as some of their work which is published independently from Edu-Factory's publications. Namely, in this section, I am engaging with the work of Andrew Ross, Sandro Mezzadra, Marc Bousquet, Toni Negri and Vidya Ashram. In other parts of the thesis I am engaging with the work of Stefano Harney, Martina Martignoni, Ned Rossiter, Brett Neilson, Nirmal Puwar and Sanjay Sharma. The order in which the names have been presented does not serve any specific purpose, it is just random.

called from the 1970s onwards), started in Italy as a political movement against work in factories by the workers themselves. The workers left the factories that were organised according to the Fordist model, joined with other marginalised communities in society (the unemployed and students) and started searching for alternative (more flexible) modes of work (Thoburn, 2003). The importance of this gesture lies in the fact that 'work' as a category was problematised for the first time. As such, these workers initiated a break with the traditional Marxist approach which, although recognising "work is a central site of problematization [...] has so often served less to problematize than to glorify work". In other words, in orthodox Marxism the socialist conception that everybody has the right to work and thus to full employment still echoes (ibid., p. 112). Given that, these workers, by deliberately breaking their right to full employment went beyond demands for an extensive and more secure welfare state, and in doing so challenged the nation-state's distributive power as to rights and representation (Papadopoulos, Stephenson and Tsianos, 2008).

However, as Hardt and Negri⁴⁵ (2000) explain, capital's adaptation is remarkable and any sort of escape can potentially be co-opted and re-incorporated back into the realm of capitalist production – including many of the escapes immanent to the autonomist movement. Thus, without drawing a line between the autonomist movement and the form of capitalism that came after Fordism, and of course without implying that the way capitalist production developed was part of the intentions of those involved in the movement, the post-Fordist organisation of capital and labour created new and more extensive opportunities for the capturing of many more aspects of working, as well as non-working life.

In particular, compared to the Fordist era, this period witnessed the rise of increasingly flexible labour as well as the proliferation of "immaterial labour" (Lazzarato, 1996) which led to an intensification of exploitation and the precarisation of ever more sectors of work, as well as non-work. Immaterial

⁴⁵ Negri was heavily involved in the movement, and "Hardt is one of the foremost authorities" of the movement (Thoburn, 2001).

labour concerns the collapsing of most of the old distinctions between production and reproduction, making the separation between work and non-work life nearly impossible. As Morini and Fugamelli (2010) describe in great detail, labour has become more relational, emotional, affective and feminised (it demands our care, full self-investment, affect and empathy). There is no longer a clear distinction between working time and non-working time, or between workplace and life place, as there is no longer a distinction between production and reproduction or between production, reproduction, circulation and consumption (ibid., pp. 240–241). These new labour conditions have caused many material and practical changes in the everyday life of people, especially in the life of young people. As Boltanski and Chiapello (2005, p. 364) suggest:

“This is why today local roots, loyalty and stability paradoxically constitute factors of job insecurity and are, moreover, increasingly experienced as such, as is indicated by the reluctance of young people in marginal positions – for example, doing jobs or living in regions in decline – to settle down in life, to borrow to buy accommodation (rather than renting), to marry (rather than cohabit), to have children (rather than an abortion in the hopes of keeping one's job), and so on. Thus, 'disaffiliation' can be initiated by self-defensive behaviour in a situation of job insecurity, the paradoxical result of which is to increase the insecurity.”

However, without denying the accurate diagnosis of today's modes of production as described above and their deep effects on people's lives, and despite the commonalities between post-Fordist and autonomist accounts of the exploitation of ever greater ranges of the spectrums of everyday life, the autonomist perspective differs from the post-Fordist with regard to one or two vital points; “first [because of] the optimism of this perspective [...] and second [because of] the focus on subjectivity” (Gill and Pratt, 2008, p. 7). That is to say, although it is true and important to recognise that capitalism has become biocapitalism – the penetration of capital into all aspects of everyday life – involving the spread of capitalism into our very subjectivities, subjectivity

cannot be entirely captured. As Hardt and Negri (2000, p. 29) underline it is important to analyse the “new figures of subjectivity, in both their exploitation and their revolutionary potential.” The fact that there is no distinction between inside and outside does not mean that everything is reduced to capital, making our subjectivities passive recipients of capital’s demands.

Thus, returning to this research project’s focus, it is not surprising that the experiences, mobility and subjectivities of international students are targets for exploitation and control by both UK higher education institutions and many other national and transnational institutions. If nothing else, the whole international student journey creates business opportunities for a range of bodies, from the recruitment agencies located in the home countries of international students, to the businesses located on campus and to global consultancies like StudentMarketing. StudentMarketing is a youth travel consultancy which is an Affiliate Member of the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO). StudentMarketing’s “mission”, according to its CEO Samuel Vetrak, is to help every small or large organisation to appropriate and capitalise on the growing youth, student and educational travel market. As is specifically mentioned on their website – although young people always like travelling, due to the new global economy “they *need* to travel for education, for work, for experience” (Vetrak n.d., emphasis added), creating a whole new variety of business opportunities.

However, the contemporary Global North university has not simply become an exemplary site of the urgent questions around the contemporary organisation of labour and productivity because the university occupies the most central location in knowledge production and because it is involved in the training of knowledge workers and because young people need to travel for studies and work thus creating new possibilities for the global market. The common proposition that educational services are a global market that is worth billions, and that international students are important for the contemporary university as they are cash-cows, providing vital income for higher education institutions as well as the national economies of the host countries, is important

(Ross, 2009a, p. 18; Brophy and Tucker-Abramson, 2011, p. 12). I further propose that international students are of central importance for the global university because they are trained to become knowledge workers through the tensions in their experiences, as informed by the new configurations of life and labour explained above. The global university needs to shape the mobility, experiences and subjectivities of international students in order to survive and spread within the new capitalist arrangements. International students have also become producers of the contemporary university, not only by participating in the production and reproduction of knowledge through their research⁴⁶, or because the research of PhD students and junior researchers or the labour of teaching assistants is frequently appropriated by more senior staff as well as the university itself (Bousquet, 2008; Ross, 2009a). They are first and foremost producers through participating in the development and expansion of the global university through its utilisation of aspects of their mobility, their experiences and, their subjectivities. Once again, this is not unique to international students. As Mezzadra (2011, p. 3) suggest migrants' mobility and experiences are also exploited:

“exploitation criss-crosses the whole fabric of production and reproduction. From this point of view, the exploitation of migrants must be traced through the entirety of the migratory process and migratory experience [...].”

However, I would suggest that despite Mezzadra's (2011) positioning as being part of the autonomist Marxist tradition of the analysis of migration, rather an economic one, he seems to pay a disproportionate amount of attention to the capturing of migrants' experiences rather than to what escapes. Thus, I would like to return to the optimism of Hardt and Negri (2000), concerning subjectivities being understood as processes of constant becoming that are potentially transformative, and to the memory work materials which have placed an emphasis on escape. I would therefore suggest that not all

⁴⁶ For example, all the memory workers are international PhD students who also teach.

subjectivities, experiences and mobilities which are produced throughout the international student journey are produced by regulatory institutions, and/or are fully captured by them. The very mobility, subjectivities and experiences of international students can enact subjectivity transformations (Natalie's becoming other than citizen) as well as social transformations, even if they cannot be immediately recognised as doing so. If everything is captured, then why are there so many points of tension, as discussed throughout this chapter? Why do the memory workers struggle? If the interpretation of the autonomist perspective is reduced only to the post-Fordist collapse of the borderline between production and reproduction, then nothing liberating remains. There is no hope, no becoming.

In the next chapter the analysis of international students' experiences is even more closely connected to work and life under late capitalist configurations of labour in general, and more specifically to precarity. In their discussions about studying business, once again the duality in the memory workers as well as some of my interviewees' accounts is present; they feel pressure to study business in order to potentially be able to have work opportunities within precarious labour conditions; and at the same time the irreducibility of their experiences, subjectivities and mobility to a drive for employability is apparent. Paradoxically enough, Natalie as well as my interviewee Ching-Lan have actually used their business studies at university to avoid working in a business environment!

Chapter 6

Why Business Studies?

*For too long, empirical research has approached
human beings from the point of view of their
controllability, the predictability of their actions.*

(Haug, 1987, p. 35)

Did you always want to study business? This question came to be one of preferred questions of my interview participants. Although it only occurred to me to ask such a question during the unfolding of my research, it triggered some very interesting and unpredictable responses that challenge some of the common assumptions related to business students. More specifically, in the interview extracts presented in this chapter, my participants express their love and passion for subjects other than business, and they explain how for them business studies was more of a necessary evil with relation to today's labour market. My interviewees' experiences of business studies are very similar to the memory workers' experiences. Nevertheless, the vibrant discussions among the memory workers offered a much more expansive and vivid analysis of business schools' role in the training of the workers of tomorrow, as well as of their role within current labour arrangements. Although the interviews could not offer the richness of the memory work, the analysis of both the interview data and the memory work data trigger interesting virtual dialogues, which I discuss in the last part of this chapter.

Another reason why interviewees' and memory workers' accounts come together in this chapter is the similarities as to their responses with respect to some of the questions raised by critical management scholars who are interested in exploring the characteristics of current business students and the reasons that attract them to business schools. More specifically, even though many management scholars' approaches are indeed important, some of them seem to dismiss many of the tensions which are present during the students'

‘decision’ to study business. Moreover, their views of business students not only carry many negative connotations, but in some cases even fall into the trap of reproducing representations which portray business students as merely potential labour power. The exclusion of the contradictory and non-representable aspects of business students’ experiences from the discussion of contemporary business schools can only serve to reproduce empirical research which approaches “human beings from the point of view of their controllability, the predictability of their actions”, as Haug (1987) suggests in this chapter’s epigraph. For instance, Tinker (2008, p. 275) has described business schools as “the Trojan Horse of modern capitalism”. However, the experiences discussed with my research participants reveal the complex and complicated relationship they have with studying business abroad. In particular, and perhaps paradoxically, my research participants’ experiences discussed in this chapter evoke: a) some of the current transformations of labour and life conditions, due to the proliferation of precarity; b) multiple ways of questioning capitalism, without entirely denying it; and c) the practical ways of manoeuvring around undesirable life and labour related situations by choosing to study business abroad.

6.1 Did you always want to study business? (Interview discussions)

This question was an unplanned one and only emerged during the unfolding of my research, becoming one of the most appreciated questions for most of my interview participants. Every time I asked this question there was a little pause from the participants’ and then something of a nostalgic smile, before they started expressing their love for various forms of art (music, painting), languages, history, media and so on. However, their feelings seemed to be in tension; while they clearly love a range of different subjects, at the same time they feel that they have to compromise with regard to these passions in order to be aligned with the current global transformations of labour. Despite having consciously made such compromises, studying for a business degree clearly did not entirely erase their love for subjects other than business. In fact, most of my

interviewees found business modules exceptionally boring, and even some of them who had work experience in a business environment were equally disappointed by working in business related jobs. One of my interviewees, Ching-Lan⁴⁷, was so uninterested in working in a business related job that preferred to continue her studies by taking another business related degree in order to have further time away from actually working in the business world.

Ching-Lan (who was doing a second Master's in management at the time of the interview, and who found this particular question a really "nice" and "interesting" one, told me with a shining face that she had always felt a passion for the arts. However, as the arts were viewed as very much a second class career choice in China nowadays, she had chosen to study business studies. She explained to me that she had returned to the UK to study, as she could not stand her work in a bank back in China. Thus, she found a way to escape by successfully persuading her parents that she needed further training in business studies. Interestingly enough, Ching-Lan is not planning to go back to the business workplace; instead she prefers to stay in academia to study for a PhD. Even if she has to teach business related modules, she considers academia relatively more interesting and creative place to be, than working in a company or in a bank.

Other interviewees shared with me their attempts to try to combine their – as they called them, "unrealistic dreams" – with the realities of the labour market and the prominent role of business therein.

For instance, Bao-Yu⁴⁸ has a real interest in Chinese history, culture and language, and hence she studied to become a Chinese language teacher. However, almost immediately following her Bachelor's degree, she had to drop her 'unrealistic' dreams and study accountancy, in order to have greater options for employment in the future.

⁴⁷ I have briefly discussed her interview in Chapter 3, but I revisit it in this chapter, too.

⁴⁸ I have already presented parts of her interview in chapter 3 and I revisit it here.

Me: Going back to the job selection, do you think ... it was any point in your life that you wanted to study something different – you mentioned that you have also studied linguistics?

Bao-yu: Well, actually, I prefer to study teaching Chinese – I really had an interest. That's why I chose that at the beginning. Because my parents wanted me to study accounting when I was ... before ... like, after I graduated from high school. But I decided to study teaching Chinese, because I had more interest in Chinese history, culture, language and I like to introduce to the world. So I had a really, like, big ambition. But after I graduate, I find it's really – how do you say it – realistic?

Me: Unrealistic?

Bao-yu: Yes, because with Bachelors' degree, you can't really teach in school, because foreigners in China are much less than Chinese people, right? So they would go to university, study Chinese. And if you want to be a teacher, you have to study for, like, PhD to teach in university. And ... well, that would take another 10 years. And I can't go abroad easily to teach Chinese or with many restriction and know the method, whatever. And so you can't really do it ... you can do it in maybe some private training school. But the payment is really low and they don't give you good benefits ... you can't get it, or get it really poorly. And there's no future promotion. So you mainly can see, it's not good way to make money and you find, well, I can barely live with this job. So I have to give up this, maybe do something else. That's why I chose to work for a company that's related to education, so I could work there, but only understood the education part and not the business part so ... And you have to work in the business part, too. So, I think it's a good way [to also study business]; that's why I chose it. So, yeah, maybe this is the reality.

Me: So somehow you can combine them in the end?

Bao-Yu: Yes.

Another interviewee of mine, Chu-Hua (who was doing her Bachelor's degree at the time of the interview), told me that she would really like to study mass media but her parents did not consider this a beneficial career for her. The way she compromised was to study business, with the hope of eventually finding ways to connect the two subjects.

Chu-Hua: I have one favourite subject, mass media, because in China I have learnt about broadcasting in my high school and my parents think, this course is not benefit for developing in China because it has limitations and I dropped my dreams. Because in my childhood I want to become a journalist, I have done some activities more related to the journalist. I think maybe sometimes your hobby can become multi-choice for you for the future life.

Me: So, you will try to connect them together?

Chu-Hua: Yes, I will find a job can suit both the human resources in the mass media companies.

Chu-Hua also told me that she would prefer to remain in the UK at the conclusion of her studies, as she believes the pace of life in the UK is slower when compared with China. She emphasised, that also of relevance to her decision was her strong conviction that, contrary to the beliefs of many other Chinese people, money and work were not the most important things in life. Here are her exact words:

... and in Britain they enjoy their life more, and they have their clear holidays and they pay more attention to their family, but sometimes Chinese are more about the [work] benefits or the money; it's not very important for me.

The conversations I had with my interviewees helped me to understand some of the multi-layered processes which create international business students within the contemporary regimes of labour and life. Thus, discussion as to their

positions is politically important, as it can arguably reactivate possibilities of looking and theorising international (business) student mobility, beyond capitalist imperatives. This does not mean that this mobility is not related or connected to market imperatives, but rather that business students' subjectivities are not reduced to or entirely captured by them. Actually, none of my interviewees even mentioned the words 'capitalism' or 'market'. Our conversations were mainly around how they carefully manoeuvre their everyday lives between what they 'really'/'freely' desire and what they have to desire. I will return to this point later in this chapter (section 6.2.1). Before I do so, I will explore the memory work discussion on the same topic. The memory workers' feelings echo those of my interviewees; however, the methodology of memory work allows for a more collective and in-depth analysis of the topic, and more clearly brought to light some of the paradoxes, contradictions and tensions which are shaping both business studies and students. Even more importantly, the interactive nature of this methodology aided our collective exploration of some of the ways in which we are implicated in capitalist power both inside and outside the business schools, though without necessarily being fully absorbed into it.

6.2 *Why Business Studies?* as a cue

The cue *Why Business Studies?* was, for all of us, unquestionably the most challenging one. It triggered frictions among the memory workers, and uncomfortable feelings and confusion, while also raising questions that none of us could have expected. While the written memories from this cue are interesting, I have decided to concentrate here only on the dialogues among the memory workers, as they vividly exemplify some of the tensions which mould international business students. All the memory workers continually contradicted themselves and continued to feel confused and unsure about the whole "studying business thing" (Andromeda's term). Because the discussion has a rather chaotic structure I am going to start from the beginning. As in

every session, after we finished reading all the memories, I invited the memory workers to point out some of the similarities between the accounts.

6.2.1 *Any similarities?*

Me: Did you notice any similarities?

Andromeda: I am not sure about this business thing, as if ... we sort of feeling we had to do it... we all sort of jumped into it without really wanting it... maybe I could do languages. That was more precise. When I got in business I could go anywhere, I had the option to do it in France or I could go back to [my home country] or here in England. It is just so vast and so vague...

Me: is that a good thing or a bad thing?

Andromeda: Scary because you don't really know why you are doing it cause it's not like you are studying engineering, so you will even become a lecturer or an engineer. But when you do business/management you don't even end up being a manager. I don't know if it is a good thing or a bad thing. I guess it is a good thing if you like the subject as such as if you have done history, which what I did actually. I didn't do it as a way of getting a job...

Andromeda rightly sensed, picking up on the written accounts, the uncomfortable/uncertain relation the memory workers have with business studies. None of them expressed a particular passion for the subject, and although Andromeda claimed (see above) that she actually liked the subject as such, she began contradicting herself soon after. Only a few moments later Andromeda linked the reasons as to why she studied business for her Master's to the limited career possibilities one possesses with a degree in linguistics.

Andromeda: Yeah, I couldn't do just languages without having something that wraps it. It is like languages is the core of my skill, maybe I would say, but I needed something else which some sort of knitting it together ...

Bob: From a career standpoint ...

Andromeda: Yeah, from a career standpoint

Natalie: Yeah, it was a pragmatic choice for some of us to some extent.

Andromeda's belief that linguistics is too 'weak' subject for someone to study from a career point of view, as well as Natalie's words expressing that for some studying business is a pragmatic choice, resonate with the feelings expressed by my interviewees, who were trying to connect their dreams and passions with the contemporary realities of labour and employment. However, shortly after Natalie's comment above she placed this logic – that any subject of study should be connected and 'supported', one way or another, by a business related degree, in order for one to be able to build a realistic career under the concept of 'employability'. Since the 1990s employability has become one of the central logics of both managerial literature and labour market policies (for a more detailed historical analysis of employability see Chertkovskaya, 2013). According to the discourse of employability, as used since the 1990s, personal initiative and the flexible adaptation of the individual worker to the demands of the market are key aspects of becoming and remaining employable (Chertkovskaya, 2013). Interestingly enough, Natalie brought an additional dimension to our conversation by underlying the university's explicit involvement in the aggressive encouragement of the discourse of employability, as well as the promotion of business related jobs. Thus, we slowly started approaching the university from a different angle as well. The strong relations between the university and the logics of the labour market was, for the very first time, explicitly acknowledged by all the memory workers. In particular, the university started to be considered by the memory workers as more like a skills training centre and as "kidnapped" (Sunny's term) by business employers.

The memory workers' feelings that universities have been "kidnapped" by business employers, which is also manifest in the strategic visibility and promotion of business related jobs on campus, reinforces the rhetoric there are no alternatives to business jobs, and this is by no means coincidental. In fact, the centrality of the employability discourse on the contemporary university's campus is empirically explored in Ekaterina Chertkovskaya's (2013) PhD research. During her extensive empirical research, she examined how the contemporary Global North university (and specifically one UK higher education institution) has been transformed into a space where the employability agenda is constantly promoted. The section of her research that is focused on the role the Careers and Employability Centre (CEC) plays in the promotion of the rhetoric of employability inside campus is especially shocking. As she explains, drawing on her interview data with some of the CEC employees as well as the information which can be found on the CEC website, it tries to make ensure that university students come to terms with the fact that employability is nowadays about much more than getting a job. In order for students to enhance their employability they would, according to the CEC, need to work on a variety of skills – including communication skills, teamwork, creativity, networking skills, organisation skills, adaptability/flexibility, problem-solving skills, IT skills, and presentation skills – and of course have endless energy to commit to life-long learning and the continuous expansion of their skills.

Even more interestingly, Chertkovskaya's (2013) data – both the interview extracts as well as the quotes from the website – highlight the centrality of the term 'tailor' in the employability discourse. However, the emphasis was not simply placed on how the university has tailored its courses in order to fit the demands of industry, but mainly on how students should be able to tailor *themselves*, if they wish to become more employable. In particular, one of the CEC employees shares with students seeking her advice a very 'clever' trick as to how to boost their employability potential – to focus their minds on the analogy of selling themselves as they would try to sell any other

product. In other words, she encourages them to understand that they are in competition with other students, as it is the case with any other competing products or brands:

IR: You've mentioned that they [students] don't sell themselves well enough. How is that? And is there a need actually to sell yourself?

V: Yeah [sighs], because we do quite a lot of work with them at the careers centre, about, sort of, you're a brand, you're a product, and that's one way looking at it. It's not the only way obviously, but you are a product, and that company wants to buy you, if you use that sort of analogy, and so, you've obviously got to think about your skills, your personality fit, you know, what the company wants. So you are packaging yourself, especially if you're applying for different jobs, it's like writing a CV, or you're writing an application, you don't write the same one for everybody, you tailor it according to the job you're applying for. So it's the same sort of process really, as when you are writing an application form, you are tailoring it, tailoring yourself to fit the job that you're applying for.... And that's a good analogy to make to students, because they realise there are lots of brands and products around these days... (cited in Chertkovskaya, 2013, p. 168).

Given this, the employability imperative stems from the logic that it is the individual's responsibility to take her employability potential seriously, investing all her energy in cultivating her own job opportunities, by tailoring herself according to each company's demands.

Returning to the conversation with the memory workers; talking about employability indeed helped us to make the interconnections between the university and the labour market more visible, but it did not entirely remove the individualising perspective from explaining why the memory workers found themselves in business related studies. As Chertkovskaya (2013) explains in her thesis, looking through the lens of the employability agenda teaches us that only by tailoring ourselves according to the market's demands can we

make ourselves into desirable employees, and hence the choice of business studies becomes a personal matter. However, despite the memory workers' affirmation of the possible influence of the employability discourse on their 'decision' to study business, it gradually became obvious that as long as we continued to discuss on a personal level why each one of them decided to study business⁴⁹- none could give a clear explanation as to why. Instead of getting a clearer picture, the more we talked the more we were becoming confused and unsure. We were moving from rationales related to employability to feelings that business studies are a necessary evil in order to survive in the contemporary market, and from fantasies that western management education would be an exciting choice to having really no memory of what exactly pushed them to study business abroad.

For instance, Andromeda changed her position multiple times; she moved from claiming to like the subject itself, to a more pragmatic need related to opening a linguistic centre, to eventually feeling that she had no memory whatsoever about her initial thoughts on the matter:

The thing is... that my memory is flawed now cause I am not fascinated by management as I think I was at the time ... I was thinking maybe open a linguistic business but unconsciously I might I like the subject... I can't tell you today after six years...

Sunny agreed that having now completed their business studies courses made it difficult to reach a conclusion about the 'true reasons' behind their initial 'choice'. Ironically enough, despite the numerous similarities between memory workers' accounts, during the first part of our discussion, each memory worker insisted on trying to give her/his personal explanation, without trying to explore what made their experiences so common. Approaching memory as personal and as able to represent a true past event, trapped the memory workers inside a cycle of possible justifications. It was only when Bob tried to

⁴⁹ Regardless of the other interests or passions they had (e.g. Andromeda loves linguistics, Natalie prefers labour studies, Bob adores music, and Sunny has a passion for dance).

connect employability with the real everyday anxieties about finding a job, in a rapidly changing labour environment in which business studies has become the hegemonic subject to study, that a new round of discussion started slowly to unfold:

Andromeda: So, I am now wondering why I didn't just choose for doing a degree in translation only. Why did I go for business?

Bob: Then you have to think of the whole hegemony thing. This is how I would answer your question. You know you wouldn't be marketable enough and so on and so forth. You are the one who made that because of what you thought it's gonna happen or what you were told it's gonna happen or what you read about job security and so on. And that is the problem today with business. For instance, my career in business, I enjoyed it quite frankly. So I don't necessarily regret it but what I regret is the system that, you know... that built it. And so I have to work within that system... So, I can separate that out from the fact that, you know, based on economy, the economy we are in and what it is going on...

However, interestingly, despite the terms 'system' and 'economy' being constantly used, none of the memory workers articulated the word 'capitalism'.

Me: nobody articulates the word capitalism and we just go around it... I mean what do you mean by system and what do you mean by economy?

Bob: I am glad you said that cause when I was referring to the system, I was indeed referring to a capitalist system where this profit imperative is the priority and I don't agree with that, I really don't.

Articulating the word 'capitalism' finally helped us to move further away from individualistic approaches and situate the problem of business studies having become the dominant subject under the issue of current global labour conditions. The feelings of an obligation to study business as the only way to

find a job and the term used by Bob – “hegemony” – express not that memory workers think there is no alternative to business studies and hence they inevitably have to study business, rather, it expresses that the normalisation of business studies is very contingent upon the current configurations of labour and life conditions in contemporary globalised capitalism.

Along similar lines, Stefano Harney and Cliff Oswick (2006) attempt to understand and explore the overrepresentation of business students inside the contemporary university by looking through the lens of Derrida’s political question – “how to critique what one cannot not want” (ibid., p. 101). According to Harney and Oswick, the success of globalisation lies in transforming necessity and compulsion into something desirable. Despite capitalist globalisation rhetoric being built on the concept of freedom and linking this to deregulation, insofar as global markets are advocates of deregulation, the authors argue that it is this creation of desire and the regulation of freedom which fuels the real power of global capitalism. Thus, taking as a point of departure Derrida’s question, they knit an argument around the impossibility of challenging business students with post/anti-capitalist ideas, insofar as students actually desire capitalism because they are convinced that it is the only path to wealth. Given this, those business academics that favour the approach of critical pedagogy face the contradiction of trying to critique what one cannot not want:

“And here one arrives at the door to the global business school classroom, where the question of what students cannot not want haunts any effort at the global sociology of management and accounting, and directly confronts any critical pedagogy [...] [These students] have arrived at the door of the classroom on this wave of capitalist globalization and its restructuring of the global division of labour seeking, most of them, its promise of wealth” (Harney and Oswick, 2006, pp. 101-102).

Despite the usefulness of Harney and Oswick’s argument that we are being trained to desire our own regulation inside contemporary capitalism, to assume

that most business students have naturalised the domination of business studies in such an uncritical way because their main goal is the acquisition of wealth generates a twofold effect. It prevents us from focusing on and exploring the contingency of the hegemonic relations underpinning business schools' domination. Even more importantly it prevents us from paying attention to the struggles and tensions that business students experience in relation to business studies and business jobs. All aspects of the conversation with the memory workers, as well as with the interviewees, which have been presented so far evoke these confusing, contradictory and antagonistic feelings towards business studies, and not an oversimplified representation of these students as wealth hunters. In fact, none of the memory workers expressed a desire to study business because they considered it as the only path to wealth. Deleuze and Guattari (2000) have also argued, in their book *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, that society teaches us to desire our own repression, but they also suggest that desire is always and inherently a creative and revolutionary force, which does not emanate from a personal lack or need – for instance, the lack of, or the need for, wealth. The memory workers, as well as some of the interviewees, have arguably exemplified the tensions between these two different and yet coexistent aspects of desire.

Thus, the memory workers did express feelings of being almost obliged to study business in order to be able to find a job under the current labour conditions, but without having it in mind to identify this with capitalism. On the contrary, they mainly tried to figure out how to deviate from capitalism, from within capitalism. In other words, while Harney and Oswick (2006) discuss how difficult it is to critique “what you cannot not want”, we discussed what we can do and what we can create with “what we cannot not want”. We tried to mix critique with creativity. In doing so, the memory workers added another layer of complexity, as they brought to our discussion the different shapes and forms of capitalism they have experienced in their countries of origin. This additional layer led us to talk about different capitalisms, instead of approaching capitalism in merely Global North terms.

6.2.2 *Different Capitalisms*

During the conversations with the memory workers the plurality of capitalism emerged, as the memory workers have experienced some of the different forms, aspects and intensities of capitalism in their countries of origin. While we were talking about disrupting or even destroying capitalism from within capitalism, the multiple approaches to capitalism which they carry with them increasingly became manifest. Their engagement with some of the multiple meanings and formations of capitalism, through their everyday experiences in their countries of origin, brought new perspectives to our discussion and helped us to think beyond oppositions.

In particular, Andromeda (who comes from an African country) and Natalie (who comes from a European country) had a heated debate on how to disrupt capitalism, drawing from their experiences with capitalism. Natalie is in favour of the idea that capitalism has to be altogether destroyed while Andromeda, thinking of examples from her country of origin, finds the overthrowing of capitalism in its totality not a particularly fruitful way of thinking. In order to explain what she meant, she used the example of her research on the operation of a big business industry in her home country. Actually, her research itself is a way for her not to destroy capitalism, but to work with it and “soften it” (Andromeda’s term):

Me: And how can you “soften” capitalism through your PhD in management?

Andromeda: What I am doing, what I am suggesting ... I am not suggesting to close [this industry] cause they have reduced unemployment – people are very happy to have jobs. Even if it is as profit making as it can be, thank god there are [these jobs] [in my home country]. People do not love capitalism but they don’t want to be unemployed either. So, what I am suggesting is not that they should close them down but they do it better. They should have better work conditions and better wage. People should not work on

public holidays ... and this is what I am criticizing and this is not to say stop giving them jobs but pay them better.

As Andromeda explained to us, despite the fact that this big capitalist industry opportunistically exploits the simultaneously cheap and capable labour (labour in this country is considered particularly capable for this job as most natives are bilingual), she is an advocate for its existence, as it allows many people to use their jobs as stepping stones towards better opportunities. However, her passionate advocacy against the abolition of these exploitative jobs, favouring instead the improvement of labour conditions, stems from experiencing her country of origin as a precarious place. As she particularly mentioned “precarity is a given in [my home country], so what can I do in order to create small changes”? Thus, what is of importance for Andromeda, is how we can create small changes, small breaks inside the already exploitative arrangements of labour. In other words, although Andromeda might consider that these precarious workers are in need of support in struggles for better conditions of work – and this is what she is trying to do with her PhD thesis – at the same time, she avoids making them victims. That is, she recognises the workers as precarious workers who work under exploitative conditions, but she does not think they would be better off without these jobs. In other words, Andromeda prefers to work with them and with their precarious experiences, instead of trying to protect them altogether from precarity.

The example from Andromeda’s home country led Natalie, who was in disagreement with her up until this point, to conclude not only that attempting to destroy capitalism all together would be futile, but that there is a process of constant escape from it in our everyday lives already:

I would like to summarize cause it is a very hard topic to discuss business. When Andromeda talked about the example from her home country, now it makes sense to me what you said to me earlier, in a way it connects to me with what you expressed earlier [that we shouldn’t try to destroy capitalism altogether] but then again the

principle I question would be the business focused on profit making or whether in favour or against it, and we are against it, but what do we do about it? Because personally business is something that is inevitable, it shapes our lives and makes us do things in certain ways and to construct ourselves blah blah blah in all sort of ways which we would not necessary want to and we would like to do otherwise. And now I am thinking that this coexists with all personal and professional escapes/alternative ways of organizing and living although business seems inevitable.

While for Natalie, our conversation reminded her of the coexistence between living within exploitative life and labour conditions in contemporary capitalism and yet at the same time resisting it, Sunny used another term to describe the resistance to, or disruption of, capitalism. Coming from an Asian country – and replying to the rest of the memory work collective – Sunny said that Asian students already go beyond capitalism as it is taught inside Global North business schools. She agreed that capitalism and business have penetrated our everyday lives, and that this is something she is increasingly aware of every time that she travels back home or that she talks with friends and family from her country of origin. However, at the same time, she shared with us her doubts about the possibility of learning about capitalism in the business classroom and then bringing this knowledge back to the Asian country she comes from. Due to her experiences in her home country, she has the feeling that the “marriage” (Sunny’s term) between the market economy and the specificities of the political and social system is not going smoothly, and it is noticeable in people’s everyday lives. Sunny thinks that Asian students, no matter if they come here to study business or not, can never be entirely confined by capitalism in their lives and work back home. Spending so many years in the UK, she strongly believes that Asian students who come to the UK to study are only confusing themselves, as there is no way to apply what they learn to the situation back home.

In support of this argument Bob, who is a mature student and who was born in a Global South country but lived most of his life in a Global North

country, working mainly in business, also talked about his experiences of the multiplicity of capitalism. During his MBA studies (in a Global North higher education institution) he travelled to different countries across the globe. As he explained to us, he found it really surprising as to how many different shapes and forms capitalism can take in different localities. Although, Bob does not think of this chameleon nature of capitalism as something positive, instead he considers it as a dangerous characteristic, he felt that it is the people who force capitalism to change, and not the other way around. Here are some of his thoughts:

So the only way to attack capitalism is by making little room here and there... And this is actually already happening. I mean, we have to understand now that capitalism has ceased to be one and the same today. Especially because of all these emerging economies adopting capitalism within completely different contexts. I mean there are now many different capitalist systems. For instance, when I went to Mexico I faced a completely different form of capitalism that doesn't resemble the western capitalism we know. For instance, there they can't get any funding unless they show that with some kind of way they give something back to the community. And of course I know that this is not always as positive as it sounds. I am not gonna lie. But still community is very important there, and the companies are aware of that and they try to accommodate it.

The way the memory workers approached the plurality of capitalism in this part of our conversation does not suggest that there are better and worse versions of capitalism. In fact, they all agreed that the very nature of a capitalist social and economic organisation, as grounded in a profit-driven logic, can only be fed by exploitation. However, the different 'versions' of capitalism they brought into our discussion arguably shows how difficult, and often how non-productive, it would be at the current historical moment to dismiss altogether the presence of capitalism in our labour and everyday lives. At the same time, it reveals their attempts to break with the fallacy of capitalism as a homogeneous

and solid social and economic system. In other words, the accounts of the memory workers show the tensions which surround and influence the operation of capitalism in different localities, instead of considering capitalism as operating on neutral and universal terrain. But of course talking about the versatility of capitalism is a delicate matter. Bob is aware of this when he brings into our conversation his example from Mexico. To revisit a section from his comments above:

[The companies] can't get any funding unless they show that with some kind of way they give something back to the community. *And of course I know that this is not always as positive as it sounds.* I am not gonna lie. But still community is very important there, and the companies are aware of that and they try to accommodate it (emphasis added).

Bob has a lot of experience with business, as he has worked for many years in this sector and is aware of what it means when business accommodates the demands of the community; “it is not always as positive as it sounds”. When the community refuses some of the practices of the business world, forcing it to take its needs into account, it can lead to the quicksand effect; where the more one tries to escape the spread of capitalism, the deeper one sinks into it. To put it differently, even when there is a well organised mobilisation against capitalism, the result can be the further expansion of capitalist practices across more areas of life and labour, in order to incorporate and assimilate those areas that are refusing (Moulier Boutang in an interview with Grelet 2001). Although this capitalistic trick is rather efficient for the evolution of capitalism, I would suggest that the memory workers, by bringing examples from their experiences with different modes and intensities of capitalism to our discussions, aimed to carefully open up spaces for heterogeneity and contingency in the way we perceive capitalism. Engaging with Andromeda's thoughts once more, I would argue that she very honestly tried to show her struggle – also as a researcher – with having to decide what kind of proximity one should have to capitalism.

Natalie, especially at the beginning of our session on business studies, took a very radical stance against capitalism, because she does not like what it does to our lives. While Andromeda brought her research and life experiences with precarity in her own country, into the discussion. She carefully kept a moderate distance from capitalism; not too close and not too far. That is, she does not identify with the capitalist logic, but prefers to retain a close proximity to it in order to be able to contingently force it to change. Andromeda also pays attention to people's choices. However, this is not a liberal or humanitarian stance, but a very practical and realistic one. According to Andromeda, she cannot start a revolution with the employees of the industry where she did her PhD research, when what they want is these very jobs. She does not shy away from the fact that they are exploited, nor does she hide the fact that they need these kind of jobs in order to survive in a country which suffers from high levels of unemployment and poverty. However, her aim is not to praise capitalism for saving them. As a researcher, she tries to take these precarious lives seriously and at the same time work towards the 'softening' of their exploitative working conditions.

The issues the memory workers raised above echo some of the concerns of Critical Management Studies (CMS) academics. Harney and Oswick's (2006) position, as mentioned earlier, is very close to Andromeda's; how does one critique what one cannot not want? Our entire discussion as to the plurality of capitalism, and of course Sunny's account of teaching capitalism to Asian students inside the Global North university, speaks to the genuine worries of many more CMS academics. Sunny expressed her strong doubts about the direct correlation between teaching capitalism in a Global North university and implementing it in an Asian country, where the social and political organisation differs so much from the Global North. As she foregrounded, Asian students manage only to confuse themselves through studying business in a Global North university, as the social and political situations in their home countries

create very different tensions⁵⁰ in the operation of capitalism, than those that arise in Global North societies. Valérie Fournier (another CMS academic), who currently teaches alternative economies and critical HRM, has done a great deal of academic work on teaching about alternative organisations, critical pedagogy and rural economies, to name only a few topics. She claims to encounter considerable resistance from students when she is trying to teach them about alternative organisations. According to Fournier (2006), most business students, including international students, are very interested in learning more about capitalist business. Although she always shares with them numerous examples of ‘successful’ non-capitalist organizations, students always come up with different rationales as to why alternative organisations would never really work in practice:

“It would not be ‘efficient’, it would quickly degenerate and reproduce capitalist and hierarchical mechanisms of regulation, it was only appropriate for a few marginal communities, stuck in the past or in some distant world but would not ‘work’ for the majority in the contemporary (post)modern world, it did not reckon with people’s natural selfishness, and so on. Any alternative we considered was safely kept at bay by various mechanisms that severed them from the ‘real’” (ibid., p. 297).

Thus, having a lot of experience with teaching about alternative organisations inside business schools, Fournier concludes that the core of the problem lies in the lack of capacity to even imagine a non-capitalist organisation as a potentially realistic alternative. In other words, students of the contemporary university explicitly express their inability to even imagine a scenario where different organisation of life and work could be practically possible. Instead, any effort to support radical difference as a possible reality is undermined, “stigmatised” and “delegitimized” (ibid.). Hence Fournier has come to recognise the fact that, even when she brings a list of examples of alternatives

⁵⁰ I have explored some of these tensions in Chapter 3, where I discuss the experiences of my Chinese middle class participants (see section 3.3).

to capitalist organisations of work and life into the classroom, students still do not manage to acknowledge or imagine a different future from the present. Through engagement with Foucault's work on genealogy, Fournier locates the problem as lying mainly in the power of history – when it is read as a linear, solid, monotonous and uninterrupted continuity. In that sense the representation of global capitalism, in business texts as well as in business classrooms, as historically inevitable and the only realistic path for progress prevents students from becoming familiar with the discontinuities of and breaks in economic history, as well as the conditions which formed the historical hegemony of capitalism:

“[We need] to insert various points of rupture, disjuncture, contest in economic history, that shows economic history (including the history of capitalism) as a rugged and cracked terrain, and one littered with corpses, the corpses of marginalized and ‘subjugated’ knowledges” (ibid., p. 306).

Thus, according to Fournier, we need to ‘break history’ in order to disrupt this hegemonic approach to capitalism that limits students’ imagination. To this end, teachers should have students engage with the multiplicities of capitalism rather than a hegemonic, triumphant story of capitalism. Only by focusing on the plurality and discontinuities of capitalism will students be able to perceive the breaks in its historical narrative, and hence envision – from within capitalism – a non-capitalist future (ibid., pp. 301-307). Harney and Oswick (2006, p. 105) agree that the direct exposure of students to anti-capitalist ideas and practices cannot help students to imagine how it is possible to deny “what they cannot not want”. To criticise, demonise or underestimate what is necessary given current labour conditions will not make students understand necessity as compulsion and freedom as regulated by necessity. Simply put, it will no help them to see the links between discipline and freedom.

According to Harney and Oswick, the only way to “turn the tables” is for teachers, together with their students, to explore whether the promises of

capitalism are not only desirable, but can actually exist and be equally available to all. That is, they recommend that business studies lecturers ask students to imagine whether following all the necessary steps, as proposed for them by capitalism, of studying business, working hard, preparing to face great uncertainty and so on, will lead in the end to all the students in the room enjoying wealthy lifestyles. According to the authors, this pedagogical strategy emanates from post-colonial theory, wherein critique involves a posing of questions about who regulates freedom, and especially how the freedom of difference is suppressed and limited. By asking these questions, one can be led to the conclusion that the regulator is colonialism, which implicitly and explicitly denies difference while imposing one way of thinking and acting (Harney and Oswick, 2006).

Thus, although critical management scholars have made a great effort to bring different and critical perspectives into mainstream business and management studies, they have seemingly failed to help students to imagine adequate alternatives to the promises of capitalism. This inability of critical management theory to persuade students that another world is possible rests not only upon the fact that a teacher cannot convince her students by simply attacking what she wants to critique, but also on the fact that global capitalism tends to incorporate strategically selected differences in its realm, through managing, controlling and regulating them. Hence, for Harney and Oswick (*ibid.*), it is only through the lens of post-colonial theory that teachers can, together with their students, pose questions as to who regulates our freedom and binds it into necessity, and specifically into the necessity of business. Only then can students come to see that we need to act towards the overcoming of such regulation and limitation over our lives; “and from here anything is possible, including at this point, and only at this point, new fantasies are lifted” (*ibid.*, p. 108).

But the fantasies of the students inside the contemporary university are not only shaped in the classroom. The logic of business is not only present but reinforced in multiple spaces across the campus. For instance, as mentioned in

section 6.2.1, Chertkovskaya (2013) shows how the Careers and Employability Centre (CEC) contributes to the shrinking of students' imagination regarding alternatives to business. The aspect of Chertkovskaya's empirical research which concentrates on the role of the CEC very clearly demonstrates the explicit promotion of business-related jobs, and especially career opportunities in multinational corporations, as the only real 'top jobs' (ibid.). Being composed of 'advisers' employed by the university and sponsored by the companies which are promoted by it, the CEC has become a very powerful part of the global university. The CEC indeed imposes one line of thinking and acting, binding capitalism into necessity and employability into market logic, which is exactly what Harney and Oswick (2006) want to undo. Even more worryingly, the suppression of difference becomes more pronounced when it comes to the case of international students. The CEC employees 'confessed' to Chertkovskaya (2013) how challenging it is to teach international students to become employable, as many of them fail to acknowledge the importance of skills for managing to get a desirable job. Nevertheless, CEC employees continue to attempt to provide an equal opportunity for all students to learn how to become employable, despite their (cultural) differences, as the market has become global – meaning that students might end up working in any country instead of going back home:

V: It's quite challenging as a lot of these students [postgraduates] are international students, and maybe don't understand the concept of... not so much of employability, but the concept of... I don't know, it's a funny thing to explain to them really, how to sort of get to self-awareness, because if you come from a different culture, I mean, thinking about China, for example, you might be sort of thinking, I do this, a degree, I do this degree, and then I get a job. So they don't think so much about having to demonstrate skills. So, it can be quite a challenge, but equally, we want to offer all students the opportunity to develop employability, because, you know, they might be working in any country, it's not necessary that they're going back to their home country (ibid., p. 171).

However, despite the efforts of the institutional side of the university, both in the case of the CEC but also in the case of CMS academics attempting to teach students (and in particular international students – as this is the focus of my project) that there are no alternatives or that there are alternatives to capitalism respectively, neither seems to be able to take into account what it is that international students bring with them. After spending so much time talking with international students during the memory work journey as well as during the interviews, it is no surprise to me that teaching about alternative organisations does not seem to ‘open up’ students’ imaginations. Fournier (2006), for example, makes a rather interesting and important suggestion for breaking “capitalocentrism” inside the business classroom by familiarising students with the “plural identity” of capitalism – as by doing so, business students can finally come to see that capitalism is not a coherent economic form, but inherently contradictory, diverse, and hence “different from itself” (Gibson-Graham cited in Fournier 2006, p. 301). But, this does not really create the space to bring into the classroom discussions of the experiences of international students with capitalism and business studies, as we managed to have through the memory work collective. For instance, in the “different capitalisms” part of our conversation, we made a more empirical, and hence closer to the experiences of the memory workers, rupture in the perception of capitalism as a homogenous and stable system than the theoretical one suggested above by Fournier (2006). Thus, once more I would like to locate the problem, not in the lack of imagination of business students to think of alternatives, but in the realisation that in most cases none of the institutional actors in the university can create the conditions which could contribute to the acknowledgment and proliferation of the non-representable aspects of the (international) student experiences related to any of the questions that have been raised in this thesis so far. And this seems to happen because none of these actors take as a starting point the experiences of (international) students.

Paradoxically, even some of the CMS academics, who in many ways both theoretically as well as during their teaching try to turn the business logic inside business schools upside down, explicitly reproduce the common representations of (international) students. For instance, Harney, who together with Oswick (2006) wrote the article discussed above on how to teach business students to detach labour from capitalism, provocatively argued in one of his interviews that there is a unique problem with regard to business students as they come to the classroom with nothing, “completely naked – no love or passion for literature or scientific discovery – and they stand before us, asking us to make them employable”. Given this, Harney (2011) argues that business students view themselves simply as labour and thus they ask their university lecturers to train them to become workers, and only workers. Although I do not agree with Harney’s specific comment, his provocation forces us to think – and perhaps that was his intention – and add dimensions to the situation through developing more contingent points that go beyond this generalisation. For instance, the points made by the memory workers as well as by my interviewees exemplified the impossibility of stripping students entirely of their passions, desires for and loving attachments to art, literature, dance, scientific discovery and so on, to allow them to stand, ‘naked’, possessing only a desire to become simply workers. To the contrary, all the research participants seemed to humbly yield to the complexity, contradictions and the messiness of their experiences that reflected both the common representations of their experiences and the openings created by contact with the non-representable aspects of their experiences.

Thus, various aspects of our discussions with the memory workers and some of the interview data blend together in the next and last memory work section, in order to explore one further dimension of both our discussion of business studies as well as on our perceptions of experience. That is to say, that in the final part of the *Why Business Studies* session Natalie came to realise and finally explicitly articulate the embodiment of her experiences. This new angle, together with some of Natalie’s accounts of business studies (which have not

been discussed so far) as well as those of the rest of the memory work collective, led me to connect some of the issues explored above – insecurities and anxieties about job prospects and future life options, business studies having become a necessity etc. – with current labour and life conditions under the regime of precarity.

6.2.3 The paradox of studying business as a way to escape: precarious experiences and the knowing body

The following dialogue between Natalie and Andromeda is from our third meeting with the cue being *Arriving in the UK*. While this meeting took place two months prior to our session on business studies, this particular part of our discussion is presented here as it is highly relevant to our exploration of business studies.

Natalie: ...I don't know but for me, what I had before the Master's was quite all right but I wanted to escape my home country and the potential job perspective. So, I could find something very competitive to do [back in my home country] as most of my classmates were planning to do so, banking etc., but I wanted to escape this environment...

Andromeda: Yes, but I think this a healthy escape; cause a lot of people want to escape and go to study because they want to have fun; you know, because there is the assumption of studying abroad being fun.

Natalie: I don't know if it was a healthy escape but it was certainly a safe escape cause I went again to a business school in order to be able to secure a job in the end of the day and settle in the UK instead of going back to [my country of origin]. I don't know, but I think from the different ways of escaping, it is one of the most comfortable. So, I don't know if I was coming like an illegal migrant would be a different form of escape for sure... But even if you come as a skilled migrant, again you would be very dependent on the organisation you work for. So it is really a nice way, and almost an independent way,

of course you are dependent on the money whoever is supporting you and so on... [but then] you are prepared for being able to go to [and create after your studies] your own life/ world and so on, something like that.

In this meeting Natalie considers her type of escape as safe, or at least safer than the alternative escape route of illegal migration. Needless to say, this is indeed in numerous ways a safer way of escaping compared to illegally migrating to another country. According to Natalie, escaping your country of origin by going abroad to study is not just a safe escape but “almost an independent” means of escape. As she explains, even skilled migrants are dependent on the organisation they work for. Thus, she considers international students as free, or at least freer than any other type of migrant, not only during the student migration journey but even after its conclusion; “so you are prepared for being able to go to your own life/ world”.

But, there is a contradiction in Natalie’s story. The phrase “almost independent way” that Natalie uses has a double meaning, and both meanings are enclosed in Natalie’s own words. On the one hand, she asserts that studying abroad provides you with the opportunity to “independently” choose your future life/world, but on the other hand Natalie does not neglect to remind herself and the rest of the memory workers that she had to choose the ‘safe escape’ of studying business in order to secure a future career. As such, being “independent” is twofold. Natalie does not feel like depending on any employer, trafficker or any other form of external control during her migration journey, and hence she is more flexible and more independent compared with both illegal as well as skilled migrants. But at the same time, dependency emanates from her own self-management. That is, Natalie has to restlessly pay attention to various possibilities that might affect securing a desirable future life/career/world and make the ‘right’ choices. In other words, although she feels independent or at least more independent than other migrants, her studying abroad is arguably another case of trying to secure one’s future

life/career under contemporary labour and life conditions informed by late capitalism.

More specifically, international student mobility is arguably interwoven with the emergence of precarious life, insofar as it is implicated in the new modalities of life and labour under the post-Fordist era, as explained in chapter 5. Although precarious labour is not the exception in capitalism but the norm as Neilson and Rossiter (2008) suggest, during the post-Fordist era the strategic systematisation of precarity has consequently generated a new multiplicity of precarious experiences. That is, the new configurations of labour and life under post-industrial, post-contractual and post-welfare conditions have contributed to the proliferation and intensification of work and life insecurity that transverse the previous divisions between citizen and non-citizen workers, and between skilled and non-skilled labour (*ibid.*). At the same time, the emergence of immaterial labour is arguably at the core of the post-Fordist societies, inasmuch as there is a constantly increasing number of labour activities which require workers with a certain level of communicative/emotional skills, creativity, care, knowledge and expertise, forcing the distinctions between production and reproduction or labour time and free time to also collapse (Lazzarato, 1996; Morini and Fumagalli, 2010).

Of course social and labour transformations, like the lowest possible level of security and the extreme demands of the individual worker to protect and manage her own self, are unequivocally supported and promoted by the political economic imperatives of neoliberalism. Consequently, the neoliberal political economy has created the perfect conditions for individualism to thrive, while the self appears to be the ultimate anchor in this sea of instability and absence of protection (Harvey, 2005). In this increasingly individualistic environment encouraged by neoliberal imperatives, managerialism also flourishes – not only in the form of management in organisations of all types, but as a personal enterprise; the management of the self⁵¹.

⁵¹ For more details on the management of the self from the perspective of governmentality studies see chapter 3 (section 3.1).

As Parker (2002) explains, managerialism has been diffused across society, as it is made obvious by the remarkable proliferation of self-management and self-improvement books. Boltanski and Chiapello (2005) have vigorously described the scary implications of someone trying to be “her own entrepreneur”. In particular, analysing the guidebook for ‘ambitious’, and hence ‘successful’ managers written by Ronald Burt, they reveal how managerialism effectively ensuring that all aspects of faith and trust are placed with the self. As Boltanski and Chiapello (ibid.) explain, being one’s own entrepreneur involves giving up on a long-term career plan – most jobs are temporary nowadays anyway – and hence adopting a very opportunistic approach to the building of relations. This is what Burk specifically refers to as networking. In effect, the successful networker should consider any connection, any network being built with others as a means of “aggrandizing” and “inflating” one’s self without caring for or helping in any way those others involved in the network (ibid.). By being mobile and changing affiliations constantly the entrepreneurial individual’s main benefit is time, as she succeeds in attaching to her name the work of the network without acknowledging or appreciating any collaboration. This kind of attention to the self also emanates from the “extremely uncertain and fluctuating” contemporary life and labour world in which only the self appears to be relatively stable, and hence “worth the effort of identifying and developing” (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005, p. 359).

Although Boltanski and Chiapello (ibid.) have analysed how managers have welcomed and actually exploited many of the conditions which flourish in neoliberal societies as they lead to maximisation of profit and wealth for certain individuals at the expense of the rest, the exceptional demands for flexible and uncertain labour created by these neoliberal political and economic arrangements have also clearly contributed to what has been previously described as ‘the proliferation of precarious experiences’. However, precarious experiences involve a multiplicity of intensities and characteristics, which are not reducible to the entrepreneurial self and self-management. I will come back

to the diversity of precarious experiences later in this section. Even more importantly, precarity should arguably no longer be considered as accidental collateral damage of neoliberal labour configurations, but as a very strategic and pervasive attempt to systematise and “institutionalise precarity”, orchestrated by vertical lines of power which transverse multiple geopolitical spaces (Papadopoulos, Stephenson and Tsianos, 2008, p. 236).

An example would again be the Careers and Employability Centre (CEC). As described in the previous section through the work of Chertkovskaya (2013), CEC staff, by using the discourse of employability, emphasise the vital importance of the demonstration of a diverse set of skills, if someone wants to get a job given today’s labour reality. However, the conclusion that Chertkovskaya (*ibid.*) reaches, is that employability imperatives are effectively masking the transformations of labour conditions under which precarious jobs have become the norm. Putting it simply, employability does not guarantee employment. Employability – the strategic and continuous personal effort of enhancing one’s possibilities to meet industry’s demands, mainly by mastering how to sell one’s self in the ‘right way’ – is promoted as the ultimate ‘cure’ to unemployment. But, according to Chertkovskaya (*ibid.*), the strong and explicit advocacy of employability inside higher education institutions and the attempt to regulate all students’ approach to labour is not only politically very problematic, but is almost evil. This is because it is an attempt to conceal that the employability logic stems from recent changes in labour conditions under which, despite being ‘employable’, many young people will never find secure jobs, but only precarious ones (*ibid.*).

Moreover, supposedly ‘caring’ about all the students and under the excuse of the globalisation of the labour market, the CEC as mentioned in the previous section (6.2.2) is dedicated to also familiarising international students with how employability works and to helping them to unlearn any different labour approaches they might bring with them. Thus, I could suggest that the CEC is an example of the institutionalisation of precarity, inasmuch as it effectively teaches students how to come to terms with being precarious; how

to make precarity ordinary. The CEC staff arguably do not prepare university students for becoming employable, but for becoming precarious. At the same time, the multinational campus seems to be one of the most promising opportunities for spreading the systematisation of precarity across the globe, without even directly involving other nation states. That is, the global university has become an institution which contributes to the formation of global labour transformations through bypassing nation states, which is how vertical aggregates typically work (Papadopoulos, Stephenson and Tsianos, 2008).

Another dimension of today's precarity is that precarious experiences are particularly intense, even after securing a job or qualifying for an occupation (Papadopoulos, Stephenson and Tsianos, 2008). Amanda Ehrenstein's (2012) PhD research focused mainly on this specific aspect of precarity. She researched how labourers experience precarity, and in particular the experiences of female workers in social care. Chertkovskaya's (2013) empirical research very clearly illustrates the efforts of organisations like the CEC to 'teach' students that being hyperflexible and hyperactive, as well as being able to present certain skills and/or feign emotions on demand are very useful and desirable skills for successfully competing in the global job market. Ehrenstein's research explored the embodied experiences of precarity; the anxieties, the intense feelings of instability, "the affective exhaustion" and "emotional exploitation" (Tsianos and Papadopoulos, 2006; Ehrenstein, 2012). According to her, precarity indeed demands skills like being able to build networks, and living with constant hyperactivity, hyperflexibility, restlessness, uncertainty and emotional drainage. More specifically, Ehrenstein pays careful attention to how precarity forces workers to master their networking skills, as well as building and maintaining numerous support practices, not only in order to remain employable – although some of the networks do become sources of potential employment – but also in order to emotionally and physically survive under conditions of intense insecurity and vulnerability.

As such, Ehrenstein's (ibid.) research suggests two more slippery aspects of precarious experiences; they are not homogeneous and they are not only related to one's labour subjectivity. Precarity cannot but affect many parts of one's life – and definitely affects one's life beyond work. As many of Ehrenstein's (ibid.) interviewees admitted to her, the nine to five job does not exist anymore. One has to keep an almost constant connection to work and at the same time 'fertilise' the ground for potential job or project opportunities to grow. As such, one has to be able to cultivate and manage one's future – even if one is currently employed – in the present. Given this, under precarious life and labour conditions the future is already exploited in the present (Papadopoulos, Stephenson and Tsianos, 2008, pp. 232–233).

In this respect, returning to Natalie's case, as she also mentioned, studying abroad does not involve dependency on an employer, yet at the same time her account of "independent escape" exemplifies the dependency on herself to create the best possible safety nets for her future life and career. That is, her future is already exploited in the present. She did not just have to be mobile in order to acquire the necessary skills/degree/qualifications demanded by today's labour market. Instead, even before she left her home country, and even before possessing the ability to foresee exact future job opportunities, she already had to choose wisely the subject of her studies; business. As such, the proliferation and intensification of precarious labour conditions affect many different aspects of everyday life, shaping the desires, hopes and dreams of people, especially young people (Morini and Fumagalli, 2010).

However, this is only one aspect of how precarity is experienced and it is certainly not the most hopeful one. It is important to appreciate the exceptional pervasiveness of today's precarious labour arrangements. Yet, the above description of precarious experiences implies passivity on the part of those who experience precarity. That is, precarity is understood as imposed upon our subjectivities and inscribed on our bodies. While our autonomy to appropriate and re-work it is almost entirely denied. Boltanski and Chiapello (2005, p.4)

have called this tendency “historical neo-Darwinism”; “‘mutations’ are imposed on us in much the same way as they are imposed on species: we must adapt or die. But human beings do not only endure history; they make it. And we wanted to see them at work” (ibid.). Thus, once again, by remaining close to and familiar with everyday experiences, we can come to notice how labour and life transformations induced by political and economic changes discussed so far are in a constant remaking, initiated (intentionally and unintentionally) by those who experience them.

Examining Natalie’s example again, in the session presented above (*Arriving in the UK*), her definition of independent escape seems to ignore how self-dependent she had to be and the perils of this kind of self-dependency. Yet, in our session *Why Business Studies?* she found the space to develop her thoughts on the matter, and express in a clearer manner what exactly filled her with these independent feelings, and what these feelings made possible. More specifically, during our *Why Business Studies?* session, Natalie expanded on the point that she came to study business abroad in order to avoid working in the business world back home. She had explained to us in different sessions that if she stayed in the Eastern European country she comes from, and having studied a Bachelor’s of economics in a very orthodox university, she would definitely have ended up working for a bank or a corporation. But she did not want to “lock herself in this particular embodiment” (Natalie’s exact words). Looking at her classmates during her undergraduate degree, who were interested in investment banking, wearing suits and expressing a competitive attitude most of the time, Natalie felt the urge to search for alternatives:

But let me go back to the body... So, I am thinking again about trying to escape business as practice by doing business in form of studies, because business as a practice is kind of constraining for the body. It puts you into certain boundaries and into certain styles of being. At the same time is draining for the body as well [...] So, not choosing business as a practice, I don’t know, it was a way to almost preserve your body and to liberate or make it free. I don’t know if this makes

sense but I think it does speak to me, and that I just started thinking about it... cause ... cause I never tried to connect the rejection of business as practice with embodied experience.

Everyday mundane experiences during her undergraduate studies in her country of origin, like observing her classmates wearing suits or sensing their competitive attitude were some of the imperceptible moments when her body came into play. In other words, instead of trying to explain the reasons why she studied business abroad in terms of a logical and rational decision making process – as was more the tendency at the beginning of our *Why Business Studies?* session amongst all the memory workers – this time her body took over.

But, the encounter between Natalie's body and her classmates' bodies should not be reduced to a phenomenological description of those bodies. Rather, I suggest a more Spinozian approach to the encounter between bodies, not as bad or good encounters but as "how encounters affect us, and they empower, or separate us from, our capacity to act (that is also to think and feel)" (Stengers, 2008, p. 44). I think this is what Natalie was expressing through her use of the word "constraining" – "business as a practice is kind of *constraining* for the body". Thus, her body acted, and this is actually what bodies do; the body is a "center of action", capable of moving things and creating along the way, and that is why "it cannot give birth to a representation" (Bergson, 1991, p. 20). Putting it differently, Probyn – inspired by Deleuze and Guattari – challenges the idea that knowledge takes place in the brain through rationally calculating possibilities, and suggests that bodies know better especially when they seem to "get out of line" (Probyn in Latimer, 2009, p. 4). That is, bodies are "implicated in forms of resistance that transport along the lines of flight" (ibid.). "[L]ines of flight" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987) can be understood as change-triggering paths which can cross and are affected by established patterns, but do not identify with or become solidified within them (Lorraine, 2005).

Natalie's body stepped out of line when it felt affected by the possibility of following the path of her classmates and working in a competitive business environment. In the following extract Natalie is again trying to explain to us how much she felt like her body wanted to escape the business trap:

I didn't want to become like that... Actually there is this notion of self that comes from business, I mean through the values of business... I mean not values, I wouldn't call them values, but I would call them characteristics that business puts on us. To be an entrepreneurial self, so you are not doing art, for instance, although you are interested in art, but you actually cannot be interested in art too much because you should be entrepreneurial and you should be employable and that stuff.

The above extract is the continuation of the previous one, in which Natalie introduced the idea of embodiment. If we read the two extracts together, it seems like Natalie makes embodied experience and subjectivity inseparable. In the first extract, Natalie's body seems to act / 'go out of line' enabling her to refuse business in the form of work, while in the second one, she once again mentions in which ways the business imperatives are inscribed on us/on our bodies. However, the ways business imperatives are inscribed on our bodies are not static and passively accepted. Indeed, Natalie actively resists to be the entrepreneurial subject that business world celebrates: "I didn't want to become like that". In other words, to refuse the docility of her body is to refuse the particular modalities of labour nurtured by business imperatives and the particular "embodiment of subjectivity" business world demands (Blackman *et al.*, 2008, p. 18). As the first extract evokes, her dis-engagement with business as work, was also a way to create space for engaging with and be affected by other things she likes; a way to enact a multiplicity of ways of feeling and sensing the world.

Memory work as a methodology encourages those who take part in the collective to bring out how they have experienced and embodied a situation, instead of how they rationalise it, and hence memory workers' bodies are

constantly present in the unfolding of the research (Willig, cited in Brown *et al.*, 2011, p. 499). However, talking explicitly about the body enabled Natalie to go more directly beyond the logic that business studies is merely a necessity in today's labour and life structures, one with which students passively comply. In other words, talking about the body, not as a universal category but as situated and as knowing in a non-rational and non-representational manner, allows us to challenge the idea of business students as unitary subjects with predictable and homogeneous characteristics that can only mirror the institutional aspects of business schools. Most business students are much more than identical to the representations of them as discussed so far in this chapter, and although I have emphasised this point throughout this thesis, bringing the embodiment of experience into this discussion on business studies serves to create another interesting and arguably more immediate lens through which we can come to see that studying business can be unexpectedly subversive and even a way to set one's body free, instead of being another mechanism to discipline it, as governmentality studies would suggest (Burchell, Gordon and Miller, 1991).

Thus, Natalie's feelings of independence, which seemed almost naïve previously, now made much more sense, insofar as her moving to the UK to study business was not solely a pragmatic decision reflecting today's labour reality. It was also a form of resistance and escape from a suffocating present and an even more suffocating future. The significance of Natalie's final account is that she further highlighted her active participation in the construction of her experiences. Even though she travelled to the UK to study another business related degree, she never identified, as she says in the extract above, with the entrepreneurial self which business logic wants to impose on us. By going abroad to study business she did not become an entrepreneurial subject, or a wealth hunter, or a social capital hunter. Her account of her student migration journey seemed to evoke the exact opposite; it was a form of escape from the possibility of working and living in contexts which would have constrained her through such identifications.

This new lens, created by Natalie, also allows me to revisit the interview of Ching-Lan. Parts of her interview appeared in the very first paragraphs of the current chapter in which her and two other interviewees (Chu-Hua and Bao-Yu) talked about their passions for things other than business, and which they were pressured (mainly by their parents) to compromise about or somehow make more compatible with contemporary labour arrangements (for more details see section 6.1, as well as section 3.3.5). Passionately talking about their love for art, music, languages and history could be considered an already powerful response to those who regard business students as uninterested in anything else apart from becoming employable. However, Ching-Lan's case is particularly interesting, and especially close to Natalie's account concerning business studies. She explicitly confirmed the same paradoxical relationship with studying business as Natalie; studying business was a way to avoid working in business. More specifically, when I asked Ching-Lan if she had ever considered studying something else other than business, she very passionately replied to me that she always loved anything to do with art. But because art is considered as a 'second class' career option in her home country, and in particular, by her family, she ended up studying for business-related degrees. At the time of the interview she was doing her second Master's in the UK in a business-related field. Yet, this time Ching-Lan's studies abroad were a form of fleeing the job she had found in a bank in her country of origin, after completing her first Master's in the UK. As she emphasised to me, she did not like anything about working in a bank, and although studying for another business degree was not an exciting option either, it was the only way to convince her parents to allow her (and to support her) to leave her home country and the job in the bank. Moreover, attempting to further (possibly permanently) postpone working in a business environment, she had decided to apply to study for a PhD in the UK in order to stay in academia. Thus, she actively participated in the creation of her own autonomous trajectories away from the 'business job trap' by – paradoxically – using business studies.

Even more interestingly, Ching-Lan's attempts to break free were not simply a reaction to the attempts of both her parents and society to control her and to make her into a responsible worker in a 'respectable job'. Rather, it was the other way around; her parents aligning with the needs of contemporary society's social and labour arrangements tried to control Ching-Lan's desires to be involved with art from a young age in order to prepare her for the reality of employment:

[...] when I was young, when I was doing the high school or even in primary school, that was a general consideration [what to study]. If you studied art there [in her home country], that means you are not good. You're like a bad student because you are so bad at the academic thing, so bad at reading and exams. So that's why you have no choice, then you turn to study art. So, it's like that. So I could... [do the academic thing]. And it was my results for the examinations were really good at that stage, were really good so I stuck to the reading though it was boring. Though I was longing for the painting and for the music... and all that. That were my dreams. Yeah, I couldn't do that because of that bad idea [art being a second class career choice] and my parents believed it. I don't know, how come people think that way. It's weird.

As the interview extract evokes, Ching-Lan's parents reacted badly to their daughter's desire to pursue a career other than the currently normative one. That is, the control came to tame her desires, and not the other way around. Even if Ching-Lan had to compromise with her parents and study what they thought was best for her, in the end she actually used the very (business) rhetoric they had utilised to control her in order to avoid working in business. In other words, she used the very means of such control in order to escape control. As such Ching-Lan's escape is a triple escape: from her job in the bank; from a social environment which supports business jobs and undermines artists; and from her parents, who as majoritarian subjects yearn for her to be properly incorporated inside the current social norms.

Ching-Lan, like the rest of my interviewees, did not take part in the memory work collective nor did she explicitly discuss the body. Yet, what Natalie's account offered to the analysis of business studies is similar to what Ching-Lan alludes to. Firstly, the mechanisms of precarious labour are in place when my participants (both interviewees and memory workers) talk about their anxieties and fears about their future lives and careers. Secondly, we see how these anxieties become embodied experiences. Thirdly, there are aspects of these embodied experiences which exceed the mechanisms of precarity. In other words, both Natalie and Ching-Lan's escapes, as well as those of the rest of my participants', are humble escapes. They do understand that they are affected by the conditions which are controlling them in any given situation (e.g. precarity, the normalisation of business studies and business related jobs, the need to be mobile and constantly flexible), but they try to carefully manoeuvre their social existence beyond them without loudly protesting against them and without identifying with them either. It could be argued that Natalie's body did not just refuse to be afraid of the possibility of not becoming employable, but it actually reached out, extended, opened up and in effect yielded to what it desired; the freedom to desire what it desires. Thus, Natalie's account echoes the creative and productive forces of desire, insofar as – according to Deleuze and Guattari (2000) – desire is inherently revolutionary. Hence, such desire is a threat to the socially produced desires which train us to desire our own oppression, in order for the social order to be maintained and spread even further.

To conclude, I would suggest that all the accounts discussed in this chapter to various degrees and in different ways challenge those representations which homogenise international students as focused merely on employability and as wealth hunters. Some of these representations are grounded, as Sidhu and Dall'Alba (2012, p. 415) suggest, in the reduction of international students to 'rational, choice-exercising consumers' who are "self-contained, self-directing and capable of self-knowledge", beliefs that also circulate through academic discourses. These representations (amongst others)

serve the establishment and the fuelling of mechanisms of exploitation controlled by the regime of precarity. For these reasons it is vital for social research to make visible how such representations work and simultaneously how their questioning is already a part of everyday ordinary practices (Papadopoulos, Stephenson and Tsianos, 2008).

6.3 Conclusion: The international student journey and its many becoming⁵²

Our very last session was dedicated to our experiences with the methodology of memory work. Due to the increasingly busy schedule of the memory workers, our last session was attended only by Natalie, Sunny and myself⁵³. Throughout the memory work process, Sunny explained numerous times that she feels different compared to other Asian students. For Sunny, the points of differentiation with other Asian students concerned her relatively low economic background; the fact that she spent periods working while she was studying in the UK; that she stayed in a cheap not extravagant and expensive student accommodation while an undergraduate student in the UK; and that she never really wanted to limit her socialising to that with other Chinese students and to speak only in Chinese. Here are some of her thoughts as she expressed in our session *Felling homesick*:

Sunny: You know I am not a typical [Asian]. But for most of the [Asian] people; typically, they stick to each other and they only speak [in their native language]. I didn't even join the language courses here, so I didn't have the chance to meet those people. Secondly, I was not a rich [Asian] like most of them who can afford to live in this beautiful student accommodation. Most of the [Asian] people choose the BEST accommodation in the uni. I didn't live in one of those. But I was quite lucky, [I found] a uni accommodation, but it is not really

⁵² I use the term of 'becoming' in the way I have used it throughout the thesis; becoming-minoritarian (for more details see section 1.4).

⁵³ I had only informal chats with the rest of the memory work collective about their experiences of the memory work process. However, I don't present them in the thesis as they are not a part of the official research process. I can only say that they all had positive feelings regarding it.

run by a uni, but it is run by a charity [by a religious one], it was like a house, but there were only 4 people [who come from the same country as me] including me and my husband, so only other two, and the rest were from really everywhere. So, you have to speak English (...) So, the landlord actually noticed that I am a different person, so he actually asked me to join a Methodist [as the Methodist charity was running the student accommodation] conference as a representative. So he said: "we don't have [students from your country] for many years, do you wanna come"? And I actually went there, and I gave a presentation to a bunch of, you know, senior citizens (...) So, this is how I think I get to stick together with the other girls, cause there was no other way, we had to speak English to each other. There was not a way for an Indian girl to speak [in my native language]. So, I began to speak English very fast, very soon.

Thus, Sunny seemed to believe in representations of Asian students as the spoiled children of the Asian elite. As a consequence of this belief, during her international student journey Sunny started deviating from what is viewed as 'typically Asian', as she wanted to be different from other Asian students. As we did not have any other Asian students in our memory work collective, in our session *Feeling Homesick*, I decided to share with her some of my Asian interviewees' experiences, in order to illustrate to her that their experiences were very similar to hers, and very different from common representations of Asian students. However, Sunny's only reaction to my comment was "Oh that's good"! It was only during our final memory work session with the cue *On Memory Work* that Sunny returned to this particular discussion.

During this session, Sunny wrote that through the memory work process she had finally discovered her 'true self'. However, Natalie's question challenging Sunny's stated new belief, served to help Sunny revisit and re-problematise her relations to and with other Asian international students. Here is the dialogue between Natalie and Sunny:

Natalie: In your memory you talk about "the true self" as if you have now reached a final conclusion of who you really are and there is no

need of further exploration. As if there is one true self and now you know it. I am not sure that you want to say exactly this. Can you explain what you meant exactly?

Sunny: Yes, you are right. I mean, I didn't mean that there is one true self but you know that I was always thought I'm different [Asian] than the others. I realised that I am not (...) And also when you said [she means me] about the interviews with other [Asian] students, I heard things that I could NEVER expect. I could never imagine that they say similar things like me.

Sunny's repeated resistance to subscribing to being a 'typical' Asian student within the Asian student community, was arguably a way to create distance between herself and the group she supposedly belonged to, in order to be able to free herself from all the expectations attached to that. Indeed, there were many times that Sunny mentioned that she wanted to be able to connect with students who came from different backgrounds and that this is what made her intentionally deviate from anything she thought could trap her in an 'Asian identity'. When Sunny talked about "the true self", she seemed to finally recognise that for a long time she had felt it necessary to dis-identify with the identity 'Asian international student', in order to be viewed and treated differently from those perceived as typically such. However, during the process of the memory work and especially when she started reflecting on what she shared with other Asian students, she realised that her Asian background did not necessarily mean that this fixed, limited or controlled her experiences as formed only by that aspect of her identity, or by how this was viewed or represented by others. Her experiences, and the experiences of my interviewees which I shared with her, exceed or go beyond typical representations of Asian international students. In this sense, international students' experiences are more resilient than stereotypical representations of them suggest.

Throughout the memory work process, we explored Sunny's multiple ways of becoming minoritarian-international student; through her remaining silent, participating in online forums and manipulating the police. In fact, the

journey of our memory work created the conditions and contexts to enable the exploration of the common ground between the different experiences of becoming international student in a minoritarian sense, rather than bringing international students' experiences together merely in institutional terms. This is to say, during our conversations we engaged with Andromeda, Bob, Natalie and Sunny's tactics of betraying the rules of the global university by lying, remaining silent, participating in online forums, using business studies to avoid taking up employment in business. By struggling with, not believing in, and not identifying with, the whole international student aggregates' rules, they created ways to become invisible, slippery, in between and 'a part with no part' – to use Rancière's (1999) term. As we saw in Chapter 5, for Rancière, having no part means that the memory workers participated in and experienced the international student aggregate in ways that were not predicted or controlled.

The long and slow process of memory work helped us to follow the international student journey almost step by step, illuminating through doing so its complexity and its 'on-goingness', as opposed to notions of linearity. In other words, the memory workers' ways of participating in the global university were not pre-decided. They continued to emerge and be created along the way, according to given situations and contexts, and the possibilities of creating alternative spaces, even inside enclosures. In fact, during their international student journeys, the memory workers struggled with and in some cases left behind hitherto well-established identifications. Above I mentioned the example of Sunny's dis-identification with her 'Asian identity', while in Chapter 5 we explored how the international student migration journey became, for Natalie, the starting point for leaving the idea of citizenship behind. Natalie had started her international student journey having in mind to "become a citizen of a normal country" (meaning the UK), and hence acquire access to 'better' institutional rights. However, during her student journey she came to realise the limitations and enclosures which come with citizenship, and this made her want to be mobile once more, leaving the UK before she became a UK citizen (see section 5.2).

None the less international students' experiences can so easily be interpreted or translated into representational language because of the way students become international students and because of the ways they understand change. During my research journey, and through the analysis of the data, I came to realise that for my participants, change unfolds around the tensions between the conditions which *seem* to be in place in a given situation and the conditions still in making and remaking. This approach to change can be troublesome to grasp as it centrally involves an appreciation of contingency, immanence and imagination. In fact, in the very first session⁵⁴ with the memory workers, we discussed how often the desire to change is an urgent feeling to get out of a specific mode of living, and not a perfectly orchestrated move towards a clear goal. Although our very first cue was *Applying to Study Abroad*, all the memory workers decided to give a new title to our first session – *Life-Changing Experience*. That first session indicated the memory workers' hopes of changing the conditions of their lives through becoming international students. Although becoming international students, in institutional terms, would bring some relatively predictable changes in their lives, at the same time the memory workers seemed excited about all the unexpected, unimaginable and unknown changes involved in their prospective international student journey. In that sense, their desires seemed to circulate around change itself. The following words come from Sunny's first written memory:

... Life changing moment for Sunny. Decide to get out of [her country of origin] and to see the outside world. It isn't an easy thing at the beginning. Sunny knows nothing about studying abroad and no confidence in English. She does not know too much about England. She doesn't know how their daily life looks like.

Sunny went to talk to agencies to see how to apply for universities abroad. Sunny didn't know about IELTS. She went to training sessions for IELTS. Painful learning process. Took the exams twice to get the required score [...]

⁵⁴ Our first session was basically a pilot session, so I've decided to only present a few interesting points made then, by the memory workers, about viewing the international student journey and experiences, as the starting point for a series of changes in their lives.

*At the end of the day, she accepted the offer from [a UK university].
She felt relieved and just prepared to get to a place she had no idea about [..]
Now glad she did it and went all the way.*

Change was linked to an adventurous spirit, to the unknown, experimentation, unpredictability, uncertainty, curiosity, ambiguity, mystery, almost magic, and yet change seemed to be so dependent on its institutional affirmation, as enclosed in the application form and the acceptance letter. The experiences of the application process as they were expressed through their memories, reveal this continuous interplay between a desire for change as an opening of a new unknown world, and a desire for change as institutionally constructed. Below, is a small section from the discussion of the memory workers, about how they imagined the international student journey, prior to its actualisation:

Me: Did you ever think, back then, how your life is going to change by studying abroad?

Sunny: I don't think anybody thought of that... I mean what is going to happen in the end...

Nick⁵⁵: No, it was almost fictional, imaginary...

Andromeda: All that matters is to be accepted. If you are accepted, everything seems possible. The letter is the ticket.

Despite their initially very positive and hopeful feelings about changing their lives through becoming international students, as discussed in the last two chapters, they very frequently felt disappointed by the aggregate of their studies abroad. Although the moments of disappointment and suffering are frequently linked, in research on the experiences of international students (see chapter 1), to harm to their well-being, due to a loss of or confusion about their

⁵⁵ As I mentioned at the beginning of Chapter 5, Nick was with us only for the very first memory work session. Thus, these are the only words of his I have used in the thesis.

identities, in chapters 5 and 6, I explored different sources of anxiety related to current migration politics; securitisation, fragmentation of borders, and strategies of simultaneous exclusion and inclusion. I also discussed contemporary labour arrangements around exploitation and precarity (hyper-flexibility, hyper-mobility, uncertainty, life-long learning, and the hegemony of business related jobs). Thus, the points of tension in the experiences of my research participants as international students seemed to be related more to the above conditions, rather than to feelings of homesickness or confusion as to their identities. Actually, the struggles they engaged in during their experiences indicated a kind of productive confusion, as it allowed the creation of space for exploring the quiet processes of dis-identification with the mechanisms designed to capture their international student experiences. This kind of productive confusion and uncertainty can set social transformation in motion, as it indicates that the memory workers are breaking with the naturalness and obviousness of their positions within the international student aggregate. Putting it differently, as it emerged in Chapters 5 and 6, the memory workers' experiences, subjectivities, and mobility cannot be reduced to an international student journey which passes only through the controlling loops of migration and relates to employability desires. The multiplicity which emerges from their experiences can potentially trigger social changes related to the realms of migration and labour. In neglecting international students' uncertain and contradictory feelings, and in trying to manage and control them, social research is *itself* implicated in the blocking of social transformation.

Final remarks

*When you know in advance where you're going to
end up there's a whole dimension of experience
lacking.*

(Foucault, cited in Brown *et al.*, 2011, p. 494)

Focusing on the contingencies of international student experiences – the directly felt, lived, and sensed – this research project does not seek to provide an accurate ‘diagnosis’ (or representation) of the international student experience, or seek ways to name or even diversify understandings of it. International student experiences have already been allocated numerous names; they have been codified and squeezed into many categories designed by various national, transnational and supranational institutions, as well as by some social scientists. Even more worryingly, I argue in this thesis, identifying new experiences and giving them names and fitting them into categorisations, especially when our lived experiences have come to be targets of valorisation in our contemporary societies of control, is not only intellectually problematic but also politically dangerous.

Thus, without aiming or attempting to provide conclusive solutions to the problem of experience, this research project offered, an array of possible ways to ‘reclaim’ experience, through social research. Or to put it differently, this thesis was an experiment with researching experience in a way that does not contribute to its capture. Thankfully I am not at all alone on this journey. Debates about reclaiming our experiences, our time, our mobilities, our subjectivities, and our labour from capitalist valorisation have been taking place for some time now. Many academics⁵⁶ are working, both academically and through their activism, on these on-going without-guarantees projects, across multiple domains and disciplines – the Internet, technoscience, migration, academic publishing, care, financialisation of economy and so on.

⁵⁶ (see for instance the work of De Angelis; Ghelfi; Haraway; Hardt; Lazzarato; Mezzadra; Negri; Papadopoulos; Terranova; Tsianos– the list is thankfully long).

Thus, I hope that my thesis has managed to make links to, draw partial connections with and contribute to dialogues of knowledges around the above projects, and the reclamation of our experiences, our subjectivities, and our mobilities. Drawing on my political commitment to autonomism and my theoretical alliance with poststructuralism, I suggest that research methodologies such as memory work can open up avenues for social research to approach experience in a way that does not make experience political *per se*, but that does force us to think about the political significance of experience and the political significance of researching experience in a collective and non-representational way.

In the current project, memory work helped both myself and the memory workers to bring to the surface their everyday interventions into the socio-political conditions which shape the entire spectrum of the international student experience. This is not to say that my interviewees' accounts indicated their passive acceptance of these conditions. In fact, many of my interviewees' insights evoked how often their international student experiences are contradictory to the majoritarian modalities of the Global North university. In this sense, aspects of the interviews could be considered as contributors to a reclaiming of international student experiences, insofar as they do not confirm the scenario that our experiences, our subjectivities, our mobility can be entirely captured and put to work for capitalist valorisation. This brings to mind the case of Jawad – the student who did not even want to try to find a job in a Global North society (the UK) at the conclusion of his studies, because he did not want merely to be included as productive labour. Then there was the example of the middle class Chinese students who wanted to study abroad not because they desired to climb up the social ladder, but because they did not want their lives and labour to be constantly policed and regulated by the Chinese state.

During the memory work process, the memory workers were able to think together, and often struggle together, in terms of getting their heads around the capturing processes of the international student experience, and the

times they intentionally and/or unintentionally intervened in these processes. In other words, memory work is a methodology which obliges those who participate in it to confront both the collective nature of experience and their active participation in the production of their experiences. I consider this obligation both crucial and positive, as it creates the conditions to directly and openly think together about the political underpinnings of experience. In our case, during the process of the research as well as during the analysis, it helped us to bring together various elements of the policing strategies with regard to the international student experience, as well as appreciate and understand many of the memory workers' everyday practices and tactics for coping, challenging, refusing, avoiding, subverting and laughing at these strategies.

Furthermore, I would also like to emphasise the significance of the slowness of the memory work process. Thinking and exploring the struggles which are involved in how we experience together demands patience and time. I regularly noticed that we were all adapting to the slow momentum of the memory work, in order to be able to co-knit all these partial threads together. In that sense, through the process of the memory work we were also reminded of Isabelle Stengers' (2011) "plea for slow science". Although Stengers (*ibid.*, p. 2) directs her plea to those academics who work in technoscience, that kind of "fast, competitive, benchmarked research" is rapidly spreading, and occupying more and more spaces in the contemporary university. I feel then, that my commitment to slow science is not simply the most relevant response to the current situation, but also one of the ways to "activate the possible, and not to describe the probable that is, to think situations with and through their unknowns when I can feel them" (Stengers, 2011, p. 1).

In conclusion, I would say that memory work gave me as a researcher, who was for the first time experimenting with researching experience, the methodological and theoretical tools to navigate my research towards our struggles and passion for freedom. I learnt from the process of memory work that in order to do so, I need to dedicate and find the time, energy and space for

coming together with other people who care about creating and dedicating time and energy to a common project on experience.

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