International Student Mobility: a comparative study between Indian and Italian students in London

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Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to explore international student mobility in current times within the changing landscape in higher education in the UK. Although this time period corresponds to increasing international student mobility in the UK, the lived experiences of international students are little known. For this reason, central to the study is the understanding of international students studying and living in a specific UK context, namely Greater London, which is both the region where there is the highest concentration of foreign students in the UK, and one of greatest ones worldwide.

In order to construct a more holistic understanding of international student mobility, the study explores some key themes, including: external dimensions (i.e.: social, cultural, political, and economic aspects), and more individual dimensions (i.e.: psychological, emotional and cognitive aspects). This research is an attempt to bring together these different dimensions to illuminate the complexity and the heterogeneity of international student mobility.

In order to provide further understanding of the dimensions encompassing international student mobility, a qualitative approach is adopted. The qualitative design includes repeated interviews with two groups of international students studying in London: a group made of international students from a non-EU country (India), and a group made of international students from a EU country (Italy). In this study repeated interviews with the same informants over a five-year period of time are used to identify themes and changes over time in the informants' feedback.

This thesis represents a contribution to international student mobility's literature by uncovering international students' lived experiences and subjectivities. It stresses the importance of seeking to understand international students' views, perspectives, and the variety of ways they deal with their mobile experiences. The research findings suggest that, although there are some differences between participants, their understanding and the strategies they adopt to cope with their realities, can influence and shape international student mobility.

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1. Contextualizing

Introduction

> *Universities are great here in the UK. Thanks to university and academic networks I could improve both myself and my career. It has been a radical change…I became more tolerant, open-minded and I realized that being a stranger in London is not a stigma. I became more open-minded, I realized that diversity is the key in this world, and I realized that there can be much more than what I thought in this life.*

These words were an inspiring assertation that Francesca, a pseudonym, shared during one of the many interviews I conducted with international students both from EU and non-EU countries studying in London, from 2015 to 2019. What led Francesca, from Italy, to study in the UK was the hope that, once graduated, working in the UK or elsewhere in the world would improve her CV and provide a gateway to migration. She was taking a calculated risk by investing time and money to actualize an imagined better future. Her sense of purpose and uncertainty in moving to a different country, despite not knowing exactly the consequences and implications of her choice, is a common denominator in international students' lives. Francesca is one of the thirty-two international students studying in London whose experiences will unfold in this study. The study shows how multiple logics and dynamics can occur in international students' lives and their trajectories. In this research, moving to a foreign country for educational purposes is understood as a combination of invisible variables (individual nature and imaginaries) and more concrete social practices (Appadurai, 1996; Beech, 2019; Raghuram, 2013; Soong, 2016). This combination affects international students individually by altering how they think, behave and live, and the social context in which they operate. The research elaborates on these aspects and investigates how international students' experiences are affected by times of global mobility (Urry, 2008). In doing so, the research provides a contribution to the current debate on international education-migration nexus.

1.1. Synopses

This chapter sets the scene by providing a synopsis of the notion of the international student in current times, and then by focusing on the research background, including the international dimensions of higher education and UK higher education in this period. The chapter includes the aims of the research and the research questions and objectives, in order to give an overview of the study.

More generally, this thesis suggests that international student mobility is a complex interplay between a variety of factors. These can be classified as external dimensions (politics, economy, culture) and individual

dimensions (psychological, emotional and cognitive). The thesis is an attempt to bring together these dimensions to provide a more holistic understanding of international student mobility. In light of this purpose, Chapter 1 introduces the idea that international student mobility in current times is influenced or shaped by both global and national dynamics, policy and higher education institutions. Chapter 2 discusses international student mobility in existing literature. In order to gain a more holistic view of the phenomenon, it argues that a combination of theoretical frameworks can be useful. More specifically, the theoretical frameworks identified for the purposes of this study are: the mobilities paradigm (Urry, 2007); the notion of Network Capital (Beech, 2019; Urry, 2008); the notions of knowledge, time and space (Foucault, 2004, 2012; Raghuram, 2013); the role of emotional and cognitive factors (Appadurai, 1996, 2004; Heidegger, 2015; Husserl, 2009); and the notion of Cognitive Capitalism (Boutang, 2011). Chapter 3 focuses on research methodology and discusses the importance of qualitative research methods as the most appropriate approach for investigating international students. The chapter also looks at how mobilities are shaped by both external and individual dimensions. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 present and discuss the research findings. Each chapter is concerned with specific key themes. Chapter 4 focuses on international students' backgrounds and decision-making. Chapter 5 explores international students' lived experiences. Chapter 6 is about international students' transitions and career paths. Each key theme is presented, analyzed and discussed through the lens of the theoretical frameworks selected for the purposes of the study. In doing so, this thesis highlights the heterogeneity and the eclectic essence of international student mobility. Finally, Chapter 7 offers a summary of the key findings and considers implications for future research.

1.2. International Students in current times

International students, to some extent, can be defined as 'strangers' in host countries (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002). The 'stranger' has always been a subject of inquiry in Western society. Reflecting on the notion of 'stranger' and its implications, as well as on the concepts of sameness and otherness and identity in relation to different people, have been some of the major ethical issues across centuries and disciplines. In the Greek and Roman Empires, the words βάρβαρος (Greek) and barbărus (Latin) mean "all that are not Greek and Roman". During the Renaissance the adjective *barbarian* was used by some European humanists to distinguish "rude, wild people, with different culture and religion", from the cosmopolitanism of the Enlightenment. In contemporary times, the same questions are still important matters of debate and controversy.

In postmodern times,

the boundaries which tend to be simultaneously most strongly desired and most acutely missed are those of a rightful and secure position in society, of a space unquestionably one's own, where one can plan one's life with the minimum of interference, play one's role in a game in which the rules do not change overnight and without notice, act reasonably and hope for the better (Bauman, 1997: 26).

Nowadays the concept of the 'stranger' represents a disputed paradox. For instance, a study conducted by the Migration Observatory at Oxford University (Allen and Blinder, 2013) analyzed 58,000 UK newspaper articles between 2010 and 2012 and found that 'illegal' is the most common descriptor for the word migration, while the word 'migrant' is more frequently associated with economic terms, especially: job(s), benefits and economy. As a consequence, the term 'migration' has progressively come to have negative connotations. Newspaper headlines, TV news and social media are playing a crucial role in creating moral panics: they are feeding fear and increasing troubles, perceptions and misperceptions connected to the so-called 'migration crisis' (Bauman, 2015). Current EU policy debate largely focuses on 'migrant crisis' as a European problem requiring a European solution (van Selm, 2016). Thus, the term 'migrant' is highly controversial. On the one hand, the World Migration Report (IOM, 2015) identifies migrants as key players in making 'significant and essential contributions to the economic, social and cultural development of their host countries and of their communities back home' (IOM, 2015: 29). More specifically, migrants are recognized as 'builders of resilience', 'agents of local development' and 'city-makers'. However, migrants can be commonly perceived as causing fear and contributing to social disorder and unrest. As Bauman has pointed out, migrants "tend to cause anxiety precisely because of being 'strange' – so fearsomely unpredictable, unlike the people with whom we daily interact and from whom we believe we know what to expect...The influx of strangers might destroy the things we cherish and intend to maim or wipe out our consolingly familiar way of life" (Bauman, 2015: 3).

The same perspective can be applied to international students. International, transnational and cross-border education seem to be not just key elements, but also undisputed goals, in global times. Meanwhile, mobile people are often described as key players in making "significant and essential contributions to the economic, social and cultural development of their host countries and of their communities' back home" (IOM, 2015: 29). Despite this, the idea of the 'stranger' in relation to international student mobility is still vague and contradictory. According to King and Raghuram (2013), international students may be desirable because of their internationalism and for economic reasons, but at the same time only if they satisfy certain political and legal requirements. Thus, the movements of international students can be influenced or limited by politics of migration control (Soong, 2016).

There are significant sociological issues in the nexus of education and migration mobility, especially regarding:

·   the ways in which policies and practices intersect with mobility;
·   how the education-migration nexus is understood and put into practice by international students and universities;
·   the subjects and the motivation behind student mobility;
·   to what extent education works to render international students as subjects of power or powerful subjects (Ball, 2010: 5).

In this age of globalisation, it is important to explore these aspects, as certain myths and stereotypes need to be clarified and addressed in the field of student mobility. For instance, Soong (2016) in her study on international students in Australia, confirms how complex and multifaceted the phenomenon is, also because:

> international students have been stereotyped by the public and social media…as polarized subjects between being highly elite or exploitable (Soong, 2016: 14).

However, there seem to be some differences between past and contemporary 'strangers'. While the earlier ones "were earmarked for annihilation and served as border marks for the advancing boundary of the order-under-construction" (Bauman, 1997: 30), their contemporaries seem to be both unwanted and indispensable. In Western society, they are often depicted as undesirable by certain political parties and ideologies, and national politics of migration control, which aim at controlling, selecting and reducing the number of strangers. At the same time, they are "useful precisely in their capacity as strangers" (King and Raghuram, 2012.). In this sense, international students can be both "desired because of their internationalism and fee contributions" but at the same time "unwanted because of the politics of migration control" (King and Raghuram, 2012: 127).

Since the study includes also EU students, this aspect became even more crucial while conducting the research. The study started before the Brexit referendum and was completed while the withdrawal of the UK was looming, with no concrete understanding of the effects that leaving the European Union would have on both EU and non-EU mobility and migration (European Commission, 2019), and how UK universities could overcome this change. This makes the research both relevant and timely for two main reasons. First, the Brexit process produced a time of uncertainty for UK universities, particularly regarding the recruitment of international students and academics as well as research funding and student exchange

programmes (Beech, 2019: 3; Universities UK, 2019). These consequences are clearly impacting EU international students studying in the UK, opening up complications such as the decision to remain in the UK, as well as increasing international student fees. Second, studying abroad, historically speaking, is not new, but both the increase in numbers involved, and the context in which international student mobility takes place, are rapidly changing (King and Raghuram, 2012). This has led to a need for research in this field.

Until a couple of centuries ago, it was less complex to identify different forms of social realities, civilizations, and social classes as distinct from one another, because technologies, supranational communication and access to information and transportation were not as widely available as they are today. Since then, "a single global civilization has emerged that, like a marble…consists of the 'higher outputs' of different cultures, political, scientific, technological, socioeconomic…that are now shared by the masses worldwide" (Gürüz, 2011: 1). In addition, the internationalization or globalization of many human activities has created an unprecedented expansion of social and geographic movements. Since the western post-World War II period, there has been an explosion of research and academic literature on migration and globalization and migration and development. However, according to De Haas, the debate is extremely controversial and "has swung back and forth like a pendulum" (De Haas, 2010: 227): from remarkably optimistic views, where migration is understood as a social process (Hough, 2004) and a key factor in the promotion of international development, to more pessimistic views, where migration is understood mainly as a consequence of unequal distribution of wealth globally (Castles, 2003). As such, poverty and underdevelopment are often identified as important drivers for migration (Vargas-Silva, 2012). So, migration during the last decades has been identified as a driver of modernization and development, but also of disintegration. It has been defined as a source of equality, but also as a factor or consequence of rising inequality (Bourguignon, 2017: Perocco, 2014). It has been analyzed and criticized through the lens of neo-classical paradigms, but also through those of Marxist and neo-Marxist perspectives (Hill, 2013). Meanwhile, the field of education has undergone significant changes since the second half of the nineteenth century in Western countries (Ball, 2010; Brooks and Waters, 2011): the twenty-first century has been characterized by the founding of many universities being linked to the exigencies of markets, globalisation, entrepreneurialism, academic identity structures and shifting knowledge structures (Barnett, 2011: 4).

In global times, characterized by different epistemologies and new shifts in the fields of migration and education (Barnett, 2011; King and Raghuram, 2012), crucial questions in relation to international student mobility need to be tackled. What does it mean to be an international student in current times? How do international students perceive themselves and how do they live in host countries? What are the

sociological, political, psychological and economic boundaries distinguishing them from the rest of the people? What are their trajectories? More generally, how do we address the wider-reaching issue related to the growing student interest in international mobility via education in the UK? To deal with these broad questions, this research attempts to provide an adequate theoretical framework that is flexible enough to handle the complexities and the heterogeneity of both global dynamics (Barnett, 2011; Gürüz, 2011) and international students (Soong, 2016), but that does not restrict itself to empiricism. It is a great challenge that I hope this research could meet.

1.3. Outlining the argument

The form of 'stranger' analysed in this research project is the international student in the specific context of London during an historic moment in the UK. The movement of students who study abroad is commonly thought of as 'student mobility' (Byram and Dervin, 2008; Murphy-Lejeune, 2002) or 'student migration' (Raghuram, 2014). The phenomenon is not new, but it has been changing very rapidly, especially during the last two decades (King, 2013; Gürüz, 2011). Meanwhile, beyond discourses celebrating student mobility (European Commission, 2015), datasets and statistical analysis of the movement of bodies (Universities UK, 2018, 2019; HESA 2016; European Commission, 2015, 2018), and the intensification and diversification of the phenomenon of student mobility (Raghuram, 2014), little attention has been given to the lived experiences of mobile students and their experiences in host countries (King and Raghuram, 2012; Soong, 2016). This study was conducted in London, which is not just one of the most powerful urban economies in the world (Florida, 2018: xi), but also one of the greatest recruiters of international students worldwide (Universities UK, 2019).

The study aims to provide a more holistic understanding of international students studying in the UK, by considering:

- The notion of the 'international student'. This includes understanding the extent to which international students become differentiated in relation to movement and education in a foreign country. It also explores interpretations of the terms 'student' and 'international' to better understand the diversity of experiences between students from EU countries and students from non-EU countries (King and Raghuram, 2012) studying in London before and during the Brexit process.
- The discrepancies and interrelations between EU and non-EU students in relation to the previous point. If we understand international student mobility as a part of global and cultural process influenced by both national and international dynamics, the socio-cultural impacts it produces are also heterogeneous (Soong, 2016: 7).

- Backgrounds, subjectivities, and trajectories of international students. The study aims to explore not only how international students live in London, but also their feelings and perceptions in relation to their realities, and how they shape or are shaped by external dynamics during the research (Beech, 2019).

The study fits with the ongoing attempt to theorize international student mobility or migration (King and Raghuram, 2012; Soong, 2016), taking into account not just secondary analysis of datasets or statistics, but also international students' decision-making or self-subjectification, the lived experiences of international students, their trajectories and career path, their narratives and their subjectivities. This can contribute to the debate on international student mobility (Beech, 2019; Raghuram, 2012), the relationships between international mobility and policy discourse, and to what extent they influence the decision to study in a foreign country (Grillo, 2018).

1.4. International Student Mobility: framing the study (who, why and where)

The main purpose of this study is to investigate international students both from EU and non-EU countries studying in London in current times. This is a comparative study of two groups of students interviewed between 2015 and 2019 and from two specific countries, India and Italy. India and Italy are two of the countries with the highest number of students currently studying in the UK (Universities UK, 2019). More specifically, India comes second among the top countries of origin of non-EU students, after China. India has a total of nearly 27,000 students pursuing a degree in the UK. Meanwhile, Italy, with a total of nearly 14,000 students, is the EU country with the highest number of international students in the UK (Higher Education Statistics Agency, 2019; UK Universities, 2018). The figures show that both India and Italy have consistently been two of the major countries of origin of foreign students studying in the UK since the mid-90s (Gürüz 2011: 247). Although the countries have no relevant historical or political connections, looking at them in relation to international student mobility may contribute to the exploration and contextualization of the phenomenon.

Students from India and Italy have been selected not just for statistical reasons, but precisely because they are completely different countries. According to existing literature, differences between economic and historical spheres impact student mobility (Byram and Dervin, 2008). While the majority of mobile students are from developing countries and most mobile students are from Asia, the majority of students from industrial or post-industrial countries are more likely to stay in those countries (Murphy-Lejeune, 2008: 18). However, Italy and India are both 'sending countries'. Thus, comparing students' experiences from these different countries can both provide social and geopolitical insights and give the opportunity to reflect on differences and/or similarities between the population of international students currently studying in the

UK. Additionally, the researcher has chosen to give greater attention to the data supplied by interviews because they are based on the students' own words and therefore provide a unique understanding and a richer description of their experiences.

The UK and India have a long historical connection. From the late 18th century to the middle of 19th century, large areas of India were annexed by the British East India Company and the UK ruled India for nearly two hundred years, before the subcontinent gained independence in 1947. Additionally, India is still a full member of the Commonwealth of Nations. In line with Smith's argument (2003), the end of colonial government might not be perceived as ending economic colonialism: there are still forms of influences and relations. The author, reflecting on the notion of 'neo-colonialism', argues that this relationship "tries to encapsulate the idea that economic power and the political power that flows from it still reside elsewhere even when independence is achieved" (Smith, 2003: 76). This historical aspect cannot be bypassed when dealing with Indian students studying in the UK. For instance, Beech in her volume on the geographies of international students suggests that:

> international student mobility to Britain often follows colonial ties, when qualifications from the "mother country" were considered more valuable both culturally and economically than those from home. This continues to the present day and is in part facilitated by shared linguistic ties and education systems which often exist between colonizer and colonized both past and present (Beech, 2019: 6).

On the other hand, the relevant Italian historical background is completely different. Italy has never been ruled or administrated by the UK and has no relevant connection with India. Italy is classified as a 'developed country' (IMF, 2018), but, to put it with Giddens' words, is a country "too accustomed to crises", with a way of life that is "becoming unaffordable", a political system which is "ill-equipped to deliver the necessary political leverage", and an academic system which seems to be "over-crowded to the point of exhaustion, with few effective reforms having been made, and expenditure on R&D is low too" (Giddens, 2007: 39). Meanwhile, India is one of the most successful economies in the world because it is "no longer competing on the basis of cheaper wages, but, increasingly, on the level of quality and technology" (Giddens, 2007: 48).

The UK has been chosen for different reasons, including its academic attractiveness and international reputation (Brooks, 2018). This led the UK to be the largest recruiter of international students in Europe (Gürüz, 2011; Universities UK, 2016, 2017, 2019). The undisputed growing importance of Anglo-American models of higher education, particularly during the last couple of decades (Beech, 2019: 10), was also considered. In 2003 the UK Department of Higher Education and Skills pointed out the importance of Higher Education in the marketplace and market strategies, because "competitors are looking to sell higher

education overseas into the markets we have traditionally seen as ours" (DEFS, 2003: 13). According to one of the last OECD reports (2018), it appears that the UK has the highest number of foreign-born individuals in tertiary education among OECD countries. In addition, the UK is the largest recruiter of international students in the world at present, apart from the United States (HEPI, 2015; Universities UK, 2019). More specifically, in 2018/2019 there were 485,645 international students (both EU and non-EU) pursuing a degree in the UK. The number saw a significant increase on the previous year, which encompassed a total of 458,520 students, and represents nearly 20% of the total student population in the UK (Universities UK, 2019). Statistics show that the total number of international students in the UK in 2018/2019 included 342,620 students from countries outside the European Union, and 143,025 students from counties of the European Union, excluding the UK (Higher Education Statistics Agency, 2019).

London has been identified as a crucial area in the UK for conducting this research for two main reasons. First, it is the English region which hosts the highest number of international students. In 2018 there were nearly 120,000 international students at London universities (Higher Education Statistics Agency, 2019). According to statistics, a quarter of the entire population of international students studying in the UK, was concentrated in Greater London. Second, London is not just the area with the highest percentage of international students in the UK but is considered one of the biggest recruiters of international students in a world in which education seems to be a major export industry (Gürüz, 2011). According to the top-ten University Rankings, three of the main UK universities are based in London (UK Universities, 2020). Looking at the top-five list of UK universities with the highest number of international students, there are two universities based in London. One is on the top of the list, with its 18,000 international students, and the second is the fourth one, with nearly 11,200 international students (Higher Education Statistics Agency, 2019). If we agree with Raghuram, who defined the places where international students move to, as "individual recipients of migration" (2013: 144), then it may be argued that London could be also understood an attractive recipient of students from all over the world.

It was decided to limit this study to one place, London, for two main reasons. First, existing studies on international students are not limited to specific areas in the UK, indeed they focus on international students or international student mobility in the UK (Beech, 2019; Brooks and Waters, 2011; Robertson, 2010). Second, according to King (2012), international student mobility should also be understood through a geographical lens. In this sense, London is not just the most important city in the UK, but also one of the main global cities. As Harvey states, a global city can be defined as:

> the city is the site where people of all sorts and classes mingle, however reluctantly and agonistically, to
> produce a common if perpetually changing and transitory life (Harvey, 2013: 67).

So, focusing the study on the London area can give a better understanding of international student mobility in a specific geographical and urban context, and provide a useful clue for researchers approaching this topic.

1.5. Research Questions

The research questions I have identified are based on the assumption that student mobility is heterogeneous and can be influenced or shaped by different variables (Beech, 2019; Brooks and Waters, 2011). Four questions have been identified:

1. What are the motives of EU and non-EU international students to study in London?
2. What is the role of social background in shaping the decision of EU and non-EU international students to study in London?
3. How do migration trajectories shape the expectations of EU and non-EU international students studying in London during my research period 2015-2020?
4. What is the career path of EU and non-EU international students seeking a degree from universities in London during my research period 2015-2020?

These questions can offer useful insights to understand the diversity of experiences amongst international students studying in London. They can also provide a better understanding of the range of understudied factors and aspects usually connected with mobility and migration, such as the social and cognitive dimensions of the phenomenon (Raghuram, 2014; Urry, 2007).

The first question allows the researcher to investigate and compare EU and non-EU international students' decision-making and their reasons for studying in London. The answers provide a better understanding of the variables influencing student mobility in London over the research period.

The second question allows the researcher to investigate and compare EU and non-EU international students social backgrounds, including: family of origin, educational and professional experiences in countries of origin, culture and variables that constitute social background. Additionally, this question allows the researcher to understand if, and to what extent social background can influence international students.

The third question explores international students' lived experiences, including their academic and working experiences in London, and trajectories. It allows the researcher to investigate their professional

experiences in London or elsewhere, their perceptions, their career expectations, and the motivations beyond them. Part of this research was conducted prior to the Brexit referendum, but much of the research took place after the vote and before the UK officially left the European Union. Exploring EU and non-EU international students' lives in this period can provide timely insights, particularly with regard to EU students who moved to the UK before the referendum and were in the UK during the transition period.

The fourth question explores the career path of international students. Raghuram (2013) points out that most existing research is focused on post-migration students' experiences and stresses the lack of research on pre-migrant student lives (2013: 141). This research suggests that researching student mobility means including both students' backgrounds and post–migration experiences. For these reasons, the research questions of this study investigate all the time periods: before moving to London; during the stay in London, and after.

1.6. A note on the theoretical insights

The research did not select a specific theoretical framework before starting the research process. Instead, these frameworks were selected during the research process and the analysis of the research outcomes. In light of the outcomes in this research, international student mobility is understood as a complex and multi-dimensional phenomenon that encompasses different dimensions. These include the sociopolitical, economic, cultural, emotional and cognitive (King and Raghuram, 2012; Brooks and Waters, 2011; Soong, 2016). To explore these dimensions, this research identifies at least four main theoretical frameworks that can be considered suitable for the purposes of this study:

- Urry's mobilities paradigm and the notion of Network Capital (Urry, 2007; Beech, 2019);
- the notion of knowledge, in relation with the notions of time and spaces (Foucault, 2004, 2012; Raghuram, 2013);
- the role of emotional and cognitive factors, including the notion of consciousness and aspiration (Heidegger, 2015; Appadurai, 1996, 2004; Husserl, 2009) in international students (Soong, 2016).
- Boutang's notion of Cognitive Capitalism (Boutang, 2011).

The combination of these paradigms and perspectives allowed the research to address the questions discussed in the previous section and to analyze the findings. These approaches in relation to international student mobility will be presented in the following chapter and then further discussed in chapters 4, 5 and 6, which focus on the analysis of the research outcomes.

1.7. International Student Mobility: Setting the Scene

The international student mobility literature is the subject of the next chapter. However, it is important to outline some of the key aspects regarding the history of student mobility so as to explore the context of modern international student mobility and gain a clearer understanding of the making of the modern international student. This research shows that international student mobility is the result of a complex interplay between demographic, socioeconomic, political aspects and individual choices. In doing so, it highlights two different dimensions of international student mobility, namely external dimension (including social, cultural, political and economic variables) and individual dimension (including psychological and emotional aspects). This study is an attempt to bring together these dimensions and their complexities to provide a more holistic overview and understanding of international student mobility. The following sections of this chapter offer an outline of the external dimensions of international student mobility that constitute part of the ground for the research questions. The individual dimensions and how they intersect with the external ones will be discussed in the next section of this chapter.

International student mobility in current times is indissolubly linked to universities and their international dimensions (Gürüz, 2011; Raghuram, 2013). Therefore, the focus of the following sections of this chapter is on the university, its international dimensions and its relationship with student mobility.

The defining characteristic of a university in modern times has been to challenge and examine both the relationships between higher education, knowledge and society, and the relationships between globalization and higher education (Barnett, 2011). The treatment of student mobility issues as a matter of international concern has been the subject of a significant debate within the academic field during the last few years, when the number of international students in OECD countries has increased to the point of becoming 'an important component of global migration flows' (King, 2013: 12).

Globalisation is a term in heavy current usage, but one whose meaning is still relatively obscure and under interrogation (Scott, 1998; Wolf, 1998). It is a matter of debate across disciplines, including the sociology of higher education (David and Naidoo, 2013), global mobility (Brooks and Waters, 2012; Waters, 2017) and migration (Raghuram, 2013). Globalisation is often assumed to be a 'principally economically motivated and commercial' phenomenon (Yang, 2003: 276), in which technological developments in communication and transport have facilitated the compression of time and space (Harvey, 1989; Gürüz, 2011; Urry, 2007). However, as the vast literature across the social sciences suggests, globalisation involves not only economic empirical changes, but social, political and cultural challenges and issues. Accordingly, some scholars within the sociological field identify global mobility as a key consequence of globalisation, that includes international migration, transnational engagement and immigrant incorporation (King, 2012). In line with

this perspective, international student mobility can be defined as part of global mobility flows in current times.

As already mentioned, the circulation of scholars has important historical lineage in Europe (Scott, 2000) because universities have historically been understood as "institutions through which individuals could come to stand in a new and surer relationship with the world" (Barnett, 2011: 11). Since universities are universal in their essence, some scholars argue that student mobility in current times can also be seen as a revival of medieval mobilities (Byram and Dervin, 2008). According to the authors, there are similarities between medieval mobilities and mobilities of today in terms of values, namely the desire for greater knowledge. However, universities in current times are also undergoing new rapid changes linked to global dynamics (Barnett, 2011; Scott, 2000), and these changes are impacting international student mobility (King, 2012; Raghuram, 2013). For these reasons, it is important to understand how globalisation is understood and its implications in the fields of higher education and mobility in the UK. Doing so will help provide a broader background and contextualize the research.

1.8. The international dimension(s) of Higher Education

During the last few decades there has undoubtedly been a significant increase in the amount of literature on the relationship between Higher Education and Neoliberalism (Lynch, 2005; Olsen and Peters, 2005; Giroux, 2014), Internationalism and Higher Education (Pennycook, 1994; Calla, 1998; Elliot, 1998; Scott, 1998; Altbach, 2015) and Higher Education and Globalisation (Scott, 2000; Yang, 2003; Altbach, 2007, 2015; Margison and van Der Wende, 2007; Varghese, 2008). Within this literature it is frequently asserted that higher education policy-making has undergone significant changes over the last few decades. This argument generally includes two main standpoints. First, policy in higher education is more influenced by global trends than national ones (Giroux, 2015; Naidoo, 2010). Second, higher education in modern Western countries is increasingly driven by economic imperatives and aimed at recruiting the highest number of students (Barnett, 2011; Gürüz, 2011). These changes are influencing and shaping international student mobility, especially in most competitive Western counties, including the UK. For instance, Robertson (2013) critically points out that structuring higher education as a pathway to skilled migrants means: first, promoting the idea of international students as "designer migrants" (Zigarus and Law, 2006), individuals who are skilled, flexible and mobile; second, encouraging the movement of foreign students who might become more vulnerable in host countries (access to welfare systems, bureaucratic or legal issues); third, stressing the idea of international students as market actors who bring economic benefits to institutions and labour markets in host countries (Robertson, 2013).

Notably, according to Soong (2016), these aspects can require international students to be economically independent and self-reliant. These aspects emerged in interviews during the fieldwork. Thus, it is important to clarify the notion of globalisation in the field of higher education, both theoretically and concretely because, as this study will show, the global or international dimension of higher education has an impact on international students in this study.

In the field of education, for Brooks and Waters, one of the most significant intellectual debates is whether globalisation should be considered as a reality, an ideology or something between knowledge systems and spaces and power of institutions (2011: 4). In line with this argument, Urry takes globalisation to be a hypothesis, rather than a real outcome, arguing that, when analyzing the phenomenon of globalisation, we should consider both its "description of putatively real process" and result of certain kinds of discourse, and its essence "as being as much cultural/environmental as it is economic/political" (1998: 8). Rizvi and Lingard (2010) suggest a similar view, based on the assumption that globalisation can be analyzed in three different ways – as an empirical fact, as an ideology, and as a social imaginary constructed by people to give meaning to the world around them. Narrowing down its meaning, Friedman (2002) suggests a conceptual tool to make sense of contemporary global society. The author points out that globalisation should be understood as the result of interactions between three actors, namely global markets, nation-states and individuals, and identifies three power balances on which globalisation is built. The first is the balance of power between nation-states. The second is the power relationship between nation-states and global markets. The third is the relationship between individuals and nation-states. This perspective is applicable to this study and can be considered a starting-point to explore the 'mobility-higher education' nexus in the UK.

Global economic growth has given the opportunity to access higher education to an increasing number of people over the past fifteen years, including in the UK (Brooks and Waters, 2011; Gürüz 2011). However, the prosperity seems to be unevenly distributed worldwide, and higher education institutions are more than ever blamed for rising inequalities (Antonucci, 2013). In this sense, Hill reflecting on the higher education sector in the UK, points out that:

> until recently the key driver for government policy in the UK was to encourage the expansion of higher education to increase participation with an express aim of creating a more educated workforce. However, a combination of funding and policy directives are forcing universities to reassess the way they are managed and promoted to ensure maximum efficiency, sales and profits. The result will be a corporate higher education system that is divided, elitist and stratified (Hill, 2013: 73).

In line with this argument, both Callinicos (2006) and Rikowski (2012) argue that these changes impact students in terms of access to university and employability in different countries, including the UK. Figures

show that the number of academic students has significantly increased in the UK from the second half of the nineteenth century (Gürüz, 2011), and in the last few decades a consistent number of working-class people for the first time in the UK could access higher education (Scott, 2000). However, according to Antonucci (2016), a possible implication of increasing numbers of students from non-privileged backgrounds accessing higher education, could be underemployment (Antonucci, 2016: 9). If and how international students studying in the UK may be affected by these dynamics is still unclear, as we know little about the experiences of international students in the UK in recent years.

There are relatively few comparative studies on international students that are concerned with the role of welfare states and policy (Antonucci *et al*, 2014). One is the comparative research on European students conducted by Antonucci. In *Student lives in crisis. Deepening inequality in times of austerity* (2016), Antonucci stresses the idea that international students are often in the paradoxical position of financing their participation in higher education by working, but at the same time they are often excluded from many welfare services because of their student status. This trend is increasing in many European countries. Given that European and global dynamics cannot have national solutions, the author makes several recommendations for future policy. These include the integration of welfare services and wellbeing counselling for students offered by higher education institutions, providing a generous and universal form of support for students (I would add: whatever their country of origin), policy intervention in students' housing, and "increasing the stability and security of wages to improve the capacity of labor market sources to sustain young people's semi-dependence" (Antonucci, 2016: 166).

Antonucci's study suggests that there is another important aspect we need to examine: the notion of 'inequality'. According to Urry, "mobilities become central to the structuring of inequality within contemporary 'disorganized' societies" (2007: 186). At the same time, in recent years, the notion of inequality is increasingly discussed both in migration research and in the field of education (Soong, 2016). Particularly, inequality is at the very root of contemporary critical education, which is based on the principle of understanding "the world through the eyes of the dispossessed and acting against the ideological and institutional processes and forms that reproduce oppressive conditions" (Apple et al, 2009: 3). However, this study suggests that it is difficult to gain a serious understanding of the limits and consequences of inequality for international students in this research unless we explore economic, political, historical and ideological dimensions in depth.

For these reasons, in this research project, narratives and paradigms of state control and hegemonic constructions of capitalistic accumulation, together with international students' experiences, are understood as interactive parts of the same picture. Geopolitical constructions of international students as

'migrants' or 'others' at the national level interact with students' strategies of transnational integration and the processes of subject formation that could influence political and educational national discourses. For instance, this research suggests that the link between international student mobility and global capitalism (as it is understood in Marxist theories) is not always as straightforward as is sometimes depicted, nor is the impact of global capitalism and neoliberal policies the same everywhere. In short, as Grillo states:

> the world and its interconnections are too intricate to allow any faith in theoretical formulae which mechanically relate phenomena in an apparently systematic way (2018: 146).

As already discussed, some historical dichotomies which served as useful tools and paradigms for decades are now insufficient for making sense of the relationships and complexities in social sciences: globalisation – neoliberalism; migration – mobility; developing countries – developed countries; student – migrant. Notably this can create confusion and discomfort. On the one hand, historical distinctions cannot be easily dissolved; on the other, they seem unsatisfactory for analyzing international students in this research project.

In current times open societies have emerged but, as Lynk reminds us, "the erection of democratic national and global institutions to manage the volatility of social and economic change has proven largely elusive" (2006: 1). More specifically, in the field of education we can distinguish two main perspectives. First, liberal theorists and historians claim that higher education should be understood as a powerful tool for individual development, social mobility and career opportunities and advancements. Second, critical thinkers suggest that higher education is significantly influenced by global dynamics, and so might contribute to the increasing reproduction of dominant market ideology (Hill, 2013; Giroux, 2014), and that expanding access to higher education does not necessarily mean better job opportunities for academic students (Antonucci, 2016).

In contrast to the last perspective, Brooks and Waters (2011) argue that there are complex and heterogeneous articulations between global dynamics and higher education, depending on nations or even regions. For these reasons, the following sections first discuss some of the key changes occurring in higher education, including discussions on globalisation and neoliberalism in higher education in recent years. Second, how these aspects intersect with international student mobility in the UK is dealt with.

1.9. Globalisation and Neoliberalism in Higher Education

Much work on globalisation in higher education has analyzed international education primarily connected with the notion of global knowledge economy (Peters, 2002; Robertson, 2005; Gürüz, 2011; Raghuram,

2013), knowledge capitalism (Burton-Jones, 1999), international student mobility and student migration (King, 2013; Raghuram, 2013; Beech, 2019). However, during the last decade, there has been a proliferation of sophisticated and analytical research in social sciences studying neoliberalism in higher education (Olssen and Peter, 2005; Ross and Gibson, 2007; Saunders, 2010; Hill and Kumar, 2012; Giroux, 2002, 2014). Existing literature has often assumed that globalisation can be perceived as "the most fundamental challenge faced by the university in its long history" (Scott, 2000; Gürüz, 2011). One part of the globalisation in higher education debate proceeds as if globalisation and neoliberalism were undermining higher education institutions (Hill, 2013; Manathunga and Bottrell, 2019). For instance, Giroux from a critical perspective, argues that neoliberal and global imperatives are:

> putting in place modes of governance that mimic corporate structures by increasing the power of administrators at the expense of faculty, reducing faculty to a mostly temporary and low-wage workforce, and reducing students to customers – ripe for being trained for low-skilled jobs and at risk for incurring large student loans (2014: 6).

The notion of neoliberalism represents a key debate in this field, especially because it is often combined with that of globalisation.

Neoliberalism can be taken up as a dimension of globalisation or perhaps a possible form through which global dynamics are explained and analyzed. According to Olssen and Peters (2005), it may be understood as:

> a specific economic discourse or philosophy which has become dominant and effective in world economic relations as a consequence of super-power sponsorship (Olssen and Peters, 2005: 314).

Notably, its central assumptions include free-market economics. The market is perceived as a superior mechanism and is responsible for solving any kinds of economic problems. Then, there is a commitment to a laissez-faire approach. The market is self-regulating and is more powerful than national governments or any other force in regulating economic trade. There is also a commitment to economic principles, while ethical considerations are removed from the economic sphere and markets and politics are driven by economic growth rather than social needs. Finally, individuals are perceived as economic self-interested subjects responsible for their own needs and economic interests (Olssen and Peters, 2005; Giroux, 2014).

Although the focus of this research is not on the proliferation and implications of globalisation and neoliberalism in higher education, some acknowledgments could be useful to better contextualize international student mobility in recent times in this research, because it is argued by different scholars that

neoliberalism has led to greater marketisation of higher education (Beech, 2019). The marketisation of higher education is a phenomenon increasingly discussed in the field of education in recent years and is impacting both higher education institutions and students (Brooks, 2017, 2018; Naidoo, 2010), to the point that some authors consider higher education a global business in current times. To put it in Gürüz's words:

> there is a complementarity and interdependence that has already created a league of 'global universities', and has the potential to evolve into a 'global higher education complex' to educate and train the workforce of the global knowledge economy (Gürüz, 2011: 324).

In existing literature there is general agreement that neoliberalism seems to have introduced a new form of governmentality or rationality, which has produced significant changes in higher education worldwide. For instance, Giroux (2014) states that higher education can be seen as a crucial democratic sphere, one which has been eroded by neoliberal imperatives. More crucially, the central argument of Giroux's 'Neoliberalism War on Higher Education' (2014) is that higher education in the US and some western countries has been subordinated to the increasing dominance of market interests. Following his argument, higher education is supposed to be 'public' rather than 'private', and neoliberalism is driving higher education to privatization. Continuing this reasoning, some of the challenges of the drive toward the effective privatization of public education are that:

> universities face a growing set of challenges arising from budget cuts, diminishing quality of instruction, the downsizing of faculty, the militarization of research, and the revamping of the curriculum to fit the interests of the market, all of which not only contradicts the culture and democratic value of higher education but also makes a mockery of the very meaning and mission of the university as a place both to think and to provide the formative culture and agents that make democracy possible. (Giroux, 2014: 17).

The changes occurring in higher education, it is argued, are driven by the purpose of increasing international student recruitment. In this sense, the recruitment of international students can be seen as a strategic source of funding (Antonucci, 2016; Robertson, 2013), and international students can be seen as "the ultimate higher education consumer, particularly as their recruitment and retention is often a key revenue stream for universities" (Beech, 2013: 33).

What is apparent is that international students are significantly relevant in these debates because their role is not only linked to economic shorter-term benefits for higher education institutions, but also to long- or medium-term benefits. For example, most EU countries are currently establishing measures to facilitate entry into the national labour market following graduation (European Commission, 2019). However, the UK represents a unique case while undertaking this research, because, as a result of Brexit, it is still unclear

what implications and impacts there might be for EU international students currently studying or working in the UK. This aspect raises important questions surrounding the dynamics of power between national, European and global policies and their implications for international student mobility. For these reasons, this study includes the exploration of the trajectories and career paths of international students both from EU and non-EU countries (Research questions 3 and 4). In doing so, it also contributes to understanding if, how and in what measure international and national policies are impacting international students' lives in the UK. The following sections reflect on the role of the nation-state in global times, and then provide an overview of UK higher education in recent times.

1.10. Globalisation, Neoliberalism and the Nation-State in Higher Education

The neoliberal paradigm within the social sciences assumes that national governments are influenced by global dynamics and, more crucially, that neoliberal globalisation is weakening states' authority, to the point that some scholars state that national policies are increasingly driven by neoliberal globalisation (Hill, 2013; Giroux, 2014). In contrast, some authors argue that the nation-states are playing a bigger role in the expansion of global capital (Gindin, 2016). Thus, according to their standpoint, the nation-states can also have an active role. As Gindin remarks:

> states have mobilized the public to accept global rules and established the institutional frameworks that make globalisation possible (Gindin, 2016).

In line with this argument, Barnett (2011) and Brook and Waters (2011), reflecting on the UK, suggest that neoliberalism could represent just a possibility that can exist under globalisation. Others counter that globalisation in higher education does not have exclusively these effects; indeed, universities are (and have always been) mainly national institutions that, 'despite being in *their* public life subservient to national purposes, in *their* private life *they* espouse international, even universal, values (Scott, 1998: 112).

Clearly, globalisation and neoliberal imperatives have affected higher education in some Western countries, including the UK, in different ways (Beech, 2019; Robertson, 2013). However, as Gürüz (2011) reminds us, care is needed, and it might be excessively simplistic to assume that the role of the university – on an international level – is completely undermined by neoliberal imperatives.[1] The evidence shows that there is little disagreement these days that neoliberalism is shaping higher education rapidly, perhaps radically, and in ways that may be unbalanced. However, beyond this common cliché, almost everything else concerning

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[1] For example, for-profit higher education in the US was not introduced by neoliberalism but has a three-hundred-year history. In this sense, it can be argued that neoliberalism may have exacerbated pre-existing tendencies, rather than having created new ones.

the phenomenon *per se* is subject to intense and often controversial debate – the role of nation-states in the globalised context, the power relationship between nation-states and higher education institutions and, last but not least, the role of students. As Maasen (2003) reminds us, despite the market model being dominant in the 1980s and 1990s, it is not possible to assume that all new governance models regarding higher education (particularly in developed countries) are market models, and so driven mainly by global economic purpose.

At this point, since this research was conducted in the UK, the role of nation-state in the UK context needs to be explored. Is the nation-state shaping higher education, as some authors suggest, or is neoliberal globalisation more responsible for influencing UK higher education in this peculiar period of time? Notably, this research does not address this big question. However, investigating and interrogating this point in relation to international students' experiences in this study, is helpful to understand how much international students' choices and trajectories are influenced by national and international policies.

1.11. UK Higher Education

Foreign students' enrolment in Europe has increased significantly since the 1980s thanks to the implementation of EU programmes aiming at increasing student mobility (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002). However, the UK was already a major destination for foreign students and during the last two decades has always been the second host country in the world, as the table of the top ten host counties in different years shows:

Table 1: Top host destinations of international students from 1968 to 2019

1968	1980	1985	2002	2004	2006	2019
US	US	US	US	US	US	US
France	France	France	**UK**	**UK**	**UK**	**UK**
Germany	USSR	Germany	Germany	Germany	Australia	China
Lebanon	Germany	**UK**	Australia	France	France	Canada
Canada	**UK**	Italy	France	Australia	Germany	Australia
UK	Lebanon	Canada	Japan	Japan	China	France
USSR	Canada	Lebanon	China	China	Canada	Russia
Egypt	Italy	Belgium	Russia	Russia	Japan	Germany
Argentina	Egypt	Saudi Arabia	Canada	Canada	Russia	Japan
Italy	Romania	Australia	Spain	South Africa	Singapore	Spain

Sources: 1968-2006: Gürüz (2011); 2019: UNESCO (2020).

There is shared agreement that the recent increase of international students in the UK is not just a consequence of colonial connections, language or reputation of UK institutions; it is also a matter of UK

policy (Gürüz 2011; Murphy-Lejeune, 2008). According to Lomer (2018), from a political perspective, International Student Mobility in the UK can be divided into three main periods:

- First period (1970s – 2006): UK policy aimed at recruiting international students, who were understood as valued contributors to the labor market. Policies were welcoming and facilitated international student mobility.

- Second period (2006 – 2013): More emphasis was placed on the internationalization of the curriculum, marketing strategies and academic reputation. In 2010, the Conservative-led UK coalition government changed migration policy in response to increasing global competition and in order to cut the amount of 'out of control immigration': new policy aimed at reducing and controlling migration which affected UK higher education institutions and international students.

- Third period (2013 – present): The IES (Coalition International Education Strategy) was launched with the purpose of taking advantage of global opportunities. However, the IES "predicted increases in numbers, but did not set targets to increase recruitment" (Lomer, 2018: 6). Meanwhile, the Brexit fallout is confusing understanding of the changes and effects on international students.

At this point, a rapid overview of the main dynamics that occurred in the UK from the 1960s is needed. The 1960s and the 1970s saw a general expansion of higher education in Western countries and the UK experienced one of the biggest growths in Europe. This growth, to put it with Barnett's words, "was achieved partly through the founding of a number of new universities, but also through the establishment of a new public sector comprising polytechnics and colleges of higher education" (1990: 24). It was in this context that, during the late 1970s and early 1980s, the Thatcher government education reforms were introduced. They called for the reform of curricula in a public backlash, but, at the same time, spending on higher education was restricted with the purpose of reducing public expenditure. It was undoubtedly during Thatcher's era that higher education was significantly reshaped in the UK (Myers, 2017). Numerous changes were made, such as the abolition of the University Grants Committee (replaced by the Universities Funding Council) and, more crucially, the introduction of 'top-up' loans for higher education students. And so began the diminution of student grants (Education Act, 26 April 1990).

The Robbins Report (1963)[2] with its belief in common culture, general education and knowledge ruled by academics, on an ideological level represents "the last great liberal statement of higher education" (Barnett, 1994: 4). Since then, a more or less gradual penetration of academic thinking into the sphere of production has started (Palous, 1995: 176). This process appears to be quite intense in the UK compared to the rest of EU countries. As Barnett remarkably states:

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[2] The Robbins Report (1963) is the report of the Committee on Higher Education chaired by Lord Robbins. The full text of the document is available here: http://www.educationengland.org.uk/documents/robbins/robbins1963.html

Robbins marked the end of a transnational era in which higher education was seen as a cultural or positional good. Post-Robbins, Higher Education was to be seen as an economic good, not only by individuals concerned, but more importantly by society at large…In Marxist terminology, higher education was to become one of the dominant forces of production, rather than…part of the maintenance of the relations of production. From here on, a new Robbins could no longer be possible (1994: 4).

Then, since 1997 a final fee-pay system has started to become more concrete. As Myers summarizes:

under the governments of both Major and Tony Blair, the expansion of student numbers coincided with a reduction in the 'unit of resource'. The 'higher education unit of resource' – the amount of money spent by the government on each student's education – had been reduced by 25 per cent since 1989…With the desire to see 50 per cent of those between the ages of 18 and 30 benefiting from some form of higher education by 2010, the Labour government aimed for 500,000 new university places by 2002. In practice, the expansion in numbers occurred with a corresponding fall in the money spent per student (2017: 14).

For these reasons Blair's government was blamed for "wanting to increase participation without being willing to pay for it" (Dearing Report, 1997).

After 2010, tuition fees in the UK "became the highest in the world for public universities, with one of the highest interest rates for student loans" (OECD, 2015), while more than 20 per cent of the student population comes from outside the UK and represents a "vital high-margin revenue stream for universities" (Times Higher Education, 2017[3]). But these changes, together with public education cuts, increasing privatization of higher education institutions and increasing competition between institutions and universities (Hill, 2013; Lomer, 2018), should not be understood as a revolutionary break with the past. As has been briefly illustrated, they represent the clash of pre-existing dynamics both inside and outside higher education. Not surprisingly, when the UK student protest movement against public cuts and increasing academic fees exploded in November 2010, much of the ideology had doubtless been incubated for years (Mason, 2015; Myers 2017).

According to Ridley (2017), over the last two decades, particularly since the coalition government's reforms from 2010 onwards, there has been a significant shift in the provision of higher education. Since national policies promote entrepreneurial expansion, many universities in the UK are increasingly acting like

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[3] The article is available here https://www.timeshighereducation.com/blog/role-business-schools-within-universities

businesses. Thus, their aims include competing to recruit the highest number of students, maximizing their revenue and reducing their costs (Beech, 2019; Hill, 2013). One of the most controversial issues seems to be the existence of a significant number of almost unclassifiable alternative providers for student loans. Following Beech's argument, precisely because these providers are based on different business models, have different legal forms and objectives, and are expanding rapidly, it is hard to evaluate how risky they can be both for universities and students and public finances (Beech, 2019: 51). Meanwhile, the decision to leave the European Union will potentially have major ramifications for the future of higher education in the UK. In the absence of clear laws, the effects are still difficult to predict (UKCISA, 2019). Thus, UK higher education is now facing not just a state of uncertainty, but also a state of deregulation, due to the fact that "the UK Government is basing major decisions on the future of higher education on very limited information" (University and College Union, 2017[4]).

Students are not immune to such radical restructuring, especially international students. Leading countries are increasingly adopting managerial models of the private sector (Naidoo, 2010). In the UK this has become apparent during the last few decades as managerial strategies are adopted in order to reclaim authority eroded by the 1980s, and to replace government funding (Altbach, 2015: Beech, 2019). The recruitment of international students has become a key strategy because they represent:

> a source of funding, with universities tapping into what seems at times a belief in an endless supply of
> such individuals, who are willing to pay inflated fees to study abroad at world-class destinations (Beech,
> 2019: 28).

While this research was being conducted, international students from EU countries studying in the UK experienced a period of uncertainty after the Brexit referendum (Beech, 2019). On the one hand, the home secretary led a Cabinet push to remove international students from UK immigration targets. On the other, in April 2017, the UK government rejected the House of Lords amendment to the Higher Education and Research Bill calling for international students to be removed from the target to monitor migration flows to the UK (Times Higher Education, 2017[5]). This created worrying tensions amongst EU student population in the UK. The consequences of new UK policy in education are unpredictable, and the state of uncertainty had a degree of impact on some EU students in this study.

Although international education has a long historical tradition in the UK dating back to the Middle Ages, nowadays the rhetoric of the university as a historically international institution is largely a myth. While

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[4] The article is available here https://hemarketisation.wordpress.com/2017/11/13/scandal-at-for-profit-colleges/
[5] The article is available here https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/amber-rudd-urges-removal-students-uk-net-migration-target

some authors suggest that when researching international students in global times the long history of international education cannot be ignored (Mattews and Sindhu, 2005; Byram and Dervin, 2008), others resist an evaluation of contemporary internationalism in higher education based on historical, reinforced memories and imaginaries (Hill, 2013; Lomer, 2018; Scott, 1998). In line with the last point, this study argues that UK Higher Education and its international dimensions are significantly influenced by national policy. UK higher education institutions should adhere to rules and regulations that have been rapidly changing in recent times. These changes are impacting higher education and international student mobility to the point that the raison d'être of universities in global times is constantly under examination (Barnett, 2011; Beech, 2019: 26). Nowadays higher education seems to be both national and global (Scott, 1998). As the case of the UK clearly suggests, despite the international outlook of higher education, national policies are still crucial. They influence and regulate institutions on a legal, economic and political level and play a key role in shaping favorable conditions for international student mobility. However, how international students in the UK cope with policies and rules in current times is still unclear.

This chapter has shown that in recent years there has been a significant rejuvenation in the interest by academics and policy makers in the issue of international student mobility (Antonucci, 2016; Beech, 2019; Brooks and Waters, 2011; King and Raghuram, 2012; Raghuram, 2013; Robertson, 2013). What is apparent is that international dynamics and policies at different levels are influencing international student mobility. What is less apparent are the experiences and the processes that international students in the UK engage with in becoming skilled or highly skilled subjects, through the development of skills, knowledge, competence and new understandings in the UK. Their lives, their personalities, their struggles, their emotions, their trajectories and changes should be known. In other words, in this study attention is given to the notion of 'subject formation' both at individual and institutional/professional levels in order to allow the re-interpretation of the content and rationalities of international students. For these reasons, international students are at the heart of this research. In doing so, this study's findings point to the added values of factors other than the experiences of students studying in the UK, to the facilitation of critical reflexive understanding of the processes of national and international contexts, their imaginaries and subjectivities, the flexibility that characterizes the labor market in which students are inserted, and their transnational strategies and experiences. I expand my analysis through reading of the ideational elements of knowledge based-economy, globalization and internationalism in higher education, as discussed in this chapter. Additionally, the study includes elements of mobility and transnational migration, which will be the subject of the following chapter. The research includes the work of key scholars, including Manuel Castells, Yann Moulier Boutang, Ralph Grillo, John Urry, Russell King and Parvati Raghuram. This research project moves through the topics of discourses and objects of international student mobility, higher education, geopolitical and social subject formation.

Summary

This chapter introduces the research topic and provides an overview of the study. The research focuses on international student mobility in the UK in current times, and identifies a group of international students from a European country and a group from a non-EU one as the main subjects. To better contextualize the subjects of the study, the chapter provides an overview of both the international dimensions of higher education and UK higher education in current times. International student mobility in this research is understood as a complex interplay between external variables and individual ones. The chapter introduces the main external variables related to international student mobility in current literature, including political, social, cultural and economic aspects.

2. Literature Review

Theorizing international student mobility or migration is challenging for three main reasons. First, research on international students' experiences in higher education has received little attention in recent years, compared to other fields of study. Thus, the centrality of students' conceptions and perceptions is a relatively new aspect in the field of migration and education (Bennet *et al,* 2000; King, 2013; Lomer, 2018; Raghuram, 2013; Soong, 2016). Second, international student mobility is heterogeneous and has no shared definition. Contemporary international students are undefined and little known (King and Raghuram, 2013; Murphy-Lejeune, 2002) compared to majority of their peers who do not take up the challenge of mobility. Third**,** there are pluralistic views on migration in relation to education and mobility (Soong, 2016). When we come to examine the notion of international student mobility in relation to migration paradigms, we clearly see how many contradictory theories there are. From scholars who take for granted that, when dealing with international students, we should use the term 'mobility' because it involves mainly individuals who are likely to have an upper-class background, to those who suggest the need to theorize the rise of a new student figure, who is no longer defined as "an apprentice member of the workforce in training, but a fully (precarious) worker in the so-called "knowledge factory" (Roggero, 2007; Raghuram, 2013).

Consequently, in this period of historical and cultural transitions between different forms of society, and economy, culture (Castells, 2010), with higher education facing a variety of global and national dynamics (Ball, 1990; Boutang, 2011; Roggero, 2007), the notions of international students and international student migration and/or mobility need to be critically explored, examined, and questioned. This is one of the main aims of this research. The urgency for new approaches and theories to understand the subject matter of international student migration and mobility is highlighted by the lack of theory (King and Raghuram, 2013) and the growing number of questions about its definition, impacts, outcomes and analyses (Beech, 2019; Murphy-Lejeune, 2002; Raghuram, 2013; Soong, 2016).

This chapter provides an overview of existing literature on international student mobility or migration. It starts by defining international students, international student mobility, the issues and gaps in existing literature, and goes on to outline the main theoretical frameworks adopted for the purposes of this study.

2.1. Defining international students

The absence of a universally shared definition for international student mobility reflects the need to interrogate the term "international students" and the need to explore their heterogeneity. Dolby and Rizvi (2008), for example, identify three main categories of young people who are geographically mobile:

1. Individuals, typically with dual nationality, who travel with ease.
2. Individuals who move under more constrained circumstances (political issues; better employment opportunities).
3. "The growing category of youth movement which is still largely uncharted" (2008: 9). This category includes individuals who move mainly for educational purposes.

Notably, international students might fit all of these categories. Some scholars argue that even if international students are officially recognized as temporary migrants, some of them may eventually become immigrants (Hazen and Alberts, 2006). This study suggests that international students may see their stays in the UK both as temporary and as a springboard towards permanent migration or longer residence. More crucially, their intentions may change over time for a variety of reasons. While some international students returned to their countries of origin once they had completed their studies, others adjusted their status in the UK or moved to a different country for professional or individual reasons.

When exploring international student mobility, there is general agreement on the fact that the length of the study abroad should be considered a key variable when analyzing international students. King and Raghuram (2013), suggest that categorizing student mobility on the basis of the length of the study abroad period, could represent a strategic starting-point. They identify three main categories: *credit mobility students* (that is, students involved in shorter-term moves lasting less than one year, as part of a programme of study, such as Erasmus programmes); *degree mobility students* (that is, students who move to a different country for an entire programme of study, such as Undergraduates, Masters, Doctorates); *voluntary or mandatory schemes of shorter duration* (that is, less formalized type of mobility, which includes students who spend a short period abroad, such as summer – schools, conferences or field trips) (King and Raghuram, 2013: 129). On the basis of this classification, King and Raghuram (2013) argue that 'mobility' usually includes all the different kinds of student moves and implies a high probability of return to the home country, while 'migration' refers to longer-term moves and implies a more open-ended likelihood of return to country of origin.

In researching international students, this study argues that international students' lives in global times may not only be shaped by power relations between national and international policies and strategies. If this was my starting point, I would define international students simply as individuals who are mainly or completely influenced by global dynamics. Indeed, research findings suggest that they can be influenced by global aspects, but we cannot automatically assume that it is always the case. Thus, in this research, international students are not understood as the product of interactions between social circumstances and collectively meaningful dynamics, but also and more crucially as co-authors of their lives. Students'

negotiation of 'what I want to become' versus 'what I am forced to do by external circumstances' is one of the main topics that emerged during the interviews.

2.2. Defining International Student Mobility and Migration

International student mobility is a complex and controversial vein for sociological theory and research, to the point that the terms 'student mobility' and 'student migration' are often used interchangeably at an academic level. From being a topic of vague and peripheral interest for academics and policy makers, currently it is considered "an issue that is highly prioritized in strategic plans and policy agendas" (Brook and Waters, 2011: 160) or, in other words, "one of the most undisputed positive goals" (Teichler, 2007: 1) in current national and international political debates.

Despite theoretical and empirical efforts, there is no unique and comprehensive international student theory (King, 2014). Indeed, there are many controversial debates attempting to define and understand international student mobility in current times. Most existing literature and policy debate tends to use the term 'mobility' when talking about international students (Beech, 2019; Byram and Dervin, 2008; Findlay, 2011; Gürüz, 2011; King, 2013, 2018). 'Mobility', as King and Raghuram (2013) suggest, is a flexible concept because it can include both students' shorter-term (Erasmus) and longer-term moves (entire degree programme). Furthermore, mobility "highlights the movement involved in migration, rather than privileging the sending and receiving localities and their perspectives" (King and Raghuram, 2013: 129). Meanwhile, there are authors who use the term 'migration' when dealing with international students (Migration Observatory, 2018; Ploner and Nada, 2020; Raghuram, 2014). So, the question arises: What is the difference between 'migration' and 'mobility' if we are dealing with international students? And, more crucially, what are the reasons most existing literature and policy debate considers the term 'mobility' more appropriate? Conflicting information and gaps in existing literature make it difficult to decide where the balance of evidence lies.

In sociology, the term 'mobility' usually refers to the movement of individuals and groups in social position over time and is commonly associated with a change in wealth status, social status, literacy rate, education, health status and other variables among groups of individuals (social classes, ethnic groups, countries) (Urry, 2008). It usually involves a recurrent return to the country of origin after achieving a temporary activity or a professional/academic goal. Additionally, in European legal terminology, mobility relates to the movement of academic staff and students (both from EU countries and third countries) from the academic environment in the EU, towards EU academic centers and universities (Byram and Dervin, 2008; Sulima, 2015). However, as Pascouao points out, "a balance sheet regarding EU rules on organizing mobility reveals a rather incoherent, and somehow inefficient, landscape" (2013: 3). This is due to the fact that mobility

seems to be available under two main perspectives. The first is open and applicable to EU citizens who can benefit from their freedom of movement, while the second concerns mainly migrant workers. Students, researchers and highly skilled workers from third countries are, legally speaking, included in the second scheme as "specific categories of third country nationals" (Pascouao, 2013). Despite the adoption of the Student Directive (2004), rights, benefits and possibilities for students from third countries can be limited by laws. Thus, it can be suggested that currently intra-EU mobility is awarded just to some specific categories of individuals under some different conditions (Universities UK, 2015).

Meanwhile, the debate on international migration has moved back and forth from the 1950s onwards: from optimistic views back in the 1950s, to radical Marxist and neo-Marxist critique over the 1970s, towards both optimistic and pessimistic perspectives in the 1990s and 2000s (De Haas, 2010).The debate can be summarized as follow:

Table 2: International Migration in academic debate from 1970s to 2000s

Period	Research Community	Policy field
Until 1973	Development and Migration optimism	Developmentalist views; capital and knowledge transfers by migrants would help developing countries in development take-off. Development strongly linked to return.
1973 – 1990	Development and migration pessimism (dependency, brain drain)	Growing skepticism; concerns on brain drain; after experiments with return migration policies focused on integration in receiving countries. Migration largely out of sight in development field, tightening of immigration policies.
1990 – 2001	Readjustment to more subtle views under influence empirical work (NELM, livelihood approaches, transnationalism)	Persistent skepticism and near-neglect of the issue; "migration and development, nobody believes that anymore" (Taylor et al., 1996a:401) further tightening of immigration policies.
>2001	Boom in research, in particular on remittances. Generally positive views. De-linking of development with return.	Resurgence of migration and development optimism under influence of remittance boom, and a sudden turnaround of views: remittances, *brain gain*, diaspora involvement as vital development tools. Development contribution of migration often framed within renewed hopes put on circular and return migration.

Source: De Haas (2007; 2010).

What is remarkable is that the specific debate on international students and higher education has evolved quite separately from migration theory. For instance, Raghuram stresses the importance of the "analysis of the spatiality of higher education and its relationship to student mobility" (2013: 139), an aspect that remains undertheorized. Following her argument and the research outcomes, this study acknowledges the need for an approach that generates an understanding of themes and aspects that cut across disciplines, and the connections between disciplines and their relationships to the world.

2.3. From International Student Mobility and Migration dilemma to the Mobilities paradigm

Migration research is intrinsically interdisciplinary and there is no single theory universally accepted by social scientists. During the last decades a significant amount of research on international migration has been conducted and criticized through the lens of Labor Market Theory (Castle and Miller, 2009) and Social Capital Theory (Bourdieu, 1986). Labor migration is historically considered the predominant form of migration. However, as Massey et al remind us, "the classical approach has now entered a state of crisis, challenged by new ideas, concepts, and hypotheses" (1998: 3). Although in recent years we have seen significant growth in social and scientific research in international mobility and migration, theoretical frameworks still remain elusive. There is agreement on some matters, particularly the importance of migration networks (Bloch and McKay, 2015) and national and international policies (Antonucci, 2016; Basso, 2010; Lomer, 2018), but at the same time there are many contradictions on the impact of mobility and migration. For example, while Portes (2010) suggests that migration phenomena cannot change or impact the main structures and institutions of developed countries, Castles (2010) states exactly the opposite. He argues that "migration is…one part of the process of transformation of these structures…which arises through major changes in global, political, economic and social relationships" (2010: 1566). Thus, we still lack a common conceptual framework in migration studies that can be used as a starting point for debates, research questions and hypotheses on international migration and, more crucially, international student migration or mobility.

According to Findlay et al (2010), understanding international student migration or mobility means considering not only the notions of social class and cultural capital. The emergence of late modernity (Bauman, 2000), centered on the urgency of reconceptualising the relationship between structure and agency, has been influential both in migration research (Castells, 1996; Gürüz, 2011) and education (Apple et al, 2009), and has provided the conceptual narrative for the new higher education shift towards a neoliberal doctrine (Giroux, 2014; Haiven, 2013; Hill, 2013). However, there are many changes occurring both in higher education and migration research, and they are transforming both the analysis of social class

and its stratification (Bauman, 2000; Urry, 2009). As a consequence, not only the term 'international student' needs to be interrogated (King, 2013), but also the phenomenon of international student migration or mobility in relation to migration theories and higher education shift (Barnett, 1994, Scott, 1998).

Some analysts have suggested that we should use the term 'migration' (Raghuram, 2013) while some authors and policy debate tend to favor the term 'mobility' (Findlay et al, 2011; King, 2013; Teichler, 2007) because it is more flexible and includes not only longer-term moves, but also shorter-term ones. But a further point is relevant here: the word 'mobility' is connected to the ability to move freely and easily, and the international mobility of highly skilled individuals and students is perceived as positive and valuable within political discourses. Borja *et al* (2015), from an historical perspective, remind us that, until the last quarter of the 20th century, the terms 'migration' and 'travel' were alternatively used, depending on the length of the journey. Since then, the term 'mobility' has come to be associated with the notion of travel. However, today the term 'migration' as equally connected to movements of individuals, is used (sometimes negatively) to describe the trajectories and experiences of lower-skilled individuals, and often vulnerable workers (Bauman, 2015; McKay, 2015). So, while the term 'mobility' has usually positive connotations from political and economic perspectives, the term 'migration' is increasingly associated with historical memories of invasion, fear, loss of control, competition and instability.

This dilemma becomes even more crucial when dealing with international students. Murphy-Lejeune, in her research on Erasmus students, suggests that migration is perceived as "the longed-for arrival in spaces carrying new premises, but home or newer possibilities are never too far away" (2002: 4), while mobility is a more general word commonly understood as "the phenomena other than movements from one national territory to another" (*idibem*) and "highlights the movement involved in migration" (King and Raghuram, 2013: 129).

Nevertheless, in debating the issues of student mobility or migration in the globalized context, there is another important aspect that needs to be considered: the growing participation of international students in the labor market (King, 2012). Mariya Ivancheva (2007), in her research on Romanian and Bulgarian students working in the UK, reflects on how student workers are "deeply frustrated about their exploitation in terms of wages, living conditions, and the fact that they have come to the UK on false promises of cultural exchange and learning" (2007: 110). Clearly, this aspect does not match the historical view of international student mobility, in which international students are defined as privileged individuals with upper class backgrounds. The multiplication of their identities (students, workers, migrants) might confirm the hypothesis that there is an erosion of the boundary between work and study (Raghuram, 2013).

Although some scholars locate the notion of mobility between the two theoretical realms of migration and transnationalism (Baas, 2012), others point out that a radical distinction should be made between the two. They suggest that mobility should be understood as a new form of migration and could be associated with the idea of an ongoing process, or a one-way ticket (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002). In addition, recent studies suggest that student mobility is largely influenced by, and connected to, both the increasingly global nature of many economic, cultural and political systems and social imaginaries of individuals (Brooks and Waters, 2011), but can be also a "social and biographical process" (Carlson, 2011). Consequently, when dealing with international students, migration and mobility may be considered as two coexisting phenomena that need to be analyzed and contextualized in light of new emerging diasporas, migratory spaces and trajectories.

As has been summarized, there are some obstacles and controversies to theoretical advancement in international student migration studies. Student mobility or migration in current times can no longer use the recipes of the traditional labour-migration paradigms for two main reasons. First, according to Raghuram, what is distinctive about international student movements is the notion of knowledge, which should be understood as the main motivating rationale. Thus, international student mobility or migration might be seen also as an essential process "to producing the reach, and hence the validity of knowledge institutions" (2013: 150). Second, according to Castles, doing migration research means:

> seeking to develop middle-range theories that can help integrate the insights of the various social sciences to understand the regularities and variations of a range of migratory processes within a given historical socio-economic constellation…such a conceptual framework would consist of a detailed mapping of the factors that influence migratory processes and of the connections between these factors (2010: 1582).

In line with this point, this study argues that social research on international students cannot focus upon a single paradigm, and then generalize from its characteristics.

2.4. Gaps in International Student Mobility literature

At present, student mobility is usually regarded as the major and most visible part of the internationalization of tertiary education (King and Raghuram, 2013; Murphy-Lejeune, 2008; Teichler, 1998); or in other words, a key element of internationalization of higher education, encouraged by the integration of world trade in order to "allow economies of scale in education systems...and bring in additional resources to finance them" (Tremblay, 2002: 39).

On the one hand, some authors focus on the positive impact of mobility for students, as it offers opportunities, fun, and excitement, exactly like tourism (Water et al, 2011). On the other, some scholars suggest that the literature on mobility tends to be caught in a misrepresentative alternative between:

- pessimistic analyses which stress the importance of the economic perspective and define mobility as a direct consequence of push-pull factors, and so the increasing competition between some developed countries and emerging economies (developing countries) for skilled labor, top talented students and top scholars (de Wit, 2008; Altbach, 2015; Wadhwa, 2016), and
- critical sociological and anthropological analyses which place the notion of mobility between the two theoretical realms of migration and transnationalism, and thus define mobility as a hybrid phenomenon which remains undertheorized (Baas, 2012: 8).

The phenomenon is often analyzed from an economic perspective, especially in the UK, where international students represent an important source of income and the higher education sector is increasingly considered a 'market' (Beech, 2019; Hill, 2013). Not surprisingly, Teichler stresses the idea that student mobility represents "one of the most undisputed positive goals" (Teichler, 2007) in current political debate, and makes a distinction between vertical and horizontal mobility:

> a most suitable way of getting access to study provisions academically superior to those at home or in areas of specialization hardly available at home…"vertical mobility"…Mobility between countries and institutions of higher education of more or less the same level of academic quality…"horizontal mobility" (Teichler, 2007: 1).

In addition, the author points out two contrasting aspects: high expectations (the ambitious reforms of creating a European Higher Education Area) and increasing scepticism (controversial issues concerning 'commercialization of transnational higher education', 'brain drain', etc.). Following his argument, five main characteristics define international student mobility, namely:

- prestigious universities attracting students from different countries.
- The historical relationship between colonies and developing countries and developed countries can influence the flows between country of origin and country of study. In this sense student mobility can be defined as "the first step towards migration".
- Student mobility as a way to promote and facilitate European integration and "understanding of neighbour relationships across Europe"; short-term study in other countries in order to encourage mutual understanding and gain further academic and cultural knowledge "but possibly not too contrasting countries and institutions" (Erasmus programme).
- The recent relationship between higher education and financial dimension (Teichler, 2007: 2).

In line with Teichler's argument, Murphy-Lejeune (2002), one of pioneers in the field, defines student mobility as "another sphere of economic activity, between international migrations and human capital formation" (2008). More specifically, on the basis of her ethnographic research on European Erasmus students, she suggests that it can be considered:

> as a particular case of migration, a choice which may surprise. Indeed, the study of travelers journeying in the context of programmes and agreements which facilitate their movements, within a relatively homogeneous cultural area, for a duration fixed in advance, might appear rather distant from the often dramatic problems besieging international migrants (2002: 3).

Thus, from her perspective, international students should be considered as individuals with different nationality who belong to the political category of "non-nationals" (*ibid.*). However, we need to consider that these theoretical contributions are based on studies conducted primarily amongst EU students and, more crucially, Erasmus students. Particularly, Teichler stressed the role of Erasmus students' mobility within Europe, whose stay abroad is usually short-term and could be different from long-term international students (Teichler, 2007: 8). The author goes on to focus on the issue from a European and political perspective and argues that both the Erasmus Programme and the Bologna Process have played a major role in popularizing short-term student mobility in Europe. Consequently, these insights may be useful but also unsatisfactory for the purposes of this study, since they are concerned with Erasmus students, who represent a particular case in the realm of international student mobility.

Over the last decade the volume of literature on international student mobility has increased significantly. International student mobility has been analyzed mainly:

- Through the lens of the knowledge society and global knowledge economy (Gürüz, 2011).
- By scholars who use Karl Marx's concept of reproduction as the theoretical foundation to analyze schools and higher education institutions as agencies of cultural and social reproduction (Hill, 2013).
- By applying the Bourdieusan concepts of cultural capital and social reproduction (Erel, 2010; Burke, 2017).

For instance, applying Bourdieu's conceptual framework, some studies highlighted the powerful relationship between social class and education, and suggest that social class can be understood as a sort of 'stigma' in educational trajectories, employment pathways and reproduction of relations and inequalities within social space (Thondhlana, 2018). Other critical thinkers suggest that contemporary higher education

is mainly producing and perpetuating social inequalities (Antonucci, 2016: Hill, 2013). As Willis (1983) clearly states:

> education is not about equality, but inequality…Education's main purpose of the social integration of a class society could be achieved only by preparing most kids for an unequal future, and by insuring their personal underdevelopment (1983:110).

Although these accounts are important, some scholars argue that they capture merely a part of the complexity of the relationships between higher education, international mobility or migration and the wider society (Beech, 2019; Urry, 2007). These accounts are in many ways based on a form of radical pessimism that gives no room for future social changes and alternatives. Both the notions of 'capital' and 'class' and 'education' seem to be static concepts, and even where forms of resistance and contradictions are taken into account, they are often depicted as hopeless strategies against the weight of capitalist domination (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977; Bourdieu, 1981).

Additionally, Brooks and Waters (2011), on the basis of a strong empirical focus on European and East-Asian mobile students, make an important contribution in theorizing student mobilities. In line with Tran (2015) and King and Raghuram (2013), they stress the importance of students' own perspectives in relation to global dynamics. In their analyses they discuss the characteristics of individuals who study in a foreign country, the geographies of their decision-making, their motivation and aspirations, social and cultural interactions, academic capital and labor market (Brooks and Waters, 2011: 95). In doing so, they also capture the political and economic background of student mobility and the internationalization of education, which is said to influence students' movements in unprecedented ways:

> the neo-liberal vision of 'international education' (invariably driven largely by mercenary concerns) is not inevitable, and alternative futures for HE, involving different versions of internationalization, must be imaged, deliberated and discussed. ...Further research is needed...which attempts to understand how mobile students fit into the larger picture of contemporary transformation in the spaces of higher education and how, also, the advantage that accrues from international mobility can be made more accessible to all students, and not just the most privileged sections of society (2011: 172).

This study recognizes the centrality of these aspects, but at the same time the outcomes suggest that there is room for other possibilities, and that international students' subjectivities and consciousness can play a significant role in shaping their mobilities. Thus, this research to some extent is somewhat in line with Giroux's critical point on Bourdieu's theory:

unfortunately…the conceptual possibility for resistance does appear in Bourdieu's work –that is, in mismatch between one's habitus and the position one occupies – the foundation for such action rests not on a notion of reflexivity or radical self-consciousness, but on the incompatibility between two structures – the historical structure of the disposition and the historical structure embodied in the institution…the result is that the power of reflexive thought and historical agency are relegated to a minor theoretical detail in Bourdieu's theory of change (Aronowitz and Giroux, 1986: 84).

Indeed, this study concerns the subtlety of illuminating the experiences of international students, that have drawn the researcher away from strictly sociological literature towards philosophy and human geography. More specifically, this study is concerned with some phenomenological principles regarding the ways individual consciousness can influence the reality (Heidegger, 2015). Therefore, the research gives room to the significance of perceptions, events, space, time and the self experienced by international students, as quintessential subjects of student mobility.

Conducting a qualitative study on international students, and then contextualizing the research outcomes, require a theoretical and empirical effort. Existing literature on international student mobility stresses the complexity of student decision-making. This should be understood as the result of a variety of factors and meanings, including policy as well as social, network and cultural capital and imaginative geographies (Beech, 2019; Brooks and Waters, 2011; King and Raghuram, 2013; Raghuram, 2014). Nevertheless, much more needs to be achieved. More specifically:

> there is a need to garner a more holistic understanding of…"global eduscape" by bringing together literatures on student mobility, geographies of education and also work focusing on educational practice and pedagogy…This linking to student geographies together with the other actors involved in their mobilities is therefore of critical importance…*because it* may help to go some way towards addressing many of the "unknowns" associated with the current political climate in the UK (Beech, 2019: 241).

Meanwhile, Raghuram argues for the need to analyze the spatiality of higher education and knowledge and its relationship to student mobility. To use her words, what is required is:

> a mode of understanding where the producers of the spatialities of knowledge are seen as central to student mobility – where different providers jostle together and compete to offer courses as part of their own institutional agendas, and where these agendas are part of, and not necessary for, producing student migrants…*and* the mobility of institutions – of their codes, regulatory practises, academics, and so on – are also seen as central to understandings of student mobility. (Raghuram, 2013: 149).

Similarly, Urry stresses the importance of network capital and its social dimensions to understand the new notion of mobilities in current times. The author argues that:

> mobilities develop into a distinct field with characteristic struggles, tastes and habituses. It is the site of multiple intersecting contestations. This field has spun off from economic, political, and cultural processes and is now self-expanding and gives rise to an emergent form of capital, network capital, that is a prerequisite to living in the rich 'north' of contemporary capitalism (Urry, 2007: 196).

What is remarkable is that these authors, in different ways, identify the sociological dimension as the key to understand both mobilities and student mobility. Beech asserts the need to address the disconnect between students and actors involved in their mobilities by garnering a more holistic view that includes, amongst others, educational and pedagogical insights (Beech, 2019: 241). Raghuram suggests seeing the knowledge producers as central, and then to explore "the contingent arrangements which shape students' subjectivities" (Raghuram, 2013: 149). Finally, Urry's analogous argument stresses the urge to examine "the social relations that the means of mobility afford and not only the changing form taken by the forces of mobility" (Urry, 2007: 196). According to the authors, the sociological dimension in this field of study includes social, emotional, economic, political, cultural and practical variables that cannot be automatically reduced to what Bourdieu defines as "economic and cultural capital" (Bourdieu, 1984). Over, above and behind student mobility we can identify a 'relational assemblage', which is the result of the relationality of individuals with others and with the affordance of the environment (Urry, 2007). This assemblage moves through time and space dimensions and finds its concreteness in "meetingness", within specific spaces in a specific time (Urry, 2007: 198). Moreover, in line with Raghuram's critique on existing literature, in these spaces, knowledge is produced and validated, and so can circulate (Raghuram, 2013: 147).

2.5. International student mobility: research issues

International student mobility in current times is contributing, both directly and indirectly, to the formation of a new global market, with a group of countries identified as 'knowledge producers' and a large number of countries that are 'knowledge users'. The UK, as it has been argued in Chapter 1, is the second largest knowledge producer in the world, after the US (Project Atlas, 2019). In this sense, international student mobility is generally understood as inward student mobility to knowledge producers and outward student mobility from knowledge users (Gürüz, 2011). So, the resulting direction of student mobility becomes from knowledge producers to knowledge users.

Statistics indicate that there are nearly 375,000 Indian students studying abroad and about 20,000 studying in the UK. Meanwhile, there are nearly 76,000 Italian students studying abroad and nearly 20,000 studying

in the UK (UNESCO, 2019). After completing their studies in the host country, international students can return home, stay in the host country, or choose amongst a variety of job opportunities anywhere in the world. However, whilst there is data on graduate outcomes, data that is focused on international and EU graduates in the UK is quite limited. The LEO (Longitudinal Educational Outcomes) surveys focus on students who work in the UK. Additionally, HESA's DLHE (Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education) surveys, which include international students working outside the UK, cannot be considered robust because the response rate is low and surveys are usually conducted six months post-graduation, which is a relatively short period to evaluate international students' experiences (Universities UK, 2019).

Available data on international students in the UK suggests that 83% of international students reported that the UK qualification helped them to get a job. Meanwhile, 53% of international students who graduated in the UK and work in their home countries reported that they earn above or well above average compared to their peers who studied in their home countries. Furthermore, more than 80% of international students recommended studying in the UK, 36% planned on doing further study in the UK, and 77% reported that they are more likely to do business with the UK. However, the number of respondents to this survey is 16,199, with 5,547 EU respondents and about 10,000 non-EU respondents (Universities UK, 2019), while there are about 460,000 international students studying at UK higher education institutions (Universities UK, 2019). So, the survey includes about 4% of the total international student population in the UK. Employability, transitions, and career paths of international students in the UK have received little attention not only by national statistics, but also by both quantitative and qualitative research in social sciences, compared to other aspects of international student mobility. As a consequence, a theoretical effort is needed to contextualize their experiences, transitions and career paths.

Existing studies suggest that social and cultural capital accumulation is the defining feature of international students as, it is argued, these forms of capital are a key motivation in their experiences overseas. For instance, Murphy-Lejeune (2002) provides a theoretical understanding, and coined the term 'mobility capital', that is defined as the "sub-component of human capital, enabling individuals to enhance their skills because of the richness of the international experience gained by living abroad" (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002: 51). The concept includes family background, personal stories, and previous mobility experiences; the author points out that the acquisition of mobility capital is a key future of international students. In this sense, her view appears to be not dissimilar to Bourdieu's distinction between social, cultural, and economic capital (Bourdieu, 2007). However, when dealing with mobilities in current times there is a major extra form of capital that cannot be bypassed, that of network capital (Urry, 2008). Contrary to some scholars who directly or indirectly take into account the concept of 'habitus' (Carlson, 2011; Murphy-Lejeune, 2002), Urry argues that the Bourdieusan notion of habitus is "national-centric", "overly static",

"non-ethical" and "a-moral" to be able to capture the essence of network capital, and to be connected to the new forms of mobility (Urry, 2007: 195).

In line with his reasoning, Brooks and Waters (2010) suggest that mobility capital needs to be rethought and "conceptualized as a form of capital which exists alongside the others identified by Bourdieu…and which can be both converted into these other types and produced by them" (Brooks and Waters, 2010: 154). Consequently, we can find different and sometimes contradicting focal points in existing literature on international student mobility, namely:

- the economic benefits of the experiences abroad, with knowledge and skills identified as fundamental to being more competitive in the global knowledge economy (Gürüz, 2011);
- student mobility as the result of vertical and horizontal mobility, where vertical mobility is defined as the "most suitable way of getting access to study provisions academically superior to those at home or in areas of specialisation hardly available at home", while horizontal mobility is understood as "mobility between countries and institutions of higher education…offering the opportunity to widen the horizon through experiencing contrasting academic environments and enhancing one's intercultural understanding" (Teichler, 2007: 1);
- student mobility as a biographical process focused on building knowledge through self-discovery, rather than as a process determined by overarching social structures (Bagnoli, 2009);
- student mobility as an integrant part of the wider mobility trajectories, where world-class education is understood as "embedded in a mobility culture that attaches symbolic capital to the very performance of international living, and that aspires to engage in international career trajectories that some might see as the hallmark of the transnational capitalist class" (King, Findlay et al, 2012);
- student mobility as the result of social network capital and geographical imaginations, rather than just the result of *homo oeconomicus* behaviors (Beech, 2019).

Each study, in its own way and from different perspectives, grasps both individual and more general aspects of the transformations underway in current times. However, existing research focuses on, and examines, mainly the motivations and the characteristics of international students (Beech, 2019; King et al, 2014). What is still hard to find in existing literature on student mobility is a qualitative analysis of the lived experiences, trajectories, and career paths of international students. There are few studies focused on student mobility and professional career or subsequent employment. Amongst the existing ones, there is Bryla's research on Polish Erasmus students studying in EU countries, a large-scale study based on internet surveys conducted in 2012. The research findings confirm certain implications between student mobility

and professional career. However, whilst the survey shows that a significant percentage of former international student mobility participants' professional development was positively influenced by the experience abroad, there is no clarity on the link(s) between student mobility and professional mobility (Bryla, 2015: 640). Survey evidence can be illuminating, but in this case it is concerned with Erasmus students, who are a very specific case in the field of student mobility.

2.6. Theoretical Frameworks

In this study theoretical frameworks have not been selected before starting the research, but during the research process and in the light of the analysis of the research outcomes. To contextualize and highlight the findings, this research identifies four main theoretical frameworks which will be explored one by one in the following sections:

- Urry's mobilities paradigm and the notion of Network Capital (Urry, 2007; Beech, 2019)
- The notion of knowledge, in relation to the notions of time and spaces (Foucault, 2004, 2012; Raghuram, 2013)
- The role of emotional and cognitive factors, including the notion of consciousness and aspiration (Heidegger, 2015; Appadurai, 1996, 2004; Husserl, 2009) in international students (Soong, 2016)
- Boutang's notion of Cognitive Capitalism (Boutang, 2011).

These theoretical frameworks allowed the researcher to better investigate the main key-themes of this study, namely: the process of decision-making of international students and the reasons beyond it (Chapter 4), the lived experiences of international students in London (Chapter 5), international students' trajectories and career paths (Chapter 6).

2.7. International Students and the Mobilities Paradigm

Although international student mobility is often defined as a particular element of the migration phenomenon (King et al, 2013; Urry, 2007), views vary as to whether its determinants do not differ significantly from those that correspond to migration flows (Gonzales et al, 2011) or there is a need to retain the distinctiveness of mobile students in the realm of research on migration (Raghuram, 2013). For these reasons, Urry's notion of 'mobilities' is identified as applicable to international students in this research. According to the author, mobility has become an entire way of life in itself, one that forces the researchers to think "beyond societies", precisely because it makes the very notion of society obsolete (Urry, 2000). Urry contends that:

the term 'mobilities' refers to *a* broad project of establishing a 'movement-driven' social science in which movement, potential movement and blocked movement are all conceptualized as constitutive of economic, social and political relation (2007: 43).

In doing so, the author outlines a pioneering paradigm, that:

enables the 'social world' to be theorized as a wide array of economic, social and political practices, infrastructures and ideologies that all involve, entail or curtail various kinds of movement of people, or ideas, or information or objects (*Ibid.*).

Urry's paradigm (2009: 47) focuses upon the interconnections between five different mobilities, namely:

- The corporeal travel of people for a variety of reasons (work, study, leisure, or family), and migration and escape, organized in terms of contrasting time-spaces modalities.
- The physical movement of objects to producers, consumers and retailers.
- The imaginative travel effected through the images of places and people appearing on and moving across multiple print and visual media.
- Virtual travel often in real time thus transcending geographical and social distance.
- The communicative travel through person-to-person communication, that includes the digital world and connectivity.

What is remarkable for the purpose of this study, is that Urry's paradigm includes a variety of mobilities, and all of them might match those of international students. It takes into account that time, speed and distances are changing in rapid ways. In addition, it allows the researcher to investigate differences between the privileged migratory elites and other mobile individuals, because mobility, as this study aims to show, can be also a consequence of social inequality. Contrary to the postmodern utopia of a borderless society, as Castles points out, "the right to be mobile is more class-specific and selective than ever" (2010: 1567).

For these reasons, in this research, the term 'mobility' is considered more appropriate for two main reasons. First, the study is qualitative research on international students and their trajectories. Although they moved to a foreign country for an entire degree programme, their migration projects are still characterized by uncertainties. The experiences of international students can vary according to different variables, such as academic life, professional life and private life. The research aims to understand the reasons why international students leave their comfort zones to venture out to the unknown: while migration due to political issues or other forms of violence is usually categorized as 'forced migration',

there is a significant debate about defining other forms of migration. Perhaps this is a major obstacle to international students' theory formation: the complexity and the diversity of international students' narratives are hardly ever straightforward. They can move to a different country just for an academic purpose, but they can also spend a long period of their life in hosting countries: these uncertainties reflect the difficulty of separating the sociological, economic and political in understanding international students' movements. Thus, assuming that 'migration' is the correct scientific term when dealing with international students could be risky, as it could mask the unquestioning assumption that migration is a negative aspect. Second, although the twenty-first century is usually depicted as a period of fluidity (Bauman, 1998) and openness, characterized by spread of communication, technology, ability to travel further and faster (Urry, 2007), national policy in developed countries is increasingly focused on migration controls, reducing net migration and selecting individuals who are allowed to legally stay. Thus, analyzing international students exclusively through the lens of migration paradigms cannot capture and explain all the contradicting variables previously mentioned.

2.8. International Student Mobility and Network Capital

In this study, network capital is understood as a key concept within the wider paradigm of the mobilities paradigm (Urry, 2007). The experiences of international students in this research suggest that to conceptualize their mobilities there is a variety of aspects that need to be considered: social background and the process of decision-making (they are explored in Chapter 4); educational experiences, job experiences, and live experiences in London (they are explored in Chapter 5); transitions, trajectories and career path (they are explored in Chapter 6). Additionally, these aspects are linked to a variety of less visible variables (i.e.: motivation, awareness, resilience…) that will be discussed in every chapter in relation to the aspects.

Urry provides a new conceptual framework, which is able to capture not just the economic aspects (that is, social class, gender, age, ethnicity and the extent to which they are economically structured), but also other important elements such as the physical, organizational and temporal (Urry, 2007: 194). He defines network capital as "the capacity to engender and sustain social relations with those people who are not necessarily proximate and which generates emotional, financial and practical benefits" (2007; 197) and identifies eight main elements that "in their combination, produce a distinct stratification order" (*ibid.*). These elements are:
1. The array of appropriate documents, visas, money, qualifications that enable safe movement of one's body from a place, city, country to another

2. Others (workmates, friends and family members) at-a-distance, who offer invitations, hospitality and meetings so that places and networks are maintained through intermittent visits and communications

3. Movement capacities: to walk distances within different environments, to be able to see and to board different means of mobility, to be able to carry or move baggage, to read timetabled information, to access computerized information, to arrange and re-arrange connections and meetings, the ability, competence and interest to use mobile phones, text messaging, email, the internet…

4. Location-free information and contact points: fixed or moving sites where information and communications can arrive, be stored and retrieved

5. Communication devices: to make and remake arrangements especially on the move and in conjunction with others who may also be on the move

6. Appropriate, safe and secure meeting places: both enroute and at the destination(s) such as office, club space, hotel, home, public spaces, street corner, café, interspaces, which ensure that the person is not exposed to physical or emotional violence

7. Access to car, road space, fuel, lifts, aircrafts, trains, ships, taxis, buses, trams, minibuses, email account, internet, telephone…

8. Time and other resources to manage and coordinate 1-7, especially when there is system failure as will intermittently happen (*ibid.*)

These elements, to some extent, can be encapsulated in international student mobility, as both existing literature and this study confirm. In Urry's view, this is not a simple classification of objects; indeed "such a classification of objects brings out huge variations of their ready-to-handedness but in all cases humans are nothing without such objects organized into systems" (Urry, 2007: 45). In other words, these objects and the systems in which they are organized augment the power of individuals. These objects allow or facilitate, amongst others, meetings, social life, education, knowledge acquisition and working experiences. What is remarkable for this study, is that these objects are all necessary preconditions for student mobility. International students' experiences presume relationships between technologies of communication and travel that move people, objects and ideas across countries and different spaces.

In line with this argument, Beech (2019) stresses the importance of social networks in her analyses on international students in the UK. For instance, the author argues, while recognizing the importance of the marketized dimension of higher education institutions, that "this is not all that matters" (Beech, 2019: 236). Indeed, Beech identifies social networks as an integral part of student mobility, to the point that they can normalize the process of international student mobility (Beech, 2019: 165). Friedman confirms the

centrality of the variables included in the notion of network capital, by advancing the critique that in the UK a large-scale re-examination of mobility is needed, and it should be based on the assumption that "people make sense of their social trajectories not just through 'objective makers' of economic or occupational success, but also through symbols and artifacts of class-inflected cultural identity" (Friedman, 2013: 364).

Moreover, Tran (2015), proposes the idea that student mobility should be rethought as a process of 'becoming' and theorized with new outlooks, particularly international students' lived realities. Based on a four-year study conducted in Australia, which included 105 international students' interviews (mainly from Asia), the author comes to the conclusion that international students can be considered as "self-forming agents who have the potential capability to pursue the course of life that they regard as being worth living and meaningful to them" (2015: 19). In addition, when criticizing mobility through the lens of Bourdieu's theory, he suggests that:

> mobility as 'becoming' is construed through the manners in which overseas education facilitates not only the redistribution of social class capital but, importantly, the pursuit of the integrated forms of profession – advanced capital and migration – oriented capital (Tran, 2015: 19).

Narrowing down this point, Simmel (1990) and Urry (2007) argue that mobilities could be understood as processes of "autopoiesis" in which "things find their meaning in relation to each other, and the mutuality of the relationships in which they are involved constitutes what and how they are" (Urry, 2007: 25). Accordingly, an autopoietic process or system is "not a kind of system that is left unmarked by something passing through; rather, it is a balanced self-organising whole that encounters perturbations with its entirety, responding holistically to a situation in terms of its own self-reproduction" (Stendera, 2015: 264). Read this way, studying international student mobility means rejecting dichotomous interpretations (i.e. input and outputs) and understanding that the effects of international student mobility are non-reducible to individual patterns (Urry, 2007). Indeed, international students are constantly in a flux that includes both social and cognitive dimensions.

For these reasons, this research investigates:
- the social background, the process of decision-making of international students and the reasons beyond it. These aspects are linked to Research Question 1 (What are the motives of EU and non-EU international students to study in London?) and Research Question 2 (What is the role of social background in shaping the decision of EU and non-EU international students to study in London?). They are explored in Chapter 4 and 5.

- the trajectories and career paths of international students. These aspects are linked to Research Questions 3 (How do migration trajectories shape the expectations of EU and non-EU international students studying in London from 2015 to 2020?) and 4 (What is the career path of EU and non-EU international students seeking a degree from universities in London from 2015 to 2020?). They are explored in Chapter 6.

Investigating these aspects means making an effort to understand the complex and nuanced student mobility landscape. In doing so, this study questions the variables that are included in Urry's mobilities paradigm and Simmels' insights. According to the authors, mobility is also an activity of the soul, which involves psychic functions and relations between individuals (Simmel, 1908; Urry, 2007). Urry reflects on the notions of 'circulating entities' and 'metaphysics' in relation to mobility, and argues that there are some less visible or invisible variables that operate and "generate analyses that focus upon patterns of more or less direct co-present social interactions" (Urry, 2007: 47). In other words, beyond the objective connections between different places and spaces, there is always human subjectivity (Simmel, 1997; Urry, 2007). For these reasons, the analysis of this study led the researcher to consider the implications of a variety of variables, including: social network, welfare, policy, knowledge, academic and professional experiences, movements, changes, and, more crucially, the cognitive and emotional variables of the experiences of international students. The key-themes, its variables and implications are presented and discussed in Chapters 4, 5 and 6.

The cognitive dimension of international students in this research is the matter of the following sections, which includes reflections on the notion of knowledge (both in social and individual terms), and on international student mobility as a mode of consciousness.

2.9. The notion of Knowledge

The notion of knowledge is crucial when dealing with international students, as what makes student mobility distinctive is "the significance of knowledge acquisition as a driver" (Raghuram, 2013: 146). In other words, what distinguishes international students from other migrants is knowledge that can be considered a form of concrete labor which is freer than the forms of traditional waged labor. As Ferguson points out:

> their play is still social reproductive activity insofar as it is integral to the creation of present and future labor power. It is simply the case that, being at some distance from the times and spaces of market compulsion, their activity is shaped more by the needs and desires of the (re)producers themselves, than by the dictates of capital (2017: 124).

However, according to Raghuram (2013), what is less clear in existing literature is how spaces of knowledge production are implicated in student mobility, and how knowledge is understood by international students. For this reason, Raghuram (2013) outlines three dimensions in which the so-called 'governmentality' is implicated in shaping international student mobility, namely: the global dimension; historical, economic and geopolitical forces; individual dimension (Raghuram, 2013). This section provides an overview of the global, historical, economic and geopolitical aspects that shape the understanding of knowledge in current times. Then, it focuses on the individual dimensions of knowledge. In doing so, in the light of the research findings, it suggests that a Foucauldian perspective can illuminate the relationship between knowledge and international students' understanding of knowledge.

The idea of higher education has shifted over time and space. Historically speaking, it has long been considered a public good. This conceptualization dates back to the eighteenth century, when Kant argued that education should be understood as a commodity that should be provided without profit to all members of a society (Kant, 1798). However, it must be acknowledged that, at that time, the economic, social and geopolitical scenario was radically different: there were no interdependent relationships between states, economics, global factors and higher education institutions as there are in contemporary times. In fact, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the so-called 'global economic world' included just North America and Western Europe, and now it includes many other countries, such as India and China (Gilpin, 2016). During the last decades some unprecedented changes took place on an international level: the ICT (Information and Communication Technologies) revolution, the transformation of the 'industrial society' into the 'knowledge society', the transformation from 'global economy' into 'global knowledge economy'. According to Gürüz, these complex and fast changes have produced a swift global transformation: the country's ability to take advantage of the global knowledge economy "depends on its capacity to participate, at least to some extent, in the process of generating, accessing, and sharing knowledge" (2011: 18).

Given the emergence of the global knowledge economy and the undisputed monopoly of higher education institutions over the production and development of knowledge, higher education institutions are increasingly being undermined, scrutinized and called on to adapt and reorganize themselves in some new directions, which include: openness towards the economic-business world in order to produce commercial activities; the capacity to "combine the best of innovation and interpretation" (Faust, 2010) and to produce a "workforce with an entrepreneurial attitude…and the skills that are necessary to adapt to the new ways of using knowledge and organizing work to produce goods and service internationally" (Gürüz, 2011: 21); the ability of being global competitors in the global higher education market, and so being efficient and

effective (Giroux, 2014). The worldwide perspectives of the academic community facing these changes are not homogenous: on the one hand, some optimistic views suggest that there may be more opportunities for far more people, and barriers of gender, nationality and background will be probably eroded (King, 1995). Also that global higher education has the potential to create new contributions to globalization with benefits to all countries (Gürüz, 2011). On the other hand, some pessimistic views suggest that higher education institutions will continue to survive as 'zombie institutions' (Webster, 2016), as it is relatively unclear which goals they have, and which features distinguish them from other kinds of institutions.

This reconceptualised knowledge, and so higher education, are strongly impacting both academic structure and international student mobility (Beech, 2019). One of greatest challenges is the perception or understanding of students. When the idea of higher education was strongly linked to the pursuit, production and share of knowledge, students were perceived as vital "contributors to the public intellectual capital of the nation" (Williams, 2016: 627). At present, they are more likely to be perceived as potential customers, mainly because they are fee-paying and seeking an economic return by investing time and money in higher education (Sax, 2004; Giroux, 2014). Although the idea of students as customers evokes intense controversy within the academic field in western countries (Cuthbert, 2010), what seems to be clear is that the process from knowledge to employability-labor market as far as the production of human – intellectual capital is, at the same time, increasingly promoted by policies and political debates. Consequently, researching international students means acknowledging that they are not "the only substantive subjects" in analyses of student mobility (Raghuram, 2013: 149).

In the field of international student mobility, Raghuram identifies some analyses of knowledge production and migration that adopted a Foucauldian approach; however, the author criticises these analyses by arguing that "they need spatial stretch to have any validity" and fail to provide "an analysis that takes account of how the spaces of knowledge are produced, and how they envelop both educational providers and student migrants has the capacity to add significantly to theorisations of student migration" (Raghuram, 2013: 148). Carrying on with the critique, Raghuram (2013) then suggests that further research should understand international students as active players and include the interdependency between institutions and international students. The exploration and analysis of the sociological dimension(s) in this study allowed the researcher to identify four key themes, namely: knowledge, power, institutions, and subjectivity. Remarkably, these concepts are all included in Foucault's oeuvre. Notably 'Foucauldian perspectives' and 'mobilities' refer to diverse literatures. Not surprisingly, mobility has never been a key point of discussion or a theoretical issue that needs to be addressed amongst Foucauldian scholars in recent times, and amongst the main scholars of mobility – namely Urry and Creswell – there is no mention of Foucault's work.

Although Foucauldian perspectives have received little attention in the field of mobilities, this study suggests that there can be both some interactions between the two realms, and that exploring questions of student mobility from a Foucauldian approach can provide further understandings in international mobility theory. Consider one of Foucault's key themes, which is also a key theme in this study: the notion of 'knowledge'. In his lecture series at the *Collège de France* in 1984, Foucault attempted to address a crucial question, that is "on the basis of what discursive practises was the speaking, labouring, and living subject constituted as a possible object of knowledge?" (Foucault, 2008:3). Reflecting on this topic, the author stresses the importance of the interdependence between techniques of governmentality, modes of veridiction and forms of practice of self. More specifically, he emphasizes as fundamental:

> the analysis of complex relations between three distinct elements none of which can be reduced to or absorbed by the others, but whose relations are constitutive of each other. These three elements are: forms of knowledge (savoirs), studied in terms of their specific modes of veridiction; relations of power, not studied as an emanation of a substantial and invasive power but in the procedures by which people's conduct is governed; and finally the modes of formation of the subject through practises of self (Foucault, 2008: 9).

Thus, here we find a triple theoretical shift that includes, firstly, knowledge acquisition and knowledge veridiction. According to Foucault, veridiction should be understood as something that cannot be objectively true but is true according to mainstream views. Secondly, power/domination and governmentality. According to Foucault, governmentality, in contrast to disciplinarian or sovereign forms of power, should be understood as the art of governing through positive means in order to create the willing participation of the governed (Foucault, 1991). Thirdly, individuals and the practises of self. Although the notion of 'self' is often understood from a metaphysical perspective in Foucauldian work, in this context the notion of 'self' is simply understood as the construction of students through the process of their mobilities (Barnett, 2008). This theoretical shift allows the researcher to explore the relations between knowledge, power and subjects. According to Raghuram, this study confirms the importance of understanding the spatialities of knowledge as key drivers for student mobility. But, at the same time, it acknowledges the three dimensions of knowledge, power and subject as three distinct domains that cannot be studied separately. As Foucault states:

> never studying discourses of truth without at the same time describing their effect on the government of self and others; never analysing structures of power without at the same time showing the knowledge and forms of subjectivation they rely on; never identifying modes of subjectivation without including their political extensions and the relations they have to the truth (Foucault, 2008: 346).

This leads us to another focal theme, that is 'subjectivity/subjectivation', which can be briefly defined as the potential modes of being for subjects. Existing analyses of student mobility based on a Foucauldian approach focus on globalisation as a discursive regime and knowledge producers competing to attract students, and see students mainly as 'consumers' (Lewis, 2005). However, focusing exclusively or predominantly on these analyses and discourses that see students as consumers "risks undermining their potential contribution and could devalue their position as culturally significant in other ways "(Beech, 2019: 230). This point is crucial, because Foucault, when articulating his view on subjectivation in relation to the notions of self and knowledge, argues that self-construction and care should not be understood as a solitary or private exercise made by individuals only for themselves. Indeed, it should be recognized as a

> social practice, and even an invitation to good government (correctly caring for self in order to care correctly for others). It remains that this care of self, basically presented in its Stoic and Epicurean version, revealed a game of freedom in which internal construction took precedence over the political transformation of the world (Foucault, 2008: 354).

In this sense, Foucault focuses on the notion of self by stating that individuals are not passive subjects. Indeed, they can be active players who act freely in any context. This is precisely the way Raghuram understands international students: "active subjects…*who* construct themselves through a variety of other positioning, individually and together" (Raghuram, 2013: 149). Additionally, Foucault emphasizes the notion of otherness, in relation to the notion of self, by defining otherness as the aspect "which makes a difference in the world and in people's opinions…which forces one to transform one's mode of being, that whose difference opens up to the perspective of another world to be constructed, to be imagined" (Foucault, 2008: 356). As has been already discussed and will be further explored in this chapter, the 'otherness' represents a key variable in mobile students' experiences. Indeed, Beech's study suggests that the idea of mobile students as individualistic students is largely a myth (Beech, 2019: 160).

Finally, the notion of power, which is intrinsically connected to the notion of knowledge in Foucauldian theory, to the point that the author uses the term 'power/knowledge' to remark that power is constituted though shared forms of knowledge, scientific understanding and "truth" (Foucault, 1998, 2008). In his view, power should not be understood only as a coercive force that forces individuals to act or perform against their beliefs, values or desires. Indeed, as has been discussed above, power is also a productive force. A key point in Foucault's perspective is that power can transcend politics and be concretely understood as an everyday, socialised and embodied phenomenon (Foucault, 1991).

Considering mobility as the result of both: domination and self-construction, being governed by external agents and self-governing, and acknowledging the existence or sometimes coexistence of each for different forms of mobility in different times and places, can provide a valuable area of student mobility research.

2.10. The emotional and cognitive variables

Although the number of interviews is not representative, the findings of this study confirm how student mobility is the result of a complex and often unpredictable interplay between individual and institutional variables (Findlay et al, 2012), combined in a variety of different places, spaces, times, feelings and perceptions. Focusing on international students' backgrounds and lived experiences allowed the researcher to gain insights about the less-visible variables influencing international student mobility. The research questions explore participants' backgrounds, their views about their decision to study in a foreign country, their feelings, perceptions, understandings, struggles, expectations and realities in order to understand if and in what measure their background influenced the choice. Additionally, questions explore the variables or reasons beyond their transitions in order to investigate the contingent arrangements that influence or shape students' subjectivities. These aspects are included in the list of crucial areas for research provided by Raghuram (2013). According to the author:

> students...are, after all, active subjects...*and* subjects construct themselves through a variety of other positioning, individually and together. They anticipate, interpret, perform and subvert the positions available to them as students alongside those as friends, family members and mobile subjects, and they do this through a range of communicative practises (Raghuram, 2013: 149).

To put it briefly, international students are substantive and active subjects, although not the only ones, in analyses of student migration/mobility.

Behind the emergence of international student mobilities in current times, existing literature outlines some key reasons, including: education and migration policies as a powerful source in both encouraging, enabling and structuring but also in restricting or discouraging student movements (Beech, 2018; Gribble, 2008); the opportunity to gain a range of "embodied and institutionalized cultural capital" (Water, 2017: 285); the chance to build strategic social networks that impact professional career (Findlay et al, 2012); the idea that being internationally mobile is virtuous (Beech, 2018). Then, traditionally, one of the main reasons or benefits of study in a UK university has been learning or improving English skills, as English is considered a *lingua franca* in current times (Byram and Dervin, 2008). These aspects, that directly or indirectly emerged during the research, suggest the entanglement of international student mobility and migration in broader cultural, economic and political processes together with implications for mobile individuals' subjectivities

and their experiences in a foreign country. Despite advancements in migration and mobility studies, existing perspectives and approaches do not provide an alternative agenda for a more holistic understanding of the motive forces of student mobility and migration. In line with Beech's argument:

> there is a need to garner a more holistic understanding…by bringing together literature on student mobility, geographies of education, and also work focusing on educational practise and pedagogy…*because* there is more to their movements than just a student consumer attitude (Beech, 2019: 242).

In acknowledging these developments, this study includes both more traditional migration drivers, some less-economic ones, and finally some cognitive concepts. Building on the work of Appadurai, Foucault, King, Raghuram, Soong and Urry amongst others, the outcomes of this study led the researcher to explore international student mobility and its relationships with individuals' modes of consciousness as key conceptual constructs.

'Motivation', 'desire', 'ambition', 'aspiration', 'resilience', 'self-empowerment' and 'synchronicity' amongst others, have emerged as key concepts during the interviews and will be explored in Chapters 4, 5 and 6. The majority of international students involved in this research identified these variables as some of the main prerequisites for educational and professional advancement. Some of them draw upon broad reflections of success to support an understanding that mobile people can achieve some level of success if they are strong, motivated, resilient and are able to work hard. A few international students identify aspiration (in relation to their international experiences) as an individual choice or approach to life and see themselves as individuals who set their aspirations in accordance with what they want or know they can achieve. Alternatively, some others simply aspire in more generic terms: for example, they want a better life or a better future. Interestingly, while some international students aspire to a future partly or completely different from the present, some others aspire for stability. For instance, there are international students who aim to secure a stable job with a permanent contract, in order to avoid significant changes in their lives. Meanwhile there are students who aim to explore different countries to collect a variety of international experiences.

What is remarkable from students' insights, is that, to some extent, they recall Appadurai's notion of the 'capacity to aspire' (Appadurai, 2004). Appadurai (2004) argues that the capacity to aspire can be considered a future-oriented ability that can improve human conditions. Additionally, the author understands aspiration as a "cultural capacity" shaped by cultural, social and economic influences (Appadurai, 2004). Carrying on with his reasoning, Appadurai (2006) states that those who:

have the privilege of choosing among career options, examining their options critically, establishing educational preferences, placing bets on different knowledge paths, and changing careers as a consequence of their capacity to benefit from high- and knowledge about knowledge. Such meta-knowledge is the true mark of global elite (Appadurai, 2006: 168).

Thus, for Appadurai, aspiration is not simply the hope or ambition to improve or achieve something. It is also a matter of individual understanding, access to knowledge and information, and being familiar with certain pathways, amongst others. However, this study's findings suggest that simply classifying international students as part of a global elite who can access knowledge, may be misleading and incomplete. It can obscure the sensitive position in which they live when they move to a different country and neglect their role in the broader social transformation in which they are involved (Raghuram, 2013). Therefore, in line with Soong's standpoint, dealing with international student mobility means considering:

alternative ways of thinking and analysis identity shifts as mode of consciousness…*in order to provide* a more nuanced view of cultures and identities that are constructed, in varying degrees, through socialisation and acculturation processes such as transnational student-migration (Soong, 2016: 36).

Consequently, this study acknowledges the importance of social and cultural background and other possible configurations of power relations, but, at the same time, it emphasizes the notion of aspiration and consciousness as dynamic learning processes that can change over time for a variety of reasons. These reasons may include transformations due to emotional or psychological conflicts between old or traditional points of view, and some new ones that became apparent during the experience as international students. In other words, individuals are usually inculcated with norms, rules, traditions and understandings of their families, communities and contexts where they were born and grew up. How deterministic these influences can be for international students is unpredictable: according to some scholars in the field of philosophy, individual choices, understanding and ways of living are not always rational and logical. Indeed, they are the result of both external or concrete aspects (family, status, country of origin…) and the ways in which individuals deal with them (Callard, 2018). For these reasons, this study argues that being an international student can be seen as the result of a complex and subjective set of factors that shape how individuals understand their life.

The research, in emphasizing how subjective and less visible variables can shape the process of student mobility, confirms Soong's definition of consciousness (2016):

consciousness can work in two forms: one is outward-looking, infinitely broad, expanding our world; another sense is inward-looking, delving infinitely deep to explore the inner heart (Soong, 2016: 36).

In doing so, international student mobility can be seen also as a mode of consciousness, in which awareness, understanding and sense of belonging play a key role. From this perspective, exploring international students can have the potential to enrich the meaning of consciousness in the fields of mobility and education.

2.11. Mobilities and Cognitive Capitalism: a way to contextualize international students' transitions

Existing literature in the field of international student mobility, whether it is very critical of global dynamics and of some forms of capital (social capital, economic capital, cultural capital) or more moderate, suggests that there seems to be a shared acceptance of both the existence of international competition between spaces of knowledge production and the centrality of knowledge at the heart of international student mobility in current times. The interdependency between spaces and knowledge-based systems through time-space variables is both the source of concern and the foundation of Urry's mobilities paradigm (2007) and Boutang's notion of cognitive capitalism. Exploring this point is crucial in this study because it means contextualizing, or at least attempting to understand, the "systems" that impact international students' paths. Notably these theories are not specifically concerned with international student mobility. As has been extensively argued in this study, at present there is no single, coherent theory of international student mobility. However, a strategic connection between these two theoretical perspectives in this study, can deepen and enhance the research findings and their interpretations. According to Urry:

> human beings are nothing without objects organized into various systems. The systems come first and serve to augment the otherwise rather thin powers of individual human subjects. Those subjects are bought together and serve to develop significant powers only because of systems that move them, or their ideas, or information, or various objects (Urry, 2007: 272).

In Urry's view, mobility systems are understood as "a subset of powerful, interdependent knowledge-based systems that organize production, consumption, travel and communication round the world…*and* have the effect of spreading connections that in all spheres become less based upon predictable co-presence and more upon relatively far-flung networks of at least partially weak ties" (Urry, 2007: 273). Narrowing down this point, Boutang argues that cognitive capitalism is the form of capitalism we are experiencing in current times; historically speaking, it comes after mercantile capitalism and industrial capitalism, and "is founded on the accumulation of immaterial capital, the dissemination of knowledge and the driving role of knowledge economy" (Boutang, 2011: 50). Remarkably, one of its distinctive features is that the "object of

accumulation consists mainly of knowledge, which becomes the basic source of value, as well as the principal location of the process of valorization" (Boutang, 2011: 57). In this view, knowledge and science become the main forces, and so the leading sector, of the system, because they are the necessary precondition for innovation: "the production of new knowledge can only be done on the basis of an accumulation of knowledge that is not reduced to technical material means" (Boutang, 2011: 55). As a consequence, human or intellectual capital becomes crucial in defining the wealth of nations and cities, and so education, research, information flow, technological advancement and digital networks become increasingly important as they constitute the foundations of the 'knowledge society'. In this vein, Urry points out that mobilities should not be understood as "individually determined or principally motivated by calculations of costs and benefits", but should be analyzed through the system process of mobilities, that includes, amongst others: the increasing interdependence between mobility and forms of knowledge; the need to analyze the "various systems that distribute people, activities and objects in and through time-space" (Urry, 2007; 272); the dynamicity of places that is linked to the "exceptional global competition between places that is transforming the character of places as they struggle for positioning on a global stage" (Urry, 2007: 275).

Both Urry and Boutang, although in different ways, identify 'mobility' as an essential value in current times or in the current phase of capitalism. Urry, more generally, understands mobilities as the interconnection between the corporeal travel of people, the physical movement of objects to producers, the imaginative travel, virtual travel and communications (Urry, 2007: 47). Meanwhile Boutang, more critically, understands mobility in present times as a criterion introduced by cognitive capitalism, and that can be defined as both "the ability to de-territorialize and re-territorialize" and the geographical as well as social "ability to travel and cooperate with people who are not from your habitual environment, your business or your original social class" (Boutang, 2011: 127).

Crucial for the analysis of international students' career paths and transitions are the notions of 'employment' and 'employability'. Existing career development literature and social studies emphasize the importance of two dominant types of capital: human capital and social capital (Smith, 2010). They are both tied to the person, but human capital concerns knowledge, skills, employability orientation, career expectations and aspirations, while social capital finds its source in relationships with others and includes relationships and career-related networks (Peeters *et al*, 2017). However, this research suggests that employment and employability are not just a matter of personal skills and relationships with others: there is more than that. In the field of international student mobility, time and space are two key variables that influence and shape network capital, and so employment. According to Boutang:

we have to see things in terms of a shifting of the terrain. Whereas previously waged workers with contacts of indefinite employment thought in terms of working collectivities and stable companies with an identifiable management structure, what we have now is a fragmentation of the unity of place and, even more so, of the statutes of labour. Work has de-materialised: the foremen have disappeared, the contours of the company have become uncertain and ephemeral (Boutang, 2011: 15).

Similarly, Urry argues that:

network sociality is particularly noticeable within highly globalized industries. Employees…are increasingly transnational…most do not think of themselves as 'company people' since their primary loyalty is to their profession. Companies are partly chosen because they demonstrate a 'cosmopolitan culture' (Urry, 2007: 222).

As a consequence, employment is increasingly becoming "post-national" and firms can no longer be described as single "rational actors", rather as "social entities" with "a façade, behind which there is an array of decentralized groups and subgroups continuously contracting with similar diffuse working units all over the world" (Urry, 2007: 223). One of the effects of the management, creation, spread and distribution of knowledge within and between organizations and knowledge producers is that employment is no longer simply a matter of 'what you know' and 'who you know', but also a matter of 'knowledge networking'. As Boutang confirms:

for the first time human beings have moved higher in society, having a brain that is equipped and extended by networked computers. This technological fact cannot be separated from a social accumulation of knowledge and of a memory of social organisation (Boutang, 2011: 37).

Boutang defines these transformations as "cognitive capitalism" because current transformations deal with collective cognitive labour power. Similarly, Urry sees in current times a:

dystopic digital Orwellization of self and society, with more or less no movement without digital tracing and tracking, with almost no-one within at least rich societies outside a digital panopticon and with a carbon database as the public measure of worth and status (Urry, 2007: 276).

Exploring the context in which international students' transitions and career paths take place is essential not only to better analyze international students in this study, but also to enrich the understanding of the spatialities of knowledge production in this field of study (Raghuram, 2013). The analysis of the outcomes shows more concretely how the combination of these theories can illuminate international students' transitions and career paths. Urry's mobilities paradigm allows the researcher to explore the relationship(s)

between paths, transitions and mobility, while Boutang's view allows the researcher to critically interrogate or interpret these relationships in this study.

2.12. Theoretical approaches and Phenomenology

It is important to clarify that in this study the theoretical approaches discussed above are used to understand and discuss the lived experiences of international students, and, as such, they cannot be automatically explained by existing theoretical perspectives or categories. Indeed, this study argues that it is only under the principle of uniqueness and unity that international students' lives can be understood. In other words, it is through the subjects of the research (international students) and the systemic activity of consciousness (Heidegger, 2013; Husserl, 2013) that their experiences can be understood and contextualized. For these reasons, a phenomenological attitude is adopted as method to establish the theoretical approaches followed in this study.

The research suggests that international student mobility is dynamic in its essence, and it does not depend exclusively on macrosocial aspects. Indeed, it can be also influenced or shaped by the activities and choices made by international students as social actors. Therefore, it is considered necessary to delve deeper into the international student mobility concerns using the international students' experiences themselves and to go beyond existing knowledge as such. In order to achieve this aim, a qualitative approach informed by phenomenological principles is considered the most appropriate one. Although methodology and the philosophical aspects will be discussed in Chapter 3, it is worth pointing out that these principles delineate the epistemological framework that guides this research study.

Summary

This chapter provides an overview of the existing academic literature in the field of research. It starts by defining international students and international student mobility, including its issues. Then it explores some gaps identified in existing literature, in order to outline the paradigms and theoretical frameworks selected for the purposes of this research. This study includes four main theoretical frameworks, namely: Urry's mobilities paradigm and the notion of Network Capital (Urry, 2007; Beech, 2019); the notion of knowledge, in relation with the notions of time and spaces (Foucault, 2004, 2012; Raghuram, 2013); the role of emotional and cognitive factors, including the notion of consciousness and aspiration (Heidegger, 2015; Appadurai, 1996, 2004; Husserl, 2009) in international students (Soong, 2016); Boutang's notion of Cognitive Capitalism (Boutang, 2011). The chapter presents these paradigms and explains why there are considered suitable for the research.

3. Research Methodology

This chapter discusses the methodological approach adopted for this study, the research methods and why they are considered suitable for the purposes of the research.

The origins of this study stem from exploration of the limited existing literature on contemporary student migration, the restricted qualitative research available on international students studying in the UK (Beech, 2019; King, 2013; Raghuram, 2013), and the lack of qualitative studies in this field. It also arises from my own experiences as both an international student and as a researcher in the UK. This study is distinctive because it compares two groups of international students: a group from a EU country, Italy, and a group from a non-EU country, India. India and Italy are two completely different countries, but they are both two top sending countries of international students in the UK in current times (Universities UK, 2018, 2020). At present, there are no qualitative studies in this field of research that compare India and Italy as sending countries of international students in the UK. Thus, for the purpose of the research, this comparative study can provide significant insights. This study is also timely for two main reasons. First, the student component of global migration flows was unprecedented when this study was conducted, and the UK is both the biggest recruiter of international students in Europe and the second one worldwide (HEPI 2015; OCSE 2016; UK Council, 2015; Universities UK, 2020). Second, this study is qualitative, phenomenological and includes international students from both EU and non-EU countries; at the time of conducting the research, some unexpected historical events took place – namely, Brexit – and there is no concrete understanding of the effects that it could have on international students, especially those from EU countries. For these reasons, unlike some previous studies that have focused more on the labour market outcomes, geographical variables (Beech, 2019; Nowok *et al,* 2013) and the "broadly positive changes associated with international student mobility" - that is knowledge creation and transfer, international CVs, managerial and professional jobs – (Brooks and Waters, 2011:137), this study aims at capturing both: international students transitions and career paths, but also their experiences as international students, their perceptions and subjectivities. It gives room to the wider context in which international student mobility takes place, including students' well-being, set of beliefs and values. Students' experiences are often highly heterogeneous, fragmented, and characterized by many contradictions. As a consequence, international student mobility cannot be fully comprehended without taking into account these aspects.

This research attempts to provide a deeper understanding and an intrinsic insight through the use of qualitative research methodologies. Additionally, qualitative research methods adopted in this study are based upon philosophical phenomenology (Husserl, 1998, 2009). The aim of this study is not to generalize the findings and make them applicable to the vast category of international students, rather to contribute

to the lack of research on the relationship between migration and education, by focusing on an unique sample (EU and non-EU students) studying in a world-leading geographical context (Greater London) in times of great historical changes.

3.1. International Student Mobility: why Qualitative Research

A rapid overview of some challenging aspects that influence the research field is useful to understand the reasons of the methodology adopted for this study. By focusing on the UK, the study has the advantage of looking in depth at one nation-state and, as it will be discussed, taking into account the wider context in which international student mobility is embedded.

The field I am researching is concerned with both migration and education. It is argued that qualitative studies and their evaluation are extremely important to investigate migration and mobility, in order to improve the understanding of: the determinants of migration, the impacts of these movements, and the long-term efficacy of migration (King and Raghuram, 2013). More specifically, they stress the usefulness of qualitative research, compared to other approaches, by stating research based on qualitative methodologies can provide a more holistic understanding of the process through which geopolitical and social changes influences the decision to migrate. The authors argue that qualitative methodologies

> enrich the analysis of international student mobility as they offer the possibility of detailed analysis of student experiences, behaviors, and attitudes. They give depth and complexity to student subjectivities...*and provide* analyses of patterns of mobility and how they vary over time (King and Raghuram, 2013: 132).

What is crucial here, is that they emphasize the importance of measurement of progress, while recognizing the importance to understand when people move, under what circumstances, why they move and with what impacts (King and Raghuram, 2013; Raghuram, 2014). In this sense, according to the authors, qualitative research can provide unique insights for two main reasons: first, it is more precise than short-term data because it can identify the long-term impacts or variables, in order to address the complexity of the migration process itself. Second, quantitative analyses in this field are quite rare, and those existing "become quickly out of date because of the volatility of some flows" (King and Raghuram, 2013: 132). Moreover, statistics can be unsatisfactory if we aim at exploring a phenomenon, because the outcomes could be influenced by over-rigid formulations of cause-effect variables. Contrarily, qualitative studies can illuminate broad complexities, including: sociological aspects, historical and political trends and controversies, psychological issues, philosophical and pedagogical reflections and contributions (Beech, 2019).

Since this study aims at exploring the broader complexities of international student mobility, that are relatively obscure in existing literature (Raghuram, 2013; Soong, 2016), adopting a phenomenological approach while conducting a qualitative research is considered a valuable strategy to seek to unravel the complexities of international student mobility in current times.

3.2. Qualitative Research: epistemological and ontological issues

Conducting a qualitative research in the field of international student mobility leads the researcher to question both the epistemological and the ontological dimensions in the fields of education, migration and mobility. This section explains why qualitative methods are considered more suitable in this study, and offers an overview of epistemological and ontological aspects in these fields of study, in order to provide a better understanding of the background of the methodologies adopted.

The research questions of this study have been discussed in Chapter 1, but are recalled in this paragraph to discuss research methods:

1. What are the motives of EU and non-EU international students to study in London?
2. What is the role of social background in shaping the decision of EU and non-EU international students to study in London?
3. How do migration trajectories shape the expectations of EU and non-EU international students studying in London during my research period 2015-2020?
4. What is the career path of EU and non-EU international students seeking a degree from universities in London during my research period 2015-2020?

These research questions are all concerned with motivations, factors, determinants and implications of international student mobility. While quantitative research and statistical methods can "answer to 'what' questions, but leave…in relative darkness about 'how' and 'why'" (Holland *et al,* 2006: 1), qualitative research allows the researcher to explore more in depth complexities and issues in relation to the research topics. Qualitative research can provide a unique range of knowledge about context, society, individuals, institutions and societal issues in relation to the research. This is exactly the kind of knowledge there is a great need for in the field of international student mobility (King and Raghuram, 2013; Soong, 2016). Particularly at a time when sociopolitical contradictions and individual fluidity are fundamental features, time and change become key-themes in social research (Urry, 2007). As a consequence, researchers should be able to think dynamically and adopt approaches that capture the dynamic aspects of people lives (Thomson and McLeod, 2015; Neale 2018).

Qualitative research in the field of education and migration is characterized by a variety of epistemologies and theoretical perspectives (Beech, 2019; Giroux, 2014; Hill, 2013; Raghuram, 2014) that both provide a rich and conceptually grounded space for thinking how migration and education interact, but at the same time generate epistemological and ontological conflicts. According to Lichtman, there is a significant debate between "those who believe in evidence-based work and those who accept a mixed-methods, interpretive or critical theory viewpoints" (2013: 15). This has become particularly evident also in the field of education and migration in the UK in recent years, where there are tensions between two tendencies: one that put objectivity and scientific claims at the heart of social research; and one stressing the importance of the researcher, who should be able to interpret and construct explanations by developing an intuitive understanding of his or her research field (Tracy, 2013).

A major issue in existing research debate is concerned with epistemology and ontology. Then methodology becomes a natural consequence. Epistemology and ontology are in their essence concerned with the nature of reality and the ways through which reality can be analyzed and understood. To put it briefly, there are: positivist and post-positivist researchers (many of them in quantitative research) who claim for scientific objectivity; constructivist and interpretivist researchers (many of them in qualitative research) who are more concerned with the construction of the reality through the researcher's lens; and postmodernist and critical theorists who aim at improving the understanding of the society and put the critique of society and culture at the heart of their epistemologies, ontology and methodology (Apple *et al,* 2009; Creswell, 1998; Hill, 2013; Lichtman, 2014).

In line with Denzin (2010) and Lichtman (2014), I agree with the need to extend the call for paradigm expansion by moving toward cooperation and possibilism, for two main reasons: first, epistemologies, and so ontology and methodology, may differ depending on academic discipline, research field and researcher's worldview and sensibility (Lichtman, 2014); second, the dichotomy 'quantitative methodologies (that is, measurements and objectivity) versus qualitative methodologies (that is, interpretation and subjectivity)' is still quite strong within the scientific community. As a result, many theorists and researchers adopting qualitative methodologies in the field of education and migration struggle to demonstrate the validity of their studies and need to find ways to overcome epistemological obstacles and to create a methodological alliance, in order to deconstruct the tensions between objectivity/subjectivity, experimental/exploratory, measurement/interpretation, casual/descriptive (Abbott, 2001; Ferrare, 2009).

Remarkably, while traditionally the two major philosophical views adopted by social researchers are positivism and interpretivism (Lincoln, 1994), the last decade in the UK and US has seen a growing attention to critical theories in education and migration studies. At the very heart of critical theories there is the

belief that social tangible progress is achievable through interdisciplinary collaborative work, and social research can provide a strong basis for the development of initiatives to create meaningful changes (Harvey, 2012; Holloway, 2012; Mason, 2013; Zizek, 2013). Critical theories, amongst others, include: Marxist theories (Haiven, 2014), Deconstructivist Theories (Hill, 2001, 2003, 2007, 2013), Pedagogical Theories (Vittoria and Mayo, 2017), Social Reproduction Theory and Marxist-feminist Theories (Arruzza *et al,* 2019; Bhattacharya, 2017). For example, the studies of Apple *et al* (2009), Hill (2013) and Myers (2017) put the relations of power and inequality at the heart of their epistemologies. The terms "dispossessed" and "oppressive conditions" might sound strong, because they imply the existence of a context characterized by restraints and unjust rules or impositions and by the existence of a relationship of dominance and subordination between individuals. From the perspectives of critical thinkers, these terms seem to be not so inappropriate in these challenging times in the UK, where "the idea of university…is undermined by a new model of higher education that sees the investment of human capital only as a private benefit" (The Alternative White Paper for Higher Education, 2016: 3). Following this argument, international students could be seen more than ever as "consumers" (Beech, 2019).

Thus, it becomes clear that the use of traditional theoretical approaches and methods, in the light of the objective reality, should be critically questioned (Henderson *et al,* 2012) if we aim at offering valuable insights to the field of international student mobility. What was required for the purposes of this research was a methodology that:

- allows the researcher to provide a more holistic understanding (as discussed in Chapter 2);
- offers more than a snapshot – provides understanding of a sustained process;
- focuses on lived experiences of international students;
- can help explain, illuminate or reinterpret data;
- interprets participant viewpoints and stories;
- preserves the chronological flow, documenting what events lead to what consequences, and explaining why this chronology may have occurred;
- illustrates how a multitude of interpretations are possible.

For these reasons, a qualitative approach that includes a phenomenological dimension was identified as the most appropriate one. The following paragraph discusses the phenomenological approach in this study.

3.3. International Student Mobility: a phenomenological approach

From the 2010s, academia has called for more prominence and a better command of the subject of international student mobility as a matter of concern in the fields of sociology and anthropology (Beech, 2019; King and Raghuram, 2013; Soong, 2016). As discussed in Chapter 2, it is only from the 21st century that debates on international migration started to identify brain gain as a vital development tool, and

international student mobility became a matter of concern in relation to international migration (De Haas, 2010). In most existing literature on student mobility, the phenomenon is understood in relation to the globalisation of current migration patterns that states use to classify people and migrants that move through states. This means that international student mobility is often seen as the result of cross-border, transnational or international exchanges intermediated by national, supranational or global policies (Antonucci, 2016; Brooks and Waters, 2011). In this regard, the issue of international student mobility has been thoroughly debated, but it is poorly systematized in terms of theoretical applications. For these reasons, as partly discussed in chapters 1 and 2, there is the need to see international student mobility as a dynamic and open research area. According to Beech (2019: 242), although international student mobility is usually associated with brain drain or capital gain, the individual dimension of international students should not be disregarded within this.

The approach proposed for this research is based on the assumption that international student mobility cannot be explored by taking for granted generalities and traditional features of individuals who move to a different country. For this reason, the study is built on this inflection point that combines the dynamic nature of international student mobility, including the individual dimensions, and a qualitative approach. As a result, this study is qualitative and based on a phenomenological principles.

Phenomenology has been selected because it can enrich perspectives for the aims of this study and the ontological principles upon which this study stands. It has features and applications of qualitative research that use theoretical frameworks and interpretive approaches to investigate a phenomenon through the participants (Creswell, 2013). More specifically, phenomenology is considered suitable for the purposes of this study for two main reasons:

- first, it is explorative and understands the researcher as the data collector; it requires a self-conscious approach to the research and demand an intense reflection as an integral part of the research process (Atkinson *et al,* 2020).
- Second, it offers the unique opportunity to the researcher to explore the phenomenon under investigation, and then to suggest his or her interpretation, while taking into account participants' experiences and views.

Phenomenology goes beyond descriptive understanding and the interpretative views provided by participants (Bynum, 2018); thus, a deeper awareness is required for the researcher. To put it with Neubauer *et al* 's words:

hermeneutic phenomenology studies the meanings of an individual's being in the world, as their experience is interpreted through his/her lifeworld, and how these meanings and interpretations influence the choices that the individual makes. This focus requires..to interpret the *accounts* provided by research participants in relation to their individual contexts in order to illuminate the fundamental structures of participants' understanding of being and how that shaped the decisions made by the individual (2019: 94).

Thus, phenomenology seeks to capture the essence of a phenomenon by including and exploring the experiences of the participants. So the exploration of participants experiences is not just a research goal, it can be also a starting point.

Moreover, the adoption of this approach can be helpful both in the process of data analysis and in conferring more validity to the study or, at least, providing a more comprehensive understanding of international student mobility. At the stage of data analysis the researcher can identify the topics, rising questions or the main key-themes emerged during the interviews and observations, and move back and forth. In other words, the researcher is not entirely focused on participants views, but at the same time he or she cannot trust only his or her interpretation; the researcher is not just an observer free or dissociated from his or her background and subjectivity, but at the same time he or she is not just an interpreter influenced by pre-existing knowledge (Husserl, 1970). Accordingly, this study argues that the ability of the researcher of being 'here and there' can add weight to the comprehension of the phenomenon.

3.4. Phenomenology: an analytical approach for understanding international students

Notably, phenomenology is understood as a methodology, but it is first a philosophy (Heidegger, 1962). In this sense, some authors point out that it would be misleading to understand phenomenology merely as an approach that establish interpretive methods; indeed, it should be understood as an approach that "begins before empirical data are even constituted" (Atkinson *et al,* 2020). According to these authors, this study results complementary in its essence and from its very beginning: the research questions of this study are concerned with why, how, when and where dimensions of international student mobility. The answers to those questions depend on the understandings and actions of international students. Why, how, when and where individuals act is one of the grand mysteries of our time, and science does not yet have strong answers to these questions (Penrose, 2007). A possible way to research these aspects is understanding human experiences as an integration of a great amount of information, that produces irreducible and unique consequences: considering individuals as the primary object of research and analysing them both in their relations to others and their social reality, and in relation to their own, meaning-constructing subjective lives (Schutz, 1972: 9).

As a consequence, in this study phenomenology is considered both a philosophical and a methodological approach in the analysis of individual dimensions of international students, because it allows the researcher to understand participants' individual dimensions as an object of study and, consequently, to link experiences and give them significance (Husserl, 2011). This phenomenological attitude is the epistemological framework that guides this research, as it is considered essential to delve deeper into international student mobility using the mobile experience in itself, and to go beyond existing knowledge (Husserl, 2013). In this way, the researcher can position himself or herself in a relatively disinterested position, where existing perspectives and judgments on the time-space aspects can be suspended, at least temporarily (Husserl, 2013: 144).

The context for this approach is the phenomenon of international student mobility in a specific context, that is Greater London. However, the study is not exclusively concerned with how the research context delineates the subject of the research. Indeed, it includes this aspect (see Research Question 2), but it is also concerned with what and how international students live in this context, in a specific period of time. Thus, international student mobility comes to be understood also as a consequence or the result of some unique dynamics or activities played by international students as agents (Heidegger, 2013), and the interaction of international students with the social field becomes the heart of the research. In line with Castles' view, international student mobility can be seen as a "social process in which participants undergo process of change and act…to modify the conditions and practices in which they find themselves" (2014; 249), or, to put it with Soong's words, as "a process of becoming" (Soong, 2016). At this point, a question arises: how can these dynamics or activities occurring at different times and spaces be visualized, described and analyzed? This study suggests a possible strategy, that is observing the research subject in two different ways: first, observing and capturing actions, activities and dynamics while these are happening or occurring; second, observing the reality as it is in a specific period of time and once actions, activities and dynamics are done or concluded. The first observational way allows the researcher to classify, organize and make judgments, while the second one assumes that classifying and making judgments should be suspended in order to describe the facts as they are. In this way, the reality can be captured both from a more objective perspective and from a more subjective one, that is through the experiences of international students (Heidegger, 1971; 2013). In order to facilitate this process the main qualitative approach to collect data is conducting repeated interviews with the same informants over time. This will be further discussed in the following section.

3.5. Repeated Interviews

Conducting repeated interviews over time with the same informants has been identified as the most appropriate way to collect data in this study for three main reasons:

1. to frame international student mobility by identifying themes in the answers and feedback provided by participants (Roos, 2020);

2. to gain a more holistic understanding of international students (Wiltbank *et al,* 2019);

3. to include changes over time in participants' experiences.

Additionally, interviewing the same participants many times at different periods helps to uncover in-depth knowledge, in order to build stronger links between the aims of the research, the research questions, the theoretical approach and frameworks, and the interviews themselves. This aspect can be exemplified by how and when some questions were posed and reposed during the interviews or as follow-up questions. One such example are the questions on the experiences of participants as international students, including positive and negative aspects. These questions, or a modification of them, were always posed at different times during every single interview, in order to get close to how international students perceived their experiences in London. When reposing the same questions, then a comparison between interviews conducted to the same participants at different times can be made. In doing so, the closeness to the aims can be held and, at the same time, the researcher can both identify the key themes for the analysis, and select the most suitable theoretical frameworks.

3.6. Data collection

The data consists of interviews and observations. This research is a five-year study, that is divided in two periods, as the graph shows:

Figure 1: Research timeline

1st PERIOD
- Duration: 2015 - 2018
- Intensive

2nd PERIOD
- Duration: 2018 - 2020
- Extensive
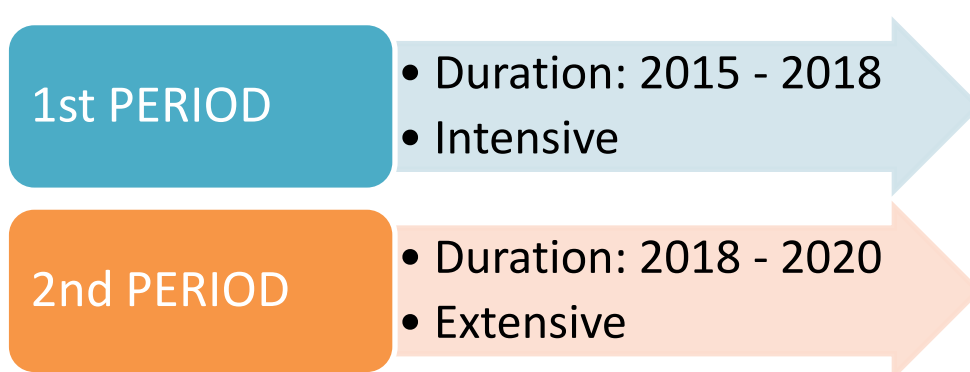
The main difference between the two periods is that while the first period is more intensive and the main focus for the researcher was data collection through interviews and observations, the second one gave

more room to phenomenological interpretation, enhanced by the researcher's reflective stances. During the first phase of the study (2015-2018) the researcher was immersed in the field and focused on three main activities:

1. Exploring the nature of international student migration and mobility in London, without setting out to test or validate hypotheses about the phenomenon (Atkinson, 1998);

2. Recruiting participants and doing field work. Field work in this study includes observations and interviews. The participants lived and studied all in Greater London, but in different universities. This allowed the researcher to do research in more than one university and gain further understanding by making comparisons between different academic experiences.

3. Doing participant observation from the inside, and so "combining participation and observation in a way that enables understanding of the site as an insider while describing it to the outsiders" (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008: 156).

During the second phase (2018-2020), the researcher was not immersed in the research field and was focused on two main activities:

1. keeping regular contacts (via email or telephone) with participants in order to collect the updates useful for the purposes of this research.

2. completing and updating the analysis of research outcomes until the saturation of the topic, and reflecting on them.

During this phase, interviews were read in full in order to gain some sense of the whole picture of the phenomenon under investigation. Then, a wider range of considerations were made in order to elucidate the analysis and attempt to gain a more holistic view of the phenomenon.

This approach gives the researcher the opportunity to describe, observe the research field and explore a variety of views at the same time. Additionally, the phenomenological approach gives the researcher the opportunity to interpret data gathered (Creswell, 1998). In this way, thanks to the follow-up funding, it was possible to build a longer perspective complementing the earlier three-wave prospective and intensive study, with a retrospective reconstruction focused on participants' lives from the end of the interviews to the revisit, and a diachronical overview of participants' experiences at the time of the interviews.

3.6.1. 1st period and interviews

The cohort of this study is made of thirty two participants, half from Italy and half from India, both male and female. This study employed a combination of two sampling strategies to select the sample: purposeful sampling and snowball sampling (Parker *et al,* 2019). In order to have a sample that adds to the validity of the research, the researcher identified the segment of the population who could provide the information

required. For this reason, the cohort is made up of international students who share a certain characteristic: being born in their native country, having moved to London primarily for academic reasons, living in London or in the UK and being at the end of their studies. The majority of participants were self-selecting: they responded to a Facebook post I shared in a Facebook group made of people from India and Italy, studying in the UK. A few of them were students I personally met during academic conferences and seminars before starting the research; they were my initial contacts. They were asked to recommend other contacts who fit the research criteria, and following their feedback I joined the private Facebook group, that allowed me to establish initial links. The participants, when selected, were all studying in London, at different universities; there were both undergraduate and postgraduate students, studying a variety of fields. Before inviting and selecting the participants, it was decided to limit this study to a place, London, as discussed in chapter 1. How far the observations and analysis explored in the following chapters have relevance to other times and places, I leave it to others to judge, and whatever the 2020s and post-Brexit times will be different from the period of time of this study, must remain to be seen.

The methodology outlined before starting the research included conducting three face to face interviews for each participant obtained during the period May 2015 – spring 2018. During the research process, the duration of the study was refined and extended, in the light of an unpredictable historical event, namely Brexit, and its unpredictable consequences on international student mobility, particularly for participants from EU countries. Thus, the research took place over a three year period. This represented an advantage because it allowed the researcher to work more intensively and on a deeper level with participants, but also a challenge both in terms of time and methodology.

During the research, three main interviews were conducted. The first interview was semi – structured and conducted with the aim to find out general information about the students, discuss their background and their decision to migrate (see Appendix 1). The second interview was an in–depth, semi-structured interview in which I tried to gain a better understanding of the students. It was structured as an "interview as conversation" (Skinner, 2012), and so based on the assumption that the outcome is a coproduction of knowledge of the interviewer and the participants, rather than a collection of responses to specific questions. The key-themes were: students' perceptions of their academic experiences in London, their lives in London, their viewpoints of their past, present and future in relation to their experiences in London, professional experience and career paths. Through this narrative, the aim was contextualizing their migratory experience (see Appendix 2). The third interview was semi–structured and conducted about six months after the end of their studies and focus on their career path. The outcome of previous interviews and digital updates, suggested the need to gain further understanding of both the fast socio-political changes (i.e.: Brexit) and the dynamic nature of students' lives, and the relationship(s), if any, existing

between these two aspects. Some of the participants experienced prolonged periods of unemployment and/or atypical, temporary and unstable jobs after their studies; some others left the UK because they got a job opportunity in their country of origin or in a different country; some others got a job they dislike in the UK and would like to move to a different country. In this fluid, complex and sometimes unpredictable situation, the realm of possibilities both increase and diversify. Consequently, it became clear the need to link macro social processes with the biographies and trajectories of students. For these reasons, the last interview focused mainly on: the events that occurred in their lives since the second interview; their lives at present and their plans for the future, and on what measure their lives and plans are affected by sociopolitical circumstances (see Appendix 3).

The use of semi-structured interviews was selected in order to give more room to participants' views and reflections. Open questions and sometimes just a list of key-topics were preferred to close ended questions, that are usually recommended in structured interviews and surveys (Yin, 2011). As it has been extensively argued, there is lack of research in this field of study, and amongst the existing studies, many of them are partly based on quantitative surveys (Beech, 2019). Given that one of the distinctive features of this study is understanding international student mobility from the views of international students, methods which allow participants to talk were considered the most effective ones. According to Ruspini,

> semi-structured or unstructured interviews *are* suitable for discerning the cultural/symbolic level of the discourse, that is, defining the situation in terms of perceptions and representations…the less directed an interview is…the better it is when trying to explore the ways in which an individual elaborates their personal history and gives meaning to their life (2002: 50).

Arguably, a potential risk in taking interviews as a case in point, is that "interviews may also choose not to tell the truth, or to embellish certain aspects of their lifestyles whilst concealing others which they may fear are less socially acceptable" (Beech, 2019: 15). However, this study is based on multiple interviews, observations and regular meetings with participants for over three years. This cannot guarantee the pureness of data, but it surely helps to mediate against inaccuracy.

3.6.2. 2nd period and follow-up

The group of participants was revisited between the end of 2018 and 2020. In this study the task was relatively simple because the sample was maintained through regular contact via e-mail, telephone and in some cases meetings. The students were not interviewed, they were asked for some feedback on interviews previously conducted and if there was anything to add and or to update in order to complete the research. They provided via e-mail or telephone some written material. This allowed the researcher to

update their biographies, to give more room to participants' subjectivities and to collect their retrospective reflections on their experiences as international students.

During the second period, digital methods became particularly useful for two main reasons: first, they allowed the researcher to keep regular contact with participants by facilitating communication through time and space; second, they forced the researcher to question existing knowledge frameworks in order to reconfigure relations with participants (Marres, 2017). Although this study is only partly based on digital research and digital technologies are understood as a complement, it argues that digital research in the field of social sciences can be helpful as it allows research beyond geographical and logistic boundaries. Thanks to emails, Skype and Facebook it was possible to stay in contact with participants living in different places via message and-or arrange for digital meetings. In some cases Skype or Facebook meetings were considered a preferable option by international students because they are smarter and quicker than written material. Digital meetings were usually short: their duration varied from five to ten minutes, and they were not recorded. With the permission of the participants, the researcher kept field notes during the meetings in order to update biographies and collect research material. In line with Marres' argument,

> the digital data deluge makes possible a shift from theory-driven casual explanation to a more empirical style of description as the dominant mode of sociological analysis, as digital data analysis enables the fine-grained description of social life on the granular level as well as extrapolations towards wider patterns of living (Marres, 2017: 18).

In this sense, the contribution provided by digital data in this research in some cases illuminated and gave more consistency to data gathered during the first research period. This study suggests that there are significant differences between being in the research field and conducting face-to-face interviews, and being elsewhere and using digital tools to collect research material. Main differences are found in the amount and quality of data gathered: time is limited and information provided by participants is more condensed. However, in this study, digital research is considered a valuable complementary tool, that can enrich data previously collected in the research field.

3.7. Interviewing

Interviewing is the main broad approach for generating qualitative research data in this research. In this study, which is combined with and supported by phenomenological principles, interviews are all semi-structured and they are understood as a tool that

seeks to understand the meaning of subjects' lived world…*and* to cover both a factual and a meaning level…It is necessary to listen to the explicit descriptions and to the meaning expressed, as well as to what it is said "between the lines". The interviewer may seek to formulate the implicit message, "send it back" to the subject, and may obtain an immediate confirmation or disconfirmation of the interpretation of what the interviewee is saying (Kvale, 2008: 61).

The definition can be applicable not only to face-to-face interviews, but also to interviews conducted via video call, that are included in this study. The interview provides many potentials resulting from the interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee, that has been acknowledged within the social sciences by "the science of the interview" (Benney and Hughes, 1956). This is the value of the interview.

Notably it has a positive impact on research outcomes, especially if the study includes repeated interviews, but at the same time it is object of some concerns:

1. the danger for the interviewee to become emotionally engaged (Thomson and Holland, 2003)
2. the participants may be reluctant to talk about their lives and acknowledge undesirable aspects (Ryan *et al,* 2016)
3. repeated contacts with the researcher may alter participants' perceptions (Holland *et al,* 2006).

However, in this study these potential issues have been reduced or bypassed by the researcher's development of more awareness and resilience, and by including not only direct interviews, but also online ones.

Time is perhaps the most important variable in this research, and it impacts the research process and design. From a logistical perspective, it makes the research process more complicated, but at the same time it can enrich the research and offer unique insights (Roos, 2020). In this study, time is also the main variable that influenced the process of developing and planning interviews. As it has been discussed, this study is made of three different interviews waves and every wave includes 31 semi-structured interviews. The interviews were conducted between May 2016, when the participants were completing their undergraduate or postgraduate degrees, and summer 2018, and planned as follow:

Table 3: Interviews' timeline and key –themes

INTERVIEW	TIME	KEY THEMES
1	May – August 2016	• Background; • migration decision; • current education; • work experience; • life in London; • ambitions and future plans

2	May – June 2017	• main events occurred after Interview 1; • current living place; • current education and/or professional position; • academic experience(s) in London; • ambitions and future plans
3	May – July 2018	• main events occurred after Interview 2; • current living place; • current education and/or professional position; • evaluation of academic experience in London. • evaluation of professional experience in London or anywhere.

This study includes three different interview schedules (see Appendices), that were constructed to address the research questions. More specifically, the first interview schedule was used for the first slot of interviews to address Research Question 1 (What are the motives of EU and non-EU international students to study in London?) and Research Question 2 (What is the role of social background in shaping the decision of EU and non-EU international students to study in London?). The main topics covered by the first interview schedule are: the process of decision-making, family of origin, background and education. The second interview schedule was used during the second slot of interviews to address Research Question 3 (How do migration trajectories shape the expectations of EU and non-EU international students studying in London during my research period 2015-2020?). The main topics covered by the second interview schedule are: migration experience, educational experience in London, job experience and future plans. Finally, the third interview schedule was used during the third slot of interviews to address Research Question 4 (What is the career path of EU and non-EU international students seeking a degree from universities in London during my research period 2015-2020?). The main topics covered by the third interview schedule are: career path, evaluation of educational and professional experience in London.

3.8. Sampling

This study includes 93 face to face interviews with 31 participants from India and Italy, whom were recruited using a combination of purposeful and snowball sampling, covering one geographical region, Greater London, and six universities in London. The interviews follow a semi-structured format that ensure cross-national consistency of methods, capturing participants' accounts relating to their experiences as

international students in London, their backgrounds, their life transitions and, eventually their career paths. For each participant three rounds of semi-structured interviews were conducted.

Sampling is not just one of the key element in the qualitative research process (Winiarska, 2017), it is also the first step of data collection and a dynamic process (Beech, 2019). Thus, it should be "coherent, achievable and appropriate to the research aims" (Robinson, 2014: 38). This study aims at providing a deeper understanding of international student mobility or migration, by comparing two different groups of international students studying in London and from two of the main sending countries: India and Italy. Therefore, specific cohort groups were selected before starting the research process. Drawing on the research aims and objectives, existing qualitative comparative studies and primary research methods, the first method for collecting data selected for this study is purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling is a widely used method, in which elements or participants are chosen from among the whole population in order to fulfill the research objective(s) (Creswell, 2011). The purposeful sampling technique involves the identification and selection of an individual or groups of individuals who can and are willing to provide information about the phenomenon of interest. To put it with Patton's words,

> the logic and power of purposeful sampling lie in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry, thus the term 'purposeful' sampling. Studying information-rich cases yields insights and in-depth understanding rather than empirical generalizations (2002: 230).

Unlike random studies, the principle on which purposeful sampling is based is concentrating on individuals with specific characteristics, who will be able to address the research questions and or verify research hypotheses (Etikan *et al*, 2016: 3). In this study, participants are all international students who share a certain characteristic: being born in their native country, having moved to London primarily for academic reasons, living in London, and being at the end of their studies when the research started. As Table 4 shows, the cohort is made of Indian and Italian students, who were studying in London when the research started. Then, the study includes both males and females, and undergraduate and postgraduate students, studying in different fields: IT, Journalism, Social Sciences, Mathematics, Arts, Education, Psychology, Economics, History, Media and Communication (see Table 4). As Figure 2 shows, at the beginning the two groups were similar in terms of level of education in London: about 50% of the participants of both groups were completing an undergraduate degree, and about 50% of them were completing a postgraduate degree. Notably there are differences in terms of age, level of study, field of study and gender, but these differences potentially can add more value to the comparative analysis between Indian and Italian students.

Adopting this type of sampling allows the researcher to address the research questions and to provide information about the main key-themes, that are: background and cultural information, decision to migrate, migration experience, academic experience in London, career paths. The emphasis is not exclusively on measuring and comparing similarities and differences, but also on exploring and understanding the experiences of international students.

Figure 2: Education level of participants at the beginning of the research
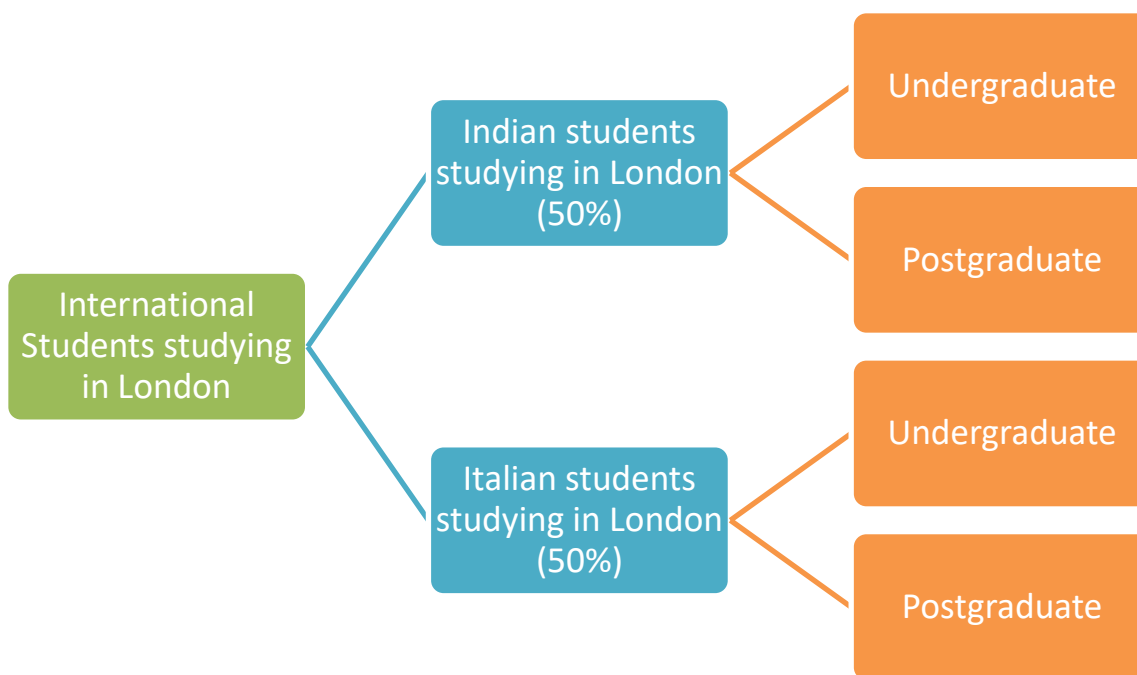
Table 4: Participants' profiles

Name	Gender	Date of birth	Country of Origin	Level of Study	Field of Study
Azeem	Male	1988	India	Undergraduate	History
Valentina	Female	1988	Italy	Undergraduate	International Relations
Simon	Male	1984	India	Undergraduate	International Relations
Filippo	Male	1986	Italy	Undergraduate	IT
Valentina V	Female	1988	Italy	Postgraduate	Arts
Nicole	Female	1986	India	Undergraduate	Education
Sara M	Female	1984	Italy	Postgraduate	Sociology
Natasha	Female	1986	India	Postgraduate	Anthropology
Annalaura	Female	1988	Italy	Postgraduate	Journalism
Margherita	Female	1991	Italy	Undergraduate	Architecture
Alexander	Male	1990	India	Undergraduate	Media and

					Communication
Beatrice	Female	1990	Italy	Undergraduate	Media and Communication
Radha	Female	1986	India	Postgraduate	Social Sciences
Francesco	Male	1986	Italy	Undergraduate	IT
Paul	Male	1984	India	Postgraduate	Social Sciences
Robert	Male	1985	India	Postgraduate	Mathematics
Lydia	Female	1990	India	Undergraduate	IT
Prashant	Male	1986	India	Postgraduate	History
Chiara	Female	1986	Italy	Postgraduate	History
Carlotta	Female	1990	Italy	Postgraduate	Psychology
Samuele	Male	1984	Italy	Postgraduate	Social Sciences
Mariangela	Female	1981	Italy	Undergraduate	Journalism
Sara	Female	1984	Italy	Postgraduate	Anthropology
Nebil	Male	1988	India	Undergraduate	IT
Abin	Male	1986	India	Postgraduate	Social Sciences
Alexandra	Female	1988	India	Postgraduate	Journalism
Simone	Male	1987	Italy	Postgraduate	Economics
Sujata	Female	1986	India	Postgraduate	Psychology
Lauren	Male	1987	Italy	Postgraduate	Media and Communication
Giulia	Female	1986	Italy	Undergraduate	Economics
Shafi	Male	1986	India	Postgraduate	Social Sciences
Vania	Female	1988	Italy	Postgraduate	Web Design

Notably, a qualitative study can be made of different units of analysis, such as communities, groups or organizations. In this study, individuals are the unit of analysis. According to Holloway *et al* (2006), individual can be considered the easiest, or at least less challenging, unit of analysis because "the larger the unit, the greater are the risks of dispersal and attrition" (2006: 21). This does not mean that the risk of dispersal does not exist when dealing with individuals, but it is minimized compared to studies with different units of analysis. In this study the adoption of ethnographic strategies was effective in building and sustaining relationships with the cohort. Only two participants decided to withdraw after the first slot of interviews, but they had been replaced by two new participants. The main strategies employed in this study are: informal visits, attending events (mainly academic seminars or lectures) with participants and regular contact via telephone and email. Then, one of the main key features both for ethnographic and studies is the role of the researcher. In this sense, the researcher's lived experience in a similar personal and cultural nuances (i.e.: insider) as the participants, and as a foreign researcher living in the UK (i.e.: outsider), had a positive impact in conducting the research and building relationships with the participants. For the majority of the participants the researcher was considered "one of them", rather than a stranger or an external agent targeted with suspicious. This creates or encourages trust and a sense of solidarity , which allowed conditions for disclosure and detailed information,

3.9. Indirect strategies

Capturing and following young people's lives, trajectories and transitions in order to build their narratives is not an easy task. Their lives are extremely dynamic, they can easily change their minds, as well as job, country and future plans. Thus, I realized that interviewing them three times in about two and a half years and writing observations and reflections, were not sufficient for the purposes of my research study. Bearing in mind the principles of reflexivity and the recognition of my responsibility and so my deep implication in the process as both an insider and an outsider (Anastasio, 2015), I came to the conclusion that a more holistic and creative approach was needed. In other words, an approach that, potentially, allows the researcher to both collect more dynamic information on some specific aspects emerged during the interviews, and identify research patterns in order to facilitate the analysis. For these reasons, a few indirect techniques were adopted: life history calendars, word clouds and written material occasionally and spontaneously provided by the majority of the participants.

Life History Calendars (LHC) are the collection of biographical data on individual charts. The format employed in this study is a big grid made of horizontal and vertical vectors. Horizontal vectors are a list of features and events (i.e.: move to London, start of education, end of education, first job, leave London, marriage…) and vertical vectors represent the time (years). LHC allows the researcher to record live events of each participant and facilitate the analysis, once data are collected (Ruspini, 2002). This research includes three LHC:

- the first one (see Table 13, chapter 6) is on geographical transitions of international students from 2015 to 2019;
- the second one (see Table 14, chapter 6) is on educational transitions and career paths from 2015 to 2019;
- the third one (see Table 15, chapter 6) is on international students' jobs from 2015 to January 2020.

LHC are the result of data collected from 2015 to January 2020. Information was gathered through interviews and digital meetings. Digital meetings in this research are considered a complementary tool that can enrich and update data. Digital meetings were usually organized once a year with every participant.

Words clouds are creative and pictorial representations of participants responses to specific questions or topics. They are the result of data analysis to specific key questions (namely, research questions) and key factors emerged during the interviews and narratives. In this study, words clouds are understood as an attempt to represent the main themes pictorially. Words clouds focus on different topics, such as: migration decision, life in London, career, academic experience. Although words clouds are often used in quantitative analysis (i.e.: online survey), they can be helpful in qualitative analysis as a complementary

tool (Beech, 89: 2019). In this study, words clouds helped the researcher to better visualize the main key-words emerged during the interviews in order to interrogate and better explore them during the process of analysis .

3.10. Research methodological issues

Change and time are the main challenging variables that need to be captured and addressed in this research in order to achieve the research aims.

Change. Social change has always been a matter of discussion for sociologists and social scientists (Comte, 1842; Durkheim, 1893; Weber, 1964). Doing sociological research means understanding society and social life; in this sense, a critical analysis of how the societies have historically changed as they have become more modern and are still changing, become crucial. Not surprisingly, since the 19th century much of the production of sociological knowledge has focused on how and why societies have changed over time as a result of modernity (Marx, Weber, Passeron, Bauman). Drawing on the main theories and most related work on the consequences of modernization for societies and groups of individuals published by later social scientists (Appadurai, 1996; Beck, 2007; Giddens, 1990; Portes, 2007; Sassen, 2006), it becomes clear that some social dimensions in current times are changing rapidly. Amongst others, we can identify three aspects. First, a growing heterogeneity: the more a society evolves, the more heterogeneous it becomes; second, the need to question and interrogate the notion of identity, both individual identity and cultural and social identity (Hall, 1995, 2000); third, the need to understand why and how changes impact different groups of individuals (Castels, 2009; Cohen, 2006). Today's world is being shaped by rapid different changes: social, cultural, economic, technological, and educational. Thus, any social-scientific theory and methodology should both assume that change is a prime feature in any social context, and should be able to address why and how relations of power and inequalities, in their myriad combinations and complexities, are manifest and challenged within the field of research (Apple *et al,* 2010; Creswell, 2006).

In this study, dealing with changes is not an easy task: international students' lived experiences are characterized by a variety of changes, due to different factors and motivations. Their trajectories, career paths and purposes, change quite often and rapidly. Their transnational experiences are constantly in the flux. Contextualizing these changes required a theoretical effort, as discussed in chapter 2. Capturing these changes required a methodological effort: in this sense, keeping students' biographies constantly updated, and adopting life history calendars as a data collection strategy, allowed the researcher to collect and summarize their changes.

Time. Time needs to be rethought in the light of rapid social changes occurring in current times. Time is the key factor that lead us to better conceptualize and understand social and individual changes. As Neale points out:

> it is through time that we can begin to grasp the nature of social change and continuity, the mechanisms trough which these processes unfold, and the ways in which structural forces shape the lives of individuals and groups and, in turn, are shaped by them. Indeed, it is only through time that we can gain a better appreciation of how agency and structure, the micro and macro dimensions of experience, are interconnected and how they come to be transformed (2019: 2).

In current times there is a growing demand for dynamic analysis of processes and courses in the social sciences (Brossfeld *et al*, 1994) and, most importantly, "there is a growing feeling that the old rules and guidelines for writing sociologically no longer work, but a fresh set of rules has yet to replace them" (Henderson *et al,* 2012). The inadequacy of the old rules becomes even more problematic when dealing with international students as research subjects (King and Raghuram, 2012).

Time is a challenging aspect in this study for three main reasons: first, the study extends over years; second, the number of students involved in this research (thirty two) is small from a scientific point of view, but it is big from a researcher's point of view. Third, the study is qualitative and based on repeated interviews and observations, so the amount of data collected is not small. In order to both overcome these issues and to find a way to optimize the research process, during the time spent in the field the researcher adopted some strategies. Every single interview was listened and transcribed; then, the transcriptions were enriched by observations and field notes. Observational data were integrated as auxiliary or confirmatory research. This strategy allowed the researcher to frame or reframe the interviewing process. During the research process, the participants were all cooperative and pleased of being involved in the research and their attitude was helpful during the data collection process. Their replies and feedback allowed to researcher to have a more holistic picture of their experiences,

3.11. Analysis

In this research the processes of data collection and analysis were challenging for three main reasons. First, there are less qualitative studies in the field of international student mobility compared to other fields of research (Soong, 2016). Second, although recent years have seen an increasing interest in international student mobility, international students' lived experiences did not received significant attention in the field of migration and mobilities (Raghuram, 2014; Soong, 2016). Third, when conducting a phenomenological research, participants need to be individuals who have experienced the phenomenon in question in order

to forge a common understanding. However, given the heterogeneity of individuals and the unpredictable changes and dynamics of their experiences, providing a common understanding can be complex.
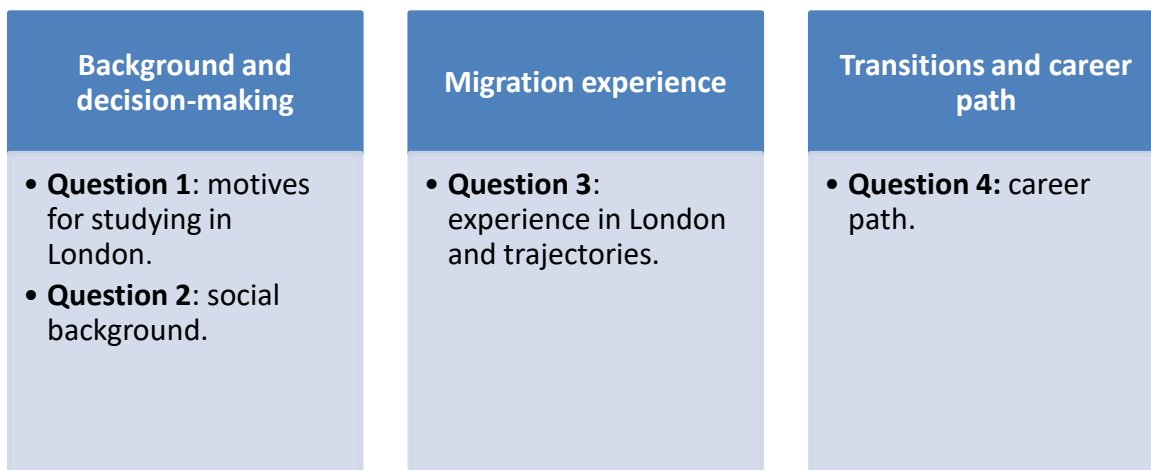
This study is both phenomenological and comparative. The comparison is between a group of international students from a EU country, Italy, and a group of international students from a non-EU country, India. Thus, for the purpose of the analysis it is required a method that is both suitable for a significant amount of qualitative data, and that facilitates the researcher in the process of reducing the information to statements or quotes and then combining the statements into themes (Moustakas, 1994).

In order to analyze international students' unpredictable and multinational pathways, a trajectory analysis method was adopted and adapted, whereby students were followed over time and space (Raghuram, 2014). This study is guided by four overarching questions:

1. What are the motives of EU and non-EU students to study in London?
2. What is the role of social background in shaping the decision of EU and non-EU international students to study in London?
3. How do migration trajectories shape the expectations of EU and non-EU international students studying in London during my research period 2015-2020?
4. What is the career path of EU and non-EU international students seeking a degree from universities in London during my research period 2015-2020?

According to the research questions, the analysis focuses on three main topics: (1) international students' background and decision-making; (2) migration experience; (3) transitions and career paths. Then, the analysis of the topics led to the identification of some emergent constructs, that will be illustrated in Chapters 4, 5 and 6.

Figure 3: Research questions and research topics

Background and decision-making	Migration experience	Transitions and career path
• **Question 1**: motives for studying in London. • **Question 2**: social background.	• **Question 3**: experience in London and trajectories.	• **Question 4:** career path.

In order to gain a better understanding of every single theme, the qualitative data gathered during the interview process is complemented by participants' observations and other indirect strategies described in previous sections. Following thematic and narrative analysis of the data using MAXQDA software, a number of key themes emerged, that will be presented in chapters 4, 5 and 6.

Data have been organized both chronologically and by source. Chronological organization has been adopted in order to show the trajectories (Tracy, 2013: 185), to highlight and explain the differences and changes between periods and participants, to identify connections between events, and to describe "subjects' intra-individual and inter-individual changes over time and monitor the magnitude and patterns of these changes" (Ruspini, 2002: 24). Additionally, organising the data by source has been considered an appropriate schema because this study is comparative. Thus, for the purpose of the analysis, two main folders were created: one for international students from India and one for international students from Italy. Every folder contains a file per student; then, every single file contains:

- chronological field notes;
- chronological interviews;
- chronological relevant data (i.e.: research records).

Interviews and field notes were transcribed and coded. The process of coding started with a deductive approach and a set of codes, but then a more inductive approach was selected because new categories and subcodes emerged during the process. When coding the interviews, three categories were identified, as the table above shows: international students' background and migration decision, migration experience, and trajectories and career paths. Then, in relation to these categories, some key-words or themes were identified.

Table 5: Research patterns and themes

Category	Key-words/themes
1. International students' background and migration decision	Reasons for moving to London; UK policy; family; knowledge acquisition; network capital; emotional and cognitive variables
2. Migration experience	Pains and gains; knowledge; London; university; job experiences; emotional and cognitive variables
3. Trajectories and career paths	Brexit; academic transitions; career paths; professional experiences; emotional and cognitive variables

As the table shows, each category is linked to a set of themes and a set of emotional and cognitive variables. Following Urry's mobilities paradigm, the key-words have been organized in two different groups: 'concrete aspects' and 'cognitive aspects'. As a result, each category is made of two parts or dimensions:

one that includes more concrete topics (such as information on university, job, background), and one that includes cognitive or emotional topics emerged during the interviews (feelings, understanding, subjective reflections). The emotional and cognitive variables related to each category are presented in chapters 4, 5 and 6.

Subsequently, for the comparative analysis of qualitative data, two main approaches are adopted in this study and in some cases (depending on the research question) combined: recurrent cross-sectional analysis and trajectory analysis. Recurrent cross-sectional analysis explores themes and investigate changes over time at the level of the entire study sample and allows the researcher to compare two time points. Trajectory analysis allows the researcher to understand individuals' experience or process over time and the reactions to it. The following table summarizes the two approaches:

Table 6: Analytical approaches of the study

Considerations	Recurrent Cross-sectional analysis	Trajectory analysis
Research focus	Describe the differences between time points	Describe how process or experience changes over time
Sample considerations	The cohort at each time point may be the same or different.	Must maintain same cohort
Theoretical approach	Determined by the research question. Any analytical approach may be used consistently throughout the study	Determined by the research question. Any analytical approach may be used consistently throughout the study
Level of data analysis	Whole sample (or subsamples)	Individual people or individual groups
Timing of analysis	May analyse as each time point is completed	Must wait until data is collected at all time points

(Source: Grossoehme and Lipstein, 2016)

For example, when analysing migration experiences and career paths of international students in London, trajectory analysis was considered more suitable. It emerged that the factors influencing decisions vary over time. Had the researcher instead analyzed the data as recurrent cross-section, such change would not have been captured because the key factors considered by the cohort as a whole did not change. Meanwhile, when seeking to gain further understanding about the academic experience of international students, the two approaches were combined: participants were interviewed before and after the conclusion of their studies in order to allow the researcher to both compare two different time points and to describe changed occurred over time.

Despite the importance of individuals' experiences, to the knowledge of the researcher, few studies have utilised a trajectory approach in the field of international student mobility/migration (Zijlstra, 2020). For

this reason, this study adopts the approach to trajectory analysis developed by Grossoehme and Lipstein (2016). According to the authors, the analysis of this research is based on the use of sequential matrices, with one matrix per unit of analysis. Every single matrix contains the largest unit of analysis and codes from participants within the same group: in this study the first set of matrices is organized with themes which occurred at all the time points. Then, the researcher was able to understand if there are significant changes or not in the thematic groupings. At this point, a second matrix is needed "in which the codes are focused on time, with reference back to the first set of matrices…*and* the data codes entered in this matrix focus on the element of time" (Grossoehme and Lipstein, 2016: 4). The first set of matrices focuses on the sample of international students and includes the main research topics as themes. The second set of matrices focuses on the sample analysis and includes both the themes identified in the first set of matrices, and the element of time. This approach is helpful for two main reasons: first, it allows the researcher to capture and understand the complexities of international student mobility/migration; second, it makes it possible to follow the trajectories that sometimes wind in unpredictable directions, including participants' transitions to different universities and countries (Urry, 2008).

3.12. Ethics

Ethical considerations pertaining to research methods employed and to the participants have been upheld as priority throughout the whole research process. Ethical considerations include: the researcher's moral and intellectual responsibilities to ensure the validity of the study and responsibilities for the participants.

Prior to the beginning of this research, approval was sought and obtained from London Metropolitan University Ethics Committee. Before starting the research, participants were all fully and transparently informed about the researcher, the supervisors and the research project. To ensure that participants, who freely accepted to be involved in the research project, were aware of the research topic and implications, they were all provided with an Information Sheet and an Interviewee Consent Form. They were asked to sign two copies of the Interviewee Consent Form, one for the participant and one for the researcher. The Consent Form included:

- permission for their contributions to be recorded and transcribed only for the purpose of the analysis;
- anonymity if quotations were used in research papers, reports or other publications;
- the guarantee of the confidentiality of the data;
- the guarantee of the anonymity of the participant;
- the guarantee of the opportunity to freely withdraw at any time, without giving any reasons.

Both the Information Sheet and the Interviewee Consent Form included the researcher's contact details (e-mail address and mobile number) and the supervisors' ones.

In addition, before starting the interviews, participants were all informed about:
- the possibility to stop the recording at any time;
- the guarantee of the professional and academic use of interviews' outcomes.
- the guarantee of the confidentiality and secure storage of data collected during interviews and the research.

Recorded interviews, together with anonymised transcriptions, anonymised biographies, anonymised written material provided by participants and information about participants have been securely stored exclusively on my personal computer and on an USB key always kept only in my possession. Research material has never been and will never be shared.

A potential risk in this research is that "the longer the timeframe..the greater the likelihood the participants will need or request some form of support" (Neale, 2013: 10). However, the boundaries of reciprocity/cooperation and professional research relationships have always been clearly defined. The researcher always contacted the participants only for the purpose of the research and the participants were always free to be back to the researcher or withdraw.

3.13. The role of the researcher in this study

Discussions regarding researcher role, his-her identity, ethics issues, engagement and emotional paths as constructed through the act of doing research have been explored and criticized across many different fields of research (Blackman, 2007; Clark, 2008; Clifford & Marcus, 1986; Willis, 2007). Ethical guidance for research is currently provided by a number of universities and associations, including the British Sociological Association (1991), which addresses the nature of power relationship between researchers and participants, confidentiality and privacy, consent and anonymity (Richards & Schwartz, 2002).

Researchers in the sociological field are called on to weight the cultural, ethical, political, psychological, economic and environmental aspects. However, there seems to be no clear rules addressing the notion of researcher identity in the research field. Probably this is due to the fact that "the social science community has yet to agree on a standardized definition for the concept of identity that has proved widely amenable for measurement across the disciplines and subfields" (Abdelal *et al*, 2009: 31). The meaning of being and becoming a researcher in the field is a complex and sensitive process, which can influence the ways we think the issues we are researching. So, in the process of entering the field the notion of identity may

generate some troubles: one the one hand researchers are supposed to be familiar with the theoretical and methodological knowledge in order to ensure ethical and rigorous research; on the other hand researchers might struggle against what 'being in the field' really means and so their position within the context. More specifically, Cameron *et al* (1992) suggest that:

> we (*researchers)* inevitably bring our biographies and our subjectivities to every stage of the research process and this influences the question we ask and the way in which we try to find answers...the subjectivity of the observer should not be seen as a regrettable disturbance but as one element in the human interactions that comprise our object of study (Cameron, 1992: 5).

Understanding and analysing who we are as socially and emotionally constructed beings not only focuses the lens on what we research, but also on the reasons why we research and the ways we conduct research. As a consequence, our backgrounds and histories, our social and cultural forms of capital and so our identities allow to position us in specific ways in relation to participants. This includes not just the way in which the researcher perceives himself-herself, but also the ways in which researcher identities are constructed through discourses and processes imposed through institutional discourses and the ways they are perceived by participants. These seem to be the main master narratives in which I am working through, with and against.

During my research, I experienced some challenging moments. These were mainly due to the fact that participants can exercise power, and reconstruct and assign identities to me, based on their perspectives, stereotypes and thinking. As a white Italian female, doctoral student, working in the UK, and who interviewed also academic students with a completely different background, sometimes I faced some challenging situations. For instance, Shazz, one of my Indian key participants, during an informal conversation, confessed that he is sure that I am likely to get a good job just because I am European. While, Francesca, an Italian participant, accepted to take part in the research project just because I am Italian and so she could feel free to speak her native language and was sure we could be also good friends. Thus, my position as a European and Italian researcher and the ways in which I perform my identities have being called into question. I have realized that all of my identities can have both positive and negative impacts within the research context, depending on the participant I am interacting with or interviewing.

My insider status has opened the possibility to enter the most intimate thinking, because I have built a fiduciary relationship based on mutual trust and confidence, but at the same time it can put me in a more sensitive position, in which I should be able to negotiate and rethinking about my identities. Particularly if the researcher is completely immersed in the research field – as an ethnographer is supposed to be -it can

be problematic deciding between being predominantly an insider or an outsider: sometimes the boundaries between the two positions are not clearly delineated (Merriam *et al,* 2001). More crucially, questioning my identities in the research field means first of all identify my identities and understanding in which measure they can influence my research.

According to Wheterell (2009), in social sciences there is "a preference for studying a sufficient number of cases to allow analysis of cross-case patterns" (Wheterell, 2009: 21). However my paradigm is not based on a cross-case comparative methodology. It is rather an attempt to extrapolate some useful principles from my ongoing research in two ways: by asking to my participants how they identify me, by inductively analysing themes and critical reflections emerged during the research and contextualizing them in the available literature.

While I was conducting my research, I realized that the notion of researcher identity within the research context might be perceived as a variable, which can influence the research. However, its simple recognition as such, may constitute a productive potential which can have "a positive effect in unsettling and further resisting dominant research hierarchies that serve to construct and sustain contemporary orthodoxies" (Garratt, 2015, p. 16). In this sense, participants' contribution is fundamental for two main reasons. First, their feedback has given me the opportunity to reflect on how they identify me, and so to compare and improve my understanding on the topic. It might be suggested that our identities are meaningful only in relationship to other individuals, and are produced (or maybe reproduced) only in interaction with them. Second, it has improved and reinvigorated the relationship between the participants and me. As Clark points out "sustaining research relationships is at the heart of the qualitative research enterprise" (Clark, 2008: 954). In fact, some of the participants argued that, before telling them that I was glad to had their feedback, they felt just passive respondents .So probably this interaction has given them the opportunity to be even more transparent and made them feel more actively involved. In addition, this engagement might represent a sort of tool, which can be useful to bridge my interior mind (subjectivity) and the research field (objectivity). According to Hopf (2009),

> identities operate cognitively, helping to ensure a predictable social environment. Given cognitive limitations on our information – processing capacities, it is hard to imagine going on in the world if one had to treat each interaction as sui generis, rather than responding in one of a limited number of ways to a situation we understand to be similar to a type of situation we have previously encountered and placed in a categorical place...The human need to understand and be understood, combined with limited cognitive resources, results in identities emerging as shortcuts to bounding probable ideas, reactions and practises toward categorized others. (p. 281).

My research includes open – ended questions. The main disadvantage of an open – ended approach is the fact that the outcome can be more difficult to analyze, but it allows participants to talk about themselves in their own words. Conducting a qualitative research, although with a small sample, has contributed in defining some aspects that can influence my identity within the research field. It clearly emerged that the main variables which influence the construction of my identity are: nationality, ethnical background, age, professional position and gender. More specifically, it might be interesting to note that while Italian students are much more focused on nationality, age and professional position, Indian students give much more importance to my ethnic background and gender.

Another important aspect emerged during my survey is that participants have appreciated the engagement in my "self – analysis", to the point that one of them stated:

> *I think it is always good to question yourself as a researcher. When you asked me about that I felt a sense of solidarity and I realized that finally you are a student like me*" (male, Indian student).

Hence, in this context questioning myself might have constituted a tool to close the ideological and hierarchical gap between participants and researcher.

Despite the results it has produced, what seems to be really significant in this context is the importance of the researcher, the researched and their relationship, and how reflecting on the notion of researcher identity can produce a positive effect both for researcher and participants. According to Garratt (2015), researchers

> might be perceived as "the masters and the slaves of their own professional subjugation. Thus, the ability to challenge convention allows the possibility and productive capacity and potential not to solve what are conceivably largely intractable methodological concepts and problems, but simply to recognise them as such" (Garrat, 2015: 16).

This might lead to hypothesize that the notion of identity in the research field cannot just be perceived as a problematic aspect, but it may be also a really useful and productive issue. At this point, a crucial question arises: can in 'ideal position' exist for the researcher within the research context?

The lack of a standardized definition for the concept of identity might put the researcher in a problematic position when he-she questions the role of identity in the research field and in what measure his – her

identity can influence the process of conducting research. Social sciences, as Weber stated, "cannot tell anyone what he should do – rather what he can do – and under certain circumstances – what he wishes to do" (Weber, 1949: 54). However, in this case, the absence of clear empirical rules or ontological knowledge might generate confusion and put the researcher in a state of uncertainty. Since identity is a strongly interpretative tool, it might generate and lead to many different interpretations or misinterpretations.

Bauman (1973), reflecting on the notion of culture as praxis, stressed the idea that

> whatever factor sociological theory will eventually select as its central analytical concept, it will be well advised to beware of choices innate in the irritatingly barren argument over social – individual priorities. It must be a factor operative on both levels. It must account for both, inextricably interwoven, facets of human existence: subjective and objective, determining and determined, creative and created, socializing and socialized. Then and only then can it be utilized in building models as once syn– and dia– chronical, and bridging the so far isolated levels of individual situation and social structure in a way which does not beg the phony question of the 'priority' of one of the two modalities of human existence . (Bauman, 1973: 81).

On the basis of this principle, I have realized that, in order to contextualize and make more understandable the elusive concept of identity in my research, attempting to identify an "ideal position" on an abstract level, might be a strategy. Thus, on the light of my theoretical and methodological knowledge and through the experience, I have tried to situate the notion of researcher identity within the research context. On the basis of a "positive unconscious of knowledge"[6] on which Foucault reflects (2002), it can be argued that, ideologically and abstractly speaking, the notion of researcher identity might aspire to be ideally situated in a point of balance between epistemology and ontology, subjectivity and objectivity.

Hence, it might be suggested that researcher identity should be understood as a strategic issue, rather than a problematic one. It cannot be neutral , but at the same time it should not drive the researcher to the old attempt to be truly scientific (objectivity), nor to the subjectivity and so the unconscious, rather in between. From this balanced and narrowed position, the researcher might be open – minded and ready to rethink about himself – herself. In other words, the researcher should be aware that his – her identity is a constantly ongoing and infinite process, exactly as his – her research is supposed to be.
In line with Foucault's argument:

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[6] The "positive unconscious of knowledge" is defined as "a level that eludes the consciousness of the scientist and yet is part of scientific discourse, instead of disputing its validity and seeking to diminish its scientific nature" (Foucault, 2002: XI – XII).

It is apparent how modern reflection, as soon as the first shoot of this analytic appears, by – passes the display of representation, together with its culmination in the form of a table as ordered by Classical knowledge, and moves towards a certain thought of the Same – in which Difference is the same thing as Identity (Foucault, 2002: 3)

However, this represents a simple hypothesis, based on my own experience while conducting an ethnographic research. As Foucault (2002) states,

ethnography occupies an extremely sensitive and privileged position and should aim to "form an undoubted and inexhaustible treasure – hoard of experiences and concepts, and above all a perpetual principle of dissatisfaction, of calling into question, of criticism and contestation of what may seem, in other respects, to be established (Foucault, 2002: 407).

Every social research represents a very personal journey for the researcher.

Summary

This chapter focuses on research methodology. It starts by explaining the reasons why a qualitative approach was considered more suitable for the purposes of the research. Then it discusses the aspects that lead the researcher to include the phenomenological dimensions in the study. It carries on by describing the process of data collection and analysis, including the research strategies and issues. Finally, it includes some reflections on the role of the researcher in this study.

4. International students' background and decision-making

This chapter is the first of three to analyze in greater depth the experiences of international students. It focuses on international students' backgrounds and migration decisions, showing that international students' decision-making is highly heterogeneous and includes both strategic and economically-focused drivers, and some less visible variables. Studying abroad requires much economic as well as psychological skills and efforts. The combination of economic, social and emotional aspects constantly influences and shapes international student mobility in a variety of ways. As a result, international student mobility is challenging in different ways: conceptually (as it has been discussed in Chapter 2), methodologically (as it has been discussed in Chapter 3), and theoretically, as it will be further discussed in this chapter and the following ones. For these reasons, the analysis of this chapter includes: the multiple ways in which international students constantly mobilise their network capital; the ways their understanding of the reality and the emotional variables can shape their migration decision; how and in what measure background, economic and professional drivers, and subjectivities interact and influence their decision-making. Following this, Chapter 5 focuses on the analysis of international students' experiences in London through the lens of Urry's Mobilities Paradigm and the notion of network capital provided by the author. Chapter 6 focuses on international students' transitions and career path. It argues that the combination of Urry's Mobilities Paradigm and some Foucauldian perspectives can provide a useful framework to analyze the experiences of international students in London. In doing so, Chapter 6 suggests that Cognitive Capitalism, as it is understood in Boutang's view, can be a valuable theoretical framework to explore the relationship(s) between international student mobility and career paths. The selection of these theories, as discussed in Chapter 2, is the result of the depth of engagement in reading and writing of phenomenological data. In other words, beyond the adoption of these theories there is an ongoing process of engaging with the data and writing reflections and summaries until the researcher is able to capture "the essence of the lived experience" (Neubauer *et al,* 2019: 95).

4.1. Background and decision-making: the 'motives'

From a phenomenological perspective beyond international students' backgrounds and the processes of decision-making, there are at least two types of motives that need to be investigated: 'in-order-to' motives and 'because' motives. In-order-to motives are those that are achieved or aimed at be achieved through action, aim and purpose, and they are usually directed to the future. Contrastingly, the because motives normally find their roots in the past and influence the course of actions adopted by individuals (Schutz, 1962: 69). For these reasons, the analysis of international students' backgrounds and decision-making identifies and explores two main types of variables: 'in-order-to variables' and 'because variables'. In this research the in-order-to variables emerged from the interviews are: policy, family, knowledge acquisition

and network capital. Then, the because variables are: ambition, aspiration, desire, imaginaries and sense of freedom. Notably, the because variables are more complex for two main reasons: first, they are not apparent and they are harder to access; second, they may include a variety of factors and individual understandings of those factors (i.e. problematic childhood, cultural limitations). In considering these different motives, this research aims at describing how international students themselves cope with the task of explaining the reality they experience during their international experiences in relation to the past, the present and the future.

4.2. Background: UK policy and family

While conducting the research, participants were all in their 20s and, in a few cases, early 30s. Studying in the UK was the first studying abroad experience for all of them; they were all London-based and the majority of them studied in top-rankings universities. Despite geographical and sociocultural differences between India and Italy, this study suggests that there are more similarities than differences between the groups. Overall, while similarities are mainly concerned with their lived experiences in London and some cognitive and emotional aspects, some differences are found in relation to individual status and cultural background. In other words, focusing on their lives as international students in London highlights many similarities between the two groups, whereas including their familiar backgrounds provides some dissimilarities.

The research suggests that the family of origin can impact international students' decision to study in a foreign country. Raghuram (2013) criticizes existing literature in this field by arguing that the role of families, who play a key role in student mobility, has been understudied:

> for long, student migration was analyzed as part of individual decision-making, in line with the emphasis on individuals as bearers of human capital… However, there has been a shift away from methodological individualism to encapsulate families as drivers and beneficiaries of student migration. Both familial investments and the benefits to families…have added considerably to our understanding of student migration (Raghuram, 2013: 143).

According to the author, this study confirms that the role of families is important in terms of cultural background, psychological and financial support. The table shows the level of education of international students' families.

Table 7: Comparison between Indian and Italian students' family backgrounds

Family's educational qualification	Indian students (15)	Italian students (17)
Both parents with degree	6	4
One parent with degree	9	5
High school diploma		5
Middle schooling		2
Primary school or no qualification		1

The study confirms that studying abroad is more common among the children of middle- or upper-class families than working-class ones (Beech, 2019). This tendency results apparent amongst both Indian and Italian students. This may be due to the fact that higher educational qualifications are still more common among middle- and upper class individuals (Byram and Dervin, 2008). Consequently, differences in the likelihood of studying abroad are influenced by both cultural and socio-economic backgrounds of the families of origins. In particular, this study shows that the level of parents' education is higher for Indian students. While Indian students have all at least one parent with degree, this is not the case for Italian students. What is remarkable from the outcomes is that for Indian students studying in the UK is understood mainly as a consequence of both the level of parents' education, and the availability of family sources, while Italian students are less concerned with this point. Being from wealthier and well-educated families represents an essential prerequisite for some students, while for some others it does not represent a key aspect; indeed, in some cases, being from a low-skilled family represents a valuable reason to get a degree in a UK university. In both cases there is sense of responsibility, which differs in its essence: the first ones feel, to some extent, forced to get a degree in a prestigious university because their parents are highly-skilled; the second ones seem to seek compensation for their low-skilled background. While the first ones are supported and encouraged by their families of origin, the second ones in some cases experienced some challenges before and during their experiences in the UK. These challenges were mainly concerned with family disagreements and availability of financial resources. As the interviews confirm:

"Obviously I can study here because my family is helping me…if a family has not enough money, it would be unrealistic studying here" (Shafi, Indian student, 2nd interview).

"you know, my father is a brilliant doctor, my mum is a famous psychotherapist…and I study here in London. If you grow up in a working class family, you would not be in the UK" (Azeem. Indian student, 3rd interview).

Meanwhile, some Italian students said:

"My dad is a DJ and my mum is actually unemployed…At the beginning they were not happy, but now they are proud of me" (Filippo, Italian student, 1st interview).

"My mum is a nurse. Me and my brother grew up with her…my dad left home when we were kids…I saw him for the last time when I was five…he has never helped us. We survived thanks to my mum's job" (Valentina, Italian student, 1st interview).

This aspect may fit the notion of 'mobility complex', as it is understood in Urry's mobilities paradigm. According to the author, the newness of mobilities in current times includes:

The scale of movement around the world, the diversity mobility system now in play,…the elaborate interconnections of physical movement and communications, the development of mobility domains that by-pass national societies, the significance of movement to contemporary governmentality and an increased importance of multiple mobilities for people's social and emotional lives (Urry, 2007: 195).

Also relevant to this point, to some extent, is Bourdieu's notion of 'habitus' (Bourdieu, 2020). Habitus, in its essence, includes the internalized social structures, attitudes and dispositions that individuals unconsciously develop from the early years, and that are unconsciously embodied and reproduced by individuals (Bourdieu, 2004, 2020). The habitus varies in relation to the field, that is the culturally, socially and politically defined context in which individuals can be differently positioned, act and behave in different ways. Carrying on with Bourdieu's view, individuals' actions and behaviors are influenced by the logics of power, which has to maintain itself and the structure of the field in which it operates (Apple, 2010; Bourdieu, 1998, 2004). However, the heterogeneous experiences of international students in this research suggest that there is still room for alternatives and possibilities. While Bourdieusan concept of habitus is predominantly static, some lived experiences show that the aspects that make individual habitus can change over time. For instance, the story of Roberto, an Italian student, is a source of inspiration and hope: Roberto, who grew up in the countryside in Italy and is from working class background, has never been encouraged to pursuit higher education by his family. Indeed, he had to struggle to get a degree in Italy. When he moved to London, his family was disappointed and could not understand the reasons of his choice. Once in London, he started an MBA in Finance, but at the beginning he felt uncomfortable. As he states:

"For people like me…from working class, if you move to London and go to university, the first place where you experience the mind-blowing class divide can be exactly the university…but it is not their fault…I mean I have never felt discriminated, the problem was inside of me. Once I saw directly the differences between me and my peers, more financially and culturally wealth, I thought that perhaps I was in the wrong place…that my parents were right, that I was not enough for being there" (Roberto, Italian student, 3rd interview).

Against all expectations, Roberto successfully completed his MBA, and after a few months he got a good job in the financial sector in London. After six months, he got a promotion at work. He is currently working as a manager in one of the top finance companies in London, and he financially supports his family in Italy. His story demonstrates how new awareness acquired during international experience is not always bounded by the cultural and familiar background. Indeed, an individual thanks to his or her new networks in a different country, the increasing interconnections between his or her life and global social influences, and the knowledge acquired through the academic experience and the personal one, can actively engaging with new opportunities and improve his or her life.

Further insights from students' feedback confirm these aspects. Whilst they are influenced by policy and political discourse both in their countries of origin and in the UK, these are not the only drivers. This study suggests that studying abroad can be understood as a choice involving the application of intuition, resilience, self-esteem, knowledge and being open minded. Thus, this implies also the ability to reconsider the belief systems and both national and domestic environments. As Urry points out,

> One consequence of this emergent 'mobility complex' is that many people are we might say 'forced' to exercise choice and are less determined by overarching social structures, of class, family, age, career and especially propinquitos communities (Urry, 2007: 195).

In line with Urry's argument, some students when asked about their backgrounds and feelings, said:

> "I wanted to become more open…I mean, more open minded, to see different people from different countries, with different lives, to see and understand new things, to live new experiences, to feel alive…these are things you cannot do if you live in a small town closed to the mountains in North Italy" (Vania, Italian student, 2nd interview).

> "I needed a break…a break from my ordinary life. You cannot grow and improve yourself if you stay in the same place, doing the same job, meeting the same people, doing the same things…until the end of your life" (Sara, Italian student, 1st interview).

Behind these words, we can identify the desire of indulging in new experiences, pleasure-seeking, satisfaction-seeking, the desire to escape an ordinary life by investing in education and knowledge acquisition, a sense of freedom that is not possible to experience within their home environments. Thus, in students' backgrounds we can find a variety of emotional variables.

Additionally, some expected differences are found in terms of policy in the UK: the UK educational and migration policies do impact international students in different ways, and those from non-EU countries are likely to be in a more vulnerable position (Waters, 2014). While Italian students could easily move to London and were not asked for particular requirements apart from the Italian citizenship, Indian students are asked to obtain a student visa. In order to be eligible for the visa, Indian students seeking a degree from a UK university must: be able to speak, understand and write English; have an unconditional offer of a place on an academic course and financial proofs (British Government, 2020). Consequently, Indian students are (or perhaps were) asked for more prerequisites than their European peers. Some Indian students reflecting on their experience in the UK state:

> *"At the beginning it was not easy, my parents helped me a lot because as you probably know life is easier for European students in London. Indian students need to get a visa fist, then they ask you for 18,000 pounds security deposit to show you have means to survive, then the British Gov wants a letter from bank, too"* (Shafi, Indian student, 1ˢᵗ interview)

> *"There are discriminations between us and European students here in the UK. European students do not have to apply for a visa and pay huge amount of money just to be legal here in the UK"* (Radha, Indian student, 2ⁿᵈ interview)

There seem to be no significant gender differences in terms of students' perceptions. The study includes both males and females and participants have never reported feelings or thoughts concerning gender discrimination during the interviews.

4.3. The role of families

Families played a key role for all the participants: both cultural backgrounds of the families of origin and their socio-economic status influenced the choice of studying abroad. According to Beech, this study confirms that

> studying overseas is increasingly a middle-class pursuit and studying abroad is still considered to provide *students* with the necessary social and cultural capital to access elite careers…because of the need for the greater financial investment (2018: 9).

80% of the participants declared during the interviews that they were partly or entirely supported financially by the family of origin. Participants describe their dependence on family sources in different ways and terms. For example Azeem, who comes from a wealthy family in Delhi, says:

"obviously my family is helping me…they did it for my brother, and they are doing it now for me. If I am studying, I cannot work…and you don't get money while you are studying" (Indian student, 2nd interview)

So in Azeem's view it is assumed that family should support sons until the end of their studies. In contrast, Valentina reflecting on the financial support provided by her family, states:

"well, my mum is helping me. She pays my academic fees and sends me money every month because life in London is so expensive. I work in the evenings as a waitress, but I couldn't survive without mum's help…hopefully I will give her the money back one day" (Italian student, 2nd interview)

Valentina does not assume that parents should provide financial support for sons studying abroad, and she feels she has a debt with her mother. The analysis of the research outcomes shows that there are some significant differences in terms of family financial support's understanding. Overall, family sources play a crucial role in determining the decision to study abroad, and so they influence not only the present, but also the future and the opportunities of international students from both countries. However, there are some differences between Indian students and Italian ones in their perceptions and reactions to family financial support. There is evidence from the interviews of a different cultural understanding of this aspect: while paying significant amounts of money to study at university seems to be logical and normal for Indian students, the Italian ones in many cases complain. In this sense, comparisons between UK universities and Italian ones, are clear: studying in Italy is cheaper and academic fees are very low compared to the UK ones. As a consequence, a significant number of Italian students during the interviews shared their perplexities about the disproportion.

This aspect confirms Urry's mobilities paradigm: the authors puts at the very heart of his view "the social relations of circulation", that is network capital. The author argues that the proliferation of mobilities in current time would be impossible without "the element of Others" (Urry, 2007: 197). Carrying on with his argument, he states

Such network capital is not to be viewed as an attribute of individual subjects. Such capital is a product of the relationality of individuals with others and with the affordance of the 'environment'. Together these constitute a relational 'assemblage', an emergent network moving through time-space and concretized in moments of co-present meetingness within specific places for particular moments (Urry, 2007: 198)

This study suggests that, in the case of international students "the element of Others", can include families of origin because, even if they are not physically in the UK, in some cases they completely finance students, and in most cases they partly finance students. Additionally, they provide emotional support to students overseas: the majority of participants had weekly contacts with family. Thus, to some extent and in different ways, families facilitate mobility.

4.4. Knowledge acquisition

Primary research analysis on students' backgrounds and migration decisions after the first interview identifies six main reasons for studying in the London. The first table summarizes and compares the motivations provided by Indian and Italian students: notably, the numbers are related to the number of students that mentioned each motivation; each student provides more than one motivation. So for example, 10 in relation to Indian students and 'interest in the city or country', means that amongst the fifteen Indian students, ten of them identify 'interest in the city or country' as a valuable motivation. The second one provides the main assumptions or key words emerged during the first interview related to the motivations.

Table 8: Comparison of the reasons for studying in London

Reasons for studying in London	Indian students (15)	Italian students (17)
Interest in the city or country	10	12
Study environment quality/ academic reputation/ rankings	11	10
English skills	15	17
Good career opportunities	15	17
Social network (knowing people in the same place and/or institutions)	13	12
More independence or autonomy	5	13

Table 9: Comparison of the motivations provided by participants in relation to the reasons for studying in London

Reasons for studying in the UK	Indian students	Italian students
Interest in the city or country	•London as an exciting city	• London as an exciting city

		• London as a multicultural city
		• London as a myth
Study environment quality/ academic reputation/ rankings	• Meritocracy and efficiency • Self-realization • More social justice • Less social inequalities	• Meritocracy • Confidence of getting a good job • Less social inequalities
English skills	• Better job opportunities • International CV	• More job opportunities • Self esteem • Being proud
Good career opportunities	• Job security • Job satisfaction • More money	• Job security • Job satisfaction
Social network (knowing people in the same place and/or institutions)	• More confidence	• Sense of solidarity • Feeling home
More independence or autonomy	• Challenging goal • More freedom	• Feeling of excitement • More freedom

When asked about the reason(s) for studying in London, respondents identified some key factors influencing their choice. First, knowledge acquisition. According to their views, this knowledge differs from the academic knowledge they could have gained in their countries of origin, because it is considered "*more valuable*" and "*better quality*". Interestingly, narrowing down their insights, it emerged that the main reasons why knowledge acquired in a UK university is perceived *a priori* better, are connected to career opportunities and self-esteem. As some students argue:

"*studying somewhere else in Europe is pointless. Studying in a university which is not English is pointless, too. Today the best places to study in are the UK and the US. The UK is closer to Italy and it was easier moving to London…today there is no hope of getting a good job without and English degree*" (Filippo, Italian student, 1st interview).

"*going to university in India is a waste of time, for me at least. Caste still matters. And then London is the centre of Europe and one of the main economic centres in the world…so once I get a degree here, then I can get a good job in India*" (Prashant, Indian student, 2nd interview).

"*being in London makes me feel braver and better than my friends who are studying in Italy…a degree here will open many doors*" (Valentina, 2nd interview).

"*I'm ambitious, I want to get a good job, I want to teach at university one day…that would be really hard in Italy, because as you know in Italy you go nowhere without the right person at*

the right moment…I don't want to waste my time waiting for…let's say additional help" (Sara, Italian student, 2nd interview).

Sara, an Italian student who shared the last insights, and Prashant, who talked about caste, lead us to the second factor influencing students decision to study in a UK university: the idea that UK universities are more meritocratic or, to put it with some students' words, "*there is more justice*", "*talent and skills are recognized and appreciated*", "*you are encouraged to develop your own way of thinking*", "*being critical is positive and not negative*". So, studying in a UK university can be seen both as way to improve the quality of their lives, and as a way to escape a reality which is perceived as unfair. Thus, deciding to move to a place that is perceived more valuable and, at the same time, more meritocratic becomes a *"right choice"* and in some cases *"the best thing you can do if you can afford it and if you are strong enough"*.

What is apparent is that all the students, regardless their nationality, provided motivations directly or indirectly linked to knowledge acquisition. All of them identify at least four of the above reasons summarized in the tables as some of the main motivations for studying in London. In particular, there is universal agreement amongst international students that 'English skills' and 'good career opportunity' are two interdependent variables. This aspect was clearly expressed during the interviews with both Indian and Italian students:

"*I want to be a good engineer in the IT sector and I think London is the best place to do it. IT language is English, then maybe a degree in London is better than a degree in Italy for your CV… And I wanted to be more independent, I used to live with my parents and now it is time to grow up…and it is hard to become independent in Italy*" (Filippo, Italian student, 1st interview).

"*Before moving to London I already knew that in London there are great opportunities because some friends I was in contact with were already in London. At the beginning it was not easy because, you know, living far away from your loved ones for a long period is hard, but fortunately my parents are very supportive and they are proud of me…then studying in the UK can make the difference in your life. Here higher education system is advanced, there are many important global industries and you can come across many interesting people that might be helpful for you…I really hope to meet one of them one day once I get my degree*" (Sara, Italian student, 1st interview

"*I decided to study here in London for two reasons: first, studying here is much better than studying in India because in India there are many social inequalities and here I have the feeling*

there is less discrimination. So, if you are the son of a powerful person, you know you can get a good job in India. Here I think things work differently…and after all, once you get a degree here you have more international opportunities" (Abin, Indian student, 1st interview)

"here you can definitively improve your career much easier than in India. And if you want to build your career in the UK you need to have a degree from a UK university and your English needs to be very good. Mine is not, sometimes British people cannot understand what I am saying" (Lydia, Indian student, 1st interview).

What is remarkable in these accounts is that: first, getting a degree in the UK and being able to speak English fluently are understood as the main determinants to get a good job; second, the decision to study in the UK is influenced by a perceived sense of social inequality and inadequacy of the higher education system in their countries of origins. Since the cohort is made of international students from India, an English speaking background country, and Italy, a non-English speaking background one, some substantial differences in terms of English skills were conceivable. In reality, most international students from both countries experienced different adjustment issues before entering university: while Italian students were more concerned with the lack of syntactic and semantic skills, India students were more concerned with phonological issues.

Narrowing down the meaning of the key concepts 'English skills', 'good job' and their interdependency in participants' views, it is clear that for students, regardless of nationality, university is understood as a place dependent of the notion of knowledge. And, more crucially, there is a collective feeling amongst participants that the knowledge provided by a UK institution gives access to global opportunities. So, from their points of view UK Higher Education is perceived to be more international, "*more universal and open-minded*" (Carlotta, Italian student, 1st interview) than Higher Education in their countries of origin. While a few Indian students identify the power of Indian caste system as the main obstacle for their career advancements, the majority of Italian students describe Italy as: "*an old country with no opportunities for young people*" (Margherita, Italian student, 1st interview); "*a nation monopolised by an elite of older man that do their businesses*" (Valentina, Italian student, 1st interview); "*a society based on medieval principles*" where "*being the child of a powerful one is more important than being skilled and professional*" (Sara, Italian student, 1st interview). In addition, an Italian participant who aimed at working in the field of higher education, stated

"Italian university is an ivory tower. It seems to me it is so old-fashioned, with old professors teaching what they used to teach twenty years ago…the world has changed and is changing and…they cannot keep up with the times" (Mariangela, Italian student, 1st interview)

These reflections are in line with Barnett's claim:

To some degree, the university's universalism has been undermined in recent years as individual universities have become more entrepreneurial and more practical in their orientation. Consequently, the university has become somewhat parochial. Its knowledges are tending to be knowledges of this region, of this set of companies, of this particular sub-group within a profession, or of this range of activities. In this parochialism is to be found the emergence of the performative university (Barnett, 2011: 99).

As a consequence, knowledge results to be something that potentially allows students to venture into international knowledge lands, but can also limit access to international pathways. In students' views, the type of knowledge acquired in a UK university is the one that can open up to a variety of opportunities everywhere. Knowledge is in most cases defined as a primary goal and a set of scientific skills that students gain at university, and allow them to apply for highly-skilled job positions. Their conceptualisation is understandable, because in contemporary society the idea of 'knowledge society' is hegemonic: knowledge is often considered synonymous with science, and science is increasingly understood as an ideology exerting the dominant form of power in the knowledge society (Barnett, 2011; Feyerabend, 1978; Gürüz, 2011). Not surprisingly, for some participants, studying in the UK is a distinguishing mark they should be recognized for, both professionally and socially. For some Indian students and more than half of the Italian ones, studying in the UK is considered a privilege. UK universities have been described by participants as: *"amazing environment where you can meet students from all over the world"* (Lydia, Indian student, 1st interview), *"stimulating place where you can join seminars or conferences with great professors every single week and great libraries"* (Nebil, Indian students, 1st interview); *"great because they way they teach and organize courses and classes help you to become more independent"* (Filippo, Italian student, 1st interview), *"fabulous! Here technology and bureaucracy are fast and efficient"* (Vania, Italian student, 1st interview), *"still surprised by student support service, something completely new for me"* (Carlotta, Italian student, 1st interview). Abin, an Indian student, for instance, reflecting on the reasons beyond his decision to study in London, went on to say that:

"Studying in the UK is a great opportunity, my friends who studied here then got a good job when they were back to India…I know that there are many Indians studying here in the UK, but trust me, there are uncountable students in India who wish to study here but they cannot

afford it. I do have scholarship but living here is bloody expensive…my parents are helping me and one day I would like to give them the money back…once I get a good job" (Abin, Indian student, 2nd interview).

Research findings suggest that, although Italy is a European country and India a developing postcolonial one, students cultivate similar understandings about the UK Higher Education system. The study identifies a set of beliefs universally shared by participants, including: the idea that the UK is one of the best country to get a degree; the idea that UK Higher Education is superior; the idea that a degree from a UK university guarantees great job opportunities. According to Beech, this tendency may be defined as the "collective mythologizing of the UK higher education experience, leading students to believe that the opportunities it offers are better, even without considering university rankings" (2019: 123). In this sense, Soong (2016) in her research on international students studying in Australia stresses the notion of 'West' in opposition to 'Orientalism' and argues that

> Australia is attracting an increasing number of international students and potential student-migrants because of how they perceive Australia to be part of the superior locus of the world-historical development. That means the body of knowledge of the West is said to take its meaning only when used in conjunction with the idea of East (Soong, 2016: 33).

For the author, then, 'West' is conceptually understood as a privileged space that represents the most influential part of the world, namely "the first World". Nevertheless, the outcomes of this study show that Indian and Italian students have similar views and understandings of UK higher education and knowledge. For example Shafi, from India, and Mariangela, from Italy, when asked about their decisions to study in the UK instead of elsewhere, shared similar motivations:

"the UK is best place in Europe to study in. Best universities are here, great thinkers are here, best knowledge is here" (Shafi, Indian student, 1st interview).

"…well, reading on your CV 'M.A. in Journalism' and then the name of a UK university instead of the name of an Italian one…I think it can really make the difference, you have more chances of getting the job you want…because if you have a UK degree, it means that your English is good and you can go everywhere" (Mariangela, Italian student, 1st interview).

More generally, international students, when discussing the reasons for studying in a UK university, share similar views, mainly regarding knowledge acquisition and career opportunities. Thus, this study argues that being from postcolonial countries do not necessarily alter or invigorate the view of UK education.

Indeed, in a few cases it is their retrospective analyses that provided some acknowledgments in their views of UK education. For instance, Carlotta, an Italian student, once completed her undergraduate studies in London, decided to apply for a Master's Degree in a different university in London because she realized the importance of ranking. During an interview, she clearly said

> *"When I arrived here* (in London) *I did not even know what ranking was. I thought that studying in London is good, it does not matter where you study…I did not even know there are so many universities…but now I know, I think it is better for me if I apply to a better university. Here I realized that the reputation of universities is important and it can make the difference when you start your career"* (Carlotta, Italian student, 3rd interview).

Therefore, international students' understandings of higher education are more influenced by their imaginaries before moving and then by their lived experiences in London as students, rather than by historical or nostalgic accounts. Further important insights regarding international students' reasons for studying in London are linked to networks. This will be the matter of the next section.

4.5. Network Capital

Existing literature on international student mobility and migration often focuses on education policy-making changes and the submission of education to international and financial imperatives (Hall and Winn, 2017; Giroux, 2014; Gürüz, 2011; Hill, 2013) as key aspects that are changing and shaping student mobility and migration. Thus, student mobility seems to be consistently driven by economic variables and global policies. In contrast, some authors analyze student mobility through the lens of concepts like building knowledge, self-discovery and confidence, and so put international students as individuals and active players at the heart of their researches (Ansell, 2008; Bagnoli, 2009). Then, Brook and Waters (2011) and King and Raghuram (2013) argue that in order to give light to the variables influencing and determining student mobility and migration, we should go beyond economic forces and explore in details the lives of international students. There are different logics and narratives running here: one that sees international students as a sort of self-made men/women, one that states that economic variables are the main driving forces, and finally one suggesting that both logics can coexist and claims for further research. Following the last approach, this study explores and interrogates not only the economic or rational aspects influencing the phenomena (previously discussed), but also the less economically-focused ones. It started from the assumption that international students are influenced by a vast range of factors and motivations that may differ in their *raison d'être.* According to the research findings, a significant variable influencing the decision to study abroad is social network, that is knowing people in the same place, country and/or institution. In

this research, it is considered a significant reason for studying in London by 90% of Indian students and about 70% of the Italian ones. Some students, reflecting on how social networks impact their decision to study abroad, state:

> *"I enrolled at university in Milan…after a couple of months I realized I didn't like the university. My friend Simon was studying in the same field in London, and he told me that his university was great. So I decided to move London…knowing that Simon was waiting for me has definitively influenced my choice"* (Valentina, Italian student, 1st interview)

> *"I had never travelled abroad before moving to London…my brother and her wife were already here, they got married in London, and my brother studied in London, too… so I live with them. It makes me feel less homesick"* (Azeem, Indian student, 1st interview)

> *"I moved to London with my boyfriend because he got a good job opportunity in the IT. Probably, without him, I wouldn't be here…then I met an old friend here in London and I ended up studying at the same university"* (Sara, Italian student, 1st interview)

> *"My father studied in the UK many years ago and my cousin was already in London when I moved. That made me feel better, I stayed with him three months before finding my place. Having a place to go with people you know can make the difference when you moved to a new country"* (Nicole, Indian student, 1st interview)

Clearly social networks influenced students in different ways and measures. For instance, Valentina was guided by the simple desire to live abroad for a while, and encouraged by the fact that an Italian friend she already knew was in London and was studying in the same field; so, being aware that a peer did what she wanted to do, made her feel it was possible. In contrast, the choice of Nicole was influenced by family's backgrounds and the fact that a relative was in the same city. Similarly, Azeem felt more confident thanks to his brother's support both logistically and emotionally. Then, Sara, whose main driving force was her relationship with her boyfriend: once in London she decided to carry on with her studies and again the university choice was influenced by a friend. While some students stressed the importance of social networks during the interviews and in many cases from the first interview, some others did not share information explicitly. For instance, Vania, an Italian student, did not recognise social networks as influential to her decision during the first interview, when asked about the reasons for moving to London. However, this aspect emerged during the last interview. While she was reflecting retrospectively about her experience abroad, she pointed out that

"when I moved to London I was alone…but I was not alone. I mean, I left alone but in London there was Chiara, a closed friend waiting for me…Chiara is my best friend, we grew up together" (Vania, Italian student, 3rd interview)

At this points two main distinctions should be made: on the one hand there are students significantly influenced by the experiences of studying abroad in their families. These students are more likely to have interiorized the assumption that studying abroad is achievable and normal during the academic period; so, consciously or unconsciously, they reproduce the same patterns of their families or friends and take for granted that it is the best or right way to perform. On the other hand, there are students, especially amongst the Italian ones, who have no experiences of studying abroad in their families. Those students are more likely to think that studying abroad is uncommon and, consequently, to perceive themselves as a sort of pioneers. Evidence from interviews shows that in many cases they stress the importance of some concepts that their peers had little or never mentioned. These concepts are: "courage", "being brave"," resilience", "adaptability"," being psychologically strong", "being enough strong", "being stronger than no mobile students". Consequently, for them, resourcefulness and courage are understood as sine qua non of their decision to study abroad. Finally, these students' social networks are usually made of friends, schoolmates, and people they already knew before moving, rather than relatives.

The analysis of this study confirms that "international students' social networks are an integral part of their mobility processes" (Beech, 2019: 163). But the unexpected aspects emerged during the interviews were: first, the sheer extent of social networks and the significant role they play in studying abroad decisions; second, the different understandings of mobile experiences between those who have family's experience of studying abroad and those who do not. Additionally, the research outcomes suggest that there is a strong connection between social networks and individual feelings or emotions in students' views. Notably social networks can shape mobility and influence status or career development (Antonucci, 2016). However, this study shows that social networks are primarily understood as a sort of informal agency that both support and help students not only at the initial stage, but also during the experience abroad. More specifically, social networks often provide concrete help and psychological support.

4.6. Beyond the concrete dimension of student mobility: the less-visible drivers

Migration studies currently highlight a growing interest in emotions and temporalities (Carling and Collins, 2018; Collins, 2018; Svasek, 2013), to the point that Svasek states:

If we want to unravel and understand the social, economic, political and experiential complexities of human mobility and belonging, it is necessary to include a focus on emotional dynamics…*where* emotions *are understood as* dynamic processes through which individuals experience and interpret the changing world, position themselves vis-à-vis others, and shape their subjectivities (Svasek, 2013: 3).

Consequently, exploring and interrogating how students build an understanding of a place or a country and how their backgrounds and feelings, perceptions and emotions operate through time is a key aspect in this field of research. The section shows the great level of complexity about the process of students' decision-making and suggests that the real-world dynamics of mobility can encompass traditional variables discussed in migration and mobility theories, such as: where individuals move, the reasons why they move or when they move, economic or professional drivers. As de Haas points out, it would be misleading to take for granted that migration and mobility take place only or mainly "with the aim of maximizing their utility" (2011: 20). This can be even more apparent in the case of student mobility, where

the pressure to succeed is enormous and parents will invest financially to ensure that their children have the best possible chance of accessing elite institutions (Beech, 2019: 9).

This is not to say that this aspect is unreal. Indeed, the research confirms that international students are more likely to be from middle- or upper-class families, as it has been previously shown. However, there is much more than that. International student mobility and migration cannot be reduced to a simple cause/effect reasoning, based on the assumption that since students are financially wealthy, they can study abroad to invest in their education. Focusing on economic or rational dynamics, although extremely useful when analysing the phenomena, may obscure other significant dynamics that operate in less visible and logic ways, but do impact the reality. Thus, an holistic analysis of student mobility should include not only economic drivers and power relations, but also social, cognitive and emotional aspects and the ways they shape international students' lives (Beech, 2019; Carling and Collins, 2018; Soong, 2016).

In this study, the decision to study in London has been analyzed both synchronically and diachronically in order to provide more valuable insights. The main emotional drivers result to be: ambition, aspiration, desire, and imaginaries. Then there are some minor drivers, such as sense of freedom. The identification of these concepts is the result of thematic and narrative analysis of participants interviews, reflections and field-notes on the key themes linked to the choice of studying abroad. These concepts are summarized in the following concept table:

Table 10: Emotional drivers in relation to key-themes

Interviews themes	Reasons/ associations	Emergent concept
University	• Self esteem • English improvement • New/better career opportunities • Acquiring and mastering new skills • UK Grad: high standards	Ambition Aspiration and Desire
Migration Decision	• Living in a multicultural context • Gaining more independence and feeling better • Having more freedom • The idea that a better life is achievable just away from home or after a period away from home • Social networks	Imaginaries Sense of freedom
Background	• Family proud • Being judged positively by family and friends	

The following word cloud summarizes the main key-words emerged during the interviews, when participants were asked about their decision to move to London. Notably the dimension of each word depends on the number of times the concept was repeated by participants.

Figure 4 : Word cloud showing the main reasons for moving to London provided by international students

These concepts are all included in the semantic field of migration studies (UNHCR, 2020), and they share a similarity: they are all temporal, and they assume the existence of a link between present and future (Hegel, 2000). However, from a philosophical and semantic perspective, there are significant differences. In this study, 'ambition' is understood as a "coherent ideal and admirable trait…*that includes* temperance, courage or benevolence" (Pettigrove and Meyer, 2008: 285) but also a strong will of power. Meanwhile 'desire' is understood as *thumos* (from ancient Greek: 'passion', 'spirit', 'heart'), a concept introduced by Aristotle to describe an irrational or illogical desire to pursue a virtuous or respectable goal (Deslauriers, 2019). 'Aspiration' is here understood as a trait similar to ambition, but limited by conflicts between old point of views and new ones that individual are acquiring or aim at acquiring (Callard, 2018). According to Hart's definition (2016) aspiration is

> future-oriented, driven by conscious and unconscious motivations and *it is* indicative of an individual or
> group's commitments toward a particular trajectory or end point (Hart, 2016: 326).

Despite philosophical and psychological or cognitive differences, this study argues that they can all suit the different levels identified by Carling and Collins (2018). According to the authors, 'aspiration' and 'desire' can be defined as two deep forces that, potentially, can operate on three different levels, namely:

1. Individual understandings and reactions to mobility opportunities;
2. Individual reactions to potential transformative dynamics operating in hosting countries;
3. Individual reaction to 'other', where 'other' could take a variety of forms, including for example national or international strategies for the recruitment of international students (Beech, 2019) and social network (Urry, 2008).

The research suggest that this conceptualisation is applicable also to the concepts of ambition and imaginaries in student mobility theorization.

This research found that aspiration, desire, ambition and imaginaries are dynamic and multi-dimensional concepts, as they can vary in importance through time and space. They can be shaped or influenced by a variety of factors, including: the constructed representations of countries, cities, places or life-styles provided by social media (Appadurai, 2016); aspirations, desires or ambitions cultivated by family, friends or community; or, contrarily, aspirations, desires or ambitions grown in opposition to those cultivated by family, friends or community. For example, Nebil's imaginary of London before moving was largely influenced by the pictures of London shared by some digital friends via Facebook, Twitter and Instragram. As he said:

"I have never been in London before moving to London. I was accepted by the university where I am studying in, and I thought 'why not?'…some people thought I was completely crazy. And probably they were right… moving to a place you do not know directly, and that you have seen only on social networks sounds a bit weird" (Nebil, Indian student, 1st interview).

Meanwhile, Giulia's decision-making was influenced by both a desire grown in opposition to the values cultivated by her family, and her imaginaries of London shaped by social networks, movies and the idea that "*in London you can do whatever you want"*. The first time we met, she stated:

"I grew up in the countryside, my parents hate big cities, chaos, huge concentration of people and noise…I have been constantly bombarded with their philosophy of life, that is nature, no confusion, yoga practices, being vegan, no pollution…well, I am not saying that they are wrong, they are simply too much. So you know, when someone tells you for years 'do not do this' eventually you want to try this…London, well it was love at the first sight, when I was a teenager and I saw the movie 'Notting Hill" (Giulia, Italian student, 1st interview).

Remarkably, both Nebil and Giulia's imaginaries of London fluctuated: after a few years in London Nebil was no longer excited of living there and was considering the idea of returning, while Giulias' perceptions moved back and forth from being exhausted by the stressful rhythms of the city to being still excited by the city. Thus, emotional dynamics do not always operate systematically and as a consequence of rational or practical concerns. They operate at different levels, at unpredictable times, in unpredictable ways, and as a consequence of an uncountable number of variables, precisely because they are largely subjective.

Additionally, a few cases allowed to the researcher to explore another driver: the sense of freedom. For instance, Alexandra went direct to the point when asked about the reasons for studying in the UK; in this case, her aspiration or desire to move to London is influenced by both the education background of her family and the will to freedom:

"I moved to London because I was accepted by a top-ranking university. Then, I have always been immersed in the field of academia because my dad is a Professor in Delhi…it was not so easy for me…leaving my country, my mother, my sisters, my boyfriend, but my dad told me that getting a degree in a good university here in London is very useful for your professional career. He has already planned my future… He is an academic, and I should be an academic too. Studying here was a sort of compromise: I study in a prestigious university so he is happy and there is nothing he can say. But at least, here I feel free, I do not have to show him every single

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day what I do, and I do not have to feel bad if my results are not excellent every single time " (Alexandra, Indian student, 1st interview)

Similarly, Shafi, who initially argued that he was influenced by his professional ambition or aspiration, then he admitted that beyond his choice there was another motivation, which is more concerned with the will the break free from the sociocultural environment of his country of origin:

"I moved to London because I wanted to work in the academic field…this is what people know, and this is true, but it is not just that…as you know I have a partner, the problem is that my partner is not a woman…my family is Muslim, for them I should get married as soon as possible…I mean a traditional marriage, so I could not marry another man and then having kids…here in London, far away from my family I feel free to live my life" (Shafi, Indian student, 3rd interview)

Then Margherita, from Italy, stated that her choice was linked to professional reasons, but when exploring her reasons we find out that they are more concerned with a sense a freedom:

"My father is the best architect in town…when I told him I did not want to become an architect he was really sad…I want to be a personal-trainer and study sport sciences…he could never accept that. He felt deeply frustrated. He cannot understand that being an architect is the best job for him, not for me…then, you know, being the daughter of a popular architect means that if do not become a brilliant architect like your father, then people say 'are you crazy? Your career in there, no need to struggle, to work hard, to get low-paid jobs before getting a good a job, you were born lucky and you waste such a great opportunity?... So I moved here. Here I feel free to study what I really want to study, and become a good personal-trainer" (Margherita, Italian student, 1st interview)

What do the experiences of these three students tell us? Surely that there can be a variety of feelings in relation to the family of origin that can influence their decision-making. All of them, for different reasons felt they should keep the distance, at least for a short period, from the family context or their community in order to feel free to be themselves. In this sense, studying abroad can be perceived also as a way that can improve not only their career or skills, but also their deeper sense self. By moving to London, they were seeking a greater sense of freedom. Remarkably, in their views, the concept of freedom is interpreted and lived differently. The meanings they provided are all linked to family, culture, and country of origin, but in different ways. Alexandra was motivated by a sense of resistance against the controlling force of his father.

Shafi's motivation is related to religious and cultural beliefs, that are unacceptable for him, so he decided to live in a different place, that respects or validates his values and his identity of homosexual man. Finally Margherita's motivation for living far away from home was influenced by the pressure of both her father and her community. According to her reflections, being the daughter of one of the most popular Italian architect, implies feeling forced to follow her father's footsteps in socially shared understanding; thus, moving to London for her meant essentially breaking some socially constructed rules.

More generally, students' accounts show how, sometimes explicitly and sometimes indirectly, emotional variables can operate. They suggest that imaginaries, ambitions, desires and aspirations are all born in a social or digital context, and then cultivated, altered, adapted or changed by individual consciousness and cognition. Although these factors are not visible and cannot be easily accessed, they can produce evidence-based consequences and influence or in some cases determine international students' mobility. These aspects will be further explored in the following chapters in relation to international students' paths and trajectories.

Summary

This chapter explores one of the three analytical themes identified in this study, namely international students' background and migration decision. It includes insights and reflections on international students' backgrounds and their migration decision in the light of the research findings. In doing so, it acknowledges and discusses the complexity of their decision-making, that is shaped by a variety of factors, including: UK policy, cultural and individual backgrounds, the role of families, knowledge acquisition, network capital, and some less visible drivers. The research findings suggest that families play a key role: both cultural backgrounds of families of origin and their socio-economic status can influence international student mobility in a variety of ways. To some extent, families can be considered a form of welfare for international students living in London. As a consequence, students from more disadvantaged backgrounds are unlikely to study in London. The comparative analysis between the two groups of international students from EU and non-EU countries, confirms that major differences are found in relation to the UK policy. International students from India are asked for more requirements than students from EU-countries, and this aspect can impact the features of student mobility in the UK.

However, the analysis of the outcomes suggest that international students and their decision-making are not influenced exclusively by backgrounds, policy and political discourses in their countries of origin and in the UK. This study identifies at least two main sets of variables, that are: knowledge acquisition and less visible drivers. According to the findings, knowledge acquisition includes: interest in the city or country,

English skills, good career opportunities, social network, academic reputation, study environment quality and independence. Then, the second set of variables includes some less visible variables, namely: ambition, aspiration, desire, imaginaries and sense of freedom. The combination of these variables confirms that international student mobility includes both cognitive and non-cognitive human capacities, which operates at different levels. According to Urry, when dealing with mobility we should acknowledge that "there are very powerful socio-physical systems, moving in and through different time-spaces" (Urry, 2007: 276). Overall, the study argues that the process of the decision-making for international students is not only a calculated choice; indeed, it should be understood as a choice involving also the application of intuition, resilience, self-esteem, knowledge and being open minded. In doing so, the research confirms that there can be countless ways in which both visible variables and cognitive ones (Urry, 2007: 50) operate and shape the international student mobility.

5. International students' lived experiences

In the previous chapter I tried to illustrate the importance of both network capital (Urry, 2007) and some less visible variables in the shaping of international students and their migration decision. However, this is just one side of the multifaceted phenomenon of student mobility. This chapter focuses on international students experiences in London. In doing so, it explores and reflects on some other sides of international student mobility, including space/time dimensions through phenomenological lenses.

5.1. Time, Space and Phenomenology

As Urry points out, the 1980s saw a 'spatial turn' in the social sciences, that influenced a variety of studies that stress the importance of notion of 'movement'. To put it with his words,

> the notion that social ordering is, indeed simply social disappears…what we call the social is materially heterogeneous: talk, bodies, texts, machines, architectures, all of these and many more are implicated and perform the social' (Law, 1994: 2). Such hybrids are on occasions tightly coupled with complex, enduring and predictable connections between peoples, objects and technologies, and these may move scientific findings across multiple and distant spaces and times (Urry, 2007: 34).

Thus, the notion of mobility in current times is made of a variety of heterogeneous hybrids. One of them is 'hybrid geographies' that "contingently enable people and materials to move and hold their shape as they move across various networks" (*Ibid.*). In this context, not surprisingly, Creswell's equation 'mobility = movement + meaning + power' (Creswell, 2006) has been recently replaced by another formula, that is 'speed = distance/time' by some scholars in the field of mobility (Adey *et al,* 2014) in order to focus on the speed, the distances and their temporalities.

Consequently, it becomes clear that researching international students requires theoretical and empirical efforts. In this sense, the adoption of a phenomenological approach can be helpful: phenomenology is concerned with the meanings of individuals' being in the world and their freedom to make choices in relation to their interpretations of their experiences (Lopez, 2004). In other words, phenomenology allows the researcher to understand and elaborate the narratives provided by international students through time in relation to their individual contexts in order to illuminate the main structures of participants' understandings of their experiences as international students. For these reasons, this chapter gives room to international students' experiences in London toward lived experience. Their experiences were investigated as they were lived, rather than conceptualized. Then, once identified the main themes, the researcher described the outcomes and considered how the data contribute to the understanding of student mobility. According to the theoretical perspectives discussed in Chapter 2, the main themes identified for the purpose of the analysis in this chapter are: knowledge, university, life in London and their interconnection

with external and individual factors. The analysis of each theme through phenomenological lenses allowed the researcher to identify, amongst others, six main key aspects in relation to the themes, namely: satisfaction, self-esteem, resilience, confidence, motivation and self-knowledge. These aspects are the outcomes of other aspects emerged and experienced by participants during the research period: the combination of repeated interviews and phenomenology allowed the researcher to write participants' biographies, and to capture developments and changes in their lives. For instance, a significant number of participants at the beginning of the research identified loneliness and financial instability as major issues. But these challenges had a positive impact in their lives: they stimulated growth in ways that probably good times do not, they allowed participants to build or improve resilience capacity together with other aspects that will be presented in the following paragraphs.

In addition, the main key themes are explored by taking into account the time/space variables and some Foucauldian perspectives, as discussed in Chapter 2. According to van Manen (1990), when conducting a phenomenological research, theories are essential to understand the findings. This chapter suggests that the Foucauldian notion of knowledge, together with Urry's mobilities paradigm, can be a way to illuminate a qualitative research on international student mobility.

5.2. Experiences in London: pains and gains

The table below summarizes the main key issues and the main positive outcomes collected during the research in relation to participants' lived experiences in London. While all the issues were collected during the time spent in London, some outcomes were provided after the experience in London.

Table 11: Issues and outcomes of international students during their experience in the UK

Name	ISSUE(S)	OUTCOME(S)
Azeem	Loneliness	Increasing self-esteem
Valentina	Financial instability; language	Increasing motivation; increasing self-esteem
Simon	Loneliness	Feeling stronger
Filippo	Financial instability	Improving confidence and self-esteem; developing resilience
Valentina V	Financial instability	Increasing self-esteem
Nicole	Loneliness	Feeling stronger
Sara M	Financial instability	Increasing self-esteem
Natasha	Tiredness	Improving confidence and self-esteem
Annalaura	Financial instability	Feeling stronger
Margherita	Financial instability	Improving confidence and self-esteem
Alexander	Loneliness; tiredness	Developing resilience
Beatrice	Financial instability	Increasing self-esteem
Radha	Loneliness	Feeling stronger; increasing self-esteem
Francesco	Financial instability; loneliness	Improving confidence and self-esteem

Paul	Loneliness	Improving confidence and self-esteem
Robert	Loneliness; language	Increasing self-esteem
Lydia		Feeling stronger
Prashant	Loneliness	Increasing self-esteem; developing resilience
Chiara	Loneliness	Improving confidence and self-esteem
Carlotta	Financial instability; loneliness	Feeling stronger
Samuele	Loneliness	Feeling stronger
Mariangela	Financial instability	Increasing self-esteem; developing resilience
Sara	Financial instability	Feeling proud
Nebil	Loneliness	Increasing self-esteem
Abin	Loneliness	Feeling stronger and proud
Alexandra	Loneliness; tiredness	Increasing self-esteem; developing resilience
Simone	Loneliness	Feeling stronger
Melanie	Loneliness	Feeling proud
Lauren		Increasing self-esteem
Giulia	Financial instability; language	Feeling stronger
Gabriel	Loneliness	Improving confidence and self-esteem
Vania	Financial instability; tiredness	Increasing self-esteem

Overall, living in London for a while is a challenging experience for international students, especially for those coming from small-scale communities and had never experienced a period abroad before. However, this study suggests that the challenges they faced have been overcome successfully. The majority of participants provide a positive evaluation of the experience in London by identifying significant personal developments and achievements amongst the main outcomes. The main positive factors or aspects emerged during the research are: self-empowerment, self-esteem, satisfaction, confidence and resilience. They are summarized in the following word cloud. Meanwhile, the main issues shared by students result to be loneliness and financial insecurity. These aspects will be explored in this chapter.

Figure 5: Word cloud showing the main research outcomes of the experiences of international students

5.3. Knowledge: confidence, self-esteem, satisfaction

The terms 'knowledge', 'higher education' and 'university' are often used interchangeably by the participants. However, Barnett reminds us that, while 'university' is just a type of institution, while 'higher education' is a deeper concept because it needs to be understood as a

> process that may or may not be found in universities: it is critical concept that provides standards such that educational processes in universities…can be assessed as to the extent to which they fulfill the criteria implied in the idea of higher education (2011: 3).

International students provide a variety of insights when asked about their academic experience and the reasons for studying in London. More specifically, a few students identify 'higher education' or 'knowledge' as the '*product*' (Azeem, Indian students, 2nd interview) given by universities; then, some others state that knowledge is precisely "*what can make the difference in your life*". There is a quite shared agreement on the fact that this product or value is, as some participant state, "*what can make the difference in your CV and career*", "*the reason why I'm here in London"* and "*what makes you a valuable person*". Moreover, some remarkable accounts show that for some participants knowledge and the acquisition of English skills are strongly connected:

> *"What's the point of getting a degree in a university that is not English? You go nowhere without English skills"* (Lidia, Indian student, 1st interview).

"Getting a degree in the UK makes me feel safe. I know that it makes the difference and I have much more chances to get a good job...I think about my friends who got a degree in Italy. They cannot even say a sentence in English...it will be harder for them to get a job" (Annalaura, Italian student, 2nd interview).

"I need to improve my English skills, now...sorry for my mistakes, I cannot speak good English...that's why I'm here. My parents told me that with good English you can have a good job" (Prashant, Indian student, 1st interview).

"Before moving to London I studied in an English school in Italy. English is so important nowadays that you need to speak it fluently. Even if I go back to Italy and I want a good job English is still important" (Beatrice, Italian student, 1st interview).

So there is a shared belief amongst both Indian and Italian participants that the acquisition of English skills is an essential prerequisite to be more competitive in global economy and to have more job opportunities. In this sense, in line with Foucauldian view, the aim of acquiring or improving English skills can be understood as a strategy of self-empowerment.

Remarkably, the perception of higher education for students often changed over time during the research. Sometimes even the same participant changed his or her view, depending on his or her feelings in relation to the reality and experience. For example, an Indian student born in the US, when I met her for the very first time, she was enthusiastic and proud of being in London and studying Education. After two years, reflecting on her academic experience, she stated what follows:

"As an international student I was allowed to work just part-time and sometimes, even if you are a good teacher, they do not want you, too many limitations. The university was not helpful in this sense, I applied for a job at university, the one I was studying in, but I didn't get it. The university wasn't helpful at all, I emailed the Psychological Support Service of the uni many times and tried to book an appointment. No way, they were back to me after three months asking me to complete an online questionnaire. Crazy. And fees, too. In Germany for example, academic fees are ridiculously low compared to the UK. One positive aspect of the UK education system is that at least your age is not a limitation, it doesn't matter how old you are, you can always apply for an academic degree. But at the same time we cannot hide the main reason they probably do that: the more students we have, the more money we get. So, businessification of education... Some of my Professors when I was at uni in London weren't

that happy too. If universities are like factories, you know, if they have some money they don't increase the salary of the academics, they would probably I don't know, design a new building! It's difficult, one of my professor was teaching in two different places" (Nicole, Indian student, 3rd interview).

Then, after getting a good job in Paris, she argued that getting a degree in a university in London made the difference in their life career:

*"It has been hard for me living in London…I don't like London as you know. But I'm glad I did it, now. I got a good job in Paris…permanent contract and good salary…and I got it because I got the degree in the UK" (*Nicole, Indian student, 2019).

Similarly, more than 75% of the interviewees by the end of the qualitative study confirmed the importance of getting a degree in a UK university and reflected positively on the knowledge acquired during their experience as international students:

"Overall I feel happy and proud of myself, today. Life was not easy while I was in London, but…you know, sacrifices are exactly what give a sacred value to your choices" (Carlotta, Italian student, 2019).

*"I can say I grow up in London. Although I wasn't that young when I moved…now I feel I'm adult. London made me improve in awareness, self-control, but also in making me stronger…I couldn't break the walls before my experience in London" (*Francesco, Italian student, 2019*).*

What is remarkable from students' insights is that knowledge is simultaneously understood as an achievement, a goal, a value to pursuit, a reason for moving and reason for struggling and making sacrifices, a source of empowerment, the way to get a good job, a way to improve yourself. Thus, knowledge is perceived as something that can act both inside the individuals and outside and, more crucially, is timeless. According to some participants' view, the knowledge acquired during their experiences in London is a distinctive feature that can operate through time.

5.4. Universities: motivation and satisfaction

Further considerations should be made on the notion of 'space' in relation to knowledge acquisition. Two main spaces are identified: universities and London city. Universities are the main spaces associated with the notion of knowledge in this study. The notion of knowledge in itself is usually associated with academic knowledge in students' views; however, in this study academic knowledge is understood as a part, although important, of the realm that the notion of knowledge includes. According to Foucault, self-knowledge

should be ideally understood as a prerequisite to access knowledge (the truth) (Foucault, 1991). To put it briefly, self-knowledge is one of the bodies of knowledge, but also the foundation of the constitution of oneself as subject; to say it with Foucaults' words:

> the ethical constitution of oneself presupposes the acquisition of more or less numerous and complex bodies of knowledge which concern more or less extensive domains which are more or less close to or distant from the subject himself: fundamental truth about the world, life, the human being…practical truths about what it is appropriate to do in such and such circumstances; in short, a whole set of things to be learned (Foucault, 2008: 339).

Meanwhile universities, from a Foucauldian perspective, are defined as

> multifaceted amalgamations of economic, political, judicial and epistemological relations of power, which still reflect the exclusionary and inclusionary binaries of their origins: university campuses are relatively artificial enclaves where students are expected to absorb socially desirable modes of behaviour and forms of knowledge before being recuperated into society (Deacon, 2006: 184).

Additionally, as it has been argued in previous chapters, universities are understood as spaces increasingly important as a result of both the growing global demand for highly-skilled individuals, and "the development of national cultural identity and nation-building" (Gürüz, 2011: 175). What is crucial here, is that universities, in spite of their goals and the variety of raisons d'être they may have, exist –not exclusively but mainly- because there are students. Students are part of the amalgamation of power relations (Deacon, 2006) on which university is based.

Overall studying in a UK university had a positive impact on students. The main aspects on which students reflected when asked about their experiences at university are: good organisation, efficiency, nice and international environments, well equipped, professors who are often defined as "*smart", "friendly", "very professional", "very good at teaching", "supportive"*, to the point that some students declared that studying in London, in the end, "*is a privilege".* A key aspect emerged during the interviews is the importance of university campuses as physical spaces. Some students defined university as "*a second home"* and *"the place where I spend most of my time".* Being physically there, meeting other students, professors, speakers, and academic staff is recognized as vital, because it makes them feel *"not alone"* and *"part of the university community".* This aspect recalls Urry's argument on meetings:

> if university is only seen in terms of the production, assembling, storage, transmitting and assessing information flows, then it is possible to eliminate the physical campus. But if the campus is understood

as a place of intense 'meetingness' then no amount of virtual connectivity can replace it (Urry, 2007, 244).

This could partly explain one of the reasons why international students of this study had never considered the opportunity to study virtually from their countries of origin: the importance of being physically there, together with the need to explore different realities, and the attractiveness of London are some of the forces behind their decision to study in London.

Additionally, the majority of participants stressed the ways English higher education is understood and organized. Two main aspects emerged: first, the importance of being critical and second, the individualistic approach. As some students point out:

"I was shocked…I mean, in a positive way…here at university being critical is important. I couldn't believe it…when I studied in Italy I used to repeat as a recorder what I was expected to say by the professor, otherwise…no way to carry on" (Carlotta, Italian student, 2nd interview).

"Here working individually and being independent is very important…everyone follows his route" (Azeem, Indian student, 1st interview).

Carlotta and Azeem's insights on academic experience are representative in this study: while Carlotta, from Italy, was surprised of being required to be critical, Azeem, from India, stressed the importance of being independent as a standard procedure within the academic field. Both students are, consciously or not, influenced by the educational understanding in their countries of origin and their individual experiences: Carlotta before moving to London was enrolled in a university in Milan, but after a few months she interrupted her studies. Carlotta did not feel comfortable in that university as she was constantly under pressure and was not free to share her questions or thoughts. As she said *"everything was unquestionable…it is as it is, no room for students' opinions"*. Thus, when she was asked to be critical at the university in London, she was impressed through unexpectedness. Meanwhile, Azeem, who studied in a prestigious British school in India before moving to London, was not surprised by the "*revolutionary aspects"* on which his Italian peer reflected.

The academic experiences of the participants were all positively evaluated. Apart from knowledge acquisition, the main reasons why universities had a positive impact on students subjectivities, according to them, are linked to or found in:

- the opportunity to feel satisfied;

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- the opportunity to feel proud;

- the opportunity to improve skills in a different language;

- an international university located in a cosmopolitan city gives the opportunity to become more tolerant and open minded;

- becoming more confident, aware and powerful;

- becoming stronger;

- being myself and feeling free, without being judged;

- the opportunity to feel independent.

In the light of the outcomes, this study suggests that international students can be considered active players within the academic context: if, as Foucault reminds us, power is everywhere, then it can be found inside or within international students, too. Identifying them only as 'consumers' or 'customers' of higher education institutions, as some existing literature does (Hill, 2013; Giroux, 2014), fails to capture their essence, their subjectivities and some of their distinctive features.

5.5. London: self-knowledge and resilience

This study suggests that the experiences of international students in London had an impact on the knowledge of themselves, the world, and themselves in relation to the world.

London city, particularly during the first interviews, is perceived by some participants as "*the centre*", "*the heart of Europe*", *"the best place to study in",* to the point that sometimes it is seen a sort of heaven, completely independent from the rest of the UK. A very special place where dreams or whatever is hard to achieve in countries of origin, can become true. As some students state:

> *"London is amazing…you see how beautiful London is….I wouldn't live in the UK, but I love London "* (Sara, Italian student, 1st interview).

> *"London gave me a sense of freedom from the very first time. Here you can wear whatever you want…you can wear a pyjama and walking in Oxford Circus, and people simply don't care…you can be a black woman from Nigeria and work in a bank, you can have a green hair and teach at uni…these things would be impossible in Turin"* (Valentina, Italian student, 1st interview).

There is universal agreement on students' views about London compared to the places where they lived before moving. The main words adopted to define or associated to London are: "*dynamic", amazing", "energetic", "open minded", "free ", "cosmopolitan", "multicultural", "efficient", "a place where it's*

impossible to get bored", "a place full of opportunities and possibilities". According to students' understandings, the openness and the restlessness of London are the main features that influenced their lives.

However, London impacted students' experiences in a variety of ways, both positive and challenging. Two of the main challenges experienced by participants are concerned with the economic sphere and the social one. The majority of the students defined London "*expensive*" and *"not affordable for everyone".* More specifically, some students state:

> *"My first period here in London was traumatic…prices are so high, especially rent and the TfL"* (Margherita, Italian student, 1st interview).

> *"moving to London was a mix of excitement and joy first, and challenging then. Once here I realized I could no longer live as I used to… because the city is so bloody expensive…just to give you an example, the amount of money I'm paying every month to travel from home to uni is the same amount I used to pay to travel from home to uni in Italy…for an entire academic year! Crazy! One month compared to one year"* (Carlotta, Italian student, 1st interview).

> *"London is very expensive…when I was in India I used to live with my parents. Here I live alone and I realized how hard it can be…my parents are helping me, they pay my rent, but I cannot do the things I used to do before…I can't go out every night, I can't join parties every weekend, I cannot travel every weekend…life is so expensive, and you know, I don't want to ask for money just to have party"* (Nebil, Indian student, 1st interview).

Thus, the first challenging aspect experienced, although in different ways, by students is the constraint to rethink their routines, and, in some cases, to reflect on the value of money. The second hardest obstacle faced by students is building a friendship network in London. The majority of the participants live far away from their family members and closed friends. Although meeting new people and keeping in contact via digital tools is relatively easy, what is hard is building long lasting relationships, making new real friends and arrange for face-to-face meetings. In this sense, Giulia shared some representative thoughts:

> *"You know London and my place are two completely different contexts. Living in my place means sunshine, ocean, smiling people, and in London everyone is in his or her own world. When you take the tube most of the people are listening to music and looking at the mobile phone. Those who are not, are just reading a news-paper. This is crazy for me, for me it's*

strange to see how people can be so isolated from each other. In London I remember I didn't even know my neighbours .it was really depressing…obviously it is easier to keep in contact via Facebook, Twitter, Whatsapp…but these are just digital friendships and to be honest I don't think they are proper friendships, at least from my point of view" (Giulia, Italian student, 2nd interview).

Some students identify the lack of a sense of community as the most challenging aspect of their experience abroad. Life in London is largely perceived as individualized. While this aspect can be exciting at the beginning, because it seems to offer a great sense of freedom, it can become widely challenging over time. Some participants stressed the difficulties they came across, due to the fact that life is fast in big cities: people can change job and accommodation very quickly, many students do not stay in London after their studies, so everything seems to be constantly on the move. As a consequence, it is hard to build relations and long-lasting networks. As one of the students pointed out:

"well, meeting new people is not that hard here in London. I mean, I go to university and there are students from all over the world: Japan, Sweden, France, India, Brazil…this is very stimulating. I do love London because of that…but sometimes I feel like I live in a fake world. I mean, I'm from Italy, and probably…hopefully, I will get a job in Italy after this experience. Even if Jinni (a flat mate from Korea) and me are good friends now…you understand what I mean, she will go back to Korea, I will go back to Italy, it's really hard to see each other again. She lives on the other side of the world, it takes me days and lots of money to go and visit her. I'm not saying it's impossible, but how often could I see her? Once a year?" (Annalaura, Italian student, 2nd interview).

These reflections lead us to what can be perhaps identified as the major social issue emerged during this study: the sense of loneliness, a feeling that all students experienced at least once and for a short period, while living in London. Students describe the sense of loneliness as "*the lack of human relations", "the lack of physical contact", "no chance to share emotions", "nobody really cares of you", "people seem to be so cold and impersonal", "nobody can understand how I feel", "I feel free but lost".* What is remarkable here is that students did not experienced loneliness exclusively while in solitude, but also in the middle of a crowd, while travelling on the tube or walking on the streets, at home although living in a shared accommodation. Their insights, in this sense, can confirm Urry's point on the shadow sides of contemporary metropolis:

Because of the richness and diverse sets of onrushing stimuli in the metropolis people are forced to develop an attitude of reserve and insensitivity to feeling. Without the development of such an attitude

most would not be able to cope with such overwhelming experiences caused by a high density of population and its movement. The urban personality is thus reserved, detached and blasé (Urry, 2007: 22).

Thus, living in a metropolis can influence, shape or even change individuals' subjectivities. This means questioning their strengths and weaknesses, rethinking about themselves and their sets of values and beliefs, acknowledging new awarenesses, developing new skills or improving existing ones. Notably, the participants experienced and described their challenges in different ways. The study suggests that the perceptions of the challenges are influenced by two main variables: first, students' personality and level of sensitiveness; second, their backgrounds. For instance, students who grew up and spent most of their life in a small town or village, where the sense of community is taken for granted, were more affected than those who used to live in a big city before moving to London.

Research outcomes suggest that one of main consequence of the "brevity and scarcity of inter-human contacts" (Simmel, 1997: 183) is questioning the notion of ourselves in relation to others and the world. The feeling of loneliness on which some students reflect during the interviews, can to be linked to the fact that metropolitan contexts are characterized by the tendency of realizing a "structure of the highest impersonality" (Simmel, 1997: 178) in which every single aspect is timetabled, rationalized, formalized and sometimes emptied of its ethical values, or at least the ethical values that students used to attribute to specific activities. These are just some examples emerged during the interviews:

> "If I feel sick here in London, I just go to Boots and buy paracetamol. Here paracetamol seems to be the solution to every problem: flu, headache, stomach-ache, cold and every single kind of pain you might have. And it can be even cheaper than fresh vegetables" (Annalaura, Italian student, 2nd interview).

> "The first time I went to my bank I was shocked: electronic machines everywhere. And just machines. If you need to take some cash, there is a machine; if you need to make a payment, there is another machine; if you need to make a bank transfer another one. And when I asked to someone for more information they said "you should use the electronic devices, they will guide you step by step…now I get used to do it, but it's still horrible" (Radha, Indian student, 2nd interview).

"I emailed the Psychological Service-Support of my uni. They were back to me after three weeks with two documents with a list of questions, there was no way of booking an appointment. I was simply asked to fill some forms" (Nicole, Indian student, 3rd interview).

"I'm working on my thesis. I've never met my supervisor. Sounds incredible, doesn't it?" (Filippo, Italian student, 1st interview).

In sharing their experiences, some students stress the importance of building personal resilience as a strategy they need to get or improve in order to survive or to live better. This aspect is connected to the fluidity of life in big cities (Bauman, 1998), and to the fact that, to put it with students' words "*everything can change faster than ever, London can be faster than the time*". Developing a positive view about themselves, being optimistic and being confident in their abilities and strengths, are in some interviews identified as the best ways to survive in London and overcome the difficulties they come across. This study shows that students, in different times and different ways, overcame the issues they faced during their experience in London.

5.6. Job and volunteering experiences: confidence and resilience

Some international students, while studying in London, volunteered or got some temporary part-time jobs. The motivations they expressed to volunteer or to get a job are multiple. Not surprisingly, the students who identified financial insecurity as an issue during the research, were more likely to search for a job, while amongst their peers who did not express economic worries, a few students volunteered. Overall, out of thirty two international students, six volunteered (five students from Italy and one from India), and eight international students got a temporary or part-time job while studying (seven from Italy and one from India).

International students who volunteered, worked for relatively short periods (up to ten months) in London for charities or associations without being paid. Some students worked as educational supporters with kids from disadvantaged backgrounds studying at different primary or secondary schools across London. Some others helped in organising charity fundraising events for a variety of purposes, including environmental and healthcare ones. The reasons why they decided to volunteer are both ideological and practical. For instance Nicole, an Indian student who wanted to become a teacher, volunteered because she loves kids and especially taking care of those from disadvantaged backgrounds or minorities, but also because volunteering can improve her CV. As she points out,

"before volunteering I felt useless. I was here alone with my boyfriend and, apart from studying there was nothing to do…staying with kids makes me feel alive…then it is great for your CV because you can show to employers that you are motivated, resilient and active" (Nicole, Indian student, 2nd interview).

Similarly, Sara, from Italy, stresses the importance of volunteering while searching for the right job:

"I think about my CV, here in the UK things are different…having long gaps in your CV is not good, so I'm working for free while applying for job positions…working for free is not encouraging, but at least I'm doing something I really like" (Sara, Italian student, 2nd interview).

In both cases, volunteering is understood as a good practise to improve the social context where they live, and, at the same time, to increase the opportunities of getting the job they like.

Arguably, behind the choice of getting a job provided by international students, there are ideological and practical reasons as well. Their insights suggest that the main reasons for applying for a job while studying are linked to a sense of responsibility, the need to be at least partially independent, the idea of being part of the community where they live, the will to build or improve their networks and, in some cases, to improve their English skills. The main reason why some students decided to work instead of volunteer is the remuneration. Although most of their jobs were temporary, sometimes underpaid and not related to their field of studies, students were overall satisfied of their job experiences. In particular, in their views, their working experiences were defined "*useful*" for different motivations. For instance, the case of Valentina, from Italy, working in a night club, was evaluated as a very positive experience:

"I know it is not the job of my life, but for a while here in London it can be great. I can meet many different people, some of them became good friends…I have fun while I am working, and I am paid for that…what else?" (Valentina, Italian student, 2nd interview)

Similarly, Annalaura, from Italy, while working for a small publishing company, was aware that she was underpaid. However, she felt proud of herself and lucky because she got that job in a few days. In addition, the company was closed to her university and she did not have to put much effort on that job. Before getting that job, which was her first one in London, she was worried about job interviews because her Italian peers living in London gave her discouraging feedbacks, and she knew she had to improve her English confidence and fluency. Thus, getting a job after the first interview was a great achievement for her.

*"I was scared of interviews…my Italian friends here in London told me that you should have good English skills, and good fluency…I was scared, my pronunciation was so bad. I studied English, I read English book, I can understand what people say…but I am Italian, I think I will never be able to speak so British…but when I opened that door (*the door of the office where she had her job interview) *I suddenly forgot my fears, I did not think about them, and finally I got the job…I still cannot understand how it happened, but I was so happy and proud of myself"*(Annalaura, Italian student, 3rd interview).

In the light of the experiences as volunteers or as temporary student-workers of nearly half of the students of the cohort, this study allowed the researcher to reflect on the importance of working for students. Existing literature often criticises the practise of working while learning, arguing that it may hurt students more than it helps, because: first, the quality of their job experiences in many cases does not help them in getting better jobs after the graduation; second, although it may allow to earn more money in the short term, their remuneration cannot cover their academic fees and living expenses (Carnevale, 2019). However this study, even if it is not representative, suggests that working experiences can also have positive impacts for international students, especially for those who are not from English speaking countries. Temporary working experiences in London for the students of this research have been gainful: although their remuneration was often unsatisfactory and unable to cover their expenses, it could be seen as a starting point in their experiences in London. Even if these jobs in most cases did not improve their CVs or provide specific skills, they were beneficial for other reasons, to the point that in a few cases, thanks to a temporary low-paid job, students met people who eventually helped them to get a good job.

5.7. Financial insecurity: resilience and self-empowerment

This section focuses on the main issues raised during the research study, that is financial instability. This aspect had a significant impact in some students' experiences in London, and needs to be investigate: if international students are likely to be from middle – upper class backgrounds, at least in their country of origin, why many students show economic concerns? And why some international students are forced to get a job in hosting country, while some others are not? According to the insights provided by international students who identified financial instability as a problem or source of anxiety, the problem is linked to both UK policy and welfare system, and the ways these students understand them.

Although growth in international student numbers in the UK has coincided with proactive policies over the last couple of decades (Lomer, 2018), this study argues that much is still unknown of how their experiences

can be shaped, influenced, and in some cases complicated by national policies and the ways international students can deal with them (Antonucci, 2016). Thus, in line with Antonucci's argument (2016), when dealing with international students in the UK we need to go beyond the issue of access higher education, and understand not just what happens to them once they enter the university (Antonucci, 2016) but also their understanding of the UK academic system, the idea of the university and welfare system they have and the issues they may experience.

The participants who stressed their unsatisfactory financial condition are all from Italy and in most cases their concerns are influenced by the comparison between UK higher education system and the Italian one. Meanwhile, Indian students of this cohort, mainly from upper class, had no experience or familiarity with Indian higher education and never talked about financial insecurity or mentioned economic issues, even when asked about it. This could led to two reflections: first, financial issues faced by students are influenced by individual and social background; second, they can be connected to students' understandings and assumptions on university and welfare system. Before focusing on students' points of view, I identify the main differences between English higher education system and the Italian one in order to provide a better understanding of what they say.

Table 12: Comparison between UK Higher Education and Italian Higher Education

	UK	Italy
Welfare mix	High role of both public spending (for investing) and private sources of welfare	Predominant role of family sources, low state support
Sufficiency	Developed student support system (loans and grants)	Less developed student support system (only grants)
Individual contribution	High	Low
Role of loans	Covering fees and living costs	Absent
Inclusiveness	Means-tested	Highly residual

Source: Antonucci (2016: 36)

In addition to this table, a rapid historical excursus of the last few decades is needed, although the topic has been already presented in Chapter 1. The UK until a couple of decades ago, was internationally well-known for its developed system of student support to the point that its public expenditure for students in higher education was higher than the OECD average (European Council, 2011). From mid-1970s to the end of 1980s, students in the UK had a level of state support that was more than three times higher than the one in 2003 (Piketty, 2014). From the academic year 2015/16, grants have been abolished and are not available for academic students anymore. International students during the research period could apply to get a student loan. This phenomena is better known as "student debt", and has been highly criticized from both the Bank of England, that launched a review into how the growing amount of student debt could affect the

UK's financial stability (Binham, 2019), and academics across the UK who defined "perverse" an educational system in which academic students have a huge debt just because they study, and no guarantee jobs (Asher, 2018).

I further explored the issue with students who mentioned it in order to understand: what means 'financial instability' for them; how they cope with the issue; what are the main reasons why they experience financial instability; if they identify someone to blame and/or any improvements that could be done. In a way the experience abroad is for some international students a particular phase of 'transition' or 'suspension' from many points of view, including the economic one. One of weakest aspects of UK policies in higher education in present times is precisely the lack of policies in this 'transition' phase: the emphasis of current political debate is mainly on access to higher education (that is increasing the number of students) and professional career (that is investigating students and the jobs they get), but what happens in between is completely missing (Antonucci, 2016: 17). This is precisely the reason why and the point from where students' anxiety arises. The ways they cope with and negotiate their status of dependence or semi-dependence from their families can vary, according to: their background, their values, their social environments (which includes the comparison between UK systems and the Italian one or others), and their beliefs and expectations. However, achieving financial stability and so independence, is not just a matter of personality and individual background. Obviously there are students who do not consider financial insecurity a problem because their families help them, and students who feel guilty and, to use one student's words, "*good for nothing*", when they ask to their families for economic help. The research suggests that is also a socio-political matter. In this sense, probably Smail's theoretical work can be considered forward-looking; more than twenty years ago he identified and analysed through psychological lens one of the riskiest tendency of the UK society, namely the "Business Culture":

> our common social environment, where it has not fractured into various essentially magical relativities
> or nationalistic interest groups, is held together only by the precarious structure given it by Business
> Culture. If the economic basis upon which that world is built…should collapse – as indeed in its present
> form it surely must -. We shall be in a sorry state indeed, with nothing to fall back on but the barbarous
> attachments dictated largely by our biology. What we need is not a 'narrative'…with which to glue
> together our fractured social lives,…we need rather to re-establish a relationship with reality which has
> all but disappeared into magic and wishful relativities (Smail, 1999: 202).

The following insights provide a clear understanding of what students mean when they say 'financial insecurity' and its implications, and describe their 'transition' phases:

"Here in London sometimes I eat just once a day to save money...I felt very bad a few weeks ago when I realized I cannot get any scholarship. At the office they suggested to apply for a student loan. I called my mum and she said she could borrow me some money, so at least I don't have to pay the interests" (Valentina, Italian student, 1st interview).

"My dad paid my fees, otherwise I wouldn't be here. He is a doctor...he said it's quite expensive but he thinks that getting a degree here in the UK could give me more professional chances. So he's happy to help me. But now I need to get a job, even if it's a s**t job. If I need a pair of shoes or I want to have dinner outside sometimes, I don't want to ask him for more money" (Francesco, Italian student, 2nd interview).

"Yes, my parents paid my fees. Getting grants seems impossible. Honestly I don't think it should be like that. Why Italian universities are so cheap compared to the English ones?" (Mariangela, Italian student, 2nd interview)

"you cannot save money here, and this is a big challenge for me. You know, if I want to go out, first I have to think 'can we afford to go out?'. And most of the time we can't. It's not good, you know. I feel that this is not even good for your health, I mean I cannot just studying and working. You are just surviving, this is not the way it should be for me. I'm aware I'm not the only one who is sad for this, many other students are struggling" (Sara, Italian student, 2nd interview).

"I applied for the student loan and it seems it was successful. Then once I get a good job I will give the money back to the government. I don't think this is bad, but let's take Sweden for example: if you go to university there the government gives you money, like a job. Here you go to university and you have to give the money back to the government plus interests. Why does it work like that?" (Filippo, Italian student, 2nd interview).

As it may be apparent from their views, money represents a crucial issue for some international students, that can impact their lives in London in different ways. For example, as the cases of Francesco and Mariangela suggest, there can be international students who aim at the being economically independent both while studying or once they complete their studies, but they cannot. Thus, their feelings of powerless and frustration are due to their inability to change their circumstances in London. Notably, their reflections are influenced by the comparison between the UK higher education system and the Italian one, where academic fees are usually lower (Universitaly, 2020), and students who get a temporary or part-time job

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while studying can be more independent from their families. Then Valentina's account is more concerned with her understanding of the student loan: in her view, taking on debt to study is unacceptable. Again, her insight, although not explicitly, is the result of a comparison between the UK higher education system and the Italian one, where the amount of fees paid by individual students depends on their economic conditions, and the average total amount of fees and contribution student pay is about 1,300 Euro/year (Ministry of Education, Universities and Research (MIUR Italy) and Eurostudent.eu, 2018). So in her understanding, the concept of student loan is wrongful. Similarly, Filippo applied for the student loan because, he argued, he had no alternatives. However, he deeply criticizes the way higher education is understood in the UK, and makes a comparison between the UK higher education and the Swedish one, where students are generally more supported than in the UK, at least financially (Antonucci, 2016; European Commission, 2019). More generally, international students who identify economic insecurity as a major issue, asked for financial help to their families of origin. In this sense, as discussed in previous chapter, families play a key role: families in many cases represent a form of welfare for students because they provide economic support. Alternatively, a few Italian students, once completed their undergraduate studies in London, applied for a M.A. in Italy instead of staying in the UK as it is cheaper.

Although the meanings students' provide and the ways they overcome economic insecurity vary among them, they are to some extent congruent to Foucault's notion of 'homo oeconomicus' (Foucault, 2004). According to the author, homo oeconomicus can be defined as

> an entrepreneur of himself, being for himself his own capital, being for himself his own producer, being for himself the source of his earnings (Foucault, 2004: 225).

In this sense, some students argues they were carrying a great burden of responsibility while studying in London. Their sense of responsibility was linked to many factors, including: getting a good job, being economically independent, financial security, being competitive for getting a good job. More crucially, the reasons they shared to be worried about are almost exclusively economic. Read this way, international student mobility can suit Foucault's definition of 'human capital', because it can be an activity or an investment that potentially can increase the possibility to earn more and provide more satisfaction. To put it with Foucault's words:

> in the elements making up human capital we should also include mobility, that is to say, an individual's ability to move around, and migration in particular. Because migration obviously represents a material cost, since the individual will not be earning while he is moving…migration is an investment; the migrant is an investor (Foucault, 2004: 230).

In line with his perspective, international student mobility can be also seen as a behaviour, that is not just a choice, a sojourn or investment of time and money. It can be much more than that: it can be a way in which individuals act or conduct themselves both as individuals and enterprise of themselves with investments and hopefully incomes. However, what happens to international students between the phase of investment and the phase of incomes is relatively obscure in existing literature. This aspect will be further explored in the following chapter, in relation to international students' trajectories and career paths.

Summary

This chapter focuses on international students' experiences in London. It identifies three main themes, namely: life in London, academic experiences, pains and gains of international students' lived experiences. Then, it discusses the research findings by analysing international students' lives through the lens of the mobilities paradigm (Urry, 2007) and Foucault's theories. In doing so, this chapter includes reflections on the notions of knowledge, power, subjectivity, and how they shape international students' lives.

The findings suggest that the main challenges faced by international students in this research are loneliness and financial instability. While loneliness is a challenge faced by all the students in different measures, financial instability is a challenge faced almost exclusively by Italian ones. A deeper analysis finds out that this issue is linked to two main aspects: first, the lack of policies and support during the studies and during the transition phase between higher education and professional career (Antonucci, 2016). Second, individual background and understandings of higher education and welfare system. In this sense, there are significant differences between the UK higher education and welfare system, and the Italian ones. Major differences are found in living costs and academic fees, that are lower in Italy. Notably, these aspects can impact the quality of students' lives.

Further analyses of the outcomes suggest that the challenges faced by international students can be successfully overcome. Overall, both students from India and Italy provide a positive evaluation of their experiences in London and identify personal developments and academic achievements as positive aspects. Additionally, they provide positive insights in relation to their self-esteem, satisfaction, self-empowerment, confidence and resilience.

Like previous analyses on international students' decision-making, also the analyses of international students' experiences suggest that student mobility is heterogeneous in its essence. According to Urry (2007) and Foucault (2012), "part of that heterogeneity is …*made of* various material objects, including nature and technologies, that directly or indirectly move or block the movement of objects, people and information" (Urry, 2007: 50). The main material objects (or systems) identified in this chapter are: university, policy, labour market and financial resources. The analysis shows how they can influence or

shape international students' lives. However, the reality is not just made of 'material objects'; indeed, there are "cognitive forces" (Urry, 2007) or "subjectivities" (Foucault, 1982) operating through time and spaces. In other words, individual power and understanding of the objects, can influence the reality. In line with the reasoning, this analysis shows that objective obstacles or issues experienced by international students can be overcome in different ways, and these ways can influence mobility experiences.

6. International students' transitions and career paths

This chapter focuses on international students' transitions and career paths. Analysing students' career paths in a qualitative study means not only having a thorough understanding of their job experiences, but also acknowledging, amongst others, their ambitions, their achievements, if they experience levels of uncertainty about the future, how and in what measure their studies in the UK influence their professional developments. More crucially, according to King *et al*, it means exploring "how international student mobility intersects with employment transitions" (King *et al*, 2014: 33), that it considering their transition(s): from education to employment or vice versa in the UK or in a different country; from education in the UK to unemployment or low-paid or low-status employment in the UK or in a different country; from low-paid employment in the UK or in a different country to better employment status in the UK or in a different country; from high-status job positions in the UK or in a different country to different job positions in the UK or another country. Notably, this list of possibilities is not exhaustive, as it will be discussed in this chapter, but it summarizes the main trajectories that international students could experience. This chapter suggests that international students' transitions and career paths should be understood as the essential component of international student mobility, that encompasses the self-identity construction process undertaken by international students (Soong, 2016: 145). Thus, the analysis of their transitions and career paths cannot be confined to a set of rational causative factors. Indeed, there is a variety of complexities that need to be taken into account, including social relations, emotional and cognitive aspects. In doing so, the chapter suggests that Urry's mobilities paradigm and Boutang's notion of Cognitive Capitalism can provide useful insights to the phenomenological analysis of international students' transitions and paths.

This chapter starts by providing an overview of the geographical transitions of international students in order to have a concrete understanding of the number of students who live in London and those who no longer live in London during the research period. Then, the chapter focuses on the academic and professional transitions they have experienced. Attention is given to a variety of complexities and tensions shared by international students during their processes of self-construction (Soong, 2016).

6.1. International students and geographical transitions

In this research the term 'transition' relies on the notion of mobility theorized by Urry (2007). So, transition is understood as various kinds and temporalities of physical and virtual movements (Urry, 2007: 9). Thus, it includes any event that results in changed routines, places, roles, assumptions, relations, jobs and whatever may impact individuals' lives. International students in this study experienced a significant

amount of transitions. Overall, their transitions are mainly: geographical, educational, professional and relational. The following Life History Calendar summarizes their geographical transitions from 2015 to 2019:

Table 13: Life History Calendar of geographical transitions

Name	Country	Moving in date	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Azeem	India	Aug 2012	London	London	London	London	London
Valentina	Italy	Sept 2013	London	London	London	London	London
Simon	India	Sept 2013	London	London	London	London	London
Abu	India	Oct 2010	London	London	London	London	London
Valentina	Italy	Oct 2013	London	London	London/Milan	Milan	Milan
Nicole	India	Jan 2014	London	London	London/Zurich	Zurich/Paris	Paris
Sara M	Italy	Oct 2013	London	London	London	London	London
Natasha	India	Aug 2014	London	London	London	London	London
Annalura	Italy	Jan 2014	London	London	London	Milan	Milan
Margherita	Italy	Aug 2012	London	London	London	London	Rome
Alexander	India	Oct 2013	London	London	London/Delhi	Delhi	Delhi
Beatrice	Italy	Aug 2014	London	London	London/Rome	Milan	Milan
Radha	India	Jan 2014	London	London	London	London	Manchester
Francesco (Paolo)	Italy	Aug 2012	London	London	Bruxelles	Bruxelles	Milan
Paul	India	Sept 2012	London	London	London	Leeds	Leeds
Robert	India	Sept 2013	London	London	Berlin	Berlin/London	London
Lydia	India	Jun 2014	London	London	London	London	London
Prashant	India	Oct 2013	London	London	London/Delhi	Delhi	Delhi
Chiara	Italy	Jan 2014	London	London	London	Milan	Milan
Carlotta	Italy	Aug 2012	London	London	London	London	Milan
Samuele	Italy	Sept 2012	London	Essex	Essex	Essex/Milan	Milan
Mariangela	Italy	Nov 2012	London	Essex	Essex	Essex/Milan	Milan
Sara	Italy	Jan 2014	London	London	London	London	London
Nebil	India	Sept 2013	London	London	London	London	London
Abin	India	Aug 2013	London	London	London	Kerala	Kerala
Alexandra	India	Aug 2014	London	London	London/Kolkata	Kolkata	Kolkata
Simone	Italy	Aug 2014	London	London	London	London/ Florence	London/ Florence
Shafi	India	Aug 2011	London	London	London	New York	New York
Lauren	Italy	Oct 2013	London	London	London	London	Barcelona
Giulia	Italy	Oct 2012	London	London	London	London	London
Sujata	India	July 2013	London	London	London	London	Kerala
Vania	Italy	Oct 2014	London	London	Venice	Rome	Venice

The Life History Calendar provides an overview of students' geographical mobility trend over a five year period, and compares the two cohorts. It illustrates the trend of international students living in London. Over the period, it can be observed that there was a significant decrease in the percentage of international students living in London. While in 2015 and 2016 the entire cohort was in London both for educational and/or professional reasons, in 2017 there was a significant climb of approximately one third of the students. Over thirty two international students, nine (five students from India and four from Italy) left London in 2017.

Since in June 2016 there was the Brexit referendum, the next section focuses on the insights and understandings provided by students in relation to Brexit, in order to understand if the withdrawal of the UK has impacted international students' experiences in this study.

6.2. Brexit and its implications

As the Life History Calendar of international students' geographical transitions shows, 2017 results to be a crucial year for geographical changes, with both Italy and India experiencing a notable rate of international students leaving London. Two points should be made here: first, overall the majority of the participants in 2017 experienced professional or educational transitions; some students experienced unemployment, others got a good job opportunity or pursued higher education. Second, Brexit to some extent impacted in different ways some Italian students decision-making. Meanwhile, Indian students did not share great concerns about Brexit. Indeed, amongst Indian students Brexit was largely perceived as a political dynamic that could not influence their lives, to the point that Shafi stated:

> *"I don't care about Brexit. Indian students studying in the UK pay already a lot of money both for visa and the academic fees, that are higher than those paid by European students…and don't forget we pay 400 pounds every year to NHS, then 18,000 pounds as security deposit to show we have means to live, not just survive…perhaps the same will happen to European students"* (Shafi, Indian student, 2017).

Shafi's insight is quite representative in this study and confirms that both Indian students studying in London are more likely to be from wealthy families, as it has been argued in chapter 4, and Brexit is a phenomenon they should not be worried about. Contrarily, Italian students were all concerned, although in different ways. There was a variety of reactions, especially immediately after the Brexit referendum: from those more anxious who left the UK in 2017, to those more moderate that started to consider the hypothesis of leaving the UK or applying for the UK citizenship. As the case of Vania shows:

> *"I feel so sad and worried…it's a disaster, I feel I can no longer live here in London, I mean at the moment I cannot get the UK citizenship, it takes time…then I'm thinking about the university, I'm sure they will increase our fees, then if I get a job I could be discriminated because I don't have the UK citizenship…no way, I should rethink about my future. I definitively want to go back to Italy, at least I have no so many things to be worried about" (*Vania, Italian student, 2017).

Vania felt no longer welcomed, so she left London in 2017. Once graduated in London, she was considering to pursue higher education in the UK, but suddenly she changed her mind and decided to pursue higher education in Italy. Notably, her choice was not exclusively linked to the political changes; she was already experiencing a period of uncertainty and had no clear ideas about her future. On the one hand she was satisfied of her professional career in London; on the other hand, there was a feeling of frustration in her insights because, apart from the professional career, there were no other motivations for staying in London for her. The Brexit referendum was, to some extent, the straw that broke the camel's back. Thus, in her story, Brexit was a minor fact: it was the one that caused her decision to leave, but as a result of the cumulative effect other aspects.

Both Vania and Shafi make some interesting points while reflecting on a potential scenario following Brexit: they both point out that Brexit could mean increasing fees for EU students. In the same vein, existing literature on international student mobility formulate some hypotheses on the future of international education and student mobility in the UK:

> There is clearly the significant risk that numbers of EU students may fall if they have to take on international student status. International student status would mean that they would have to pay significantly higher fees than they do currently for studying in the UK, but also that they would not be entitled to the same levels of governmental support (in the form of loans and so forth) (Beech, 2019: 240).

Additional accounts include some more moderate and reflexive thoughts. For example Carlotta and Filippo state:

> "*Honestly I have no idea of what is going on and what will happen, and I think that nobody does. There is no clear information, everything is so confused and up in the air…at the moment I don't want to think about it, I'm completing my MA in a few months and I don't believe there will be radical changes in this period. So, step by step…first, my MA and then let's see what happen"* (Carlotta, Italian student, 2017).

> "*I'm glad we are not the only ones ruled by crazy politicians! Well, seriously, I don't think that Brexit is a good strategy for the UK. Especially for European students…personally, at the moment I'm not so worried…I'm thinking about it, and probably I will leave the UK sooner than I thought. But sooner doesn't mean tomorrow or in a week…I will start sending applications in other countries"* (Filippo, Italian student, 2017).

Both Carlotta and Filippo, together with the majority of their Italian peers in this study, shared feelings of sadness, uncertainty, anger and confusion. Behind their motivations there was always a state of fear or nervousness, due to the impossibility to make plans for their future. In particular those students who wanted to pursue higher education in the UK shared a deeper feeling of annoyance because they feared cuts in research funding. Their fears were concretely motivated by the fact that until 2019 there had never been a transparent debate or a clear decision about funding for EU Science Programmes in the UK. Indeed, Professor Wilsdon, who works on the governance and management of research at the University of Sheffield, defined Brexit in relation to UK universities as "a spectacular own-goal by the government" (Wilsdon, 2020).

Overall, the interviews conducted between 2016 and 2017 show that Italian students after the Brexit referendum started to rethink about their life in the UK. By the end of the research, as the Life History Calendar of international students' geographical transitions show, 75% of the Italian students were no longer in the UK. Although Brexit was not identified as the main motivation factor for leaving the UK, it impacted Italian students of this study in many ways: in a few cases it quickened their decision making, and, in many cases, it increased students' anxiety and uncertainty.

6.3. Transitions: academic and professional motivations

The analysis of this research suggests that amongst the students, both from India and Italy, who moved to a different country in 2018 and 2019, the majority returned to their countries of origin. The interviews confirmed that students' geographical mobility in London is mainly linked to academic or professional reasons. In other words, in most cases their experiences in London were extended after the graduation mainly for good job or academic opportunities. There are international students who returned to their countries of origin or moved to a different country immediately after completing their studies for academic and professional reasons:

> "*Incredible! I applied for an M.A. in Italy...and I was accepted! I'm so excited...it's not exactly in my town, I need to move to Milan...but I'm so happy*" (Beatrice, Italian student, 2019).

> "*I got a good job at university here in Delhi...now I'm very happy of being here...sometimes I miss London, but I can come back for holidays*" (Prashant, Indian student, 2019).

Both Beatrice and Prashant got good academic opportunities: Beatrice's application for an M.A. in Economics in a prestigious Italian university was successful, while Prashant got a good job opportunity as

researcher in his hometown in India. In both cases students were very excited of getting great opportunities in their countries of origin, and there was a strong belief that their experiences in London allowed them to be successful in their countries.

What is apparent in 90% of the interviews collected from both the Italian and the Indian groups, is that there is a more or less explicit economic and employment motivation beyond both their geographical mobility and immobility. In particular amongst the Italian ones living in London, there are very strong pull factors of London. In fact, the Italian narratives, compared to the Indian ones, make much more frequent use of words or sentences like "*there are no good jobs*", "*lack of meritocracy*", "*it is hard to survive*", "*they destroyed our future*", "*unemployment*". During the interviews with Italian students, most of them underlined the fact that their geographical transitions from Italy to London was a dynamic process influenced by different reasons. However, they all stressed the importance of the combination of two main factors: the economic background and the Italian political and economic uncertainty; more specifically, political uncertainties are perceived as an obstacle, that can block or discourage the ability of highly-skilled individuals to build an independent life. To put it with Mariangelas' words,

> "*When I was in Italy I was in a sort of limbo…I used to work in Milan, I'm a journalist, I used to work six days per week, twelve hours per da, but still…I couldn't be independent. I was forced to live with my parents. So, working as a slave, underpaid, and being unable to survive without my parents. That's simply ridiculous. I do have a dignity…I guess Italian politicians do no not even know what dignity means…here in London life is hard, perhaps harder than before, but at least I feel I can manage my uncertainty…in this sense living here and going to university here was helpful" (*Mariangela, Italian student, 1st interview).

Mariangela makes a stimulating point. In her view, her state of uncertainty was not morally acceptable in Italy. Her professional instability did not allow her to build a career, get married, buy a home, have a family and, more generally, organize her life without being worried for the money. Her decision-making was understood as an investment. Once in London and after a degree in a university in London, something inside her changed: she could survive with uncertainty. In this sense, her experience abroad had a therapeutic effect: in London she realized that uncertainty can be a natural state of affairs. In London she had the time to reflect on her experiences from a different point of view: London is an extremely dynamic place where young people from all over the world can change job, accommodation and partner more easily than in Italy, and where young people do not usually move primarily to build a family, so she felt encouraged. In the same vein, Valentina, an Italian student working in a university in London, summed up the situation perfectly:

"Doing a PhD in Italy is impossible…I mean, it's hard to do a PhD in the field I'm doing it…then publishing…again it's very hard if you don't know the right people. Here in London I just sent an application and the publisher accepted without knowing me personally, because he found interesting my work…they evaluated my work. Simply…here I have the feeling there is much more meritocracy…I'm not saying there here life is easy, you need to work hard, but in the end you know that if you work hard then you can succeed…in Italy you can work hard for ages, but if don't know the right powerful person there's no chance to succeed…here you can succeed even if they don't know you and even if you are not the son/the daughter/the lover or whoever of a powerful person" (Valentina, Italian student, 2019).

Valentina makes two interesting points: first, she confirms and summarizes an aspect that often emerged from the interviews with Italian students, that is the Italian structural crisis and the subsequent difficulties for young people. Emigration of skilled, highly-skilled or highly-qualified people from Italy is not a new phenomenon, it dates back to the 1990s; Italy represents a unique case in the EU in suffering from a brain drain as opposed to the rest of EU large economies, that are more likely to experience brain exchange (EUROSTAT, 2015; ISTAT, 2018). Not surprisingly, Italy is also the EU country that sends the largest number of international students to the UK (UNESCO, 2019). Thus, the broader structural crisis, together with increasing cuts in welfare, education services and research, affect highly-skilled people who experience increasing unemployment and precariousness within the labour market (Coin, 2018). Then, statistics and survey-based studies suggest that there is a tendency within the Italian graduate population: individuals with postgraduate qualifications, with top-class degrees, from the most prestigious universities and from the North of Italy, have higher migration propensity (King *et al,* 2014: 18). Valentina's interview provides a realistic description of the main issues Italy is experiencing. But there is a second interesting point she makes; she highlights the centrality of networks, that represent the key in current times, because, as Castells in a visionary way argued a long time ago, "*they* constitute the new social morphology of our societies, and the diffusion of networking logic substantially modifies the operation and outcomes in processes of production, experience, power and culture" (Castells, 1996: 469). This aspect will be further explored later in this chapter.

Contrarily to the Italian students, Indian students did not shared feelings of uncertainty about their future or concern regarding Indian socio-political context. Only two Indian students reflected on the power of caste systems during the interviews. They acknowledged that, although the caste system has been officially dismantled, its power is still strong in some areas because it seems to be deeply embedded in Indian society. Shafi remarkably states

"Hindu caste system is very powerful, there's nothing you can do, no way to improve your life if you are born in the wrong family…when I say wrong I mean poor. There is a broader understanding in our tradition, we do believe in fate or destiny…you need to understand that Indian students who are here in London are all or at least quite all from wealthy families…studying in London is a privilege and you need to have money to come here" (Shafi, Indian student, 3rd interview).

While amongst the Italian students there was a feeling of rebellion or subversion, Indian students were more moderate and peaceful. Those who reflected on the role of the caste system were aware and critical, but at the same time they did not share the feeling or wish to reform or reorganize their context.

Overall, research findings suggest that London is usually understood as a place to live in for a temporary period: there is shared agreement between participants that London can offer many opportunities but it is economically, physically and emotionally highly demanding. As Prashant says,

"London is amazing, but I wouldn't live here for the rest of my life. It's too chaotic, too expensive, too busy…then I miss my family and friends in India..so I take everything I can take from London…London is like a teacher for me, the best teacher of ever, it has been teaching me how to live" (Prashant, Indian student, 3rd interview).

Thus, international students undoubtedly perceive their mobility and transitions as challenging. The main differences are found in the ways they overcome or manage the challenging aspects they might face. While some students were often melancholic or even depressed to the point of leaving London the day after their graduation ceremony, some others developed a sense of resilience, achieved not least through the powers of their own critical self-reflection. For instance, Prashant defines London as a sort of 'school of life', and like him, many other students identify their stays London as intense and powerful experiences. Unsurprisingly, 90% of participants recommend London as an experience that everyone should try in his or her life.

6.4. Other reasons beyond international students' lives

An interesting aspect that clearly emerged by the comparison of the interviews of Indian and Italian students, is that Indian students were more likely to be homesick and disliked London, to the point that a few Indian students experienced a feeling of hostility. In their views, London is *"too much noisy", "too busy"*

and *"so stressful"*. These Indian students left London a few months after the end of their studies: they had no secure job in India before leaving, but they were quite sure to get a well-paid job in their country thanks to their UK degree. Thus, in these cases, their decision to leave London was not influenced by academic or professional reasons, rather by a feeling of weariness. As Abin clearly stated,

> *"I have enough of London…I feel I can no longer live here, this is not the right place for me. I feel it is time to go back home"* (Abin, Indian student, 3rd interview).

Abin recognized the variety of job and career opportunities that a global city like London can offer. However, he felt that London was not the best place to live in.

Similarly, other international students, after a few years in London, expressed their will to go back home, but they faced the impossibility (at least temporarily) of returning home for family and or relational reasons. For instance Giulia, an Italian student living in London who got pregnant after graduated, said:

> *"I have enough of London, I would like to go back to Italy…but it is hard. We had a baby and me and my husband need to get a good job…and it is hard to get two good jobs in Italy now, especially for me"* (Giulia, Italian student, 2017).

Similarly, Sara, an Italian student, and Radha, an Indian one, both female and living in London, pointed out:

> *"I would leave the UK tomorrow if I could…I mean, I am not saying it is a bad country…but I really would like to go back home, I miss India…I am still here just because of my husband, he got a good job at the university here, and it is not easy to get a similar position in India"* (Radha, Indian student, 2019).

> *"I don't like big cities…London is amazing and exciting, but…you know…after a while it becomes exhausting…I'm still here just because of my boyfriend. He has a great job and it is a well-paid one. It would be unbelievable doing the same thing and getting the same salary"* (Sara, Italian student, 2019).

Thus, Giulia, Radha and Sara's lived experiences in London are influenced by their partners' jobs. They are not delighted to extend their experiences in London for a variety of reasons, including homesickness, loneliness and fatigue. However, according to their insights, they constantly try to develop a sort resilience or resistance because they are aware they cannot quickly leave London. Arguably, this research suggests

that family represents a key aspect in international students' lives: it can be a reason for leaving the country of origin, as discussed in Chapter 4, and at the same time a reason for extending the stay abroad.

6.5. Educational transitions, career paths and emotional/cognitive dimensions

The research outcomes lead the researcher to make a distinction between educational transitions and career paths because not all the participants entered the job market after the end of their studies in London. Indeed, a significant percentage decided to pursue further studies in the UK or in their countries of origin. The following life history calendar summarises their educational transitions and career paths:

Table 14: Life History Calendar of educational transitions and career paths

Name	Country	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Azeem	India	Undergraduate Student	Undergraduate Student/ MA student	MA Student	Unemployed	Part-time job
Valentina	Italy	Postgraduate Student	Postgraduate Student	Postgraduate student	PhD student	PhD student
Simon	India	Undergraduate Student	Undergraduate Student	Full time job	MA student worker	MA student worker
Abu	India	Undergraduate Student	Undergraduate Student	Full time job	Full time job	Full time job
Valentina V	Italy	Undergraduate Student worker	Student worker	Student worker	MA student	MA student
Nicole	India	MA Student	MA Student	Unemployed	Part time job	Full time job
Sara M	Italy	Student	Student	PhD student	PhD student	PhD student
Natasha	India	Student	Student	PhD student	PhD student	PhD student
Annalaura	Italy	Postgraduate Student worker	Postgraduate Student worker	Part time job	Full time job	Full time job
Margherita	Italy	Undergraduate Student worker	Undergraduate Student worker	Part time student/ Full time job	Part time student/ part time job	Full time job
Alexander	India	Student	Student	Part time job/full time job	Full time job	Full time job
Beatrice	Italy	Student	Student	Unemployed	Postgraduate student	Postgraduate student
Radha	India	Student	Student	PhD student	PhD student	PhD student
Francesco	Italy	Student worker	Student worker	Part time job/ full time job	Full time job	Full time job
Paul	India	Postgraduate Student	Postgraduate Student	PhD student	PhD student	PhD candidate
Robert	India	Student	Student	PhD student	PhD student	PhD student
Lydia	India	Undergraduate Student	Undergraduate Student	Undergraduate Student	Unemployed mum	Unemployed mum
Prashant	India	MA Student	MA Student	PhD student	PhD student	PhD student
Chiara	Italy	Student	Student	Student worker	PhD student/ part time job	PhD student/ part time job

Carlotta	Italy	Student worker	Student worker	MA student	MA student	Full time job
Samuele	Italy	Student	Student	PhD student	PhD student	PhD candidate
Mariangela	Italy	MA Student	MA Student mother	Unemployed	Part time job	Full time job
Sara	Italy	Student	Student	Unemployed/ part time job	Part time job/ full time job	Full time job
Nebil	India	Student	Student	Full time job	Full time job	Full time job
Abin	India	Student	Student	PhD student	PhD student	PhD student
Alexandra	India	Student	Student	Student	MA student	MA student
Simone	Italy	Student	Student	PhD student	PhD student	PhD student
Shafi	Italy	Student	Student	Unemployed	Full time job	Full time job
Lauren	Italy	Student worker	Student	Student	MA student worker	MA student worker
Giulia	Italy	Student worker	Working mother	Unemployed	Part time job	Part time job
Sujata	India	Postgraduate Student	Postgraduate Student	PhD student	PhD student/ part time job	PhD student/ part time job
Vania	Italy	Undergraduate Student	Full time job	Full time job/ Unemployed	Full time job	Full time job

A comparison between Indian and Italian students suggest that Indian students are more likely to pursue higher education, whereas Italian students are more likely to enter the job market earlier than their Indian peers in London. The empirical analysis of the outcomes on educational transitions and career paths lead the researcher to distinguish between participants who pursued higher education and those who entered the job market. Between the groups there are some similarities but also some significant differences. These aspects are further explored and discussed in the light of some key-themes emerged during the fieldwork. The following table summarises these key-themes and elucidates the educational transitions and career paths of international students presented in the above life history calendar:

Table 15: Life History Calendar of international students' jobs. A chronological comparison and related emotional/cognitive aspects

Participant	Accounts provided during the 1ˢᵗ interview	Job position in January 2020	Concept(s) emerged
Azeem	Working in the field of historical heritage	Accountability	Resilience, adaptability
Valentina	Working in the academia	Working in cinema industry	Self-empowerment
Simon	Becoming a teacher	Organising flash-mob	Synchronicity, satisfaction
Abu	Becoming an IT engineer	Working as IT engineer	Satisfaction, happiness
Valentina V	Working with people from disadvantaged backgrounds	Completing an MA in Journalism	Self-empowerment, resilience, happiness
Nicole	Becoming a teacher	Working as teacher	Satisfaction
Sara M	Becoming an academic	Working as research fellow	Satisfaction, happiness
Natasha	Becoming an anthropologist	Completing her PhD	Self-empowerment, satisfaction, synchronicity
Annalura	Becoming an editor	Working as web designer	Synchronicity, satisfaction
Margherita	Becoming an architect	Working as personal trainer	Resilience, satisfaction,

			happiness
Alexander	No idea	Working in Media and Communication sector	Happiness, synchronicity
Beatrice	Working in the field of social media	Completing an MA in Economics	Satisfaction, happiness
Radha	Becoming an academic	Working as Research Fellow	Satisfaction, resilience
Francesco (Paolo)	Becoming an IT engineer	Working in the IT sector	Happiness, satisfaction
Paul	No idea	1ST year PhD	Adaptability, satisfaction
Robert	Becoming a mathematician	Working at PWC	Satisfaction, self-empowerment
Lydia	Working in the fashion industry	Stay-at-home mum/MA student	Resilience, adaptability, happiness
Prashant	Becoming a teacher	PhD candidate	Resilience, satisfaction, happiness
Chiara	Travelling as a job	Accountability	Resilience, happiness
Carlotta	Becoming a psychotherapist	Working as psychotherapist	Satisfaction, happiness
Samuele	Becoming an academic	Working as Research Fellow	Satisfaction, happiness
Mariangela	Becoming a journalist	Working as teacher	Resilience, happiness
Sara	Becoming an anthropologist	Working in the IT sector	Adaptability, resilience, synchronicity
Nebil	Becoming an IT engineer	Working as IT engineer	Self-empowerment, happiness
Abin	No idea	1st year PhD in Anthropology	Resilience, satisfaction
Alexandra	Becoming a journalist	Working at BBC	Resilience, satisfaction
Simone	Doing research in the field of economics	PhD candidate	Self-empowerment, satisfaction
Shafi	Becoming a teacher	Travelling around the world	Resilience, happiness
Lauren	Travelling as a job	Working at Booking	Happiness, resilience
Giulia	Working in a bank	Stay-at-home mum	Resilience, adaptability
Sujata	Becoming a teacher	Working as teacher	Self-empowerment, synchronicity
Vania	Becoming a web designer	Accountability	Self-empowerment, happiness

The following word cloud summarises the main key-words emerged during the interviews, when participants were asked about their transitions and career paths.

Figure 6: Word cloud showing the main research outcomes of transitions and career paths provided by international students

Self-empowerment

Adaptability   Resilience

Happiness

Synchronicity   Satisfaction

6.6. Happiness, satisfaction and self-empowerment

Economic and professional reasons are found in both international students who pursuit higher education and those who entered the job market after the graduation. More specifically, some international students entered the job market for a variety of economic reasons, including: the need to be economically independent to boot self-confidence and self-esteem; the need to become completely financially independent in order to do not depend on family for help, to enhance reputation among family members and friends, to move freely and do not be bound to circumstances or be limited by the lack of financial resources. Vania and Nebil for instance, who both entered the job market a few weeks after their graduation ceremony, point out:

*"Happiness comes from independence, and independence comes from being economically independent…My family paid my academic fees, my rent here in London…now it's time to become adult. I want to be completely independent. I don't want to call my mum if I need a new pair of shoes and ask her to send me some money…I did it while I was studying, but it makes me feel so miserable" (*Vania, Italian student, 2*nd* interview).

"They say money is not happiness. I say money can make you happy…don't misunderstand me, I'm not saying I want to become like Bill Gates, I'm just saying that financial freedom is

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important, especially here in London. The city is very expensive, and even if I live confined within my area without using transports I need money to survive…rents are high, food is expensive…I can't call my family to say "sorry, I have nothing to eat, could you send some money please?"…I got a degree here, now it's time to work and start building my life" (Nebil, Indian student, 2nd interview).

In their views, happiness and self-empowerment are strongly connected to financial independence. Thus, getting a job is a natural consequence of their stays in London after their degrees. Contrarily to these views, some students took a break before entering the job market or pursuing further education. For example, Nicole and Alexander experienced a short period of unemployment and then got a part-time job because they needed more time to think about their lives. They were more confused after the end of their studies, they considered the opportunities of staying in London, leaving London, moving to a different place or returning home. Thus, their periods of unemployment were not due to the lack of job opportunities, rather to their need to take some time for themselves.

The comparison between the groups of students who entered the job market after their studies and those who pursued higher education, allowed the researcher to reflect on their understandings of the notions of happiness, satisfaction and self-empowerment. While those who applied for a job position immediately after or even before the end of their studies usually understand happiness, satisfaction and self-empowerment as a consequence of financial independence, those who pursued higher education have a different view. From their perspectives, happiness, satisfaction and self-empowerment are more than just gaining financial freedom: there is a deeper or more ideological, and in some cases even metaphysical feeling in their views. They are likely to be sensitive, critical and to have both an idealistic perception of higher education and a more collective rather than individualistic perspective. Knowledge is usually understood as the highest value, and so universities are seen as romantic or revolutionary spaces, where some ethical and social values still exist and operate. In these students' views, the set of values include: *"truth"," scientific truth"," knowledge", "understanding", "empathy"," care"," critique", "freedom of speech"* and *"cooperation".* Behind their reflections, there is a shared agreement that universities are powerful institutions, and their power is linked to the set of values above listed. Those values can improve the society and the world. To some extent, they recall the idea of 'ecological university' on which Barnett reflects:

> the ecological university has its being and its possible becoming intentionally against the horizon of the categories of the infinite and the universal. The ecological university is without bounds, operationally, epistemologically and ontologically. It lives in an open-ended way with and for the world. It goes on stretching itself in its interactions with the worlds…the ecological is none other than the fullest expression of the idea of the university (Barnett, 2011: 151).

Notably international students who decided to pursue higher education do consider the financial aspect. The majority of them stressed the importance of scholarships and financial help provided by universities and institutions, to the point that both Simone (Italian student) and Paul (Indian student) declared:

> *"getting a scholarship made the difference, otherwise I wouldn't be here. Doing a PhD is time consuming and intellectually demanding so, unless you have some money, it would be impossible…you cannot work while conducting research and living here in London is bloody expensive…so the scholarship allowed me to carry on with my studies"* (Simone, Italian student, 2019).

> *"I think that a self-funded PhD is simply crazy. I mean, it's not impossible, but it's a huge investment… a three-year self-funded PhD sets you back several thousand pounds. I know the UK has been introducing some doctoral loans, but it still extremely challenging I think…Fortunately I got a scholarship, so I can carry on with my research, being focused and do not be worried about financial issues"* (Paul, Indian student, 2019).

Overall, main differences between international students who pursued higher education and those who entered the job market between 2016 and 2019, are found: first, in the ways they understand happiness, satisfaction and self-empowerment; second, in economic backgrounds and access to financial support in the UK. Students from more wealthier family were more likely to consider the opportunity to pursue higher education in the UK, and the availability of scholarships influence their choices. For instance, Valentina did not get a scholarship in the UK and this made the difference for her; as she stated,

> *"Doing an MA in Journalism here in London would have been great, but I didn't get the scholarship. Then, the idea of a student loan for me is just crazy…in the end, before starting to work you have a huge debt. Ridiculous. Then, I could no longer ask for money to my mum…so I decided to go back to Italy"* (Valentina, Italian student, 2017).

Then, some considerations should be made on international students entering the job market and the experiences of international students in the job market. This study shows that the investment in higher education is usually perceived as an important decision to enhance individuals' socioeconomic status. International students of this study in most cases enjoy better job market outcomes, than their peers in Italy and in India who do not pursue higher education in the UK. Participants both from India and Italy employed on a full-time basis in their country of origin confirmed the importance of their UK degree, that helped them to both get a good job and, consequently, to earn more than their peers who studied in their home countries.

Amongst international students who returned home, major differences are found in terms of time to find a job. While Indian students returning to India did not report significant difficulties in getting a good job, a few Italian students experienced some difficulties, suggesting that there could be significant disparities in career performances among students who obtained the same degree in the UK. The research outcomes suggest that career success does not depend exclusively on the quality of higher education and the amount of knowledge and skills acquired at the university in the UK. Some Italian cases show that the socio-political context is significantly important. A few Italian students experienced a short period of unemployment when they returned to Italy, before getting a good job or pursuing further education in Italy. For instance Sujata, an Indian student, got a great job opportunity in a month in India, while Carlotta, an Italian student, got a good job opportunity as a teacher after one year in Italy.

6.7. Working in London: self-empowerment

The majority of participants had at least one job experience during the research period. Some of them had more than one job experience both in London and or in their countries of origin. Particularly those who had the opportunity to work both in London and in their countries of origin, made some comparisons and shared some valuable insights. Some students identified as key motivations to work in London "*an opportunity to escape the reality*" (Sara, Italian student 3rd interview) or a chance to improve themselves. London, according to their views, is understood as a unique place where young people are exposed to cultural, ethnic and social diversity. Thus, there is a widespread belief that the heterogeneity and open-mindedness of London could provide unique opportunities and resources that the homogeneity, the parochialism or restrictedness of their home institutions and businesses could not. In their belief, "unique opportunities" is an holistic concept that includes: better jobs, professional satisfaction, career advancement, well-paid jobs, but also self-improvement and self-empowerment. To some extent, this is true, London can provide great opportunities that perhaps they would not have experienced at home, especially in rural or less advanced areas. However, this is only one part of the story. While some students leave home believing that studying and working in London will only improve the quality of their lives, the lived-experience in London often produce results that strongly differ from their imaginaries.

Interaction and relations with colleagues from different countries and strong competition were identified as major issues in their job experiences in London. Some participants noted that there can be a variety of reasons that prevent or make it difficult positive relationships from forming at work, but cultural and individual attitudes seem to be the main ones. For instance Valentina, an Italian student, stressed this point in several occasions:

> "*Italians are different, there's nothing to do. I am always active, I usually talk to people…interaction is important for me…my colleagues from the UK or China look so cold…they*

may ask you sometimes "how are you?" but in reality they do not really care how you really feel, you must say "fine thanks" and that's all...once my English colleague told me that I talk too much...they are always focused, they can say two words in three hours, and this is absurd for me...sometimes I no longer ask them how they are because it seems to me I annoy them" (Valentina, Italian student, 2nd interview).

Valentina's reflection includes the main aspects shared by other participants in relation to the issues experienced at work in London. Valentina felt that it was easier for her to speak to people from her country of origin and, more generally, to communicate with young people who shared the same difficulties and experiences. Remarkably she does not recognize as 'peers' British and English-speaker colleagues: she sees them as people living in their comfort zone, who do not want to interact with her and make her feel out of place. Thus, main dissimilarities were found in terms of individual attitudes and cultural understandings of human and professional relations.

Additionally, the sense of competition at work was identified by some participants as stressful. Some students found the degree of competition even shocking, and could not understand the reasons why they were constantly forced *"to be the best"* (Carlotta, Italian student, 3rd interview) and to be capable of selling themselves to get a job or career advancement. This aspect was initially perceived as challenging and sometimes negative or dishonest by some students, particularly by the most insecure ones. For instance, Alexander was shocked after his first job interview in London:

"It was horrible, the recruiter told me that it doesn't really matter how skilful or good I am...if I cannot sell myself to others I can go nowhere" (Alexander, Indian student, 2nd interview).

However, conducting repeated interviews with the same participants allowed both the researcher and the participants to make more sense to these experiences. It gives the time to reflect and elaborate what happened and why it happened. Most students came to the conclusion that it is a matter of experience and awareness: sometimes the actions, the attitudes and beliefs of people surrounding us may appear illogical and incomprehensible. This can happen not because we are incapable to understand, rather because we cannot see over the horizons that limit our view, and so we make sense to what happen to us on the basis of what we already know. In other words, we analyse new experiences through old lenses. This is what many participants experienced while working in London. A retrospective look to those professional experiences, gave the participants the opportunity to reflect on the usefulness of those experiences both in terms of individual growth and cultural understanding.

6.8. Resilience and adaptability

As the table on the main key-themes of international students' experiences shows, nearly half of them identify 'resilience' and or 'adaptability' as two important factors or abilities that can improve their transnational experiences. In students' views, these abilities are similar but they are not exactly alike. They are both concerned with the ability to cope with change and uncertainty. However, resilience can be defined as positive adaptation or a "*way of living*" as Sara suggested, while adaptability is simply temporary adaptation. International students' experiences in this study include unpredictable changes and events that forced students to be adaptable or to develop a sense of resilience.

For example, Sara, an Italian student who wanted to become an anthropologist, ended up by working in a completely different field. She studied Anthropology in London but, before the conclusion of the research, she got a job in the IT sector in London. At the beginning she was not satisfied: she felt miserable and depressed at work. But after a while she was pleased to be working there. So in that case, being an anthropologist was her ambition or aspiration, while working in the IT sector was the only decent job she got. According to her view, initially that job gave her the opportunity to improve her adaptability; then, after a few months, that job became, to say it with her own words, "*the best job I found: permanent contract, flexible hours, amazing colleagues..it is not the job of my life, but at the moment it is a good temporary solution*". Thus, an 'unwanted job' became an opportunity to develop both adaptive skills and resilience.

Similarly Lydia, an Indian student who aimed at working in the fashion industry, got pregnant immediately after the completion of her studies in London. At the beginning she experienced tension: on the one hand she was happy of becoming a mother; on the other hand, she perceived that change as scary and untimely because she had already applied for a Master's Degree in London. But unexpectedly her mother decided to move to London to help her. So Lydia eventually gave birth to her child and started her Master's Degree one year later. As she said during the last interview:

> "*My life went to a totally different direction…being away from home, being pregnant, having no job and ready to start a Master's Degree…I was scared…but thanks to my mum's help I was able to manage almost everything…I started my Master one year later, and meanwhile I became a mum...Resilience is definitely the key*" (Lydia, Indian student, 3rd interview).

Sara and Lydia identified resilience as a strategy to manage the unexpected changes occurred during their transnational experiences. Initially they both experienced a deep feeling of fear or anxiety, but they ended up by building a strong sense of resilience, that allowed them both to adapt well over time to their life-changing stressful situations, and to find the positive aspects of their situations.

Sara and Lydia were not the only ones who had to deal with uncertainty and radical changes in this study. A temporal analysis of the outcomes of the research, suggest that less than 50 % of the students after five years from the first interview, were doing the job they intended to do. The rest of the students changed their minds, trajectories and career. Overall, over thirty two students, eighteen made some significant changes in their lives. With a few exceptions, these changes were mainly professional and educational. Another example is the story of Abin, an Indian student who left London after his graduation, with clear ideas about his future. He did not want to pursue higher education, but he ended up by getting a PhD position in India: initially he was scared for many reasons, including insecurity, the idea of being incapable of doing it and the sense of responsibility. Before the conclusion of this research, he reflected on the importance of resilience:

> *"this PhD is a learning process for me…it is not easy, you know you need to build a strong sense of resilience to be able to deal with everything…highly demanding people, huge amount of stress, many things to do, publications, conferences…but if you are enough resilient and flexible you can deal with everything"* (Abin, Indian student, 2019).

Abin's change was also a matter of synchronicity: when he was asked to apply for a PhD he was in right place at the right time. This happened to other international students, who made some important changes thanks to synchronicity and resilience. The following section discusses the notion of synchronicity in international students' lived experiences.

6.9. Synchronicity: the importance of being networked

A crucial aspect emerged during the research on the experiences of international students in the job market and higher education is the importance of network connections. As Boutang reflecting on the current phase of capitalism reminds us,

> In cognitive capitalism, in order to be a producer of wealth, living labour must have access to machines (hardware), to software, to networks and conditions of deployment of its networking activity (environmental conditions in particular). Freedom of access supplants the concept of exclusive ownership. Here the production means accessing at the same time, and together, information and knowledge in order to produce other knowledge (Boutang, 2011: 118).

In line with his reasoning, research findings confirm not only the importance, but also the central role played by networks in students' experiences:

"here in London if you are not connected you are lost…the digital world is bigger than the world we see I think" (Abu, Indian student, 3rd interview).

"there's no way to survive here, there's no life outside the digital world. Everything you have to do, you should do it online; applying for a job, applying for university, bureaucracy, see what is happening in the world" (Sara, Italian student, 2nd interview).

"In London it's impossible to get a job without internet. And not only that…it's good because its fast, efficient, you don't need to travel for bureaucracy or whatever…but sometimes I'm a bit scared…sometimes I miss to see people faces, you know, human contact" (Margherita, Italian student, 1st interview).

In students' experiences network connections are extremely important for building their career and access information about higher education and job market. This study shows that all the international students who got a job in London, sent an online application before being contacted for a job interview, and in most cases job interviews were online. Thus, in their views, entering the job market and in some cases pursuing higher education, is first of all a matter of digital synchronicity rather that knowing personally people who could help them. As Shafi brilliantly summarises:

"I got a great job…and I'm really happy now. But still remember the huge amount of time spent in front of my laptop sending applications everywhere…and this is what most people do here in London…then statistically, if you send one hundred applications, then at least one recruiter should be back to you" (Shafi, Indian student, 2019).

In this sense, this qualitative study allowed the researcher to collect many representative stories. For example, Simone, an Italian student, applied for PhD position thanks to a friend who shared the link of the application on Facebook. Then, Annalaura, an Italian student who got a job in an important global company, applied thanks to a virtual friend who shared the application for that job on Facebook. Finally Prashant, an Indian student, who got a job at the university in Delhi while he was still in London, because he sent an online application. This is not to say that accessing higher education or getting a good job is just a matter of networks; indeed, knowledge and skills are extremely important. Nevertheless, it is the combination of network connections and knowledge and skills, that can open up to a variety of opportunities and in some cases can open many unlocked doors.

The study suggests that network connections and digital knowledge are not only the keys to get access to employment, but also an integral part of participants' employment in itself. By the end of the research, 90% of the participants were employed in higher education, journalism industry, financial, business and IT sectors mainly in the UK and in their countries of origin. Thus, they are constantly immersed in the digital

world. Notably digital skills are increasingly required in all types of jobs, to the point that 93% of European workplaces use desktop computers, 94% use broadband technology to access the internet, and 75% use portable computers and other portable devices (European Commission, 2018). However, in most cases, participants' works are mainly and in some cases exclusively digital. And this leads us to confirm the prophetic view of Urry's mobilities paradigm:

> New systems have to find their place physically, socially, economically and discursively within a fitness landscape in which there are already physical structures, social practises and economic entities that overcome distance and structure mobility in sedimented or locked in forms. Some of these sedimented systems are organized over very large spatial scales; their spatial fixing will be national or international . systems are organized through time and this entails a path-dependency or lock-in of such systems (Urry, 2007: 52).

However, many questions about the future still remain. As the notions of time and space are constantly changing in unexpected and unpredictable ways, what are the possible scenarios we might face in a few decades? Urry does not exclude the hypothesis of a global future "poised between an Orwellian or a Hobbesian" perspective (Urry, 2007: 290), while Boutang reflects on a more critical economy of hope and suggests that new generations should be strong and creative:

> In an economy that produces the living by means of the living and manages the population, in a society that produces new knowledge through knowledge and where the capture of positive externalities is the basis of the capitalist surplus, we need to: find different ways of thinking; establish new categories; rethink wealth and value; and alter distribution and taxation on the basis of this radical transformation of the foundations of wealth (Boutang, 2011: 184).

Thus, our questions about the future cannot be answered in current times.

Summary

This chapter focuses on international students' transitions and career paths. It starts by discussing the geographical transitions of students and its determinants. Then, it considers both professional and educational transitions and their implications. It includes some reflections on the impacts of Brexit in international students trajectories. Analyses expectedly suggest that Brexit did not impact Indian students and, overall, it was not identified as the main reason for leaving the UK. However, a closer look at Italian students' experiences shows that by the end of the research, about 75% of Italian students were no longer in the UK. The analysis shows that Brexit in a few cases affected Italian students' willingness to stay in the UK, and in most cases it increased their anxiety and feeling of uncertainty. At the individual level, one of the main drivers were feelings about the future rather than the present time.

Overall, by the end of the research about 30% of the students were still in London, while the rest of the students were back to their countries of origin or elsewhere. The interviews confirm that international students' geographical mobility is mainly linked to academic and professional motivations. The comparison between the two groups shows that Indian students are more likely to pursue higher education, while Italian students are more likely to enter the job market earlier that their Indian peers. Beyond this evidence, there are different reasons. The main ones are: the need to be financially independent to boot self-esteem, the desire to be completely independent from the family of origins, the will to take decisions and to perform actions without being limited by financial insecurity.

However, higher education and professional career are not the only drivers of international students' transitions. This research shows that there can be other reasons beyond students' transitions, such as loneliness, homesickness, fatigue, partner's career and family. Like previous analyses on decision-making (Chapter 4) and experiences in London (Chapter 5) suggest, the analysis of students' transitions confirms the importance of some less visible variables. The analyses discussed in this chapter show that these variables (synchronicity, resilience, adaptability, happiness, satisfaction, self-empowerment) can operate in unpredictable ways and can produce unexpected consequences. Changes at all levels can be not gradual; indeed, they can occur dramatically, in a kind of rush. Changes can shape international student mobility, but also the ways international students deal with them, can influence their mobile experiences. In line with Urry's view on the meaning of 'being mobile', mobility in current times is "to very varying degrees constituted through circulating entities…that bring about relationality within and between societies at multiple and varied distances" (Urry, 2007: 46). These words capture the real essence of the analyses on transitions presented in this chapter.

Finally, from a sociological perspective, it is argued that a combination of the notion of 'cognitive capitalism' suggested by Boutang, and Urry's mobilities paradigm, can be a useful theoretical framework to deeply discuss international students' transitions and career paths. Boutang focuses on networking activities and knowledge, and defines them as key players in the current phase of capitalism. Meanwhile, Urry sees information, communication and new kinds of software as powerful tools that "transform networks and social life through transforming the background within which human movement takes place, through new mundane virtual objects that remodel the technological unconscious" (Urry, 2007: 163). This study confirms that these factors play a central role in international students' transitions and paths, too.

7. Conclusions

This chapter summarises the main key findings. It starts by providing some methodological and theoretical reflections, and then it focuses on the main key themes, namely: international students' background and decision-making, international students' experiences and international students' career paths.

Methodological Reflections

The aim of this qualitative research was to explore the following research questions in order to contribute to the increasing debate on international student mobility in the UK in current times:

1. What are the motives of EU and non-EU international students to study in London?
2. What is the role of social background in shaping the decision of EU and non-EU international students to study in London?
3. How do migration trajectories shape the expectations of EU and non-EU international students studying in London during my research period 2015-2020?
4. What is the career path of EU and non-EU international students seeking a degree from universities in London during my research period 2015 to 2020?

In seeking to address these questions, a qualitative methodology was considered the most appropriate one. This qualitative study is based on repeated interviews and includes two groups of international students studying at the university in London: one from a EU country, Italy, and one from a non-EU country, India. The research is based on the assumption that in qualitative research the systematic and uncritical adoption of fixed techniques can be counterproductive if used prescriptively (Saldana, 2003). In this sense, the lack of available qualitative studies that focus on students' lives in the field of international student mobility, generated both epistemological and methodological questions. In order to provide a more holistic understanding of the phenomenon under investigation, phenomenology was selected as a suitable approach for the purposes of this study.

Phenomenologists have often emphasized the importance of the so called "life-world" (Husserl, 1970; Schutz, 1962), that includes the dimensions and the aspects that are usually taken for granted. Following Husserl, Schutz (1962) identifies human beings as the primary object of sociological research. This does not mean that sociological research should have no interest in agencies, power relations, power structures, political and economic dimensions. Indeed, their importance is unquestionable, but we should not forget that, in their essence, these dimensions and aspects are all made of individual experiences, actions,

understandings and interpretations (Schutz, 1962: 34). For these reasons, international students are both the starting point and the heart of this research, and their experiences are the roots and the structure of the work.

Conducting a qualitative phenomenological study allowed the researcher to capture, explore and analyse the human dimensions of international students (i.e. variables, dynamics, changes, understandings and events occurred in their lives), that other types of research would not have accessed. The analysis of their experiences suggests that international student mobility should be understood not only in relations to economic- or professional gains, skills acquisition or career advancements, but also, and more crucially, in relation to a variety of less pragmatic variables, that have much more to do with subjectivities, individual backgrounds and understandings of the reality we experience. This study identifies and explores some of these variables that are often neglected in existing literature, namely: satisfaction, happiness, self-empowerment, self-esteem, resilience, adaptability, self-knowledge, ambition, aspiration, imaginaries and sense of freedom.

Theoretical Reflections

The research outcomes lead the researcher to interrogate multiple theoretical frameworks. For this reason, three main theoretical frameworks were selected: Urry's mobilities paradigm (Urry, 2007), some Foucauldian insights and Boutang's notion of cognitive capitalism (Boutang, 2011). Each framework was adopted to explore, to analyse and to interpret the key topics of this study: international students' background and decision-making; international students' experiences in London; international students' transitions and career paths.

Urry's mobilities paradigm provides a rich theoretical space to contextualise the mobilities of international students, including: networks, information, technology, institutions, time, spaces and places and their implications for the society. The notion of knowledge, as it is understood in Foucauldian theories, illuminates the meaning of knowledge in depth by including the notion of power. It allowed the research to investigate these concepts in relation to international students' experiences and, more crucially, from international students' perspectives. Boutang's notion of cognitive capitalism reinforces Urry's view of networks and illuminates some aspects of the career paths and transitions of international students.

Analysis and Outcomes

The analysis of this research focuses on three main topics, namely: international students' backgrounds and decision-making, international students' experiences, and international students' transitions and career paths. This research is predominately based on Urry's mobilities paradigm, that argues that mobilities in current times are made of a variety of concrete objects (transports, digital tools, media, spaces…) and systems (governments, institutions, enterprises, policy …) "that serve to augment the otherwise rather puny powers of individual human subjects" (Urry, 2007: 45). So, according to his view, student mobility can be seen as a combination of objects, systems and subjective aspects. As a result, the analysis of every topic includes both some more concrete aspects and variables, and some less visible ones. The analysis of international students' backgrounds and decision-making includes as major themes: UK policy, family, knowledge, network capital, but also ambition, aspiration, desire, sense of freedom and imaginaries. Then, the analysis of international students' experiences identifies as major themes: knowledge, UK higher education, London, job and volunteering experiences, financial aspects, but also self-knowledge, resilience, confidence, satisfaction and self-esteem. Finally, the analysis of international students' transitions and career paths includes as major themes: Brexit, educational and professional transitions, synchronicity, but also happiness, self-empowerment, adaptability and resilience.

Overall, the outcomes of this research suggest that the power of international students is augmented by different 'objects' or concrete aspects, such as: family of origin, financial support, the opportunity to travel and study in the UK, national and international policies, access to higher education and digital tools. However, mobile experiences cannot be understood and contextualized only through these 'objects'. There are also some subjective and invisible forces that operate and shape international student mobility. Individuals' backgrounds, understandings, perceptions, feelings, desires and the ways they deal with reality and its issues, play a key role in mobile experiences. In this sense, the comparative analyses of two different groups of international students reinforce these aspects. As the outcomes show, it is undoubtedly that cultural backgrounds, socio-economic status and policies influence international students mobility. Nevertheless, this study suggests that it is misleading focusing exclusively or predominately on these aspects. Beyond them, there is a variety of less visible variables that operate unpredictably. Both Indian and Italian students share similar beliefs, attitudes, opinions and issues during their mobile experiences. The exploration of these variables allowed the researcher to consider that there can be more similitarities than differences, even if the groups of international students are different. For these reasons, the study argues that human values, abilities and strategies can overcome nationality and cultural background.

International students' backgrounds and decision-making

This is the first of three themes of this study; the research findings are reported in chapter 4. The analysis of the economic and socio-political context for growing international student mobility in the UK, allowed the researcher to identify and explore some key themes, namely: UK policy, international students' family, knowledge acquisition, network capital and some less visible variables, that are ambition, aspiration, desire and imaginaries. These were found to be the main variables that influenced international students' decision-making in this study and were contextualized and analyzed through the lenses of Urry's mobilities paradigm. The comparison between the two groups suggest that the UK policy have different impacts on Indian students, who resulted to be in a more disadvantaged position compared to their Italian peers. However, while this research was conducted there was the unexpected withdrawal of the UK from the European Union and by the time this research was completed, there were still unanswered questions surrounding both Brexit and its impact on European students studying in the UK. Thus, Brexit did not impact European students' decisions to study in the UK: they were already there when it happened; indeed it impacted their transitions. Overall, apart from political aspects, there are not significant differences between Indian and Italian students' migration decisions. Some minor differences are found in their family backgrounds. The intersecting implications of knowledge, network capital and subjectivities are the foundation of international students' experiences in this study.

International students' experiences in London

This is the second theme; the research findings are reported in chapter 5. Chapter 5 focuses on international students' experiences in London. Here four main key words were identified for the purpose of analysis: knowledge, power, institutions and subjectivity. The emergence of these concepts as key themes of international students' experiences, lead the researcher to include a Foucauldian perspective. These concepts were then analyzed through the lenses of Urry's mobilities paradigm combined with some Foucauldian insights, and lead the researcher to deeply explore these themes. Accordingly, a retrospective analysis of these themes in the light of the outcomes, allowed the researcher to identify the what there is or there are beyond these themes and their meanings: beyond the notion of knowledge there can be other less visible variables, namely confidence, self-esteem and satisfaction; beyond their experiences in London there is a strong combination of resilience and self-knowledge. Then, at the heart of both their economic and professional dimensions there is a powerful combination of resilience, confidence and satisfaction. The analysis suggests that the combination of a sociological perspective and a more philosophical one has a great potential in researching international students' lives.

International students' transitions and career paths

This theme is the last one and the analyses include geographical transitions, educational transitions and career paths. The research findings are reported in chapter 6. The findings lead the researcher to analyse the outcomes through the lenses of Urry's mobilities paradigm, together with Boutang's notion of cognitive capitalism. In this study cognitive capitalism is understood as the current historical economic phase we are experiencing, that is based on the creation, spread, accumulation and dissemination of knowledge. These paradigms allowed the researcher to explore participants' transitions and career paths: international students are both mobile and knowledge driven. While Urry's mobilities paradigm is helpful for the analysis of their transitions, Boutang's cognitive capitalism can illuminate from a more critical perspectives the relationship(s) between knowledge and mobility. The comparative analysis of international students' transitions and career paths both from a simultaneous perspective and from a retrospective one, allowed the researcher to identify some key-aspects, namely: happiness, satisfaction, self-empowerment, resilience and synchronicity. Remarkably, these key-themes are the results or the outcomes of their experiences as international students and their ability to overcome the challenges experienced during the research period.

Venues for further research

This research has identified several topics which would benefit from further research. First, there is lack of both quantitative and qualitative studies in the field of international student mobility. In particular, comparative studies on international students' transitions and career paths would be beneficial. Second, Brexit left us with a variety of unanswered questions regarding its impact on EU students studying in the UK. Third, the proliferation of digital research and creative research methods in recent years (Giorgi *et al,* 2021; Marres, 2017) appears to challenge the legitimacy of the social sciences to research and interpret social phenomenon. In this sense, the fields of education and mobility, are fields that have a great potential in terms of new knowledge production, theory development, ontology creation for new understandings and research advancement. So further research, both quantitative and qualitative on this topic would be needed and beneficial. Additionally, there is a need to gain a deeper understanding of international student mobility, because it is a complex and heterogeneous phenomenon which is facing rapid and unprecedented changes.

In this sense, Beech suggests that bringing together literature on student mobility, geography of education and pedagogy can be a possible route (Beech, 2019: 241). In line with her view, this research suggests that the study of international student mobility is necessarily interdisciplinary. This research shows that Urry's mobilities paradigm can be a valuable theoretical framework, as it provides a wholesale revision of the ways in which social phenomena have usually been understood. It is an holistic framework that includes both objects and subjects, because "we have never been simply human, let alone purely social. Human life…is never just human" (Urry 2007: 45). But, at the same time, it is the human aspect that gives meaning

to objects. International student mobility is a social phenomenon, but like all social phenomena, it is the result of individual actions, understandings, beliefs and interpretations of some objects (or systems). For this reason, this research suggests that it is precisely from the understanding of individuals that we could start. For these reasons, further qualitative and comparative research that investigates or critically interrogates the subjective aspects beyond student mobility, could be beneficial. This comparative research shows that international students from two completely different countries potentially share more similarities than differences during their mobile experiences. However, this study cannot be considered representative and many questions remain unanswered. I believe that if researchers in social sciences, pedagogy, geography and psychology cooperate with each other under the banner of international student mobility, there could be significant advancements in this field.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Interview Schedule: 1st interview

Section 1: General Questions
Name
Sex
Age
Country of origin
University/College Department
Degree
Contact details
How many years in London

Section 2: About Yourself
1. Could you tell me a little bit about yourself?
 • Where do you come from?
• Where do you live in London?
• What are your interests?
2. Could you tell me a little bit about your family?
• Parent's profession
• Parent's education and background
• Siblings and their situation
3. Could you tell me a little bit about your country of origin?

Section 3: Decision to Migrate
1. Why did you decide to study abroad and when did you take this decision?
2. Why did you choose to come to the UK?
• Did anybody suggest you to move to the UK?
• Did anybody help you to move to the UK? (Perhaps a relative or a friend who was already in London or had lived in London in the past...)
3. Why did you choose London?
4. Did you visit London or the UK before you decide to study here?
5. Now that you are here, what do you think about the UK and the experience of living in the London?
6. Do you have any regrets moving to the UK or London?
7. Overall, how would you describe you migration experience in relation to your personal development?
8. Looking back what was the most and the least memorable aspect of your migration experience?

Section 4: Current Education
1. Could you tell me a little bit about your academic life?
• Background education (did you study in your homeland before moving to London? Or elsewhere in the world?)
• What are you studying?
• Why did you decide to study this subject?

- Was this your first choice?
- Why did you choose this university?
- Do you like this university?

2. Could you please name three advantages of studying in the UK?

3. Could you please name three disadvantages of studying in the UK?

4. Generally speaking, what do you think about UK universities?

- Is that different from how you have studied in your home country?
- What kind of differences did you find?
- If this is the case, do these differences affect you and your education?

Section 5: Work Experience

1. Do you have any work experience in your home country?

- If this is the case, please provide details

2. Are you allowed to work in the UK?

3. Have you ever been in paid or voluntary work in the UK?

- If so, could you tell me a little bit about your work experience? (Workplace, job position, wages, hours, work conditions...)

Section 6: Life in London

1. Could you tell me a little bit about your life as an international student in London?

2. Perceptions of London:

- What do you think about London?
- Could you tell me a little bit about some of the positive and - or negative aspects of this city?

3. What are the greatest challenge(s) you experienced in London?

- Did you feel lonely and-or homesick at any stage?

4. How did you imagine London before moving?

- Is London exactly what you imagined? If not, could you explain why?

5. Overall would you describe you experience as an International student in the UK as positive or negative? Please explain why.

Section 7: Plans for the Future

1. Could you tell me a little bit about your plans for the future (long-term, short-term or both)?

2. Are you planning to go back to your country, to stay in the UK or to move to a different country, once you complete your studies?

- Please explain why

3. What are you ambitions?

- Do you think that a UK qualification could help you in this sense?
- If this is the case, please explain why.

Appendix 2

Interview Schedule: 2nd interview

Section 1: About yourself

1. Could you please tell me a little bit about yourself now?

- Have there been any changes since the last time we met?
- Do you live in London at the moment?
- If not, where do you live now?
- Why did you move to a different place/country?

2. After a period in London, how do you perceive now your country of origin?

- Have you ever felt lonely and-or homesick?
- What do (did) you miss most in London?

3. Could you tell me a little bit about your family?

- Are you in contact with them?
- What do they think about your decision to study and live abroad?

Section 2: Migration experience

1. Looking back at your migration experience, what are your perceptions and feelings right now?

2. Could you please tell me what you think, generally speaking, about London now? (Or what you think about London compared to your new place)?

- Could you please tell me a little bit about the positive and negative aspects of the city?

3. What are the most important lessons, if any, you have learned in your experience in London?

- Can you remember when and/or how you learned them?

4. Could you please name three advantages of studying and living in the UK?

5. Could you please name three disadvantages of studying and living in the UK?

6. Would you recommend living in London at the moment?

- Why or why not?

7. Looking back, what was the most the least memorable aspect of your migration experience?

Section 3: UK universities and students', experiences and perceptions

1. Are you studying at the moment?

- If so, what are you studying?
- Where?
- Why?
- Why did you choose to study there?

2. Overall, how would you describe your academic experience in the UK in relation to your personal development?

3. How would you describe your academic experience in the UK in relation to your professional development?

4. Generally speaking, what would you say about your university in the UK?

- (*if the student is studying in a different university*) Did you notice any difference or similarity between your previous university and the current one?

5. Focusing on your UK University, what are its main features, both positive and negative, from your point of view?

- (if the student reflects on weaknesses or negative aspects in relation to his-her experience in a UK university) Do you think that this/these issue(s) could be improved in some ways?
- What could be done, from your point of view?

6. Would you recommend studying in the UK?

- What are the main reasons why you would or would not recommend studying in the UK?

7. Overall, would you recommend studying abroad?

• Do you think it may impact your life in some ways?

Section 4: Work/professional experience, career, opportunities and perceptions

1. Are you working now?

• If so, could you please provide details? (workplace, job position, wages, hours, work conditions)

• Was it easy for you to get the job?

• Is that your job related to what you studied or are studying?

2. Overall, are you satisfied or happy with your job?

• Why or why not?

• If you are not satisfied, are you considering applying for a new job?

• If this is the case, could you please provide details about it?

3. From your point of you, what do you think about la relationship between London and job opportunities?

• Do you feel that in London there are more opportunities for young people?

• Explain why.

4. Have you ever worked while studying in London?

• If this is the case, was it easy for you to get a job?

• What kind of job did you get?

• How would you describe that experience?

Section 5: Plans for the future

1. What about your plans for the future?

• Do you have any long-term plans?

• If yes, what are your plans?

• Do you have any short-term plans?

• If yes, what are your plans?

2. Are you planning to go back to your country one day?

• If this is the case, please explain why.

3. Are you planning to stay in the UK (or anywhere you are) or perhaps to move to a different country?

• If this is the case, please explain why.

4. Do you have any dream or ambition in your mind?

• Do you think that a UK qualification could help you or has helped you in this sense?

• If this is the case, please explain why.

Appendix 3

Interview Schedule: 3rd interview

Section 1: life changes

1. Could you tell me a bit about your life since the last time we met?

2. Where do you live now?

If the participant is no longer in London:

• When did you leave?

• Why did you leave?

• Were you happy to leave?

• Why and/or why not?

- Are you happy now?
- What are your feelings about London now?
- Would you go back?
- Why and/or why not?
- Thinking about London now, could please identify three things you miss and three things you do not miss at all, if any?

If the participant is still in London:
- Could you please tell me a bit about your life in London now?
- Where do you live now?
- Do you live alone?
- Overall, are you satisfied of your life in London? Why and/or why not?
- Would you move to a different place?
- If so, where would you move and why?

3. What are the main events and/or changes occurred in your life since the last time we met?
- What about your family and/or partner, if any?
- Have there been any changes in this field, since the last time we met?
- Do you think that your experience abroad has impacted your family and/or social relations?
- If so, why?

Section 2: professional experiences
1. Are you working at the moment?
If the answer is "no":
- what are you doing in this period of your life?
- Are you happy?
- Why or why not?
- Could you please identify at least three positive aspects of this period of your life?
- Could you please identify at least three negative aspects of this period of your life?
- Are you searching for a job?
- If so, which kind of job are you searching for?
- Could you please tell me a bit about your previous job experience, if any?
- Do you have any goals/ambitions/desires in your mind at the moment?

If the answer is "yes":
- Could you please tell me a bit about your job?
- Are you happy with your job?
- Why or why not?
- Is it in line with your expectations?
- In which country are you working?
- What are the main features of your job?
- Which type of contract do/did you have?
- Could you please identify at least three positive aspects of your job?
- Could you please identify at least three negative aspects of your job?

- Was your UK degree helpful?
- Overall, do you feel satisfied?
- Why or why not?
- Do you have any goals/ambitions/desires in your mind at the moment?

If the participant is still studying:

- What are you studying?
- Where are you studying?
- In which university are you studying?
- Could you tell me a bit about your academic life?
- Do you like the academic environment?
- Could you please identify at least three positive aspect of your academic experience?
- Could you please identify at least three negative aspects of your academic experience?
- What are the main changes, if any, compared to your previous academic experience in the UK?
- What are the main reasons that influenced your choice?
- Are you working while studying in this period?
- If yes, could you tell me a bit about your job?

Section 3: migration experience

1. Looking back at your migration experience in London, how would you evaluate it now?

- What are your feelings and perceptions now?
- Would you recommend it to other people?
- Why and/or why not?
- Do you think that this experience impacted your life?
- If so, in which ways?
- Do you think that an experience abroad can improve students' lives?
- Why and/or why not?

2. How would you describe your academic experience in London in relation to your professional development?

- Do you think that studying in a UK university can impact your professional life?
- Why and/or why not?

Section 4: Brexit

1. Thinking about Brexit, what is your opinion?

- Do you think it could impact international students?
- And UK universities?
- Do you feel it could impact your life in some ways?
- Do you think it might influence your career of plans for the future?

Section 5: plans for the future

1. Could you tell me a bit about your future?

- Do you have any plans for the future?
- Do you have any goals/dreams/ambitions in your mind?

2. Overall, has your experience in the UK influenced your present and future plans?

- If so, why? Or in what measure?

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