

Special issue: *Belonging and home-making in the internationalised campus*

Research article

Defying grand narratives of 'being an international student': finding 'home' in the Other

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Abstract

The PhD students in this study create a sense of being at home as part of their own way of being themselves. Their programme requires and allows considerable autonomy in how they choose to be with the people around them. Different to common expectations of the 'international student', their nationality and its 'culture' being apart from the 'culture' they find is not the major factor. Instead they draw resources from their personal cultural trajectories within which their lives in Britain form another stage in a lifelong journey of identity construction. They do not 'assimilate' in the expected sense. Their friends are not mainly 'British'. Their brought multilingualism is characteristic of a natural hybridity that prepares them to be different selves in diverse social locations and with people of

diverse origin on and off campus through an ongoing negotiation process of small culture formation on the go.

Keywords international HE; international versus local students; interculturality; neoliberalism; discourse

Introduction

In this article, we focus on the experience of a small number of PhD students, sponsored by the Algerian government, as they go about learning to be themselves in their everyday lives in Britain. We explore how these students construct a sense of home by navigating leisure and friendship groups during the very individualised and often isolating nature of PhD study away from their 'home country'.

We revisit the data from a larger study carried out by one of the authors (Sadoudi, 2022). By means of a range of ethnographic interview and observational data, Sadoudi (2022) explored the students' experience of and attitudes towards 'travelling to the West'. While these data were not collected with the specific topic of home-making in mind, we feel that aspects of it that we present here demonstrate that students were indeed learning how to be 'at home' – and quite differently to the common essentialist expectation that to be at home in Britain requires integration into British culture and university life in a narrowly conformist manner. In contrast, students find diverse ways of being at home that allow them to build on and extend their existing personal cultural trajectories – in what has been termed 'hybrid integration'. This article also brings further theoretical perspective to this understanding. How the themes are developed from those of the larger study is explained below.

In her study, Sadoudi (2022) selected 13 PhD students on the basis of all having recently been through the Algerian educational system and visiting Britain, and in some cases travelling abroad, for the first time. They were aged between 25 and 28 years and had been enrolled on the programme for about one to three years, having undertaken a six-month British university PhD preparation programme. Having spent at least one year in Britain was another criterion for selection, so that the selected students had passed the initial stages of settling in. The data presented in our article concern only seven of the students, but are informed by the context of all the data in the wider study.

While the broader focus of this special issue is finding home on the university campus, in this article we explore how these PhD students navigate this sense of home when their contact with the campus is less intense and perhaps more isolated than students on taught courses. British PhD programmes commonly do not require coursework. Students are expected to make personal decisions about meeting with supervisors, attending seminars, using campus facilities and so on. As mature students, they also tend to live in diverse forms of private accommodation, where they need to manage domestic sharing and relations with accommodation owners. Therefore, we foreground how they engage in intercultural and multilingual practices that we feel relate to building the concept of home in the broader sense of 'a fulcrum around which our most important mental and material activities reside' (Bahun and Petrić, 2018: 1).

Methodology and theoretical orientation

Sadoudi's sense making of the research diary descriptions and interviews, resulting from spending time with each of the students, was informed by her own life experience and way of being as a PhD student, sometimes similar, but not identical, to the participants. This helped her to understand their accounts, where she needed to go to with them to understand their lives, and, as brought into focus by the topic of this article, find resonances with her own 'home' forming off and on the campus. Her reflexivity is sharpened by her developing awareness, through interaction with each of the students, of the intersection between sometimes conflicting identity positions. She has to bear the imposition on her of the Othering, commodifying and marginalising labels of 'non-native English speaker' and 'international' student (Collins, 2018; Holliday, 2015), while celebrating her roles as a woman, a researcher and a citizen of the world. There are resonances here with 'walk-along ethnography', where researchers 'investigate

their embedded and embodied experiences as they engage critically, emotionally and reflectively with unexpected intercultural spaces' and 'the significance of places, objects and emotions' (Badwan and Hall, 2020: 225).

Sadoudi's interconnectedness within the study is thus underpinned by a postmodern ethnographic approach that acknowledges the implicatedness of researchers in the intersubjective nature of the research event (Clifford, 1986; Holliday and MacDonald, 2020) and the colonising falsity of the positivist image of the rational, individualist researcher as separate from an irrational relational subject (Quijano, 2007). Openness to the possibility of the students finding home, which draws threads with the realities they bring with them, is informed by a critical cosmopolitan and postcolonial imperative to sidestep the dominant 'us'–'them' Orientalist grand narrative that tries falsely to represent students from outside the West as culturally deficient, with nothing to contribute from their brought cultural experience (Delanty, 2006; Said, 1978).

We therefore challenge the assumption that the greatest intercultural difficulties are an opposition between 'cultures' that those labelled as international students bring and encounter. The biggest inhibition is instead essentialist *blocks* in the form of brought and found 'us'–'them', essentialist and, in effect, racist grand and personal narratives that create false notions of difference. Holliday (2022a) notes that his own culture shock during his sojourn in Iran was not due to cultural incompatibility, but to the Orientalism (Said, 1978) brought from his upbringing, which falsely characterised the found culture to be collectivist and indolent. Elsewhere, Sadoudi (2022) notes that a major block against the Algerian students finding threads with their new experience in Britain was the same Orientalism, learnt in colonialist aspects of their education, which falsely characterised their brought culture as deficient. This Orientalism is also supported by the neoliberal university, which needs to position the students as 'culturally deficient' to be able to claim its 'value-added' contribution (Collins, 2018; Kubota, 2016; Shahjahan, 2014).

To counter these blocks to interculturality, we maintain that intercultural travel is supported by personal cultural trajectories (Holliday, 2019) that enable the students to find *threads* with experience from their country of origin as they encounter the university campus, the communities where they find their new lives and the 'home' that they construct there. The notion of *threads* here derives from shared, underlying universal cultural processes that span across all cultural scenarios, and that enable our past cultural experience to be the main resource for negotiating new intercultural experience within the dynamic context of personal cultural trajectories (Holliday, 2019; Holliday and Amadasi, 2020). Tapping into these trajectories opens the possibility of 'hybrid integration', where we participate with full agency in new cultural environments on our own terms while building on the practices and values we bring with us (Baraldi, 2021). Rather than being located mainly in moving between separate large national or civilisational cultures, the intercultural is located in everyday small culture encounters throughout these lifelong trajectories, such as with unfamiliar families and workplaces (Holliday, 2019). It is therefore in this negotiative process of small culture formation on the go where threads need to be sorted from blocks (Holliday and Amadasi, 2020). This is the everyday engagement with the intercultural, wherever we find it, in which we are conscious of positioning and repositioning ourselves (Holliday, 2022b), and in which we constantly reassess what George Simmel (1950) refers to as a shifting 'thinking-as-usual'.

It is therefore possible, and indeed necessary, to regard the students as already bringing with them this small intercultural experience by means of their own personal cultural trajectories. Indeed, they already possess a ready-made interculturality described by Dervin (2016) as a messy process of sorting out the politics implicit in blocks and threads. Interculturality is therefore more related to identity negotiation, than to some 'intercultural readiness' or to a set of skills and knowledge related to the host environment, as suggested by Brinkmann and Weerdenburg (2014) and Guerriche (2020). Instead, we think that the experience of travelling to places fosters an already existent interculturality and potential for adaptation to change.

The notion of developing personal cultural trajectories is supported by Stuart Hall's (1996a) assertion that identity is an unfinished, always changing project that is never singular but always multifaceted, and a matter of 'becoming' and renewal rather than 'being'. This view of identity as an ongoing lifelong project (Block, 2006) is constructed at the interstices of multiple axes, such as age, class, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, institutional affiliation, social status and language (Pavlenko and Blackledge, 2004), and it is 'situational and contradictory' (Pham and Saltmarsh, 2013: 131). That these are 'vibrant identities' (Ros i Solé et al., 2020: 399), which are always on the move and which enable 'the self to add new subjectivities rather than to exclude old ones', also connects with the postcolonial, de-Centred

notion of hybridity as our normal state of being, and as our means for escaping colonising structures (Bhabha, 1994; Hall, 1996b). With respect to the students in this study, this rejection of the 'us'–'them' essentialist images of culture and hybridity means that they do not have to be simply and essentially Algerian or British or in-between. It also goes against the established Centre view that often perceives newcomers as 'displaced' (Hall, 1996a: 4).

This de-Centring also brings a new meaning to Homi Bhabha's (1994) notion of the 'third space'. It is not to do with being between cultures, but becomes a means for both the students and us researchers to make a different, although sometimes difficult, sense of the intercultural (Holliday, 2022b; Soja, 1996) that can enable non-essentialist threads between multiple intercultural settings. We do not therefore claim that the data we present prove that the students find home through finding threads with their brought intercultural experience, but that de-Centring enables this reading of the data.

The data we present show that the way in which the students do this enables new understandings about the complexity of such trajectories for all international students – and, indeed, further interrogation of the meaning of 'international'.

Relations and emerging themes

Small culture formation on the go also formed the basis of Sadoudi's approach and interaction with the students: how research of the students' engagement, as well as her own, comes together with the intercultural; and how she needed to confront and put aside her own Orientalist blocks. She presented herself as a colleague who would share their life routine for a few days, rather than as someone who would scrutinise every aspect of their lives. This also helped her reduce the essentialist naivety of simply presuming 'insider', 'same culture' status. We feel that this relationship was instrumental in building a rapport through which the students shared stories and confidences, inviting the researcher to access their worlds. This immersion in their lives, even for a short period, enabled Sadoudi to find the resonances with her autobiography, as suggested by Merrill and West (2009).

The interviews were carried out in several settings and cities. Sadoudi was able to use both of the students' first languages, depending on their preferences. These were Arabic and Berber, or Amazigh, as spoken in North Africa, and Algeria more particularly (Benrabah, 2014). The data extracts presented here are all therefore translated into English, keeping as far as possible the original linguacultural sense. We take linguacultural from Risager's (2022) suggestion of carrying hybrid cultural meaning from one language to another. The settings included empty rooms at the university, students' rooms, university library spaces, public gardens, the gym, the grocery store and even supervisory meetings. The choice of these locations was given to the participants, but they were required to choose a setting characterised by comfort, privacy and quietness, to put them at ease, protect their identity and reduce the likelihood of problems with the audibility of recordings.

The students are represented by pseudonyms to protect confidentiality and anonymity. To help 'disturb the data' – to break stereotypical discourses that associate one 'named' culture with a particular 'named' language (Baker, 2022) – pseudonyms that are not normally associated with Arab or Berber names were chosen. Sadoudi found that this was an important strategy in helping her to put aside the Orientalist grand narrative.

We shall look at the following three themes: "'I think I'm satisfied with what I'm doing'", 'Situational and hybrid' and 'Being intercultural means feeling at home everywhere'. These are not the themes that were used in the original study, but they emerged through the same coding and thinking process as the one described there (Sadoudi, 2022). The intersubjective nature of this process, with the fresh focus on 'home', and the non-essentialist focus on hybridity and the intercultural described above allowed the emergence of these three new themes from the same data.

'I think I'm satisfied with what I'm doing'

In this theme, we see the students, despite ups and downs, being positive about their overall experience of study abroad. When asked if they wished that their journey were different, there was a strong sense of satisfaction with what they have accomplished so far. There are claims that particular experiences, be they positive or negative, have contributed to the construction of who they have become:

I think I'm satisfied with what I'm doing and the way I'm doing it ... [and] what you see now as not good for you or as not your ideal situation or ideal lifestyle, you'll discover later that it's good and it took you to a place. (Dany, interview)

I'm satisfied with my experience so far ... [The] PhD gave me lots of opportunities to learn more and to explore new horizons. (Mina, interview)

I'm quite satisfied about the journey that I'm having now because every single day I'm experiencing different things and I'm learning from them, so I can consider this journey as a very good lifelong experience that made the person I became. (Emily, interview)

References here to exploring, discovering, experiencing and learning indicate a kind of satisfaction, despite the potential block that life in Britain is not the 'Western ideal' that their brought Orientalism (as referred to above) had led them to expect. The accounts instead reflect a more complex reality. Dany refers to how he put aside this idealism:

I would call them foolish expectations ... I imagined this as a perfect scenario, now it sounds really stupid, but I expected it to be like a fairy tale or something, like everyone friendly, life easy, comfortable, ... I just expected so much from life in here. (Dany, interview)

There is a sense of critical negotiation here, which is different from the more established 'assimilationist' approach, where typical 'success' is measured against how many 'local' friends and 'host' country's practices and values are acquired (see, for example, Sawir et al., 2008; Wu et al., 2015), as critiqued by Ploner (2018). Indeed, some of the students did not socialise with those labelled as 'local' students. They describe instead an agency in assessing their journey according to their own standards, which they are discovering for themselves. They appear to have managed to navigate changes in their lives by being themselves, on their own terms. Their attitude to adaptation seems to be related to creating a 'new' life routine in the 'new' environment, regardless of where it is located. There is therefore no sense of any sort of incompatibility that might be associated with a more essentialist notion of moving from one culture to another.

Interestingly, the students rarely refer to 'culture' in their statements about adaptation. Dany speaks about adjustment as making some changes in order to achieve a desired fit, not integrating with the host culture's features, but based on personal needs and preferences as they emerge:

You need time to adjust and to get used to things, to establish new routines, and after a while that becomes your routine and becomes your comfort zone, and you just go back to normal. (Dany, interview)

Dany's statement indicates a familiarity that draws a thread with his brought cultural experience. Similarly other students appear to have gone through a period of identifying some of their needs and challenges as they emerged, then coming up with potential solutions or coping strategies in order to fulfil this developing awareness of needs. This did not necessarily mean that it was a straightforward process, but time seemed to be the key.

Other students indicated that they adapted to their transition from Algeria to Britain at different paces. They seemed already to be resilient, or to have developed resilience that maximised their chances – thus tapping into their brought cultural competence. This connected with their subsequent identity shift, mainly displayed through their awareness of how they had idealised the West or been prejudiced against it. Therefore, they tried to adjust to the actual environment in which they lived, not as imagined, but as experienced.

As with previous research (for example, Gould, 2018; Nada et al., 2018; Saubert, 2014), this evidence of positive self-direction in making the education experience engaging and rewarding repudiates the common essentialist notion of cultural difference as a problem. The students' accounts reflect a reality within which transitioning to Britain appears less dramatic than usually described by the assimilationist literature (Brinkmann and Weerdenburg, 2014; Kim, 2012).

There is a confidence here that resonates with the students stating quite definitely and openly that they 'belong to the world', to the 'human race' as global individuals, rather than as inhabitants of a particular nation. As suggested by Delanty (2012), this is in defiance of national culture containment – indeed, claiming Centre ground from what might be considered a marginal non-Western origin (Hall, 1991). Hence these statements:

I feel more open to the world. I think we belong to the world, we live in the same Earth, so everyone should respect everyone ... I think people are people. (Zack, interview)

There is only one race, the human race. People are so focused in seeing the differences, but at the end we are all humans ... I have one of my friends last year, she's Indian and she's Christian as well, we got along, she understands that I am Muslim and [I] understand she's Catholic, and I'm not bothered with that because we have this tolerance ... She accepts me for who I am, and I accept her as well, and I wish more people be more like that, accepting the others, who they are, we don't have to be all the same. (Sofia, interview)

In Sofia's statement about her so-described Indian, Christian Catholic friend, more than the expected trope of tolerance of the religious and cultural features of 'another culture', we see a two-way appreciation of, and indeed demand for, intercultural equality. There is thus evidence of constructing a 'home' world that can exist anywhere, and that can be carried wherever personal cultural trajectories take us.

Situational and hybrid

Within this theme, we explore how the students negotiate the multiple facets of their identities in the multiple public and private spaces they occupy – their accommodation, the university, the workplace and other settings. This, we believe, serves to indicate how students who are usually labelled as 'international' are so many other things.

During a week of shadowing Arezki, Sadoudi noticed many facets of his identity, as these snapshots of his everyday life indicate:

I met Arezki at his university, and from what I observed, he seems so professional. He gets ready for Friday's prayer. As I have already noticed, he is a practising Muslim.

I met Arezki and his friends around 7 p.m. We went to a Turkish restaurant. Most of the time, Arezki was making jokes, and I think he is different from the Arezki I observed so far.

Today, I met Arezki around 10.30 a.m., and we went to the gym. He told me a lot of stuff about sports especially weightlifting. He seems so passionate. He even asked me to video record him while doing a weightlifting exercise.

I had the opportunity to see Arezki in different settings, talk to him many times. (Fieldnotes)

Here we see Arezki as the Muslim man, the doctorate student, the athlete, the friend and the colleague. He appears to tailor his behaviour depending on the setting and the people around him. The embodiment of facets of his identity are strategically situational, shifting within the space he occupies, and with the people with whom he interacts. His professionalism when he is in an academic setting is indicated in how he speaks and dresses. In the gym, he is absorbed by his work-out programme, and he speaks with other people there about diet and weightlifting. He is different again when he is relaxed and joking with his friends.

This is one example of how the students' identity negotiation appears to be shaped by their different experiences, through finding threads between their accumulated past selves (the cultural experience they bring with them), and their developed selves within the environments in which they find themselves. There is evidence throughout the data that, in several instances, the students identified themselves with many aspects of their identities, be it nationality, ethnicity, religion, institutional affiliation or other small culture memberships. This shows the richness of the complex, multifaceted and hybrid nature of their identity at every stage of small culture formation on the go.

This on-the-go, positioning and repositioning hybridity is resonant of more de-Centred accounts of how we can all be many things at the same time – for example, how the inhabitants of the London suburb of Southall communicate different and sometimes conflicting aspects of their cultural identities depending on who they are interacting with (Baumann, 1996).

It is this de-Centred theorising of hybridity that enables us to notice aspects of the everyday lives of these so-labelled international students that might previously have been characterised otherwise. Whereas, in the assimilationist, essentialist model, spending time with other than the 'target' language of the new 'target' culture would have been considered problematic (Kumaravadivelu, 2007), these students demonstrate a richness in their multilingual abilities:

Eva uses Berber with her family when she speaks on the phone. She has some French housemates, so she sometimes uses French to communicate with them. Eva speaks Arabic with her co-national friends and colleagues. She usually uses English to communicate in the academic setting, and with her multi-national friends. (Fieldnotes)

This is not just switching codes, but another means for negotiating the multiple facets of her identity, depending on the topic and the people with whom she interacts:

For instance, when she spoke with her parents, she was calm and talked about herself and the events that happened in her life. Whereas, when she was with her female kitchen-mates, who are very cheerful girls, she was quite like them, high-spirited and zestful. While, at university, she used English to communicate with her supervisor and other fellow colleagues. (Fieldnotes)

Like the majority of the students, Eva's existing mastery of several languages enabled a thread through to gaining other forms of competence and skills related to interaction in both academic and social settings. There is an ability to adjust identity, marked by dress, personality and language, according to the context. The students showed different versions of themselves, for example, at university during a supervisory meeting, compared to being in a restaurant with their friends. This resonates with Canagarajah's (2022) account of his translingual competence from childhood, and McDermott's (2022) study of the identity politics of Spanish–English families in London. In both cases, there is a reported resistance to native-speakerist and colonialist norms about who is labelled as belonging.

Within this journey of becoming, the students appear to negotiate the threads between their past and present selves in a space in which the different facets of their identities (old and new) blend to form new selves. In this natural hybridity, they shift and adapt to different spaces, drawing threads from their upbringing, such as being practising Muslims, to negotiate newly found practices and perceptions.

Being intercultural means feeling at home everywhere

All the students mention their experience of unfamiliarity with British practices and particularities. Although they did not face any language barriers, they appeared to have faced some communicative awkwardness related to their lack of knowledge of certain British social norms and cultural references. However, their accounts show how underlying universal cultural competence gives them an awareness of the ability to communicate with people, even though they did not share their cultural references. An example is Zack's encounter with people that he referred to as 'English boys':

I've been once with three English boys, and we went to a pub and there was music, and each song that comes on, they would ask me, do you know this song and I was like no, I didn't recognise any of the songs, but they grew up with these songs, but at the same time, would I expect them to know all the songs that I grew up with? Of course, not ... it's normal if I didn't recognise the songs, I came from a different place, I didn't grow up with them. This is just an example to say even when my behaviour doesn't fit or doesn't go as smooth ... it's no one's fault, it's just how people work and how they should understand that we're different ... They are not very important as long as the communication is meaningful, meaning is there, people understanding what you're saying, and you understanding what they say. (Zack, interview)

This account shows the choice that Zack had between looking for the block of not recognising the childhood songs known to the English boys, and feeling different and deficient in his ability to understand, which is often easier, or looking for the thread that would facilitate conversation. Despite differences, Zack found ways to communicate with the boys, and he acknowledged that all cultural differences become less important when meaning is conveyed.

Other students also encountered some communication awkwardness and difficulty due to their lack of knowledge about others' cultural practices and references. However, they seem to have found threads to help them to see that home is not a country; it does not have borders. Home is not a place, but rather a feeling, and this ability of feeling at home and being able to find oneself even in unfamiliar terrains represents what being intercultural really is. The overall flexibility that this brings can be seen in this statement by Dany:

I became more flexible, more like a dough, you can shape me in any shape you want. It's not like I'm playing along with someone, it's more like this is who I am now, this individual is open to everything, and nothing surprises me ... nothing surprises me ... So, these things for me are very important and core parts in what I have learnt about life and about social life in Britain. (Dany, interview)

It is important, however, to note that his reference to 'not playing along' indicates his developing principled understanding of who he is.

Conclusion

As Sadoudi immersed herself in the diversity of the circumstances that governed the particularities of how each of the students engaged in the activities of their daily life, she saw that each of them had different personal experiences, lifestyles, hobbies and friendship patterns, all of which blended with the fabric of the broader society in which they found themselves. This was regardless of any 'other cultural' provenance, unless it was the case that this provenance enabled the rich threads on which they drew. This experience of their lives also enabled Sadoudi to redefine 'the intercultural':

Through my ethnographic research, I learned a lot about not only my participants, but also about myself. Travelling to multiple places and cities to meet them on and off campus, to be immersed in their lives, to observe the way they live, study, communicate and blend into the social environments they frequent, made me realise that feeling 'home' is not necessarily to do with where you were born and grew up, where you came from or where people believe you come from. Feeling home is a more complex and multidimensional concept that can simultaneously refer to a place, a feeling and an experience in which the individual feels familiarity, safety and belongingness. According to what I have observed, home-making can be enabled through many processes such as settling routines, negotiating, communicating and more importantly defying prejudices. (Fieldnotes)

This insight into the way the students experience life in British environments, and the way in which they negotiate their multiple identities and manage their lives as PhD researchers, managing their time, emotions and tasks to make home for themselves, is to do with their hybrid identity. We position and reposition ourselves in different ways at different times depending on multiple circumstances. This means that 'the intercultural' has always been with us as we move through diverse settings in everyday life, from family, friends, school or work, through finding ways to be ourselves, and to feel or create familiarity wherever we go and whenever we interact, by negotiating our upbringings in the process of small culture formation on the go, wherever it is located. Adaptation to change and transition is, thus, an everyday constructive process of negotiating one's hybrid multifaceted identity in relation to the systems and particularities of the setting – be it local or global – that are necessary for getting on with things.

For the students to construct positive threads on arrival in Britain, they first needed to put aside the idealised grand narratives of 'the West' that they brought from their upbringing and prior educational experience – overcoming the prejudices they brought and defying the prejudices they met. Only then could they find multiple ways of being 'at home' in British society on their own terms. Therefore, the development of identities is neither a straightforward nor an easy process, which demonstrates the inherent struggle involved in the process of small culture formation on the go.

While the students were not asked specifically about home-making, we feel that what they said demonstrated that they were learning how to be at home in their own ways. The process of home-making, or transforming what is commonly referred to as their 'host' environment into their 'home', seems to differ from one student to another. Indeed, for some, feeling at home meant feeling comfortable, while for others, this meant blending, feeling safe, being oneself and even feeling accepted. It is also important to note that the students' nationality was not of significant importance during their process of home-making. Analysis of their accounts indicated that, in some instances, the students' references to 'their home', as in their country of origin, seem to convey the idea of a nostalgic place that they remember from time to time.

The students' accounts also indicated that they could not be defined by their national badge. Before everything else, these students seemed to perceive themselves as doctorate students with a multifaceted identity going beyond being nationals of a particular country. This resonates with Holliday's

(2017) study of PhD students of diverse backgrounds who did not self-label by nationality in interview. It is indeed by defying the easy nationality label that is commonly attached to the concept of 'international student' that the students come to their own ways of finding 'home' in the Other, and of being personally fully responsible for their own identity construction and negotiation. The themes that have emerged in this article highlight the hybrid and multifaceted nature of the students' identity, which is in constant shift and movement, resulting from an overlapping negotiation of a brought and developed self. Through their day-to-day interactions and encounters in both social and academic settings, the students seem to constantly mediate their present-day and their accumulated past selves, ready to face what awaits them in the future.

Declarations and conflicts of interest

Research ethics statement

The authors declare that research ethics approval for this article was provided by Canterbury Christ Church University ethics board.

Consent for publication statement

The authors declare that research participants' informed consent to publication of findings – including photos, videos and any personal or identifiable information – was secured prior to publication.

Conflicts of interest statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest with this work. All efforts to sufficiently anonymise the authors during peer review of this article have been made. The authors declare no further conflicts with this article.

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