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ABSTRACT

In this research project, I draw from a critical discourse analysis of peer-led discussions in International Lounge, an internet forum for international students in the UK, to explore how new class paradigms and competencies are constructed in an online transnational communication space and in an age of increased individualisation. Just as mass media have facilitated the formation of national middle classes, online media may offer the communication architecture and social morphology necessary for the emergence of a transnational hypermobile class. Nevertheless, this study takes into account instances of spatial and temporal in-betweenness over the course of migration for education. It thus argues that student-migrants envisage a transnational middling class through online participation.

INTRODUCTION

The early days of international higher education were marked by an 'education as aid' paradigm (Auletta, 2000). The Colombo Plan was enacted in the 1950s to provide financial aid for students from developing countries to attend universities in richer Commonwealth countries and the United States. This strategy aimed to cultivate liberal sentiment into local elites who were sympathetic to capitalist interests as a bulwark against communism (Oakman, 2010). The direct effect was the middle-class leanings of the Colombo Plan graduates, who expressed dissatisfaction after returning home and wanted to establish a better life themselves in Western countries. Here, intertwined dynamics of imperialism, liberalism and capitalism reveal that international higher education and social class were historically related.

My research explores this relationship in the contemporary context that is increasingly configured by neoliberal capitalism, intensive migration and networked individualism. I suggest that, seeking to understand the online class politics in migration for education

requires asking some very fundamental social questions: how to gain elite status in a seemingly egalitarian space, and why it matters in a period of increased decentralisation? Further, in treating the study of student-migrants' online class identity as an empirical lens to look at a much wider phenomenon of hypermobile elites, I interpret transnational class reproduction as a spatial and temporal negotiation that takes place in three different yet related arenas: mediated communication, education and the labour market.

I start by reviewing the literature on the processes of differentiation in international higher education and international student mobility, with a specific focus on how neoliberalism has an impact on the conception of social hierarchy. This is followed by a review of the arguments for the significance of online forums as loci of class reproduction. Next, I introduce a conceptual framework and methodology used to examine patterns of social class in online communication between student-migrants. Research findings are then reported, including the critical discourse analyses of online forum discussions about personal attainments and global competencies. Through these analyses, I aim to offer a novel theorisation of key aspects of the middling transnational class envisaged by international students, based on diverse meanings of 'home', 'national' and 'international'.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Recent historical context of international higher education (IHE)

My research contextualises contemporary IHE within the shift from 'education as aid' to 'education as trade' since the 1970s (Auletta, 2000). It takes Rizvi and Lingard's (2010) position in contesting the notion of axiomatic globalisation and its spontaneous effects on IHE in Western countries. According to the authors, global power dynamics have facilitated a normative neoliberal imaginary of globalisation and education provision. As a repercussion of privatisation and deregulation, a key attribute of neo-liberalist policy, state funding for universities was withdrawn, forcing them to compete in the spirit of international trade (Clark, 2006). Therefore, IHE has moved away from the principles of cultural exchange towards a more pragmatic focus on providing an alternative source of revenue (Waters, 2008). The submission of education to the pursuits of global economy has pushed forward a consumerist rhetoric involving the analysis of IHE through a producer/consumer model (Ackers, 1997; Salehi-Sangari and Foster, 1999).

Contradictory views in the literature about this transformation highlight the paradox of social class in IHE. On one hand, it is suggested that trade liberation opens up the possibilities for expanding education provision, and consequently turns it into a mass cultural product that

obscures class differences (Case & Vita, 2003; Cogan, 1998; Parker & Jary, 1995; Ritzer, 1993, 1998). In their critique of the commodified curriculum as a vehicle for market share, Case and Vita observe 'the proliferation of courses in which bits of international content are introduced to give 'the commodity' some kind of international certification... so as to make provision more attractive to a wider range of potential customers' (2003: 387). This piecemeal approach deems education the spoon-feeding and digestion of content, rather than a process of ontological development. The 'learning as eating' conception of IHE corresponds with Ritzer's (1993, 1998) and Parker and Jary's (1995) analyses of the McDonaldisation of society and its implication for IHE. They identify two processes running parallel to the commodification of curriculum: 'product' standardisation through quality assurance systems and managerialism to intensify professional labour. These processes homogenise higher education around the globe (Tapper & Palfreyman, 2004). In this sense, education is a commodity which saturates a growing market and ceases to be a marker of exclusivity.

In contrast, there is now a large literature on an emerging global hierarchy of universities where processes of differentiation take place (Deem, *et al.*, 2008; Gill 2009; Sadlak & Cai, 2007; Marginson van der Wande, 2007). Marginson and van der Wande (2007) pioneer the conceptualisation of vertical and horizontal differentiation in IHE. Vertical differences, including age and ranking, primarily create the hierarchy of elite places to study. However, commercial forces have seen horizontal differences like language of instruction and academic culture being used as metrics in university league tables. These characteristics are perceived to confer power on universities and add symbolic value to their degrees. The dynamics of differentiation in IHE have recently been heightened due to a fetish with the concept of 'the world class university', a brand that can command a premium in a global market (Deem, *et al.*, 2008). Overall, these critiques concern a growing global consensus that having exclusive educational experiences, rather than equal access to education, is the main fuel for progress. In this regard, neoliberal restructuring of IHE engenders the reproduction of differences at a global level.

The two bodies of literature unfold the simultaneous diminishment and reinforcement of stratification within the contemporary IHE system. One could argue that as part of their participation in the system, international students negotiate between forces of differentiation and homogenisation to shape their class identities. This approach also suggests a link between neoliberal ethos of competition and the reconfiguration of social class. Those ideas form strong grounds for my research, but I subscribe to Brooks and Waters (2011) that the emphasis on top-down globalisation overlooks the likely impacts of bottom-up social reproduction on IHE. The next section underlines the significance of the latter perspective by engaging with concepts about capital accumulation in international student mobility.

The search for capital through international education consumption

Migration for education has been conceptualised as a continuum of life chances and aspirations, rather than a one-off event (Findley, *et al.*, 2011). This literature inquires how international student mobility (ISM) is embedded in an enduring process of capital accumulation linking familial background, credentials attainment and labour market outcomes. It draws primarily on Pierre Bourdieu's model of socio-cultural reproduction of class. Bourdieu (1984) hypothesises a subconscious perpetuation of class identity through 'the sense of distinction', which is progressively inculcated by social institutions, including family and education systems, through everyday practices of judgement and classification. The generator and product of these practices is 'habitus', a combination of individuals' dispositions that orient their choices to their appropriate social positions. The analytical shift towards class internalisation inspires Bourdieu to break with Marxist notion of 'capital' as material assets, and to propose instead three forms of capital: economic (wealth), social (valued networks), and cultural (legitimate knowledge). Cultural capital is Bourdieu's main concern, because it is the accumulation of cultural capital in the function of habitus that obscures the causes of inequality. At the same time, he acknowledges contests for dominant class positions. They take place in 'fields', the various social arenas where agents battle for dominance by exhibiting and competing for desirable capital. Two main forces regulate these so-called 'games': the field's rules, and the habitus–derived intuition to utilise capital and improvise in response to circumstances, or 'a feel for the game'. While fields inherently facilitate a self-perpetuating class system, resistance occurs when participants endeavour to gain power to redefine fields.

Bourdieu (1984) provides a theoretical vocabulary to distinguish two fields connected with ISM, namely education and the labour market. A recurring theme in research into the international higher education (IHE) field is that access to and attainment of oversea educational qualifications presupposes the possession of cultural capital (Waters, 2007, Ong, 1999). Departing from the arguments about the strategies to cultivate an elite habitus in preparation for entry into top international universities, Murphy-Lejeune (2002) focuses on the subconscious 'taste for travelling' that confers native membership in the IHE field. For many student-migrants, early experiences of foreignness and history of familial mobility engender a peculiar vision of 'ready to move', emboldening them to anticipate and prepare for future ventures, ahead of their counterparts. Further, these dimensions nurture the 'international mind', an ideal intercultural personality, which is 'at home in another space, capable of taking on active role in it because s/he has acquired the competence which enables one to move from one world to another' (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002: 30). Those who possess this 'mobility capital' are born into the game and arbitrarily adapt to the IHE field. The concept of

'belonging' flourishes in research on ISM as an indicator of the need for such 'a feel for the game' to fully participate in IHE (Koehne, 2006; Sawir, *et al.*, 2008). Peripheral participation despite the intention to fit into university signifies the unawareness of what is at stake in the field, and stems from unequal access to legitimate cultural capital, such as language proficiency and adaptability.

Another body of literature investigates the global labour field and its relation to the understanding of ISM (see Finley, *et al.*, 2011). Historically, the democratisation of access to higher education in post-industrial societies worldwide since the 1970s means 'the middle class no longer has exclusive ownership of the rewards accruing from access to [local] higher education, with consequences for their social reproduction' (Waters, 2008: 8). Neoliberal transformation of the global economy since the 1980s further triggers a decline in the resources of the industrial core middle class, and the simultaneous emergence of a new middle class, which consists of corporate professionals and cosmopolitan consumers (Rutz & Balkan, 2009). Both class fractions have turned to international education for social reproduction, because it provides access to professional occupations within globally integrated economic sectors (Brown, 1995).

Investigating the consequences of this historical class bifurcation on ISM, researchers highlight the pragmatic motivations of ISM, particularly the protracted character of transitions from university into work (Ley, 2010; Brown & Hesketh 2004). This is shown in international students' long-term strategies in pursuit of distinction to pave the way for new economic opportunities after graduation. For example, Rizvi (2000) stresses that narrow selection of academic subjects, including management, commerce and economics, among East Asian students, is the substantial evidence of the search for 'institutionalised' cultural capital to join prestigious corporations, the key players in the global labour field nowadays. To distinguish themselves in the field, international students also seek 'embodied' cultural capital, particularly transferrable skills through extra-curricular activities which enhance their 'employability'. This engenders the penetration of pragmatic corporate culture into the academic culture (Brooks, 2007). Boden and Nedeva (2010) warns that the language of 'employability', reified by the government, employers, universities and students in the UK, shows the global spread of the neoliberal doctrine of self-sufficient subjects. In necessitating universities' contribution to the national economy through supplying self-investing customers and adaptable workers, it also legitimises the neoliberal reform of higher education discussed in the previous section.

I identify two important, yet overlooked, issues arising from the interplay between top-down transformation of IHE and bottom-up accumulation of cultural capital in ISM under

neoliberal pressure. Firstly, class reproduction among student-migrants could be understood in terms of a neoliberal shift away from a collective interest in shaping a field, towards personal projects to cross-fields for individualistic liberation, facilitated by an institutional framework that fosters homologies between fields. In particular, losing their dominance in the national international education field, the middle class has striven for transferable cultural capital to move from IHE field to global labour field and meet new criteria of power. Therefore, social class remains, but in an era of instability as neoliberalism thrives, the collective and acquiescing sense of social class is supplanted by an individualised model. It emphasises that individuals take responsibility over their uncertain futures, and stage their adaptability across fields. This individualising principle is accompanied by the neoliberal IHE project that reinforces autonomy and competition.

Further, neoliberal transformation merges 'sub-field of restricted production' and' sub-field of large-scale production' (Bourdieu, 1984) to create a market-based system of education. This creates the condition for cross-field accumulation of cultural capital on the part of international students, who will compete in the global labour market upon graduation to enrol into the middle class. Secondly, the neoliberal ethos of competition and individualism triggers three competing forces that drive the class reproduction among international students: personal endeavour to search for distinctive mobility habitus, conflicts between powerful employers over the 'employability' agenda to compete for talent, and intensive use of quantitative measurement of attributes to ensure universities provide a voluminous yet homogeneous cohort of workers. Therefore, my research attempts to fill the gap in the literature about class reproduction amongst student-migrants by addressing two issues: the individualisation of class-consciousness, and the negotiation between personal, professional and institutional forces.

Aspirations for mobile lifestyles: the transnational politics of social class

The previous sections have focused on various processes of differentiation which mediate the linkages between individual mobility, the internationalisation of higher education and destination of talent flows in the global labour market. Theorisation of these processes draws strong criticism from researchers who dismiss the neoliberal 'push-pull' model of migration (Baas, 2010; Robertson, 2013). Baas (2010), for instance, argues that the preoccupation with the question of 'why migrate?' means research into student migration ultimately revolves around 'leaving' and 'arriving', while the richness of students' experience during their migration journeys is rarely explored. More importantly, the theoretical neoliberal education-migration nexus envisages international students as 'savvy consumers' and migration as a

'lifestyle package', which 'obscure[s] the possibilities of vulnerabilities and marginalisation in the student-migrant experience' (Robertson, 2013: 42).

Transnationalism offers an alternative model to foreground the question of how migration is experienced. Instead of investigating the life conditions that motivate students to migrate in pursuit of a better life elsewhere, it describes how student-migrants regularly turn crossing borders into a lifestyle. A transnational lifestyle, as Basch, Schiller and Blanc-Szanton (1994) define it, involves multi-stranded activities and relationships that forge the ties between migrants and various countries. The transnationalism of oversea education manifests itself in various ways. Firstly, as elite migrants, international students are part of globally dispersed networks of kinship (Ong, 1999; Robertson, 2013), friendship (Bilecen, 2014) and highly skilled diaspora (Welch and Zhen, 2006). Vertovec (1999) calls this a transnational 'social morphology', articulating the social relationships that transcend national borders. Secondly, as Mitchell (2003) argues, since cosmopolitanism serves as the optimistic inspiration in international higher education, student-migrants socialise with each other in a transnational 'mode of cultural reproduction', to use Vertovec's (1999) words. This brings us to the third most important form of transnationalism – a 'type of consciousness' (Vertovec, 1999). On the multiple identifications of student-migrants, Murphy-Lejeune writes: '[They] question the notion of borders and meaning of home. Places are just locations, where one can work, live and love... Home becomes one's language and friends, a house one carries around as a portable commodity' (2002: 234). The powerful paradox of the so-called student-migrant consciousness, as suggested in this quotation, is the rupture between 'familiarity' and 'foreignness', 'here' and 'there', 'participation' and 'detachment'.

My research locates migration for education in between the two seemingly opposite theoretical realms of neoliberal stratification and transnationalism. It follows Waters (2007) in making explicit the relationship between transnational experience of overseas education and the reproduction of the 'transnational capitalist class (TNCC)'. This class fraction was first conceptualised by Sklair (2001) in a book with the same title. A product of the growing dominance of supranational corporations, the TNCC distinguishes itself by allying its interests with globalising rather than localising capital, expressed in the neoliberal free market rhetoric. In order for capitalism to be reproduced, it boosts the consumerist culture-ideology that corporate membership and accelerated consumption is the sine qua non for successful globalisation and higher quality of life. Nevertheless, to cope with the responsibility of being local citizens, the TNCC also facilitates the incorporation of nation-states into the global system, primarily through mobilising national competitiveness on behalf of a mythical national interest, and measuring it by global benchmarking mechanisms.

Unlike other migrant groups, members of the TNCC, including decision-makers of major corporations, globalising politicians, technocrats and consumerist elites, enjoy mobile lifestyles, defined by ever-expanding professional and networking possibilities that enable escapes from locality-derived commitments. Sklair describes their professional and personal strategies as a constant search for an 'elsewhere' and an attempt to 'master' an otherwise unsettling world, both of which are structured around a fear of entrapment and fixity unless individuals are equipped to meet global competition. This corresponds with Mazlish and Morss's (2005) conception of 'the global elite' who project themselves as players in a meritocratic global stage. Savage and Williams (2009) warn that in an age of increasing deregulation and meritocracy, individuals tend towards disposition to treat with detached curiosity both high-brow and mass cultural products, as well as conception of hierarchies as ladders rather than limits. Consequently, elites are pushed out of the academic gaze. They regard dispelling this 'glaring invisibility of elites' (Savage and Williams, 2009: 2) as an important task to comprehend growing inequality and shifting power relations in a post-organised capitalist order.

Waters (2007) traces the changing contours of elitism in international higher education (IHE). As noted, the TNCC succeeds in reproducing neoliberal capitalism by turning education into business. However, Waters is more interested in the pivotal role of IHE in furnishing students with an international outlook and facilitating exclusive transnational networks of alumni. He proceeds to hypothesise that international graduates form a crucial fraction of the TNCC. In contrast, Baas (2010) and Robertson (2013) problematize the conception of international students as transnational elites, despite the possibilities for endless acquisition of privileges through IHE. Instead, they propose the concepts of 'imagined mobility' and 'middling transnationals' respectively to capture the blend of legacy, uncertainty and aspiration in the student-migrant's identity. According to Baas (2010), student-migrants' journeys revolve around imaginary moments in the future when they achieve transnational lifestyles as mobile professionals. Similarly, Robertson argues that student-migrants 'occupy a spectrum of experiences in between those of the unskilled and highly vulnerable labour migrant and the elite and resourced knowledge worker' (2013: 160). This challenges the assumption about belonging to particular categories, and underlines the on-going struggle with transnational assemblages of power to cross boundaries. Both concepts draw on instances of in-betweenness to highlight contradictory class positions, as well as circuitous rather than linear migration trajectories of international students.

From synthesising the divergent perspectives discussed so far in this literature review, I reckon the paradox that submission to and subversion of the status quo defines the reproduction of the transnational capitalist class through oversea education. Undeniably, it

reinforces existing structural hierarchy, because participation in IHE entails mobilising desirable forms of capital derived from personal circumstances to occupy a dominant position in the field. On the other hand, it is about the aspiration to search for possibilities within hierarchies, and the imagination of personal liberation in the future. In this sense, for student-migrants, experiences with transnationalism over the course of education serve to acquire the right disposition for mobility opportunities in work and life, which enable them to move across fields and disrupt social structures. In turn, this disposition subtly enables hierarchy not to limit, but foster their advancement in the decentralised system brought about by neoliberalism. Building on these arguments, my research explores how conflicting patterns of transnational class politics manifest in student-migrant forum communication. The following section will introduce the theoretical debates that underlie an investigation into the reification and intensification of social class in virtual arena of activity.

Making the networked self and imagined international communities: the online construction of social class

Intensive use of computer-mediated communication platforms, including internet forums, to form and maintain social relationships 'here' and 'there' has been regarded as the prime signifier of transnationalism in overseas education (Collins, 2010; Robertson, 2013). However, online communication has barely been a part of the discussion about the transnational class politics among student-migrants. This undermines the correlation between digitalisation and the individualisation of class-consciousness. In their studies of transnational migrating professionals in the rich North, Elliott and Urry (2010) coin the term 'network capital' to describe the 'subjectless, communications-driven, and information-based' (142) capital that derives from the distant and intermittent connections in routinely mobile lives. This indicates that in the making of mobile subjects, collective values cease to have binding moral content, while online media assume their structuring nature by shaping the social repertoire for self-taken networking routines, short sets of intermediaries and privatised collection of data. This analysis exemplifies 'networked individualism' (Wellman, 2002), and makes sense the way reflexive architecture of communication systems ushers in individualised order of competencies and instantaneous transfer of capital transnationally.

Notwithstanding its focus on the relation between the individualistic networked self and the transnational capitalist class identity, my research concerns the function of group dynamics in the online construction of social class. It faces a major challenge where prompt connections and text-based communication in online forums, together with the libertarian viewpoints of participants, produce a discourse that presents online space as a haven from offline stratification (Kendall, 1998). Therefore, my research looks into the conversation

topics that subtly convey classifications, so as to trace the improvised language for thinking and talking about class online. It adopts two analytical categories from previous studies about group dynamics in online class politics. First, Kendall's (1998) research into a chat-oriented MUD called BlueSkype suggests that participants enact a sense of middle-class peer group through 'roll calls' about lifestyles and corresponding levels of income. They hold these as measures of *personal attainment*, which not only indicates their pride on autonomously achieved status, rather than ascribed status, but also implies their superiority over others within the virtual community. Second, Polson's (2011) study of meet-up websites for elite migrants in Paris shows that methods of distinction are used to carve out new class competencies and hierarchies based on *global proficiencies*. Members of these online groups demonstrate their belonging to 'imagined communities' (Anderson, 1982) by displaying their migration trajectories, language capacities and a series of global mindsets, which in turn confer levels of status on them. Above all, they benefit from online and offline opportunities to develop personal networks and unique characteristics that could position them as 'real international'. Engaging with forum discussions on personal attainment and global proficiencies, I seek to unfold the interplay between territorialising/organising online communication space and advancing networked individualism, competition and solidarity, fragmentation and consolidation.

Conceptual framework

The literature review has shown that research into online class politics among oversea students is rather underdeveloped, although it could provide valuable insight into the nature of a new class fraction emerging in the age of globalisation, international migration and intensified computer-mediated communication. Therefore, this conceptual framework essentially establishes a theoretical paradigm that guides the interpretations of this phenomenon throughout my research project. It features a taxonomy based on four perspectives that conceptualise international student-led forums as the loci of class struggles: (1) the field, (2) the in-between transnational space, (3) the personal network and (4) the community.

The first perspective is built on Bourdieu's field theory. My research regards an internet forum as a field where participants strive for dominance. Moreover, the online communication field mediates between the international higher education field and the global labour field. This conception presumes the significance of mobility capital and habitus in the three fields, which prompts certain homologies between them. Therefore, my research explores how mobility capital deriving from offline habitus interacts with the online communication field's rules to confer status on participants. Using this as an entry point, it

seeks to comprehend the transfer of capital across fields, which marks the complexity of class politics in neoliberal capitalist society.

The second perspective takes into account the transnational nature of both communication space and participants in internet forums. Especially, it adopts Baas (2010) and Robertson's (2013) conceptions of 'becoming transnationals' during migration journeys for education. It features two key aspects. First, the online class politics among student-migrants is the negotiation of power between students and various actors across borders. These actors include national governments, families, universities, employers and other migrant groups. Online and offline, they influence the migration trajectories and class perceptions of international students. Second, it is not only a spatial negotiation between 'here', 'there' and 'elsewhere', but also a temporal negotiation between 'now', 'then' and 'the future'.

The third perspective concerns Wellman's (2002) theory of 'networked individualism'. Here an online forum consists of the personal networks of each participant. This perspective suggests that forum participants actively network to leverage mobility capital, in response to the need of media literate, hypermobile and culturally nimble labour in neoliberal capitalist system. At the same time, open and flexible online networks envisage liberation, autonomy and individualism, fuelling the fragmentation of class structure.

The fourth perspective interrogates the persistent hierarchal and exclusive nature of online forums. In other words, a forum is a community of different groups with conflicting interests. Each group revolves around power differences between members and its distinction from other groups. The latter requires a collective effort to form a group identity, which reduces the effect of competition and individualisation set out in the first and the third perspectives respectively.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND OBJECTIVES

Research questions

Taking into account the conceptual framework discussed above, I have formulated the following overarching research question:

How do international students construct social class in a transnational online communication field?

Class construction in this research is examined from four perspectives: (1) *constructing fields* - which forms of capital enable dominance across online communication, international education and the global labour market? (2) *constructing transnationalism* - which communication strategies do participants use to take command of the process of 'becoming transnational'? (3) *constructing the networked self* - which aspects of forum communication allow participants to establish connection and detachment at the same time? and (4) *constructing group membership* - which features are unique to members of an online international group?

Research objectives

The research question and sub-questions of this study inquire into the opposing forces underlying the online class politics among student-migrants: top-down globalisation and bottom-up capital accumulation, constraints and opportunities, subordination and aspiration, security and liberty, individualisation and connection. These aspects are not new to the academic literature about oversea education and online communication, but as I pointed out, there is a lack of research synthesis regarding how they interact to facilitate the interplay between agency and structure in a new paradigm of social class.

My project aims to be the first step towards closing this research gap. It seeks to provide an overview of the link between striving for dominance in a transnational communication space and enacting a distinctive set of class values. To this end, it observes student participants' strategies to use resources derived from structure to their advantage, but at the same time subvert and resist structural determinism. Consequently, the goal of this research is not only to focus on social class in student-migrants' communication practices, but also to contribute to a broader understanding of the impacts of neoliberalism, globalisation and digitalisation on class reproduction.

METHODOLOGY

Critical discourse analysis

To unfold competitive and differentiating dynamics in a communication space requires a methodological framework that views the use of language as a discursive strategy to negotiate power relations and establish meanings. Therefore, this study seeks the answers for its research questions through doing a critical discourse analysis (CDA) of student-migrants' forum communication.

CDA features 'a type of discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context' (van Dijk, 1993: 352). CDA receives its impetus to describe the political struggles at the discursive level from Foucault's notion of power. Foucault (1972) coins the term 'knowledge/power' to articulate the idea that power is constituted through accepted forms of knowledge. In his quest to reveal power relations, he insists on the need to investigate how 'discourses', as forms of representation, legitimise a particular way of understanding about the world. The idea that power resides in meaning-making guides the examination of forum communication in my research. An internet forum is defined as 'an online public discussion area where users exchange ideas and information' (Mann and Stewart, 2000: 219). Which contributions are allowed in those discussions, and by whom, need to be taken into account when studying internet forums (Witschge, 2008). My research particularly looks at how forum discussions are structured in patterns of discourses about social class. Here, the question of power comes into play: who determines what can be said about social class in online communication as a discursive field, and for what purposes?

CDA is inspired by Foucault's macro socio-political analysis of social practices, but features an interdisciplinary approach through incorporating detailed textual analysis of linguistics and micro-sociological interpretative tradition. In other words, it concerns 'the relationship between texts, processes and social conditions' (Fairclough, 1989: 26). Therefore, this research uses Fairclough's (1989, 1995) three-dimensional model for CDA (see Figure 1). Adapting this model, my analysis covers the linguistic strategies used in the discussions in an online forum, the context in which the content is produced and interpreted, and wider social practice relating to class formation of these dimensions.

Last, but not least, the methodological framework of this research is grounded on Bourdieu's (1991) sociological account on discourse. He distinguishes three types of discourses in linguistic markets: orthodoxy (dominant opinion), heterodoxy (opposing opinion) and doxa (the self-evident). Doxa is not only reproduced through habitus, but also congruous with the field's rules. Conceived in this way, it deems the domination by certain groups in a field as taken-for-granted and favourable. My study operates by identifying the link between the types of discourse drawn on in forum discussions, the habitus of the subject who produce them and the field's rules.

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│  │      Text consumption          │  │
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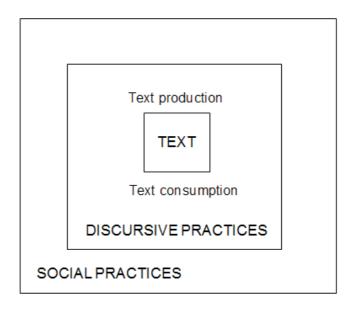
Figure 1. Fairclough's model for CDA (1992: 73)

Having argued that CDA provides a powerful tool to conceptualise the power dynamics behind the interactions between participants in an online forum, I acknowledge the limitation of CDA in providing a systematic understanding of language (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2008). At the heart of CDA is the interpretation of language, which is shaped to a large extent by the socio-cultural backgrounds of researchers and thus inherently subjective. As Denscombe (2007: 310) points out:

> A disadvantage of using discourse analysis . . . is that it does not lend itself to the kind of audit trail that might be needed to satisfy conventional evaluations of the research. It is not easy to verify its methods and findings . . . because the approach places particularly heavy reliance on the insights and intuition of the researcher for interpreting the data.

This research holds that CDA not only exposes ideologies, but is also constituted of ideologies. In other words, it seeks to unfold the discursive patterns of power, but it is also subjected to the control of power over knowledge. Therefore, it avoids any assumption about neutrality that goes beyond the function of discourses, and will offer my interpretations of the phenomenon, rather than the 'truth' about social class or what participants 'really' mean. This claim over the constructed nature of the methodology does not undermine the credibility of my research, but ensures its reflexivity.

The research field

Among various internet forums that international students could participate for different purposes, this study focuses on International Lounge. A sub-forum of The Student Room, claimed to be the largest online student community in the UK (The Student Room Group,

2013), International Lounge is dedicated to those who are interested in studying in the UK, or have already come to the country.

The choice regarding the research field was based on two reasons. First, the structure of International Lounge exemplifies the transnational and exclusive communication space into which this research inquires. With the aim of bringing international students together, the forum operates by facilitating general threads where participants from any country could ask questions about studying in the UK and lead the discussions. Nevertheless, over the time, participants have created 37 national/ethnic 'societies' to connect with their compatriots. The coexistence of nationalism and cosmopolitanism, group identities and personality traits in the forum provides a very dynamic field to study the online manifestations of the transnational capitalist class. Second, the UK abolished the post-study work visa in 2012 and work permit of non-EU college students in July 2015, which means student-migrants are now faced with more constraints on the prospect of subsequent mobility. This is a promising political context for a CDA, for it triggers the proliferation of discourses to moderate the relation between migration for education and education for migration.

Data collection

Fairclough's (1993) interpretation of the manifestations of language inspired my conception of data and guided the data collection in this research. First, he suggests critical discourse analysts to identify 'discursive events' where they could observe common trends in language. The next task is to examine the interactions between these discursive events that ultimately create an 'order of discourse'. Fairclough borrows this concept from Foucault to describe 'the social ordering of relationships amongst different ways of making meaning' (2001: 235), an understanding of which makes it possible to detect the effects of power over knowledge. Further, Fairclough argues that 'the boundaries and insulations between and within the orders of discourse may be points of conflict and contestation' (1993: 135), so it is important that CDA aims to conceptualise how power balance is transformed through discursive patterns in language.

Following this approach, the data in my research was generated from the text produced in the 'discursive events' about social class in International Lounge. In particular, they are the discussions about personal attainment and global proficiencies, which were pointed out in the literature review as two useful topics for studying online class politics. Through examining the literature on the transnational class politics in oversea education, I also recognised that these two issues are based around three main aspects: 'home', the 'national' and the 'international'. Therefore, in order to identify the relevant 'discursive events' for data collection, I used three groups of keywords that help locate the discussions on these three

aspects. They are (1) 'home'/'family', (2) 'national'/'nation'/'country' and (3) 'international'/'global'/'worldwide'. Although the search function of International Lounge allowed me to identity the exact posts that contain these keywords, I took a step further by including the relevant posts before and after them in the data set, primarily because this exemplifies Fairclough's idea of 'events'. Moreover, designing the data collection in this way enabled me to look at the negotiation of power occurring as participants in the discussions took a stance on the issues at stake and legitimised their arguments. The sample of text used in my research was comprised of the content posted in International Lounge over a period of one year, from 1st August 2014 to 1st August 2015.

In this project, I conducted a CDA of the selected text to investigate the construction of an intermingled elite-equity discourse about social class. I particularly paid attention to the way in which the qualities of 'being competitive' and 'being international' were defined by participants, and in turn helped them gain status in International Lounge. I also explored instances where structure was subverted in the function of mobile habitus and individualisation. These signify the paradox of social class wherein structural hierarchy is simultaneously perpetuated and contested. These findings will be presented in what follows.

ANALYSIS

In International Lounge, participants reconstitute their simultaneous embeddedness in various national and international groups. This transnational social morphology facilitates a mode of cultural production that creates the conditions for a new class schema characterised by accelerated individualisation. The analyses presented here focus on the extent to which individualism as a class value is legitimised through discursive patterns of distinction. These patterns are organised so as to allocate people and practices into cultural categories, as well as draw moral boundaries between these categories.

Belonging to an online national community

Belonging as nationalist emotional attachment

TSR Pakistani Society is the most active national group in International Lounge, with over 12,000 posts split across 13 threads. Its members have drawn on a discourse that links home to emotional attachment to express a sense of belonging to the group. In particular, the feeling of being at home is routinely brought up by both new and veteran participants:

> *tangledinthemist*: hi people, newbie here. I just found my home!

> *Zahra96*: Came across this society and already feeling at home.

> *Princess31*: (...) I think i have developed a lack of identity. Which is why i have joined this soc. I feel right at home haha.

Moreover, participants often recall nostalgic memories when referring to Pakistan as 'home', locating it in an unchanging past that is incorruptible by their present circumstances and intrinsically a source of comfort:

> *Ankaabout*: (...) I miss my family, friends, Pakistani food, my pet cat, comfort of servants (...)

> *arfah*: (...) no one can escape the joys of a Pakistani home even if outside is different. (...)

> *mrnazzoo923*: (...) I remember when I was struggling to survive, after the first day I was dying to go back home. (...)

In this sense, in-group belonging is an affective construction, which is based on longing for a 'lost' time and space, and identification with Pakistani heritage to maintain 'ontological security' (Giddens, 1991). Conceived in this way, nationalism plays itself out in terms of personal strategies to establish a connection with others through shared past experience and utter affiliation, which simultaneously resolve present dissatisfaction due to spatial mobility. This kind of nationalist belonging arguably does not presuppose classification for its existence, viability and maintenance.

Albeit this non-exclusive nature of nationalism, the personalisation of online space and the competition for legitimate linguistic capital underlies the transnational class politics in TSR Pakistan Society. The society proclaims itself leaderless and open to both Pakistani and non-Pakistani participants, but a combination of voluminous conversations about everyday family issues and advice on learning Urdu confer authority on a few members. This is a somewhat different picture of belonging than the non-divisive one I started out with, for the field's rules, mobile habitus and cultural capital, including personal histories and linguistic ability, operate together to establish a hierarchy of 'being more Pakistani'.

The commandment of native participants

A 'sticky' named 'International Lounge Posting Guide!' left at the top of the forum sets the rules of an international communication field, including the standards for what type of people should feel welcome and which activities are desirable:

(…) The International Lounge is a place for TSR users from all corners of the world to get together. This is a great section to be in if you are living in Britain but have different cultural heritage. (…) Are you an international user or want to chat to those who are? Perfect – post in this section. (…) The off-topic rule is more relaxed in the societies – feel free to chat away, but please don't spam. (…)

According to this, the field invites all TSR international users to subscribe, but particularly values expat experience. Second-generation Pakistani immigrants in the UK have made use of these rules and their nomadic disposition to adhere to TSR Pakistani Society. Their ascendancy over those who migrate from Pakistan to the UK for their degrees is inscribed, not by formal ranking, but implicit in the very 'playing of the game' whereby they organise activities in the field as native members. This is evident in the way second-generation immigrants induce quick chats and dwell on stories about the everyday life of expat families, for which other Pakistani students in the group cannot fit. The following conversations illustrate the language strategies that second-generation immigrants use to make themselves at home in TSR Pakistan Society:

Birani007: When I come home and see my mum's made biryani (…)

MrsMars: Lucky… my mum won't be home, so I have no idea what I'm having.

Dinaa: No one is home… Mum took my keys… It's raining… Standing behind door. No one entertain me… It's cold too…

The_Internet: I go home this weekend. Well I go home for Saturday cos brothers birthday. Got some chocs in my car lol!

Short sentences and the salience of journaling as in SMS messages create the discourse of homey intimacy that transforms a supposedly public forum into a personal communication space. Moreover, the way in which second-generation immigrants make an effective use of expat families' routines to commandeer the communication space signifies not only their acknowledgement of the advantages prescribed by the field's rules, but also the adaption of nomadic habitus acquired through the experiences of being an expat. Here, the discourses of intimacy and familial foreignness operate to engender what I would term the personalisation of online space.

This process demonstrates the individualised class politics based on crossing fields, as hypothesised in the literature review. First of all, it is worth noticing that second-generation immigrants are generally not classified as international students in the academic literature. Nevertheless, this research reveals that in online participation, second-generation

immigrants not only identify themselves as international students, but also actively establish supremacy over their fellow compatriots. Their belonging to TSR Pakistani Society is disengaged from the nationalist appeal to organise a collective field through cultivating homogeneity. Instead, it is rooted in personal strategies to deploy a practical sense of transnational communication, derived from offline nomadic habitus, to meet the demands of an online communication field. Their commandment of the field comes at the expense of inclusive participation. In this regard, social class is intrinsically a cultural construction of unique lifestyles and communication paradigms, which enables individuals to distinguish themselves and obtain an advantage in a particular social arena. Moreover, at the centre of class reproduction is the individualising impulse that works to establish a bridge between being at home offline and becoming at home online, offline cultural capital and online competence, the private familial field and the public communication field.

The language for legitimate belonging

While second-generation immigrants largely direct the organisation of activities in TSR Pakistani Society, their membership is often questioned by Pakistani participants coming from outside the UK, mainly through the debates about their levels of Urdu, the national language of Pakistan. The analysis presented here focuses on a thread named 'I'm Punjabi, but can't speak the language, help?' (see Appendix 1). This thread was posted outside TSR Pakistan Society, but it is this lack of affiliation that makes it an interesting case of the subtle conflict between nationalism, globalisation and the individualisation of social class.

Before discussing the discursive patterns of social class in this thread, I shall first introduce the theoretical and historical context of the relationship between language and social class. Bourdieu's concept of 'linguistic capital' (1990: 114) provides a useful departure point. A form of embodied cultural capital, it is defined as the mastery of language that enables one to speak in a manner which is more favourable to the structure of the linguistic market. Power relations work to determine the allocation of linguistic capital, ensuring that the elite always speak the most prestigious language. Building on Bourdieu's work to study nationalism, Hage (1998: 53) argues that 'national belonging tends to be proportional to accumulated national capital'. 'National capital' includes 'valued characteristics within a national field: looks, accent, demeanour, taste, nationally valued social and cultural preferences and behaviour' (*ibid*). In this sense, the possession of dominant linguistic disposition indicates one's national capital and belonging to a country.

The historical class struggle over language in Pakistan is a relevant case in point. As a result of the colonial conflict in India in the nineteenth century, Hindi came to be associated with

Hindus and Urdu with Muslims. During the decline of the British Empire, Pakistan was founded as an independent country from India at the urging of elite Muslim Indians, leading to the flight of Muslim refugees from India, including the Muhajirs and the Punjabis. Despite the linguistic variety created by the ethnic diversity of the refugees, elite Muslim Indians demanded the protection of Urdu as a means to consolidate power. In response, the government enacted a new policy wherein Urdu was recognised as the official national language, with the intent to perpetuate a single language and forge a national consciousness among its population. This reflects the nation-state model prevalent in the rise of globalisation. In Ayres's (2009) interpretation, the language policy is the primary contributor to Punjabis' inferior social status. Despite its similarity to Urdu, Punjabi has been stigmatised as a non-elite local dialect, resulting in Punjabis rating themselves lower in aspects like 'social grace', 'modern' and 'cultured' (Ayres, 2009: 92). These dynamics show how nationalism, globalisation and language simultaneously shape the formation of social class.

Urdu is regarded as the de facto national capital in TSR Pakistan Society, as participants communicate in English, but often ask if their peers speak Urdu. Therefore, within this national group, Urdu skills not only indicate legitimate membership, but also signify elite status and confer recognition. In contrast, the forum thread in question concerns the prospect of Punjabi being alternative national capital that enables social class to operate outside the elite strata and cultural homogenisation in a global age. The significance of Urdu as a mark of belonging and elitism is challenged by *cake_lover*, a second-generation Pakistani immigrant who remained an active member of TSR Pakistani Society but started this unaffiliated thread. Introducing herself as an Urdu speaker, *cake_lover* described Urdu as the language of the mass ('most young people there speak and is common'; 'I just don't feel a connection with it'). This contrasts to the discourse of authenticity conveyed in her narrative of Punjabi ('Punjabi heritage', 'mother tongue', 'perfect the language').

Similarly, when giving advice to *cake lover*, other participants show their resistance to the dominance of Urdu, and the stigma of Punjabi, by using a range of phrases commonly associated with an official language, to talk about Punjabi, ('ancestral language', 'it helps you learn about your culture and roots', 'the proper form of Punjabi', 'pure Punjabi', 'my accent isn't perfect in Punjabi'). In this case, Punjabi embodies the national capital that serves the making of the unique Pakistani subject, as opposed to the homogeneity of Urdu speakers.

Alongside the fragmentation of aristocratic nationalism, the thread reveals the ways in which the tension between nationalism and globalisation forms part of student-migrants' social imaginary about social class. This takes place in the debate between *william_walker*, *Polpo* and *SSS_JJJ* as to whether *cake_lover* should speak Punjabi or English. At the discursive

level, this conversational text is comprised of three discourses, namely belonging, risk and liberty. On one hand, *William_walker* and *Polpo* made a connection between speaking English ('speak English with a regional British accent that is all you should want', 'gain a high fluency in English') and being British ('if you want to be British', 'you can support the language of the great country you live in and are part of'). On the other hand, william_walker frames Punjabi as a threat to the UK ('immigrant legacy', 'colonising Britain'). *SSS_JJJ* challenges both discourses of belonging and risk, stating that 'people can learn whatever language they like'.

At the social level, competency in English equates with more than linguistic pursuit. Immigrants in English-speaking countries tend to perceive English as a 'premium language' (Chew, 2010: 83), and link it to an outgoing and confident manner that displays a 'Western comportment' (Ong, 1999; Brown & Hesketh, 2004). Further, Park and Bae (2009) argue the significance of English as a mobility capital encompasses 'the belief that good English skills are indispensable requirement for success in the global economy' (368). This social context suggests that to decode the conversation above, we should view English as not only the national capital of the UK, but also the mobility capital of globalisation. The discourses of belonging and risk lay bare submission to the imperialistic norm that subordinates immigrants whose first language is not English to 'native' nationals in the UK. Despite this, the concern over unbridled Westernisation amongst international students in English-speaking countries, either to seek belonging or to enhance global competency, is misplaced. As shown in the thread, *SSS_JJJ* confronts that personal choice over multilingualism not only proclaims an international characteristic – the complete opposite of nationalism, but also gives migrants the power to resist imperialism inherent in globalisation. This ultimately hints at the individualising ethos of neoliberalism.

The making of the distinct national and international subject presented in this analysis demonstrates what Mendez (2008) calls the tension between the essentialist and the self-fashioning in the contemporary neoliberal class politics. While individualisation is commonly linked to anti-elitism and the diminishment of social class, Mendez proposes to place individualisation processes in social and ethnic registers as 'they could be in tension with various ways of understanding authenticity: being true to oneself or to one's origin' (2008: 222). For her, individualisation stresses the need for moral judgements on 'being real', and thus triggers a new class-consciousness based on horizontal differentiation, where legitimate distinctiveness oddly emerges from ordinariness. Therefore, social class becomes an ambivalent category where continuity with origins ceases to be deterministic, and instead implies moral authenticity, as opposed to artificial elitism. The Pakistani students in the thread 'I'm Punjabi, but can't speak the language, help?' take on the chances to distinguish

themselves and become more individualised through the rhetoric of authenticity, signifying the reproduction of social class through establishing moral boundaries. However, these boundaries are fluctuating, for the student-migrants are caught between conflicting forces of nationalism and globalisation within a transnational communication space, where authenticity takes on various meanings. If 'speaking Punjabi' means 'being authentic', Urdu speakers serve as the banal elite Other in the refinement of Pakistani nationalism, but when it comes to the resistance against global homogenisation, they belong to the same category with Punjabi speakers in opposition to the imperialistic English-speaking Other. This paradox reflects the simultaneous experiences of subordination and liberty within the transnational class politics among student-migrants.

Becoming transnational through ad hoc groups

Whilst online national communities like TSR Pakistan Society are important loci of the spatial negotiation in student-migrant class politics, ad hoc groups in International Lounge are created for participants to negotiate the temporal in-betweenness during their journeys toward future mobile lifestyles. Here, an ad hoc group is a forum thread where a participant poses a question about migration. The discussion formed around this question then leads to the formation of a community based on shared experience and the simultaneous emergence of a competition to win expert power. In this section, I will report on four types of ad hoc group, each of which corresponds to a phase of the migration journey, and envisions an expectation of personal attainments and global competencies.

On course to university abroad: the departure from immobile home
The first type of ad hoc group consists of peer groups where prospective students deal with the anxiety prior to migration. The two threads 'Telling Parents about going to School in the UK' and 'American Applicants 2015' typify these pre-departure ad hoc groups. They feature the tension between fears of being entrapped at home and the craving for new horizons.

Posters in the two forum threads in question seem to be aware of a burdensome 'stay-at-home' lifestyle. Instead of being a source of comfort, home is construed as the fixity of the mundane from which they want to escape:

> *MattSkoldpaddan*: (...) my only obstacle of having my dream come true is my parents. They want me to go to school in California and stay near the house.

robthehero: (…) I was born in Moscow, and came to NYC when I was 5. I've pretty much lived here my whole life, apart from spending a year in Switzerland as part of a student exchange. (…) I can't wait to get out the city.

younggirlbribri : (…) I think a lot of people want to go some place different and for me that is leaving the desert to go to a place that is completely the opposite. The appeal is someplace different.

In contrast, international experience has the transformative effect as it distinguishes student-migrants from 'stay-at-home' people:

squeakysquirrel: (…) I think sometimes Americans can be a bit blinkered when it comes to the rest of the world so any experience will be good. (…) An international education can be very enlightening and very beneficial to your future career.

Callethiel: (…) there are some really legitimate reasons for wanting to study outside the US (experience, new perspectives, independence) (…)

coffeetime: (…) It sounds like England would be a perfect addition to your life.

The stigma of 'living at home' as immobility and the benefits of studying somewhere 'different' reveal two striking points regarding to the relationship between migration for education and social class. First, the desire to be transnationally mobile, rather than economically successful, is crucial in understanding the class politics behind the decision to study abroad. Second, living away from home, or individualisation through discontinuity with origins, becomes a strategy to search for capital.

Notwithstanding the emotional support that brings their members together in the first place ('I have thoroughly stalked the threads to relieve my fears'; 'It's nice to see other American students that are in the same boat as me'; 'Fear of rejections normal though!... we have each other in this thread to support everyone'), ranking is salient in these ad hoc groups. In the thread 'American Applicants 2015', one's position is determined not only by academic achievements, but also by choices of university. A rule is set out in the first post: 'I should start this thread for us Americans to talk about what Universities we are applying for and what course... Grades are optional to list'. However, participants still express a sense of inferiority when referring to their unsatisfying grades, especially through using sad emoticons in the absence of real body language:

LissyDearest: I have a 3.25 GPA, so my grades are pretty so-so 😰 (…)

avash27: SAT: 2020 😡 SAT (…)

derek15: (…) could you possibly tell me if I seem qualified [for the LSE]?

SAT 2020 ☹ (…)

D_ecrivaine: (…) Unfortunately I'm seeing the APs and SATs of some people here and mine scores are VERY mediocre in comparison ☹.

This could be interpreted as a direct transfer of cultural differences into informal electronic communication. On the other hand, the discourse of prestige emerging from participants' announcements of their application and admission to universities abroad reveals a correlation between the operative cultural capital of the education field and that of the online communication field. This involves the vocabulary of a global hierarchy of universities discussed in the literature review ('a world class university', 'top tier universities', 'top pick', 'a university in the top three of worldwide university rankings', 'members of the G5', 'top Universities to break into the profession from'). The emphasis on the vertical differences between universities in this case manifests the effort to gain peer recognition, and subsequently gains credibility for one's expert voice on admission within this online group.

On international fresher week:

How international are you? The second type of ad hoc group operates to assist international students in the second phase of migration: learning to become 'international'. At this stage, student-migrants celebrate the cosmopolitanism of international education through collective imaginations of the global lifestyle. These patterns are illustrated in two threads named 'InterNationals' and 'How cultured are you?', where participants make sense of global competencies and attempt to position themselves as 'real' internationals. Both threads revolve around networking with international fellows in an ad hoc manner, resembling the sociable atmosphere of international fresher weeks at universities.

Salient in the two threads is the expectation that a global lifestyle is not a product, but a perquisite of international education. It is first pursued through travelling opportunities. For example, to join the thread 'How cultured are you?', participants are required to answer the question 'How many countries have you been/lived in?'. Similarly, the thread 'InterNationals' invites participants to provide information about their 'location'. In this regard, geographical mobility is perceived as not only the essential international credential of student-migrants, but also the indicator of their cultural distinction in text-based peer communication. The significance of geographical mobility as a form of cultural capital in a transnational communication field is revealing in the following post, where *Hayley Williams* associated her lack of travelling experience with not belonging to the 'cultured' peer group:

> *Hayley Williams*: I have only lived in England and I speak English (…) Yep, it's safe to say, I'm not cultured at all.

On the other hand, participants in the 'InterNationals' group often provide excessive information about 'location' to display their connections with various places beyond their country of residence, and distinguish themselves as being more 'international':

> *Ribomania*: Riga, Latvia/Somerset, England

> *r_raghav11*: chennai, india (that will change to birmingham, England in 3 months)

> *Shef*: Uk (But i'm half Indian, quarter burmese and quarter armenian)

> *Lovina*: Japan- lived here all my life but im indian. going to London in a couple of months, to study at KCL.

The global lifestyle demands not only going and living abroad, but also developing a set of characteristics and tastes that can position one as a 'real' international. These ideal personal traits of an international student are envisioned in the introductory questions of the 'cultured' group:

> *BurstingBubbles*: (…) Do you speak any other languages? Which different cuisines have you tried? Do you know much about Religion? Are aware of international events?

These questions allow members to assemble a series of personalities, including multilingualism and curiosity, as well as capacities such as political awareness and the ability to get along with people from diverse cultural backgrounds, all of which package the 'international' identity. While these discussions concern the so-called 'international mind', there exists the conception of the 'international taste' in the 'InterNationals' thread, as participants are suggested to share their 'favourite food, favourite movie, favourite song and favourite band'.

Overall, in an online transnational space accessible for all people, the discourse of internationality as diversity and openness continuously defines the boundaries of international groups. In the absence of formal gatekeepers, exclusivity is inscribed through peer judgements on disposition and taste. This demonstrates Bourdieu's hypothesis of the cultural reproduction of social class at the global level. What is significant about group terrorisation in the cosmopolitan ad hoc groups in question is the way in which the discourse of commonality is backgrounded in favour of the discourse of distinctiveness. In other words, social class is increasingly less about community solidarity than notable individuals, their diverse experience and unique personalities. This hints at individualism inherent in the

transnational capitalist class, as discussed in the literature review. Further, the individualisation of social class in this case is double-edged, precisely because it detaches from the normative coherence of national class, but at the same time conceals patterns of categorisation in the name of heterogeneity. *William_walker* , who previously equated multilingualism to colonialism in the thread 'I'm Punjabi, but can't speak the language, help?', goes on to identify himself as a 'cultured' individual in the thread 'How cultured are you?':

> *william_walker*: [living in] Britain. [speaking] English. British, Italian, Greek, Indian, Chinese [cuisines]. I am a High Church Anglican. Well sure I am interested in geo-political forecasting so I have to know things about other places.

It is clear that for *william_walker*, foreign languages do not form legitimate cultural capital of the internationals, but a taste of exotic cultures do. This is a striking example of post-colonialism in a class fraction purportedly consisted of open-minded individuals.

Embarking on an international career: How to afford a new home?
The third type of ad hoc group in International Lounge emerges in the light of toughened immigration policies in the UK, which increases the need for career advice among international students who aim for subsequent migration. As will be shown, career-related threads become places where student-migrants redefine discourses of 'home', 'national' and 'international' in response to the opportunities and challenges that they encounter when attempting to enter the UK job market.

In contrast to the discourse of home as immobility prominent in the first phase of migration, the search for a new home is referred to as the motivation for soon-to-be-international-graduates to stay on for work in the UK. Consider the following posts in the thread 'How can international student get a PR or citizenship in UK?':

> *NotYourMom*: (...) I prefer living in UK because it genuinely feels like home as in everyone speaks in English. (...)

and the thread 'How difficult is it for international graduates from top unis to secure employment?':

> *contextual*: I would like to avoid a situation where I complete the degree and am forced to go back home. (...) Of course, I would choose a country where there are more opportunities for my career.

For these posters, home is conceived as a place that caters to their personal lifestyles. Therefore, it is selected on the basis of the maximum benefits one can reap for a particular purpose rather than emotional belonging. Moreover, in order to afford this new 'home', student-migrants should acquire sufficient capital to stand out in the globalised job market in the UK, as shown in *Typonaut*'s advice for *NotYourMom,* who started the thread 'How can international student get a PR or citizenship in UK?':

> *Typonaut*: You probably need to be offered a job that no one else in the UK or rest of the EU can do, you need to be the *unique* candidate for the job. (...)

The emphasis on uniqueness in this post reveals the complex relationship between student-migrants and the UK government, the transnational capitalist class and nation-states. In particular, the reproduction of social class at the global level is the by-product of the 'demand-driven' conception of immigration featured in the UK nationalist immigration policies.

Faced with major obstacles that prevent their transition between the international education field and the labour market field, participants in the forum have contested the concept of employability promoted by universities and employers. In the thread 'Employability', online peer communication space operates as the locus of class resistance, for participants disclose the vulnerability of international students, which is suppressed in the neoliberal discourse of the self-sufficient subject. It gives voice to a group that is not heard in offline institutional and professional settings:

> *Rjdjones*: I had to sit through a morning long presentation on my university's dream for the future. That students would be given everything they need to head out into the world and get the best jobs, that companies would be demanding our graduates - just rehashed 'be the best you can be' stuff with an almost impressive determination to completely ignore factors like (...) the job market waiting for graduates.
>
> *Moosferatu*: Nowadays you have to be perfect with CV, interview etc. just to get a chance. In 50-60 years who knows, maybe people will have to do interpretive dance routines in order to get work and career services will be pouring resources into making sure everyone is perfectly choreographed.

By mimicking university and employer's language of employability, those participants establish disengagement with elitism and pragmatic corporate culture. They also question the quantitative approach used by universities to measure employability:

> *Toro89*: (...) I know that they have a good percentage of graduates getting jobs after 6 months. (...) That's just statistics. I wanted someone 'real' to tell me how they get on (...)

It is striking that *Toro89* challenges statistics provided by institutions, predominantly regarded as fact or self-evident truth that makes employability a doxa discourse. Instead, s/he looks for the 'real', or the heterodoxy in Bourdieu's term, in online space despite its stigma regarding fake identities, arguably because it is the field where she is a native member and knows better what is at stake. This offers an intriguing instance where the operation of fields provides the conditions for the emergence of different types of discourses.

Despite the class dissent above, career-related ad hoc groups enable international students to establish a social hierarchy in the interest of the transnational capitalist class. In the thread, 'Reasons why the UK shouldn't take more refugees', posters use the language of competencies and class interest to distinguish between refugees ('poorly educated', 'speak insufficient English', 'most likely have little skills or worth for our economy', 'run away from their problems rather than face them') and international students ('so little is done in this country to actually reward and support merit', 'the biggest 'drains' on the economy are people who have been studying here'). Here, the differentiation between the two groups of immigrants inherently implies the elite status of international students. This suggests the coexistence of power resistance and power consolidation in the third phase of migration for education.

Arrival – The Self on the Move

The three types of ad hoc group introduced so far in my analyses all contain elements of individualism. However, the idea of networked individualism is perhaps best illustrated in the fourth type of ad hoc group, namely the network of wanderers. Here I focus on the thread 'What nationality are you?' (see Appendix 2). Although this thread was not created in the final phase of migration for education when international graduates become highly mobile professionals, it exposes the performance of hypermobility, a recurring theme in the literature about elite migrants. In this regard, the thread is an ad hoc group of wanderers and a site of imagined mobility par excellence.

Unlike other forum threads, the thread 'What nationality are you?' does not contain any discussions, but features self-introductions of nationality. Connecting but not communicating frequently with international fellows, posters in the thread indeed make use of the field's rule wherein 'the International Lounge is a place for TSR users from all corners of the world to get together', but inherently break the conventions of forum discussions in favour of instant information-based interaction. I see this as the interplay between structure and agency, or what Michelle de Certeau (1984) terms strategy and tactics of everyday life, in order to create a communication architecture that adapts to the mobile habitus of the transnational capitalist class.

Moreover, through their responses, participants make the question about nationality itself redundant. Especially, uprootedness and disconnection are presented as playful and liberating:

> *Theonehitwonder*: C'mon… so what are you?
>
> *Geneticist*: I don't know seriously
>
> *Mehrdad jafari*: I'm a citizen of the world but I'm not Socrates lol
>
> *ExRN*: In our lifetime this question will have changed completely. It won't only be what nationality? But what planet are you from too…

With the answers framed as such, it is clear that the posters deem the nation-state system unnecessary, and place the individuals at the centre of the conceptualisation of the world. Therefore, it could be argued that despite dynamics of nationalism here and there, online participation sets the stage for individualistic class-consciousness, and enables international students to subvert the social structure within which their class fraction is reproduced.

CONCLUSION

Although the politics of the transnational internet forum are certainly shaped by myriad gender, racial and religious issues, which I have not highlighted here due to spatial constraints and the scope of the research, a specific focus on the individualisation of social class, opens up new ways of conceiving identities in the age of globalisation, neoliberal capitalism and online social networking. In particular, this research has shown a transnational process of class formation in the International Lounge forum that departs from the traditional national class structures identified by Bourdieu and Passeron (1977). To use Hall's words (1990), it features two vectors: continuity and discontinuity.

The vector of discontinuity underlies an individualised social class paradigm where distinction is increasingly configured by ruptures in origin. As unfolded in the analyses, various discourses of 'home', 'national' and 'international' works within the online communication between student-migrants to envisage a hypermobile class fraction. Through mobilising these discourses to exhibit their belonging to national and international groups, members of International Lounge give strong instances of uprootedness, world-class qualifications, diverse taste and extrovert personal traits required to be 'real' international. For many of these student-migrants, the desire to escape from 'home', the signifier of entrapment and fixity, to explore the world and experience something 'different' is the prime

motivation for departure. Student-migrants also perform an individualised communication paradigm, characterised by personalisation of online space, social networking through ad hoc groups and information-based instant interactions.

At the heart of the transnational class reproduction in International Lounge is the function of mobility capital. It is intrinsically transferrable between the education, labour market and online communication fields, as we have seen participants using national and international credentials acquired offline to organise online activities. This suggests that mobility capital permits and demands adaptability of individuals. Nationalism has focused on creating institutions to support the reproduction of the middle class within a coherent national community. However, globalisation and neoliberal capitalism gives rise to decentralisation, and weakens the stable structure and the acquiescing sense of social class. The national societies and international ad hoc groups in this study indeed respond to the lack of social institutions for an emerging transnational class fraction. These networks are created as a result of personal strategies to utilise mobility capital and improvise in response to circumstances arising during their migration journeys. Conceived in this way, social class revolves around the individualistic effort to cross and adapt to fields, rather than the collective effort to enact homogeneity and sustain supremacy.

Nevertheless, individualisation does not free the transnational class subject from power domination and subordination. This is because the vector of discontinuity intrinsically relies on the vector of continuity for its reproduction. The 'international' status conferred on participants in International Forum is the result of their effort to distinguish themselves from elite nationals and inferior refugees. The discourses of authenticity and meritocracy enacted at the moments of fragmented nationalism and cosmopolitanism in International Lounge suggest that individualisation is inherently constituted of moral boundaries.

Due to the scope of a postgraduate dissertation and limitation of data, my research did not explore in sufficient depth the role of online communication in the transition between the education field and the labour market field, although this is an important phase of migration for education. However, future researchers in this field could operate by investigating a student-led careers forum to comprehend the link between the middling transnational class to which student-migrants seem to belong, and the transnational capitalist that they aspire to enrol as professionals.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1

I'm Punjabi, but can't speak the language, help?

cake_lover: I was born in the UK and my parents brought me up to speak Urdu (national language of Pakistan) as that's what most young people there speak and is common. But my parents speak to each other in Punjabi, so I understand it but I'm just so nervous I'll mix up words and sound stupid trying to speak Punjabi. How can I perfect the language?

I just feel so proud of my Punjabi heritage and feel annoyed I can't speak my mother tongue.

Coolgirlaamy: I'm stuck in the same situation haha but I can't speak urdu either. I can like understand everything people say to me, I'm just too scared to reply back in punjabi and so I just carry on speaking English.

My mum keeps saying I'll have to learn for when I get married though

cake_lover: That's why I feel somewhat lucky I can at least speak Urdu, but I just don't feel a connection with it.

I swear all Asian mums just think about is getting their kids married!

Coolgirlaamy : I spent some time trying to learn urdu/punjabi but yeah, I don't really feel connection with it either tbh.

And yeah, omg that's so true...

cake_lover: Just to mess with my mum I tell her I've found a nice Jewish Nigerian girl :P Bump, kind of want some suggestions not a debate...

Feraligatr: If you want language help, use Byki or Memrise to learn a language

But tbh, I'm a Punjabi Pakistani born and raised in London but I can't speak Urdu or Punjabi at all but then again, I'm not proud of my heritage though and I see no need to be able to speak Urdu or Punjabi either

Graceful_Lawy: This is exactly how I was brought up. My parents speak in Punjabi but I speak in Urdu. However, I can still speak Punjabi but I don't use it regularly. I love both languages, Urdu and Punjabi. I love being a Punjabi and speaking in Punjabi. However, my accent isn't perfect in Punjabi which I realised when I heard my Pakistani Punjabi cousins speaking in Punjabi.

I would suggest you to start speaking to your parents in Punjabi and tell them to correct you if you speak it wrong. Listen to Punjabi music or Punjabi movies. Plus, funny Punjabi shows, like, Khabaarnaak.

Hope this helps. Punjabiyaan di shaan vakhri haha.:bhangra:

William walker: Sorry to be the big bad bigot here but you are British and should give up the legacy of parents and their ancestors if you want to be British. Otherwise you are colonising Britain with an immigrant legacy. If you can speak English with a regional British accent that is all you should want. Of course it is your choice to be British or Punjabi.

Polpo: Ignore William Walker (http://www.thestudentroom.co.uk/show....php?t=2990931) , just learn your ancestral language and speak it at home and gain a high fluency (which I'm sure you already have) in English and speak that when outside, that way you can support both the language of the great country you live in and are part of, and you can also enjoy your ancestral language at the same time.

leema1122: Just have a go as that's what languages are all about it doesn't matter if you make mistakes as that's the whole point and in spoken form many simple mistakes don't really matter tbh and im saying this as I can speak Urdu, Punjabi (and a dialect of them which is mirpuri) French and obviously English too so if u need any help just ask xxxxx

daindian: Speak Bengali then I'll be impressed :P samja

leema1122: Well I want to learn Arabic or Pashto instead :P and I can understand some bits of sylheti and how many languages can u speak ?? xxxx

daindain: Looool no u don't :P and syletti is horrible it's not Bengali :P I speak English, Bengali, German, hindi :P xxxx

leema1122: HUH :/ I don't what?? LOOOOOL im confused is that bit to the Arabic and Pashto part or to understanding sylhetti? and yes I can add hindi to my list too :P xxxx

daindain: The Arabic and Pashto part Loool. :P I can add urdu to my list then xxxx

leema1122: Ermmm yes I do want to learn them both tbh and also your just cheating u know that don't u??

daindain: Loool shush :P xxx

leema1122: hahahahahahahahahahaha

polpo: Why not Arabic and Pashto are amazing languages, there's no need to be biased, it seems like you are trying to say Bengali is superior to other languages.

cake_lover (responded to *leema1122*): I guess so, I think speaking to my mum in Punjabi might be a good start.

My sister's in-laws speak in the mirpuri accent, I always struggle to understand it lol. My family has a similar accent to Sikh people, so I might just watch some Punjabi films to help lol

leema1122: yeah I understand which accent your talking about as that is the proper form of Punjabi and btw where are u from back home? Xx

SSS_JJJ (responded to *William walker*): What a load of nonsense! So your saying people can't learn languages if they want to? So your saying when they teach us Spanish or French in school they're 'colonising' Britain with immigrant legacy. Seriously?! People can learn whatever language they like.

Polpo (responded to *daindain*): Why not Arabic and Pashto are amazing languages, there's no need to be biased, it seems like you are trying to say Bengali is superior to other languages.

Science100 (responded to *cake_lover*): I CANT SPEAK PUNJABI I ONLY SPEKA ENGLISH AND I AM PUNJABI LOL (indian Punjab)

William walker (responded to *SSS_*JJJ): People can learn what ever language they want. However if they attempt to learn a language to support an immigrant legacy from their parents, that is colonialism.

Polpo (responded to *leema1122*): Ignore the other poster and keep learning Pashto and Arabic

cake_lover (responded to *leema1122*): From Lahore, but pre-partition my family's from Ludhiana. You?

leema1122 (responded to *cake_lover*): My dads side is from Punjab -Jhelum but Mums side from Mirpur that's why I know how to speak both accents loooool but like don't your brothers/sisters or mates speak Punjabi? Xxxx

leema1122 (responded to *polpo*): Awwwww thank u do you know how to speak any one of them by any chance? Xxxx

polpo (responded to *leema1122*): I've heard others speak them

leema1122 (responded to *polpo*): oh I see :P xxxx

polpo: With Pashto however you will have to choose a dialect e.g. Peshawari Pashto because the accents in Pashto are different so kha would mean good but the softer sha would also mean good.

Anymorefor123: Tenu punjabi toh samaj toh ayi hogi na ? Ya nay ? Lmao don't worry I'm pakistani ... Half punjabi and half Pathan and I can kinda speak punjabi but literally don't know a word of Pashto lol .-. I guess it's just the way your parents being you up learning a language so chill xx you'll learn sooner or later I'm sure . Chinta na kar (I think that was Hindi fml)

leema1122 (responded to *polpo*): OMG! How do you know about it? As I am learning the peshawari accent as I have links to far related family there xxxx

polpo (responded to *leema1122*): Pashto is quite easy to pick up in terms of vocab and grammar rules, it's just that it's unrepresented in the media which is why most people haven't heard of it.

william walker (responded to *SSS_JJJ*): Curry is a choice based on free trade. Nothing to do with legacy or culture.

polpo: if you would like to learn Pashto a website exists called www.thepashto.com

leema1122: Polpo :P LMAOOOOO and oh okay d.w about the ethnicity thing but thanks as I will check the link out too xxxx#

cake_lover: I'm from a really white area and there's not many Asians on my course at uni, who I'm mates with at least. My sister can speak it, but I'm just used to speaking to her in English lol

leema1122: ohhhh I see! well try speaking with your sis and then she can help you as you probably feel like shy in front of her than your parents as the way I improved my languages was with my friends tbh and family as I just kept practising! Best of Luck Koi mere laik khidmat theh menu das deyo Ji :P xxxx

daindain: Personally I think that speaking your mother tongue is important because it helps you learn about your culture and roots.

SSS_JJJ: Okay so curry is from India and exists here and is enjoyed by everyone! That's a form of colonialism , shall we stop making curry for the British public ?

willam walker: Curry is a choice based on free trade. Nothing to do with legacy or culture.

Appendix 2

What nationality are you?

theonehitwonder: C'mon... so what are you?

Michiyo: I am Romanian with Moldavian, Bulgarian, Mongolian, and possibly also Russian ancestors, currently living in England.

BobbieShamro: 1/2 Norwegian, 3/8 English and 1/8 Scottish.

-Native Briton-: British and proud

ursula28: My parents are Nigerian and I was born in the U.S.

Ggmu!: Japanese

SpeedyGonzal: Nigerian but born in UK

childofthesun: Lebanese,but born in US so i have American nationality. Also have Ivorian and French nationality

kcv001: Portuguese!!! ^_^ … but born in India

Lyrical Prodigy: I have dual nationality, Nigerian (Don't know if you can count African American as a nationality) and Dutch I've lived in London nearly all my life though after coming from the Netherlands!

beaverhausen: Jamaican mon, born there too but have been in the UK for most of my life

Balloon Baboon: I'm British. I'm actually 1/4 Scottish. 1/4 Irish and 2/4 English.

Nadine_08: British Arab(half Iraqi, half Lebanese)

the1only: indian!! but live in the uk have lived here for 12 years, moved there when i was 4.

Yeah dude: American

Saratheawesome: British

geneticist: I don't know seriously

-Rainbow Drops-: Half white half Pakistani. Born in Spain, lived in the uk since I was 3

babouska: Dutch.. Yayy.

Lilyghz: Malaysian

Inachigeek21: Well, everyone on this thread has exotic 'mixtures'… shall I say?

markreed: Dual nationalities, half English and half Filipino living in England atm.

Mehrdad jafari: I'm a citizen of the world but I'm not Socrates lol

jedanselemyia: Dual british and french nationality, but my background is more diverse

MrKmas508: Boring British… 1/8th Armanian though.

Valyrian: I'm half Chinese half Irish

Some Bad Karma: I always thought mix was pretty boring lol. Your mix is so cool, I've actually never seen an eastern asian/european. Judging from your avatar the mix has made a beautiful creation!

trustmeimlying1: Irish born and bred for generations. Will likely end up diluting that component in the future but who knows.

localblackguy: Nigerian origins, but Irish nationality - born and lived there my whole life. Tbh, consider myself more Irish than I ever will Nigerian.

Novascope: Interesting

Some Bad Karma: What are you trying to imply?

The two eds: I am English. I won't get a yellow card for racism will I?

MoniC255: British born West Indian (Grenada, St.Lucia and Antigua) - with Indian on both parents side, and Chinese from Mums side.

Toddman10: Irish passport holder in Northern Ireland, I don't particular believe in the concept of nationhood, I have closer blood relatives in USA and Canada than I do in Ireland/GB. 'countymen' are just strangers who share a common ancestors to you from 1000 years back.

VannR: I wonder how many people on this thread are confusing nationality with ethnicity?

Ishan_2000: Born in Scotland to Indian parents who also have Indian parents, and have lived in UK my whole life. So, British Indian as my passport puts it, or I think it says British Asian which I don't like.

BrokenLife: So you prefer British Indian over British Asian?

Ishan_2000: Yes, because British Asian could mean I am from anywhere in Asia, including China, or Indonesia, etc

Shqiptare: I'm ethnically Albanian from Kosovo. I hold British citizenship.

ExRN: In our lifetime this question will have changed completely. It won't only be what nationality? But what planet are you from too.... At present, I am no doubt British, although I do have Danish blood on my mother's side.

Ndella: I'm Black British

Ser Alex Toyne: The only Moldovan on TSR.

VannR: I had a Moldovan great-grandmother.

pinkteddyx64: I'm the only British person here born to Ukrainian parents.

Muhaha_6: French - Living in London and was born to Sri Lankan parents

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