

Hybridity, identities and inclusion of international PhD students in England

Item Type	Journal article
Authors	Tsouroufli, Maria
Publisher	The Department of Business Management, Heriot Watt University HWU and published by SML
Journal	Interdisciplinary Perspectives in Equality and Diversity
Download date	2026-05-17 02:05:21
Link to Item	http://hdl.handle.net/2436/608461

Hybridity, Identities and Inclusion of International PhD Students in England

Maria Tsouroufli¹

London Metropolitan University, London, UK

Abstract

This paper draws on a qualitative interview study, which aimed to explore how international PhD students make sense of their experiences of studying in a Russell group University and living in England. Hybridity was narrated as contextual and relational identity performance in response to encounters with difference and was imbued with emotions of loss, confusion, tension and disappointment. Hybridity encompassed a range of identity positions including shifting old identities, blending local and global identities, and re-defining old identities. These positions intersected with students' constructions and performances of gender, religion, culture, nationality and community and were shaped by international PhD students' attempts to interact with home students, staff and the wider community, and feel included. Although international students' attempts to create social capital and negotiate hybrid identities took place within unequal relations of power, they demonstrated intentionality, agency and diversity. Further research is required to critique the homogenisation of international students and unravel multiple inequalities in higher education, which continue to constrain the participation of many groups of students despite popular discourses of internationalization and widening participation.

Keywords: identities, hybridity, international, PhD students, inclusion, England

Introduction

The multiple and hybrid identities of international students have received a lot of attention in the media and by researchers (Devos 2003). Postmodern and post-structuralist approaches to subjectivities (Foucault 1979; Hall 1996; Weedon 1987) have resulted in more nuanced understandings of the identities of international students and a turn to the '*constant movement between flows and closures in relation to their subjectivity*' (Koehle 2005, p.108). International students need to be examined as agents who reconstruct and negotiate their multiple identities (Haugh 2008), as well as challenge their discursive positioning attributed to them by others (Koehle 2006). This paper is concerned with how international PhD students in a Russell group University negotiate their identities through their interactions. It

¹ m.tsouroufli@londonmet.ac.uk

explores how encounters with difference (linguistic, ethnic, cultural etc.) as well as experiences of inclusion/exclusion in higher education spaces and beyond might shape hybrid identities. In this paper I highlight the role that emotions play in international PhD students' in processes of identification (Sluss and Ashforth 2007), becoming and inclusion. I start with a discussion of relevant literature on hybridity and explain how the concept is treated in this paper in relation to international students' identity projects and their gender, national, cultural and religious performances. I highlight the role of international student agency, diversity, and intentionality in the complex process of negotiations and renegotiations of legitimate hybrid identities shaped by the marginalising nature of power relationships hidden in higher education (Fotovatian, 2012). I argue that further attention is required to these emotional processes and the inequality regimes which continue to operate in higher education, and constrain the participation of many groups (for example, working-class, black, international students) in multiple and complex ways (Tett, 2004) despite popular internationalisation, massification and widening participation agendas.

Hybridity

Hybridity: a term used extensively in cultural and postcolonial studies but less so in higher education studies and indeed within the context of internationalisation of British higher education. As a marker of identity, hybridity has been studied mainly in relation to hyphenated cultural and racial identities. In this paper I focus on the identities of international PhD students and the potential or ways they can afford to practice and enact hybridity during their studies in the UK.

Hybridity has been discussed in the literature as a blending of cultures and representation of coexistence of difference in which new structures and perspectives emerge (Canclini 1995). As Sakamoto (1996) explains:

'giving up the desire for a pure origin, hybridity retains a sense of difference and tension between two cultures but without assuming hierarchy. It is not just a new identity but a new form of identity'' (1996, 115-116).

This cultural dialectic is also noted in the writings of Russian philosopher and literary scholar Bakhtin (1981), who explains that the hybrid is:

'not only double-voiced and double-accented (as in rhetoric) but is also double-languaged;... it is the collision between differing points of views on the world . . . they are pregnant with potential for new world views' (Bakhtin 360).

Here, Bakhtin notes the "double-ness" of two merging perspectives or "voices" that the hybrid identity inhabits as well as the capacity for "new world views" to emerge. Indeed, hybridity is a creative "third space" for many scholars (Bhabha, 1990; 1991; Bolatagici 2004; Sakamoto 1996).

However, the degree of merging, blending and fusion of cultural and other identities is the result of neither a-contextual nor apolitical processes (O' Connor 2012). It is important to

consider the local, national and global contexts and discourses of culture, history, education as well as gender, religion and class, which might present subjects with different possibilities for hybridity praxis (Hall and Du Gay 1996). In this paper I am interested in the everyday experiences of subjects and the strategies they might devise in order to navigate through difference. I am interested in the forms and enactments of hybridity practised within a white 'Western' and middle-class context (a Russell group University in an affluent city) as they attempt to make sense of the 'new' worlds they might inhabit. I take a pragmatic view of hybridity and attempt to speak out of the esteemed and celebrated identities but also the marginalised, dismissed identities and those mundane examples of hybridity (O' Connor 2011; 2012) enacted within a context of disparity of power between 'Western' educational and cultural practices and non-Western cultural norms and historical discourses (Said, 1993). Western driven, but universally applied systems of knowledge on one hand, and neo-liberal domination on the other hand, masks the pathologization of international students' identities and the persisting inequalities in higher education. The silencing of the pedagogical, emotional, and ethical challenges posed by internationalisation is legitimised within a context of learning reduced largely to economic motive (Beckett 1998; Gabbard 2000) and individual, cognitive-technical practice. As Sutherland points out:

'The way that knowledge is organised both physically and epistemologically within most mainstream higher education context demands the erasure of the body' (2011, 1).

However, the body has feelings, morals, and dilemmas shaped by personal as well as collective predispositions influenced by social constructs of gender, class, culture and ethnicity (Bourdieu 2001a; Bourdieu, 2001b). This paper focuses on the embodied and multiple identities of international PhD students in the UK and draws attention to their emotional, gendered and racialized projects of inclusion in British higher education and society.

Identification, becoming and emotions

I see the process of identity making as a dynamic, contextual and relational process (Sluss and Ashforth 2007; Sang et al. 2013). In this paper I focus on the process of identification: *'an ongoing internal process wherein personal meaning and significance are achieved as one locates one's place in a given social context'* (Atewologun and Sealy 2011) and becoming (as opposed to being) (Archer 2008) in an attempt to throw light on how participation in higher education and the British society can be influenced by international students' gendered, racialised, nationalized and classed understandings and constructions of themselves and others (Tsouroufli et al. 2011a; Tsouroufli 2012).

Understandings and performances of self are neither static nor disembodied but in fluidity, negotiation, and always in relation or at times in line with others, as subjects strive for coherence and belonging in a global context of mobility, turbulence and uncertainty (Marcu, 2012). Experiences of learning and becoming are lived out through bodies which are physical, mental, relational and indeed emotional. Embodied selves in this paper are treated as storied selves fraught with emotions. The hybrid self is narrated as the product of

experience, a product of gendered discourses and practices in which power, resilience/resistance and emotions are at the centre of understanding self-formation (Foucault 1977; Tsouroufli et al. 2011b; Tsouroufli 2012). Emotions are not narrated as things that happen to passive sufferers as Zembylas points out:

'Emotions are discursive practices operating in circumstances that grant powers to some relations and delimit the powers of others, that enable some to create truth and others to submit to it, that allow some to judge and others to be judged' (2003, 115).

Research on the experiences of international students in higher education has found that they experience negative emotions upon relocation for the purpose of studying, including stress and alienation (Halic et al. 2003). UK studies have shown that international students feel isolated and would like more interaction and integration with home students (Harrison and Peacock 2010; Tsouroufli 2011). Studying abroad has been found to lead to re-conceptualizations of students' multiple identities (Haugh 2008; Ichimoto 2004; Oikonomidou and Williams 2013).

Higher education research has also interrogated students' gendered, racialized and classed subjectivities and the negative feelings of having identities that higher education institutions devalue or pathologise (Mack 2006; Skeggs 1997). Emotions such as anger, shame or feelings of rejection and lack of entitlement to participate in higher education have been found to constrain the participation not only of international students but also other non-traditional students (mature, working class), particularly in the old elite Universities (Tett 2004; Reay 2008; Reay et al. 2009; 2010; 2011).

In this paper I explore the negotiations, re-conceptualizations and repositionings of the multiple and embodied identities of a diverse sample of international PhD students in an old elite University in England and the emotions that constitute gendered and racialized identity formations.

Methods

This paper reports on a small, semi-structured narrative interview study conducted in England in 2011-2012. International (non-UK origin) PhD students were drawn across different departments in a Russell Group University and were interviewed over a year. The study was granted ethical approval and funded by the employing organization of the author. Each interview lasted approximately one hour. PhD students were asked to discuss their background and reasons for coming to the UK, their experiences of studying and living in the UK, their relationships with other students and supervisors, their experiences and views on teaching, research, assessment and inclusion/exclusion. All the interviews took place at the researcher's/author's office at her employing organization. The researcher is a British Greek born academic who came to the UK in 1996 to do a PhD in gender and education, funded by the Greek State Scholarship Foundation. The researcher acknowledged her position in the interviews. Also on many occasions throughout this research project she drew on her own

experiences and her multiple hybrid identities as an international PhD student in the mid-90s and later a migrant academic in an attempt to connect with the participants and make sense of her storied self and the storied selves of the participants (Tsouroufli, 2012).

The participants were from different countries and from different disciplines (Education, Politics, Languages, Conservation Studies, Linguistics). Most PhD students were in their second or third year and only 3 in the first year. 8 students were female and 7 were male. Their ages varied with the youngest one being 27 years old and the oldest one being in his 50s. Some had come to the UK with their families but the majority of the PhD students were living alone.

I employed a purposive as well as a snowballing approach in order to get diversity of perspectives and experiences. The sample was small and constitutes a snapshot of the experiences of international PhD students at a particular location and time of their lives. A longitudinal, larger study of international students drawn from different Universities might reveal a more diverse set of findings.

Through the students union and Director of the PhD programme across departments, I invited international PhD students for an interview. Field-notes and a reflective diary was also kept throughout data collection, analysis and writing up. Interview data was recorded and transcribed verbatim. Excerpts from interviews, including information about participants' gender and country of origin are used to illustrate the views and experiences of international students. In order to protect the anonymity of interviewees, I have used pseudonyms.

The aim of the study was to explore, how international students' identities shape and are shaped by their participation and educational experiences in an internationalised University. Through the process of reading and comparison of data (Weber 1990), and reading of literature on multiple inequalities and identities in higher education, hybridity became the focus of my analysis of international PhD students narratives of education and life in the UK

The analysis presented in this paper is informed by a post-structuralist paradigm, in which identity is constructed, negotiated and re-constructed through narrated texts and lives (Foucault 1977). I see identity as precarious and unstable and the performance of subjectivities as a 'project' to be constantly worked at, to be accomplished or achieved (Kerfoot and Knights, 1998, 12; Tsouroufli et al., 201; Leathwood and Read, 2013). I view international PhD student narratives of their study in the UK as subjects' attempt to construct meaning of the narrated event but also an attempt to communicate effectively to an audience. My analysis aims to bring to the fore processes of 'identification' (Atewologun and Sealy 2011), becoming (as opposed to being) (Archer 2008) and belonging, as well as the role of emotions and multiple strands of difference (Tsouroufli et al. 2011) in the constitution and performance of identities. Discourses of gender, culture, and religion, particularly Islam, as well as the intersections of these categories of difference appeared to be very important in enactments of hybrid and embodied identities of international PhD students.

Analysis was inductive. At first data was organized under the themes of the interview schedule (lower level descriptive analysis) (Richards and Richards, 1995). Constant comparison of themes/categories and reading of literature on 'identification' and the

performance of emotional identities (Tsouroufli et al. 2011; Tsouroufli, 2012), directed the emergence of higher order categories: 'Glocal', 'inbetweeners', 'social rejects', resilience, rejection. The analysis in this paper is organized under the higher order or second level of these themes in an attempt to demonstrate the enactment of the hybrid identities of international PhD students in their attempts to be included and the role of emotions in this process.

In an attempt to increase the credibility of findings interviewees were consulted at different stages of the analysis and some read drafts of this paper prior to its submission. I have maintained contact with some of the interviewees who expressed an interest in my work and were agreeable to be interviewed again about the same subject should I wished to do so

Findings

In what follows I will discuss, the different student identities played in encounters with difference, the role of emotions in enactments of hybridity and the challenges that international PhD students faced in their projects of inclusion.

Global/International identities and resilience

All PhD students appeared willing to embrace the opportunities afforded by diversity and difference in higher education and the wider British community. The experience of living and studying in the UK, and particularly encounters with people that they had not normally interacted with, allowed international students to challenge their assumptions about difference. Ahu, discussed how she became aware of her prejudice against religious people. Mustafa discussed how he became more accepting of sexual difference and diversity since he came to the UK.

Ahu: 'For example, let me confess something about you. Normally I don't get on well with religious people. When I learned that you were religious, I thought, okay, Maria, Greek-Orthodox, well, she will not like me. I accuse myself of being racist, nationalist, prejudiced person. I said, this prejudice does not work at all. So I can get on well with a religious person. It is so nice for me because I learn. I learn from my mistakes. I learn from my prejudices and I just quit my prejudices. You cannot just read and... this is wrong'.

Both Ahu and Mustafa believed that shared understandings and values transcend the grand discourses of ethnicity, religion, etc. They approached ethnicity, gender, and nationality as socially constructed categories that sometimes can be mobilized as dividing mechanisms in global contexts. Mustafa had a resilient and optimistic attitude to international experiences. He felt that shared interests, and likes, such as sports or music and the use of online technologies can function as bonding and connecting resources in the local and global sites of diversity and difference. This view was shared by nearly all male interviewees but only one female interviewee. Overall female students expressed more difficulties in meeting and

bonding with other international and home students through organised events including parties, and student societies.

Mustafa emphasised the importance of actively engaging in the making of the 'international' subject. In the following extract Mustafa discusses how the experience of living and studying abroad has led to the 'coming out' of a more global self.

Mustafa: 'I think I feel more as an international person now, international student. I feel like the borders of the countries are just the borders, like the shape of the countries and the landlines. I think they are only on the map, they are not actually on the world itself. I think the world itself is a whole part. Now I think like that but before I started living abroad I was not thinking like that, I was thinking the countries are separated, things are so different from each other. I think being a student in the University made me more global'.

Some students mentioned that they had always felt very international and/or global because of their exposure to different cultures prior to coming to the UK and their accommodating personality. Rim was proud of her ethnic identity and culture but always very resilient and willing to align certain performances with normative expectations of acceptable behaviour across different national contexts.

Rim: 'I have no problem, if I go to a very rural city in my country. They don't like people to wear very strict clothes or something. I would wear whatever they like. I have no problem with it. I wear the national dress of my country, I'm very happy to wear it, why not? Other times I wear very, let me say, Western type of dresses or whatever and I feel very comfortable with it. So I don't need to stick with one thing only in order to say that because I'm from this place or from the other one... So, and I feel very happy with that because you get to meet different people'.

Rim's hybrid identities and context specific performances of difference and sameness are clearly embodied in the aesthetics of her dress as this extract illustrates. Rim also talked about spaces her body occupied in order to fit in with the cultural, religious and gendered expectations in different contexts.

However, encounters with difference were not always narrated as positive experiences, following a linear path towards new perspectives and the development of hybrid identities. Instead, they appeared to be fraught with ambiguity, challenges and emotions, constitutive of identities narrated as 'glocal' or 'inbetweeners', and 'social rejects'. These identities do not reflect a rigid categorization, they rather demonstrate the fluidity of identity and the complexity of enactments of hybridity

Hybridity and emotions

Nearly all interviewees expressed a sense of loss and suppression of feelings in performing hybrid identities and attempting to be integrated in British Higher Education and at times, the wider British society. PhD students' from different parts of the world felt that certain aspects of their ethnic and cultural identities were at odds or in contradiction with enactments of acceptable behaviour in personal and professional relationships in the UK. For these students their identity projects centred at gaining legitimacy through alignment of performances with the privileged identities of home students and staff. However, these alignments of performance were fraught with emotions including loss and confusion. In the following extract Massimo shares his uncertainty and confusion of being and interacting appropriately in flirtatious encounters with women in the UK.

Massimo: 'I mean the (country of origin) part of me would be a lot more kind of social and talking to people even, but then I always think, "Oh well, okay, should I actually say that?" "Should I not? Should I talk a lot more? Should I not?" I mean, looking at girls, I mean, it might be silly but, I mean, in (country of origin) people look and that's normal. Here you don't look at girls. The kinds of things you say to a girl to approach her are different here. They're acceptable there, not acceptable here, and vice versa'.

Mustafa discussed how much he missed touching and hugging people, and Muvi, who was Muslim, discussed how shaking hands was a way of creating a connection with British people. However, as I will discuss later shaking hands could put most Muslim female interviewees in a very difficult position. Kissing, touching and looking at people were not simply forms of social etiquette for some international students but embodied and gendered performances of bonding, connecting and coming together.

Muvi: 'When I go to chess meetings I just want to shake hands, but they don't want to do this, maybe as they are not getting used to it. But this is how I am involved. If I shake hands, I can see this person is This is the way how I make some connections. When you touch somebody's hands you can take the electric from this person, and you are giving yours to this person, so you are making a connection'.

Attempts to be included and enactments of hybridity brought loss, concerns, tensions between old and new identities, or different forms of identity. In the following extract Mahasen discussed the new form of Muslim identity that she developed through interactions with her supervisor, students, her husband and her life in the UK. Again as with Rim earlier, the aesthetics of dress and relational practices are narrated as embodied acts of sameness, difference and belonging, offering possibilities for normality and legitimacy.

Mahasen: 'I've always considered myself more like a strict Muslim. Sometimes I think, I wish I were one of those girls who were always at home and probably do

my religious things more properly, so I don't have to meet so many men, and to get the chance to wear my clothes in the proper way as a proper Muslim. But because of my situation I realise and I know that this is impossible now. I will have so many male friends, so many male colleagues and students, so it's impossible for me to be so strict. I need to be kind of normal or...'

Mahasen's hybrid Muslim identity reflects a very resilient attitude. Nevertheless shifting her religious identity came with a cost and fear for what she has become and what she may become in the future as the following extract illustrates.

Mahasen: 'It's not a pain, but a concern that if I am like what I wish, it might have been better for me probably in front of God, I don't know. But also I'm doing something good now teaching and learning and all these things, but at the expense of something else. I'm not doing anything wrong. So we'll see where it goes'. I've already become what I probably feared!'

Attempts to be included had different implications for international PhD students who appeared very conscious and aware of their multiple identities and the emotions constitutive of new or shifting identities. Mahasen focused on her religious identity, whereas Muvi discussed his 'in-between' status in terms of his ethnic identity. Ellada also felt that her experience of studying and living in the UK resulted to a state of 'in-betweenness' but she did not refer to religion or ethnicity at all. Instead she mentioned a holistic change of her personality and a completely new perspective to life.

Ellada: 'I mean, other people might describe me like that or as having two heads, and I don't even feel I have two heads. Actually I do feel an in-betweenener. Somebody told me, "Why don't you go back home now?" you know, and I would like to go but at the same time I feel like... I don't know... because when I go back and meet, like, friends of mine that I've known for ages, we're still friends, but I'm a different person and I've done things and seen things and I've got a different perspective on things and they have a completely different perspective'.

Ellada's bicephalous (two-headed) monstrous imagery is very powerful. Although she rejects it, her self-description as an 'in-betweenener' shows that her enactment of hybridity is associated with changes, new beginnings and transitions in her life. Unlike Mahasen and Rim, Ellada's embodiment of hybridity is mainly focused on personal relationships and her personality changes since she moved to the UK.

Inclusion, internationalization and new forms of identity

International PhD student narratives clearly demonstrated different perspectives, world views, experiences and implications of encounters with difference. However, nearly all felt disappointed, or upset that despite their resilience and commitment to participate and integrate, there was little or no effort from British students and apparently no effective

University strategy to support diversity, difference and inclusion in the internationalized university and beyond. Azad, felt that internationalization was simply an economic imperative and international students were usually treated with suspicion and prejudice, particularly those from an Islamic background. Alexandros discussed how teaching and learning at the University was not inclusive. He felt that the perspectives of international students were simply used to 'spice up' or as an 'add on' to the norm. Alexandros had made many efforts to be included at the University as well as the local community. However, he firmly believed that becoming an equal member of an internationalised University and a multicultural society, ethnic and cultural differences should be respected, understood and accepted rather than lost.

Alexandros: 'To me, it seems that inclusion means becoming a member of a society without losing your identity, your country identification, and actually become an equal part without thinking about your background, your culture, and your language, and all the things which we discussed before. And I think other people have to accept you are as you are and pay attention to the experience you have and what is different in your country, and maybe even the modules could include this background that you have'.

Alexandros who was a first year PhD student, unlike Mahasen and Ellada, was not prepared to lose, shift or redefine his identity in an attempt to feel 'normal' or accepted in higher education and the wider British society. He had not yet found himself in situations which created contradictions, or frictions between old and new identities, nor did he go 'the extra mile' in an attempt to integrate. For example, Ellada had made a conscious decision to go to pubs and drink excessively as she felt that this was the only way to make friends and feel part of the British society. Ellada did not feel that she had compromised. She liked going out but had tried really hard to integrate and adjust to British culture. Mahasen, on the other hand, avoided going to University events where there was alcohol. She also never felt comfortable telling her supervisor that because she was a strict Muslim she did not wish to shake hands with men. In the following extract she discusses how shocking and difficult the supervisory relationship had been for her and how much it challenged her strict Muslim identity.

Mahasen: 'In our culture always the teacher -student relationship is very, very, very formal. This is one of the things that I found difficult here because they want to make things not so formal, even from the very beginning by calling them by their first names. So this was a shock kind of. I'm a female, at the beginning my supervisor here was male so it was also kind of – because I had to stay with him in the same room and even the first time I saw him he shook hands, and all of those cultural difficulties that I had great difficulty with, but I accepted everything and it's fine. Well, he should have known some because his wife is Lebanese, but I don't think she's Muslim. But he should have known something about our culture. I don't shake hands. But it's not polite to just not'.

Mahasen's hybrid identities are enacted and sustained on embodied relational practices. This extract highlights two issues; first, that these embodied relational practices are informed by competing and sometimes contradictory discourses of gender, culture and religion. Second, these embodied relational practices are shaped within a predominantly white-British middle class University context which 'others' certain religious, classed and ethnic identities as a relevant body of literature has demonstrated (Ahmed, 2012; Reay et al. 2009; Puwar, 2004)

The narratives of international PhD students show that there was hardly ever an opportunity to discuss their cultures and traditions with UK origin supervisors and students. They also stressed the absence of opportunities to negotiate a shared understanding and to develop intercultural competence with UK origin students, staff and local communities. Expectations to conform and lack of attention to international PhD students' understandings and performances of ethnicity, religion, gender, community and inclusion alienated some students and led them to give new meanings to old identities. In the following section I will discuss international PhD student experiences of exclusion and the implications for their hybrid identities.

Exclusion and the rejected/ rejecting hybrid

Some international PhD students mentioned that they had experienced patronising behaviour and discrimination from UK origin students and staff, reflecting perceived white-British supremacy over certain cultures and religions (e.g. Islam). However, what stood out for all international PhD students as fundamental for their sense of inclusion and belonging was the absence of diverse communities formed through relationships with UK origin and foreign students. Ifigenia did not feel that she had been left out from a student community but rather that there was no community to interact with and get to know British students. Her experiences as an undergraduate and later an Erasmus student outside the UK were very different as she had formed relationships with other students and felt part of a community. Yo and Ahu had been very resilient but felt that the absence of a space for coming together and closer made international students feel lonely, alienated and excluded. Ahu felt that the only emotional connection she had at the University was with her supervisor. She felt that friendships were difficult in the UK and that parties were in one of the very few opportunities to meet people.

Ahu: 'I just have an office here; I just have some friends in the... but I'm not a part of the University. I love my supervisor, but that's all. I can't explain the dynamics behind it. Nobody knows nothing about anyone. Common room doesn't work. Who will go to common room? I always dreamed about having a corridor like this and PhD study rooms so we can communicate with each other. There is no space like this. They just have common room because they think it's kind of social. But they know it's not working at all. So I'm not feeling that I'm part of political department. I think the parties are the primary... to feel that you can have friendships'.

Mehmet like Ahu felt that there is no space to interact and that drinking and partying was the only way to make friends. Mehmet described himself as a Western man. Although he was an atheist, many times he would describe himself as Muslim in the UK in an attempt to show solidarity with other foreigners, feel a sense of belonging, and cope with exclusion and loneliness. Ahu would also describe herself as Muslim in the UK but never in her home country. Muslim identity took a new form for both of them during their studies in the UK. Encountering difference and occupying less powerful positions as students, foreigners and Muslims in a predominantly white-British middle class University and city, led to new affinities and identity positions.

Ahu's imagery below is graphic, very powerful and emotional. The metaphor of vomiting is used here to describe her suffering as an international student who has not managed to be integrated in an elite University and the British society just like certain foods do not agree with one's body and are rejected.

'I don't feel included. Sometimes when I first came here I felt that... I don't know how to explain it. I wrote to my friends that this society is vomiting me. I tried to be 'eaten, but it is vomiting me. I can't explain why I'm not included, but I really don't feel I'm a part of British society.'

However, Mehmet, who also felt excluded, took a different position in relation to rejection. In a short follow up interview he clarified that his new alliances with Muslims from the UK and other countries were a conscious and dynamic act of rejection against privileged identities in the British context. Again, as in all the international students' narratives, relationality, intentionality, power and agency appear pivotal in shifting and reconstituting identities, doing new identities and undoing old ones (Tsouroufli, 2012).

Discussion

Hybridity encompassed a range of international PhD student identity positions including shifting old identities, blending local and global identities, and redefining old identities (e.g. Muslim woman, heterosexual man). These positions were connected with international and British students' understandings and practices of gender, religion, ethnicity, community and inclusion and international students' attempts to create spaces for negotiating identities. Not only were such spaces limited for international students but when created there was very little, if any, attempt from the University, staff and home students to play a meaningful role in promoting inclusion and diversity. The data analysis suggests that even some of the most resilient international students in this study felt as *'bodies out of place'*, bodies that caused discomfort, and had *'to work hard to minimize the signs of their difference'* (Ahmed 2012, p.41) Despite the perceived diversity of the University, international students felt they could be integrated into the common institutional culture of the University and the local communities only by not sticking out. The analysis presented in this paper suggests that this was not the result of individual racist attitudes but rather failure of the institution to recognise and understand difference and provide an appropriate service to international students because of their colour, culture, gender, and ethnic origin (Macpherson 1999; Solomos

1999; Ahmed 2012). This was of course a small study and a more diverse sample in terms of University sites might have produced different data. A longitudinal study of the identities and experiences of international PhD students across different University sites (e.g. Russell group and post-1992) might yield interesting and more diverse findings about the identity constructions and re-positionings of the identities international PhD students. Larger samples of diverse groups of international students might also allow for a more in depth exploration of the gendered and classed processes of belonging and developing social capital.

Further research is required to critique the homogenisation of international students and unravel multiple inequalities in higher education, which continue to constrain the participation of international students and many others including working-class and mature students, despite popular discourses of internationalization and widening participation. In the study discussed in this paper, although international PhD students' attempts to create social capital and negotiate hybrid identities took place within unequal relations of power, they demonstrated intentionality, agency and diversity. International PhD students intentionally employed strategies to navigate difference and overcome institutional whiteness in an attempt to develop social capital and a sense of belonging in the host University, local and country culture. However, their belonging projects and identity shifts and repositionings varied depending on the salience of certain identities, their upbringing and worldviews.

Processes of hybridity and becoming (Tsouroufli 2012) were narrated by international PhD students as contextual and relational performances in response to encounters with difference and they were imbued with emotions of loss, confusion, fear, tension and disappointment. International PhD students' narrations of hybridity indeed echo the notion of a creative 'third space' discussed by Bhabha (1991) and Bolatigici (2004). However, the role of emotions has not so far been given sufficient attention in the formation of hybrid identities. Trendy and popular notions of hybridity as fusion, have overshadowed the negative emotions that students and other groups might encounter in their identity projects and the implications for their personal lives, learning trajectories and inclusion. Further research is required to illuminate the experiences of students' hybrid, identities and particularly the tantalizing moments and negative emotions resulting from non-harmonious relationships of multiple, shifting and sometimes new forms of identity of international PhD students.

Conclusions

This paper focused on the hybrid identities of international PhD students in a Russell group University in England. The analysis presented in this paper illustrates the embodied and emotional experiences of international PhD students and the range of their identity positions, including shifting old identities, blending local and global identities, and re-defining old identities. International PhD students were neither passive nor homogenous in their identity and belonging projects. Their identity positions and repositions were diverse and the result of an amalgamation of influences and emotional experiences. Further research with international students should address issues of emotionality, intentionality, agency, and diversity; the contexts of institutional whiteness and racism within which identities are done

and undone; and the implications for equality, diversity and inclusion in higher education in the UK.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank all the students who participated in my study and the University which funded this study. I would also like to thank the reviewers for their insightful comments and Professor Jayne Osgood who read and commented on a draft of this paper.

References

- Ahmed, S. 2012. *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life*. Duke University Press.
- Archer, L. 2008. 'The new neoliberal subjects? Young/er academics' constructions of professional identity.' *Journal of Educational Policy* 23(3): 265-285.
DOI:10.1080/02680930701754047
- Atewologun, D. and Sealy, R. 2011. 'Advancing racio-ethnic and diversity theorising through 'intersectional identity work' . In *Proceedings of the Seventieth Annual Meeting of the Academy of Management (CD)*, edited by Leslie A. Toombs. Academy of Management, Gender & Diversity on Organisations Division.
- Beckett, D. 1998. 'Disembodied Learning: How Flexible Delivery Shoots Higher Education in the Foot, Well Sort of.' *Electronic Journal of Sociology* ISSN: 1198 3655
- Bhabha, H. 1990. 'The third space': interview with Homi Bhabha. In *Identity: Community, Culture and Difference* edited by J. Rutherford. London: Lawrence and Wishart.
- Bhabha, H. 1991. 'The Postcolonial Critic: Homi Bhabha interviewed by David Bennett and Terry Collits.' *Arena* 96 (Spring): 47—63.
- Bakhtin, M. 1981. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Translated by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Edited by Michael Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Bolatagici, T. 2004. "Claiming the (N)either/ (N)or of 'Third Space': (Re)presenting Hybrid Identity and the Embodiment of Mixed Race," *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 25(1): 75–85.
- Bourdieu, P. 2001a. *Homo Academicus*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Bourdieu, P. 2001b. *Masculine Domination*. Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Canclini, G. 1995. *Hybrid Cultures: Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Devos, A. 2003. Academic standards, internationalisation, and the discursive construction of 'the international student'. *Higher Education Research and Development* 22(2): 155-166.
- Fotovatian, S. 2012. Three constructs of institutional identity among international doctoral students in Australi. *Teaching in Higher Education* 17(5): 577-588.

- Foucault, M 1977. *The History of Sexuality*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Foucault, M. 1979. *Discipline and Punish*. London: Penguin.
- Gabbard, D. Ed. 2000. *Knowledge and Power in the Global Economy: Politics and the Rhetoric of the School Reform*. NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Inc.
- Giroux, H. 2009. 'Neoliberalism, Corporate Culture, and the Promise of Higher Education: The University as a Democratic Public Sphere.' *Harvard Educational Review* 72(4): 425-464.
- Hall, S. 1996. Introduction. Who needs 'identity'? In Hall, S. and Du Gay, P. 1996. *Questions of Cultural Identity* (pp.1-17). London: Sage.
- Halic, O., Greenberg, K., Paulus, T. 2009. *Language and Academic Identity: A Study of the Experiences of non-native English speaking International Students*, *International Education*, Spring: 73-93
- Hall, S. and Du Gay, P. 1996. *Questions of Cultural Identity*. London: Sage.
- Harrison, N. and Peacock, N. 2010. Cultural distance, mindfulness and passive xenophobia: using Integrated Threat Theory to explore higher education students' perspectives on 'internationalisation at home' , *British Educational Research Journal*, 36(6): 877-902.
- Ichimoto, T. 2004. Ambivalent 'selves' in transition: A case study of Japanese women studying in Australian Universities, *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 25(3): 246-269.
- Haugh, M. 2008. The discursive negotiation of international student identities. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 29(2): 207-222.
- Koehne, N. 2005. (Re)construction: Ways international students talk about their identity. *Australian Journal of Education* 49(1):104-119.
- Koehne, N. 2006. (Be)coming, (Be)longing: Ways in which international students talk about themselves. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 27(2):241-257.
- Knights, D. and Kerfoot, D. 2004. "Between representation and subjectivity: gender binaries and the politics of organisational transformation", *Gender, Work and Organisation* 11(4): 430-54.
- Leathwood, C. 2003. 'Experiences of struggle: findings from a longitudinal study of Investigations in University.' *Teaching and Learning* 1(1): 7-10.
- Leathwood, C. and Read, B. 2013. 'Research Policy and Academic Performativity: Compliance, Contestation and Complicity.' *Studies in Higher Education* 38 (8):1162-1174.
- Mack, N. 2006. Ethical representation of working-class lives: Multiple Genres, Voices, and Identities, *Pedagogy: Critical Approaches for Teaching, Language, Composition and Culture* 6(1): 53-78.
- Macpherson, W. 1999. *The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry*. London:HMSO.
- Marcu, S. 2012. 'Emotions on the move: belonging, sense of place and feelings identities among young Romanian immigrants in Spain.' *Journal of Youth Studies* 15(2): 207-223.

- Mills, D. and Berg, M. L. 2010. 'Gender, Disembodiment and Vocation: Exploring the Unmentionables of British Academic Life.' *Critique of Anthropology*, 1—23. Published by SAGE Publications.
- O' Connor, P. 2011. 'Everyday hybridity and Hong kong Muslim youth.' *Visual Anthropology* 24(1/2): 203-225.
- O' Connor, P. 2012. *Islam in Hong Kong: Muslims and Everyday Life in China's world city.* Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.
- Oikonomidou, E. and Williams, G. 2013. Enriched or latent cosmopolitanism? Identity negotiations of female international students from Japan in the US, *Discourse: Studies In the Cultural Politics of Education* 34(3): 380:393.
- Puwar, N. 2004. *Space Invaders: Race, Gender and Bodies out of Place.* Oxford: Berg.
- Read, B. Louise A., Leathwood, C. 2003. "Challenging Cultures? Student Conceptions of 'Belonging' and 'Isolation' at a Post-1992 University." *Studies in Higher Education* 28(3): 261-277.
- Reay, D. 2008. 'Psychosocial aspects of White Middle Class Identities: Desiring and Defending against the Class and Ethnic `Other' in Urban Multi-Ethnic Schooling.' *Sociology* 42: 1072-1088.
- Reay, D., Crozier, G., Clayton, J. 2009. 'Strangers in Paradise: Working class students in elite universities.' *Sociology* 43(6): 1103-1121.
- Reay, D., Crozier, G., Clayton, J. 2010. "Fitting in" or "standing out": working-class students in UK higher education." *British Educational Research Journal* 32(1): 1-19.
- Reay, D., Crozier, G., David, J. 2011. *White Middle Class Identities and Urban Schooling.* London: Palgrave Press.
- Richards T, Richards L (1995) Using hierarchical categories in qualitative data analysis pp. 80-218 in U Kelle (Ed) *Computer- aided qualitative data analysis: Theory Methods and Practice*, London: Sage.
- Said, E.W. 1993. *Culture and Imperialism*, New York: Knopf.
- Sakamoto, R. 1996. 'Japan, hybridity and the creation of colonialist discourse.' *Theory, Culture & Society: Explorations in Critical Social Science*, 13(3):113- 128.
- Sang, K., Al-Dajani, H., Ozbilgin, M. 2013. 'Frayed careers of migrant female professors in British academia.' *Gender, Work and Organisation* 20(2): 58-171.
- Sluss, D.M. and Ashforth, S.E. 2007. Relational Identity and Identification: Defining ourselves through work relationships, *Academy of Management Review* 32(1): 9:32.
- Skeggs, B. 1997. 'Classifying practices: Representations, Capitals and Recognitions. In Mahony and Smroczek 1997:123-39.
- Solomos, J. 1999. 'Social Research and the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry' *Sociological Research Online*, 4(1). Available at <http://socresoline.org/uk4/lawrence/solomos.html>

- Tett, L. 2004. Mature working-class student in an 'elite' university: Discourses of risk, choice and exclusion. *Studies in the Education of Adults*, 36(2):
- Tsouroufli, M. 2011. International students' identities and inclusion. Research project funded by the University of York.
- Tsouroufli, M., Rees, C., Monrouxe, L., Sundaram, V. 2011a. 'Gender, Identities and Intersectionality in medical education research.' *Medical Education* 45: 213-216.
- Tsouroufli, M., Ozbilgin, M., Smith, M. 2011b. 'Gendered forms of othering in UK hospital medicine: Nostalgia as resistance against the modern doctor.' Special Issue: 'Understanding the dynamic of careers and identities through multiple strands of equality.' *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion* 30(6): 498-509.
- Tsouroufli, M. 2012. 'Breaking in and going out a Medical School: Feminist Academic Interrupted', Special Issue on 'Being a Feminist Academic' *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion* 10 (5): 467-483.
- Weber R.P 1990. *Basic Content Analysis*. Newbury Park CA: Sage.
- Weedon, C. 1987. *Feminist practice and post-structuralist theory*. London: Blackwell.
- Zembylas, M. 2003. "Interrogating 'teacher identity': emotion, resistance and self-formation", *Educational Theory* 53(1): 107-27.