

Engaging With the Everyday Politics of Internationalisation of Higher Education: Contrasts Between Interviews and Collective Memory-Work

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Abstract

The experiences of international students have been mainly studied with one-to-one interviews. Researching experience with interviews is arguably limiting as they often fail to capture and delve into the historical, political and social production of everyday experiences. Having in mind these limitations, I took a different entry point to the experiences of international students in the UK during the period of 2012 and 2016. In my attempt to offer justice to the socio-political aspects of their experiences, I used the feminist methodology called Collective Memory-Work. Adding another layer of methodological complexity, I also conducted one-to-one interviews in order to compare and contrast the produced empirical material and the different research dynamics. This methodological experiment proved to be particularly valuable, as it contributes to the argument that research methods are as crucial as our theoretical and political lenses. In fact, they are ways to make these consistent with each other. For unpacking the possibilities and the potentialities of methodologies like memory-work, which is designed to be politically and theoretically situated, I use the thought of Rancière. His provocative view of representative politics as mere politics of policing versus everyday experimental politics offers another angle to reflecting on the politics of social research.

Keywords

research methods, memory-work, everyday politics, Rancière, international students, experience, social transformation

Introduction

Contemporary universities have been consistently following the steps of a globalised market economy in the last three decades. Consequently, one of the directions that higher education is following is internationalisation. Offshore

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campuses, exchange programmes, international university consortia and student recruitment agencies are mushrooming around the globe. Given this tendency and the great value of international students for the economic prosperity of contemporary universities, there is a noticeable proliferation of research on the experiences of international students. Most commonly, those studies use one-to-one interviews in order to document and/or evaluate the quality and the nature of international student experiences. Below I present a brief summary of the main tendencies of research on international students' experiences:

- In most research projects on international students' experiences, *experience* seems to be considered as something *personal*. That is, experience can be possessed and fully understood by an individual. This also means that by talking with research participants about their personal experiences, a researcher can have access to the student's authentic inner voice.

- Some studies approach international students as exclusively driven by their *self-entrepreneurial interests*, as related to *employability* and *social-economic capital* (e.g., Sin, 2009; Papatsiba, 2005).

- International students are sometimes *psychologised*, based on their negative and/or positive experiences. Extensive analysis on the *damaged well-being* of international students due to their new fragmented and/or lost *identities* can be found in some of the research articles (e.g., Gu, Schweisfurth & Day, 2010; Russell, Rosenthal & Thomson, 2010; Sherry, Thomas & Chui, 2010; Sato & Hodge, 2009; Grimshaw & Sears, 2008; Luzio-Lockett, 1998).

- As a consequence of the previous points, it appears that the *subjectivities* of international students are often analysed in a *de-socialised* and *a-historical* manner, insofar as they appear as mere expressions of the inner self and of the personal drives of each individual.

- At an *institutional level*, international student *experiences* are approached as if they can be pre-decided, organised, managed and *manufactured on demand*. The conclusion drawn is that universities should deploy certain strategies which work towards the production of a more *trouble-free international student experience*, if they want to continue *attracting international students* (e.g., Burdett & Crossman, 2012; Coles & Swami, 2012; Ramachandran, 2011).

- When the study of international students is approached through the lens of *migration* (usually transnational migration), the analysis of their experiences is often limited to a discussion of *cultural differences* between them and the local students. In other studies, transnational migrants' relation to the state and *state representation* (in terms of citizenship) is the main line of analysis (e.g., Robertson, 2013; Neilson, 2009; Nyland et al, 2009).

The above summary evokes the most common limitations of research on international students. Most studies overlook different angles of the international

student journey and the multiple potentialities of the experiences of international students. Instead of looking for multiplicity and novelty, those studies tend to reproduce neoliberal discourses, deploy narratives of assimilation that foster colonial discourses, and attribute a predominant and overpowering role to the state. Is social science's role to confirm and reproduce the dominant language, or in Deleuzian terms, are we bound to legitimise "majoritarian" narratives (Deleuze, 2000)? Is there any way to escape that trap, especially when everyday experience involves an intimate contact with such discourses? Could a researcher contribute to challenging them? Could research facilitate transformation? And most importantly, how can one create the research conditions that enable it? Can one cease contributing to the "interview culture" which reproduces normative representations of the self as the core of subjectivity through which we "experience" life? (Atkinson & Silverman, cited in Brinkmann, 2011, p. 57). With these questions in mind I went on researching the experiences of international students in an increasingly globalised higher education.

I found some answers to those questions in Collective Memory-Work (CMW). CMW was an initiative of a group of German, Marxist, feminist intellectuals (Andresen, Borman, Bünz-Elfferding, Haug, Hauser, Lang, Laudan, Lüdemann, Neur, Nemitz, Niehoff, Prinz, Rätzzel, Scheu and Thomas) that came together to collectively explore their experiences of being and becoming women. In doing so they designed a methodological strategy which can trace and utilise the double position of women in the socio-political world: a) women as subjected to unfair power relations created by hetero-patriarchy, and capitalism, and b) women as active socio-political participators, and hence capable of challenging, intervening and shaping the conditions which asphyxiate them. In order to do so, they took as a starting point their everyday experiences and they experimented with a set of methodological steps that aimed to facilitate the emergence of the socio-political underpinnings of everyday life. Thus, attempting to avoid the usual methodological hurdles which tend to reproduce self-identitarian approaches to experience, Haug et al. (1987) developed a set of practices which de-centralise the self as placed at the core of experience. Instead, in their approach, the members of a memory-work collective co-decide to write about a memory of a particular topic, describing the circumstances as to what took place, but without attempting to give any interpretation. This arguably offers the opportunity to re-visit our experiences differently and to question our previous self-identitarian understandings—as well as our memories of them. Haug et al. also insisted on the use of writing their memories in the third person (she/he), instead of the first (I), as another means to avoid the reproduction of normative self-narratives.

I encountered CMW during my doctoral research and given my ongoing interest in the relations between everyday experience and politics, I found it particularly attractive. Coming from a migration studies background, I wanted to

focus on the experiences of international students in the UK—a very clichéd and over-researched case, as I explained above. However, my desire to explore the experiences of international students grew even greater precisely because of the significant amount of research that is done on the internationalisation of higher education and how heavily it depends on interview data. As I mentioned already, the interview data seemed to reproduce a-historical and individualistic perceptions of international student experiences, lacking attention to their socio-political production. Hence, after I mapped out the most predominant research outcomes of studies on international students' experiences, I confirmed that I should not only focus on *what* the experiences of international students are about but also on *how* to research them and the interrelations between the “what” and the “how.” Given that, I experimented with deploying both memory work and one-to-one to interviews. First, I conducted ten in-depth interviews with international students who were studying in the UK during the period I conducted my research. My so called “sample” was diverse, in terms of age, ethnic background and sex. Their interviews touched upon migration related issues including racism, and matters of employability including precarity and exploitation. Their reasons for and expectations of studying abroad were also emerging themes. At the end of the interview “data collection,” I started the CMW sessions with four international students and myself. Altogether we had eight sessions, each one based on a different topic related to their experiences as international students in the UK.

The main aim of this article is to look through my research case study on international students' experiences into the interconnections of theory, politics and research methods. In doing so, I will compare and contrast the two methodological approaches I experimented with in order to talk about the possibilities of doing social science that offers justice to everyday politics.

First, I analyse an interview with one of my interlocutors and compare it with one of the memory-work sessions. In particular, I discuss how both the interview and memory-work empirical material point to the strong connections between the migration politics and the internationalisation of higher education in the UK. However, I unpack the crucial differences in these two methodological approaches looking through the lens of the political suggestions of Jacques Rancière. Finally, I elaborate on this contrast to discuss the transformative features of CMW.

Part 1. Interview

Jawad (pseudonym) started by listing the reasons that brought him to the UK, instead of studying in Pakistan. First and foremost, for him studying abroad seemed a worthwhile experience as it provided a unique opportunity to be exposed to a different environment, different cultures, and a more multicultural/hybrid lifestyle in general. In particular, he stated that

...for me studying abroad gives you this global perspective that you can't have if you stay back home. Of course, parents also play a role, they push [you] you know [to study abroad], but it is the multicultural thing here which makes it a really unique experience for me”.

However, the more comfortable Jawad seemed to feel, the more he started “sapping” his own initial enthusiasm about the “multicultural” university. Half-way through our interview, Jawad started expressing his doubts about “the global and multicultural perspective thing.” He started looking at me as if he was weighing me up—in order to make sure that what he was about to say would not cause him any trouble—and then he said that he was very disappointed by the “multicultural” university. I asked him why he said this, and although it took him a while to decide whether or not he should trust me and share the following pieces of information, once he started sharing them, he seemed really happy and relieved.

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

Me: Yeah, they exploit them.

Jawad: Exploit them. The person who has been paying will pay them under and that person, he's not actually mentioning them on his tax return [...] They are not offering a legal contract...and “Okay, fine, if he's not putting me on a contract but that's his business, I need to work, I need to....I'm doing my 20 hours and that's it. Why should I work more?” But people are doing it. And when it comes to proper legal work, Okay, I've been looking in the university [...] I know that if I get in a job like it's not going to be anything much improving my skills and my competency of financing but it's just interaction with other people, you interact with them, you learn the whole experience just to be with them...you sit with them, talk with them, just be a part of them. And when you're applying for like in the library, for part-time work...even for a silent patrol and stuff like that, and you keep on applying with your name you never get a call. Okay, fine, there is a friend of mine, she's from Canada, and she applied and she got it. I was like, “Okay, fine, come, see my application, is it alright or is any problem with that?” And she said, “Oh no, no, there's

nothing wrong. Apply again.” And I did it again, I did once, twice, thrice. And I even like went to them and asked them, “Okay, fine, what’s the problem? I can’t understand. I’m...I’m like...I can’t say I’m over-qualified or stuff like that but I am.... But, come on, it’s like four months now and I keep on applying and applying, even in the finance department even for basic stuff. What’s the problem? And then I did a different thing, I just changed my name on my CV and I got a call. I got a call but I can’t go, I can’t go. I can’t go but I got a call!

Me: Perhaps you should go [laughs].

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

Me: What kind of name did you put?

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

Me: [Laughs] That’s smart.

The forms of exploitation that Jawad’s friends experienced echo the cases of employment exploitation researched by several Australian social researchers like Robertson (2013), Neilson (2009), and Nyland et al., (2009). They particularly emphasise that many international students (in Australia) fall into the category of vulnerable workers—exploitable, flexible, often working under illegal terms and conditions. Given this, although Jawad does not explicitly talk about his own or his friends’ student status, the example he provides confirms the blurring of migration categories. Although international students have a legal right to work up to 20 hours a week during term time (UKCISA, 2016), as Jawad mentions, many employers do not hesitate to exceed the number of hours legally allowed, in this manner increasing their profits through undeclared tax. Thus, student status does not necessarily stop employers from exploiting international students—same with other categories of migrants who are more obviously vulnerable (e.g., illegal migrants).

Jawad’s experience of trying to find work at the library in the university where he was studying adds a whole new dimension, which is not nearly as visible, to considerations of international students as workers. Jawad was not openly refused work in the library and he was not exploited as his friends were (the ones who

worked under illegal terms in the city), and yet he felt—even before his experiment with changing his name—that he was being discriminated against. His friend from Canada got a call for an interview immediately after she submitted her first job application, while he applied several times without receiving any response to his applications. Although there was an absence of any verbal, written, physical or even symbolic expression of discrimination, he felt discriminated against on the ground of race. He felt like a “Paki,” so he “had to change his name.”

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

Although Jawad felt racially discriminated against and the decision to change his name, even only temporarily, proved effective enough (as his application was finally taken seriously), his case is a slippery one. That is to say, there are no clear distinctions between minorities and majorities inside the university and no clear borderlines between inclusion and exclusion. In fact, Jawad initially expected to neither belong to a minority group of students nor to a majority group of students. He expected to become part of a multicultural university that had moved beyond divisions and hierarchies. Jawad felt further confused because, as he mentioned, UK universities put so much effort into attracting international students—yet he came to notice that international students' large numbers inside the “diverse” campus did not translate into equal access to, for instance, employment, compared with the cases of EU and home students or indeed international students who came from Global North countries, like his Canadian friend. Jawad found it striking that despite the considerable number of international students studying at the university, they were implicitly being treated in an exclusionary way.

Arguably, this kind of slippery experience exemplifies the embeddedness of new practices of racism in multiculturalism and the collapse of clear demarcations between inclusivity and exclusivity. Simply put, twenty first century practices of racism can no longer be adequately analysed without also taking into account the politics of multiculturalism (Pitcher, 2009). This is to say, cultural/social diversity and racism are not mutually exclusive terms considering the manner in which they operate inside contemporary multicultural societies. On the contrary, multiculturalism has come to be the main mechanism which has transformed the nature of racism, through its production and legitimisation of new, subtler, and yet

no less pervasive, forms of racism. In fact, as Puwar (2004, p. 137) suggests, it has led to a situation in which it has become exceptionally difficult to even describe a racist practice as racist—and to confront it as such. It might sound paradoxical, and it was indeed confusing for Jawad, but the institutional “hunger” for valorising diversity (cultural, gender, racial, religious and so on), has not led to the decline of racism, but only its constant reconstruction and its further legitimisation (Balibar & Wallerstein, 1991; Sharma & Sharma, Hardt & Negri, 2000, 2003; Puwar, 2004). It was this double process, which blends together various practices and degrees of inclusion and exclusion, that made Jawad oscillate between feeling confused and feeling sure about what had happened. As he said:

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

Me: Exactly.

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

The irony here is three-fold: a) liberal and pluralistic approaches to difference, which prevail in multicultural societies and institutions, still make use of modern versions of racism—normalisation and neutralisation of distinct boundaries around different groups for the security and stability of national belonging (Pitcher, 2009); b) there is one majoritarian group which is still organised around whiteness (as well as, I would argue, masculinity and heteronormativity) (Puwar, 2004); c) the socio-political project of multiculturalism utilises even the “stigmata of otherness” (e.g., skin colour) (Balibar & Wallerstein, 1991, p. 18) through channelling them to serve capitalist production. This is to say, the stigmata of otherness have been valorised, commodified and sexualised (think of the western need for the “exotic other” (Sharma & Sharma, 2003, p. 308)). The impact of these functions of multiculturalism also seem to be present in Jawad's case. He is welcomed in the global/multicultural university (he can even find food on campus from his home country), but his job application was ignored until he changed his name to Jonathan Brown. Until then, he could not even prove to himself the basis on which his

application was ignored; was his CV not good enough, or was his name an indicator of a specific accent or skin colour or a lower level of ability with the English language? He spent time discovering the number of international students that were employed by the university (he found only one), and yet he still could not manage to bring together the experiences of all the other international students who presumably have applied for a job at the university and whose applications must have been also ignored. In other words, the multicultural university brings together different groups but keeps them at a “proper distance” (Sharma & Sharma, 2003, p. 306) from each other, exactly because it utilises the liberal approach to difference effectively.

The interview of Jawad is an exceptionally interesting one and clearly shows the embeddedness of the contemporary higher education in the current political agendas of intensely managing while exploiting mobility. His account exposed both the exploitation of international students by the whole aggregate of the internationalised higher education and the strategies he developed in order to challenge it. However, because of the format of the one-to-one interviews, there were several limitations that I could not overcome despite my theoretical and political intentions.

While conducting the interview I did not have a) the chance to collectivise the experiences of my interviewees and see what this collectivisation does to the participants and the research project as a whole; b) my interviewees had a single chance to talk to me, and hence I had only access to whatever they decided to share with me at that particular moment. In terms of our relationship to past experiences, a) we did not have the possibility to delve into the processes which are involved in the construction of international students’ positions towards the international education in the UK; b) my interviewees had one opportunity to recollect their experiences. In terms of sharing the empirical material with the world, a) I could only carefully select fragments of the interviews to publish, making it impossible for the reader to get any glimpse under which circumstances this empirical material was produced; b) all the weight of the theoretical analysis was up to me and what I want to focus on and strategically publish. In terms of the dynamics between interviewees and researcher, a) the boundaries between us were rigid; b) my interviewees had only a vague idea about my intentions and my theoretical and/or political attachments to this research.

From a fast and individualist methodological mode, I moved to CMW which is designed to be collective, slow and politically provocative. Below I present a part of the CMW material in order to show what emerged from our session that we called “student visa.” After that follows a thorough comparison between interviews and CMW in the way I experienced them.

Part 2. Doing CMW With International Students

The memory workers were Andromeda, Sunny, Natalie, Bob (names anonymised using pseudonyms). We were all friends prior to forming the memory work collective. All our meetings took place in a pub (during non-busy hours) and all our sessions were recorded with their permission. Our meetings took place every two weeks over a six-month period. There were times when we had to skip a meeting due to members of the collective having other pressing priorities, and there were also times when we could not all be present. Overall though, there was a consistent commitment to the project and a lot of enthusiasm.

To begin our first meeting, I introduced them to CMW and we decided to loosely follow the methodological steps and see where they led us. So, we flexibly applied the following steps:

- 1) Every session was on a topic related to the international student experience.
- 2) In each session memory workers wrote a memory related to the topic (except me—I was not an international student).
- 3) After reading each other's memories we expressed opinions and ideas about each memory in turn, and looked for similarities and differences between the memories, and links between the memories where their relationships with each other were not immediately apparent.
- 4) Each person tried to identify clichés, generalizations, contradictions, cultural imperatives, metaphors in the memories etc., and discuss relevant theories, and popular conceptions, sayings and images concerning the topic.
- 5) Finally, at the end of each session, we drew together some preliminary conclusions regarding the topic of the session.

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

Andromeda's memory (written by her in third person):

Andromeda arrived in the UK after an 11-hour flight from [an African country]. She had not much time to prepare for this arrival so she was very stressed. As she arrived at the airport, she had to queue up in order to go through the border agency folks. That two-hour long queue exhausted her. A few months before, she had travelled to the UK from France and waiting to go through was not that daunting. She remembers how irritated and disappointed she was when she saw the immigration officers were treating some students before her. They were not used to the

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

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

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

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

Andromeda: Yeah, but the thing is that when you have a student visa you feel that you are more privileged. For instance, when I was waiting in the queue with the rest of the non-EU people, I was feeling quite confident. And then all of a sudden, I felt like an illegal immigrant; I felt dirty. I had to go to the room to be examined. And after this horrific process was

done, I felt even more lost and anxious. I was in the country, but I had no English bank account to buy a bus ticket. I had to recognise this girl [from the same country as me] who was nice enough to buy the ticket for me.

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

So, Andromeda’s written account concerned a very specific event of a type that the other memory workers did not really experience. Yet, it served to spark many diverse memories related to similar attempts at regulation over international students’ mobility. More specifically, the memory workers brought some of their day-to-day encounters with the UKVI (UK Visa and Immigration), police officers, administrators and even special university tutors responsible for “teaching” international students about student visas, into the discussion. These, rather arbitrary, gatekeepers make international students feel like they are dependent on them. I call them arbitrary because as the experiences of the memory workers indicate, the way gatekeeping works can change from case to case and/or from time to time; be performed in unexpected and unpredictable ways; and even feel completely random, unexpected and unjustified. Even more importantly, our discussion revealed the everyday tactics deployed by international students in an attempt to “pass” through these “gates.” Their tactics vary, from rehearsing answers to the questions they expect to be asked, to lying, being cynical, sarcastic, or even pretending to be dumb.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Bob's comment is particularly interesting as he begins from the normalised assumption that coming from the US, you "obviously" do not need to register—yet soon after he reveals his ambivalence and confusion concerning police registration. At the beginning of his account, he seemed to rush to distinguish his situation from Sunny and Andromeda's—but this distinction was made only in retrospect. That is to say, not registering with the police when one comes from the US only became normalised for him after his UK higher education institution made it clear that he did not need to register because he is from the US.

In his interview, Jawad had also focused on discriminatory and exploitative practices against international students. However, he did not have the chance, as the memory workers did, to share, compare and re (think) his experiences with others or

to write them down in third person or read and listen to other international students' situated experiences. As we can see from their conversations above, Andromeda, Sunny, Natalie and Bob together created the term "periodic reminders" (of being aliens) in order to describe their feelings about the controlling practices imposed on them. They also brought their experiences with feeling that some international students have a more privileged migration status than others—see the example of Bob. Jawad also thought that his Canadian friend was more welcome to the UK and had greater access to employability opportunities than him, but he did not have his Canadian friend present during the interview. Memory workers also came back to the same or related topics during different memory-work sessions, adding every time new layers to our discussions. Jawad had a single chance to recollect what he thought was important to him and to my project.

Thus, both Jawad's interview and the memory workers indicate the embeddedness of the globalised higher education in the politics of securitisation, control and management over mobility. Jawad had also talked about some of his strategies to manoeuvre around the controlling practices he encountered during his international student journey in the same way as the memory workers. Despite the common threads between Jawad and the memory workers' accounts, it is important to unpack the effects of the two different methodological approaches on a) the discussion about the links between the internationalisation of higher education and migration politics, b) the research participants' modes of engagement with the project, c) the dynamics developed between research participants and researcher, d) the possibilities of doing social research that can be considered as actively politically engaged. The next and last section deals with these reflections in an attempt to sketch the interconnections between theory, empirics and politics.

Part 3. Contrasting: Interviews vs. Collective Memory-work

What are the differences between Jawad's interview and the collective memory work with Andromeda, Natalie, Sunny, Bob and myself? Why are those differences important? What happened to me as a researcher during the interviews? What do I think/felt happened to the interviewees? How did the memory workers experience this research project? How did I feel as a researcher when I participated in the memory work?

In my attempt to reply to some of the above questions, I will think together with Rancière and his notable book *Dis-agreement: Politics and Philosophy* (1999). The reason why Rancière should inform my answers, is the attention he puts to socio-political change. His political philosophy is about transformation and how it comes to be. As I have already underlined right from the start, I believe that social science should be transformative and not reproductive, and Rancière illustrates the necessary ingredients for the "shaking" of an established socio-political order and the creation of multiple diversions away from it.

In particular, according to Rancière (1999, p. 28) the representative form of politics is not actually politics but policing, insofar as it is reduced to the “distribution of places and roles” and “the legitimisation of this distribution.” In other words, representative politics is about who can participate in the established order of things, in which way, for how long and to what degree. Both, the interview with Jawad and the discussion we had with the memory work collective, revealed that politics of this nature informs the discourses and practices that run through the globalised university. For instance, Jawad’s experiences revealed how different groups of students have access to different roles and places according to their national/ethnic/cultural background, whilst at the same time the global university feeds from all international students. In the case of the CMW collective, our discussions also exemplified how the well-established rhetorics of securitisation police international student mobility. Thus, we talked about the simultaneous inclusion and exclusion of international students, the multiple degrees of inclusion of certain groups in comparison with others and the varying temporality of inclusive and exclusive practices. This makes Rancière relevant to the case study of this research—internationalisation of higher education and how it is aligned with the policing of migration. Rancière has extensively engaged with the politics of policing and how diametrically it differs from the real politics of everyday life.

However, if during the interview, Jawad did not feel “safe” or comfortable enough to talk about his experience with racism, this very important insight would have been missed. In fact, none of my other interviewees ever mentioned anything explicit or in detail regarding racism, exclusion or mobility restrictions. Also, Jawad and I did not know each other in advance—we met only once for a very limited time period, and the line between him as an interviewee and me as a researcher was much more rigid than it was in the memory work collective. Jawad did not have the chance to fully understand my intentions and the purposes of the research project, did not know my political stance regarding the case under study and had no other international students present with whom to share and compare his experiences. That is the reason why Jawad initially hesitated to talk to me about his experiment with changing his name. Maybe he had second thoughts after he walked away from the interview but never expressed them to me. On the contrary, during the memory work I had the chance to make clear my position to the other memory workers and to talk about my attachments to the subject, giving them space to develop their own positions to the subject, as well as to agree and disagree with me; in short, to be part of the analysis. Moreover, Jawad gave me many hints about the porosity of migration categories and that international students also drift in and out of different migration categories. This point was only implicitly made during his interview, and thus it would be placing too much weight on my interpretations of this to provide a very detailed analysis of the porosity of migration categories in relation to international student experiences.

Nevertheless, as the memory work material discussed above revealed, the porosity of migration categories became a central point of analysis because the conditions of the research process allowed it to more fully emerge. Thus, the exclusionary practices that Jawad talked about in his interview and his disappointment with the hypocrisy of the global university was not an individual case or an exaggerated interpretation of his. His arguments touched upon the policing politics that underpin the global university. And although he knew that his case is by no means unique, he did not have the chance, as memory workers did, to collectivise his experiences during the unfolding of the interview. He did not have the chance to reflect together with other international students upon the socio-political production of his experiences. He only had his individual story and his personal ideas to narrate to me.

Moreover, as Karin Widerberg (1996) suggests, interviews traditionally simply translate the experiences of research participants into text. This implies that interviews fail to bring to the surface the conditions under which the research participants articulated their experiences and the role of the researcher into this articulation. In other words, the details of the research process remain invisible to the reader. While analysing the interview of Jawad, I tried to present as many parts of our conversation as possible—keeping in mind that I had to follow the “rules” of a PhD thesis and academic writing in general. But, in most cases, the only thing a reader can have access to is limited fragments of the participants’ narratives selected by the researcher. In that sense, according again to Widerberg (1996), experiences become dead static objects of scientific inquiry that feed the needs of positivistic research outcomes. The reader rarely finds out the conditions under which the knowledge was produced and what the particular conditions enabled or disabled. Also, Middleton and Brown (2005), looking at the same problem from the perspective of memory, remind us how interviews fail to appropriately take into account of the manner in which and the settings through which, our memories are enacted as aspects of how we remember our experiences. That is, the very process of triggering can alter the perception of and our approaches towards the recollected experiences (Middleton & Brown, 2005). On the other hand, CMW is designed to look back in order to understand and talk about the ways our experiences are produced during our lives and at the same time to open up space for collectively configuring and reconfiguring our experiences during the research process. This double effect of CMW is exactly what makes it in my opinion politically important in the Rancierian way. Let me explain why.

For Rancière nothing is political per se (a strike, a protest, the personal). Politics emerges when specific groups that have been ascribed a specific “part” through the mechanisms of policing make visible both those policing mechanisms and their controlling effects, and at the same time illuminate the political potentialities which arise every time a social group dis-identifies with the “who”

should be (the name) and “what” should or should not do (its functions). These are the moments when it becomes simultaneously obvious that certain “parts” (of the society) do not have a part other than the one that is allocated to them by institutions, and yet they start interrupting this policing. In that sense, political acts emerge only when social groups discard their obviousness and naturalness by refusing their allocated part and creating “a multiple that was not given in the police constitution” (Rancière, 1999, p. 36).

CMW precisely creates the conditions for problematising and de-normalising practices and discourses that we take for granted in our everyday lives and social interactions (Jansson, Wendt & Åse, 2008). Passing our experiences through multiple filters—writing them down as a memory in the third person, reading each other’s memories, discussing them, comparing them, questioning them, reworking them, looking at them from many angles during the different memory work sessions, unpacking the contradictions in them, focusing on how we embody them and embracing their messiness—gives the participants the chance to live and embody the malleability of experience. This kind of experimenting with pulling and stretching our experiences in every possible direction, feeling how plastic they can really be, helps memory workers to also (re)train their senses and sensibilities. We noticed how much more alert we became to the ways we use language, our neglected/suppressed bodies and their downplayed participation into the making of the social, the common perceptions we take for granted and the forgotten or imperceptible practices that become producers of our everyday lives.

For instance, a relevant example from the memory work collective concerns one of the memory workers (Natalie). After having outlined, in most of our sessions, one version of why Natalie wanted to leave her home country for good through the route of studying abroad, at one of our final meetings she started paying more attention to her body. She explained to us how asphyxiated her body felt due to the idea of staying in her country of origin and having to work in a business environment. She even described her anxiety and its physical manifestation every time she saw her university classmates dressed like business people preparing to be absorbed by banks and multinationals. However, it took time before she started paying more attention to her body. It was only after months of doing CMW that she remembered or stopped forgetting how she had embodied certain experiences and what this embodiment enabled. Up to that point, studying abroad for her was a rational decision.

Conclusion

I suggest that CMW does not only contribute to producing more in-depth/provocative empirical material that enrich, challenge or even transform our theoretical assumptions of a certain socio-political issue, but its transformative potential expands beyond the place, the time and the reason for which the MW

collective was formed. If nothing else, what stays with memory workers is the reminder of our active participation in the making of the social. This is a skill—a skill that has a long-lasting effect in the lives of memory workers. This is something that interviews are not designed for. That is the reason why CMW has been extensively used for educational purposes also (see for instance the work of Judith Kaufman and Karin Widerberg). There is a great difference between talking, for instance, about gender in the classroom and having students reflect upon how they have lived, sensed, embodied gender in their everyday lives.

This is also what makes CMW politically relevant in the Rancièrian sense. Rancière is interested in the conflicts and tensions that are manifested in everyday experience. According to him, politics does not emerge when a social group “becomes aware of itself,” finds its unique voice and aspires to extend its functions and rights within the majoritarian social realm (Rancière, 1999, p. 40). Rancière does not believe that politics should be about expanding rights and representation allocating more predetermined roles and functions. For him politics is about “the meeting of incommensurable worlds,” which does not depend upon a pre-supposed and carefully calculated set of strategies (Rancière, 1999, p. 42). Police-politics operate on the basis of predetermined strategies, calculations and precise measurements. Everyday politics is immanent in experience: it starts with empirics and experimentation. This is to say, politics beyond the realm of policing is inherent in and flows from experience, as it is rooted in the directly lived and sensed everyday life. So, pulling, stretching, challenging, de-stabilising and messing with our well-established ideas about our experiences creates room for transformation—for change. The methodological steps of CMW help the participants to unpack some of the mechanisms of the police-politics and at the same time it is a sort of training to experiment with our multiple becomings.

Connecting Rancière’s (1999) analysis of politics with the case of international students, I suggest that international students’ small everyday strategies to avoid the controlling practices they encountered during their international student journey indicate the impossibility of reducing international students to mere representations. In Rancière’s terms, those everyday betrayals are political acts. One could ask though; why not boycott the global university altogether? Why do those international students continue their studies in the UK or indeed come to the UK in the first place? Rancière’s (1999) view of politics is not a politics of the outside. For him, the enactment of politics is grounded precisely in the meeting of, and relationships between worlds—between those with a “part” and those with “no part” in the majoritarian apparatuses—and exactly at the moment when those with no part participate in majoritarian communities, but not as it would have been expected by institutions. Rancière says that this tension creates politics.

Given this, having no part inside the majority is threatening to the majority, and not to those without a part (Papadopoulos, Stephenson & Tsianos, 2008). That

is the reason why incorporation to the point of absorption is the ultimate strategy of any sophisticated policing system of domination. For instance, as I have already mentioned, for international students to be allowed the degree of mobility which has been allocated to them by the institutions which sustain the manageability and policing of international student mobility, international students need to participate one way or another and follow the rules set by the UK government and the university. Every time international students start sabotaging their visa statuses or lying to the police, they begin to become a threat to the various “policemen” of free mobility. In other words, social groups’ subscription to their allocated roles, rights, functions and experiences, is vital to the survival and perpetuation of the national and transnational institutions. Individuals and groups need to believe in the representations of themselves, and to this end there is a constant production and reproduction of roles, functions and experiences endlessly circulated in the social realm, creating ready-made lenses through which all that can be seen is these representations. CMW helps us to actively question those representations—the ready-made lenses—and that is why we desperately need methodologies like this when we do social research. Hence, I suggest that CMW is a methodological vehicle that can transform a social study to a collective project during which all the participants can energetically look for and engage with those practices, actions, minor gestures that kick off—they are unconventional, half-finished, messy. “For too long, empirical research has approached human beings from the point of view of their controllability, the predictability of their actions” (Haug, 1987, p. 35).

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