**Nation boundedness and international students’ marginalisation: what’s emotion got to do with it?**

This paper contributes to an understanding of the ways in which not being bound to the nation of education, in legal and cultural terms, excludes international students. Based on narrative interviews with 20 students from 6 countries, the paper considers a range of difficulties international students encounter in social and educational domains in which they are interacting and, utilising the conceptual framework of ‘nation-boundedness’, explains these difficulties. The analysis offers new insights in terms of the role of emotions that were seen in the research to be a new discursive practice, prompting international students to marginalise their rights and voices and not to exercise rights that could protect them from discrimination and racism. The paper concludes that by considering emotions alongside regulatory structures that are established for international students in the receiving countries, a more complex understanding of the ways in which lack of ‘nation-boundedness’ excludes can be developed.

Keywords: nation boundedness, exclusion, international students, emotion, self-marginalisation

# Introduction

Many international students cross borders every year for educational purposes. They usually choose nations with an established global profile in education, mostly in English speaking countries, due to the perceived prestige of degrees from these countries and the role of these degrees in professional and social ‘status sorting’ at home (e.g. Tran, 2016). But this high status at home often comes at the cost of the subordinated status in the country of education. International students are often subordinated because they are not ‘bound’ to the nation of education, in social, political and cultural terms, which legitimises their discrimination and leads to processes of ‘othering’ (Marginson, 2012; 2013).

Marginson (2012; 2013) argues that such lack of ‘nation-boundedness’ disadvantages international students because, by being citizens of one country and studying in another, they are governed by two national regimes and therefore not fully protected be either. This dual-status weakens their security and access to the same rights as national citizens (ibid). Marginson (2012;2013) further argues that legal and social othering of international students occurs because of the inability of governments to manage global flows of people and cultural plurality. As a result, their experiences ‘are located in a ‘gray zone’ of regulation with incomplete human rights, security and capabilities’ (Marginson, 2012, p. 497).

Differing rules for international students manifested in, for instance, visa restrictions, additional entry requirements, higher fees for the same programmes that home students can access for less money and imposing additional restrictions for international students to access local services, construct limiting realms of possibilities for international students. These realms stem from the politically entrenched attitudes towards international students, which then create conditions that allow those in authority to explicitly curtail international students’ social and personal rights guaranteed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Marginson, 2012). But limiting these rights is legitimised by host governments through a rhetoric of protecting public and national interests, which means that actions of governments that may restrict capacities and well-being of international students go unnoticed in the political mainstream (Hayes, 2016). For instance, recent immigration discourses in England portraying education immigrants as ‘abusers’ of the generous welfare and higher education system have permitted restrictions on international students in terms of where they can study and how long they can stay in the country of education. But these restrictions have received public support whose thinking is based on the view that if international students come to England for study purposes, there is no need for them to be able to exercise the same citizen rights (Burns, 2016).

It has also been widely argued that rules and laws that govern international students’ lives in the country of education are almost always driven by national self-interests (e.g. Pietsch, 2012, Walker, 2014, Pham & Tran, 2015). This, on the one hand, means that power-relations in each gray zone may vary, as the characteristics of the socio-political context in which they are formed change, which makes some ‘gray zones’ less disadvantaging for international students than the others (Johnstone & Proctor, 2017), but on the other, most analyses agree that when the socio-political contexts of ‘gray zones’ do change, it is rarely for the benefit of international students, as self-centred priorities of the receiving countries position them mainly as economic objects and vectors of additional resources for universities (e.g. Paltridge et al., 2016, Lomer, 2016; Schartner & Cho, 2016). The ‘gray zones’ therefore make international students ‘vulnerable to betrayal in the political games as they become tossed backwards and forwards on the waves of ideological change’ (Walker, 2014, p.341).

But there is also another layer of questions about the relationship between various socio-political characteristics of gray zones, their associated regulatory, legal and immigration regimes that establish a ‘living’ environment for international students, and ‘betrayal’ that is *less* explored. This layer of questions focuses on exploring why, despite availability of legal frameworks and laws in gray zones that could protect international students from this ‘betrayal’, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, anti-discrimination laws in individual countries and equality charters at universities, international students choose not to take advantage of the support systems that these laws and charters can offer. Marginson (2012; 2013) offers one explanation and argues that despite the declared freedom of every person to exercise social, cultural, legal and economic rights described in the Human Rights Declaration and equality charters, international students are not able to exercise them because they are governed by different regulatory frameworks in the country of education than home students, and these differing rules increase the likelihood of international students being subject to coercion. This is, for instance, evident in situations when they are forced to work longer hours than home students but do not disclose it for fear of breaching their visa rules (ibid). While Marginson’s explanation is valuable, in that it provides insights into ways in which disempowerment of international students emerges at the backdrop of political regimes in countries of education, it also carries an assumption that political regimes in countries of education are the dominant reality for international students. This paper, on the other hand, shows that disempowerment and ‘betrayal’ also happens beyond structural levels of differing country regulations and that there is also ‘another’ (and concurrent) reality in which international students ‘operate’. This reality is mainly constitutive of unspoken emotions and subjectivities of student interpretations that, on the one hand, produce the kind of sense-making that imposes coherence for international students between the past, present and the future, but on the other, prompts them to self-marginalise their rights and voices when these could be heard. This kind of sense-making, at least in the eyes of international students in the research, makes the ‘betrayal’ less of an issue of politics and discriminatory rules and more of a process that they accept as part of being an ‘outsider’. That is why, as the paper will show, they do not exercise their rights and protections offered by in-country (and universal) equality laws.

Such findings carry important theoretical implications. Research to date has of course signalled the role of emotions in the ways international students ‘manage’ their time in the country of education. It has shown that students control their emotions as their adjustment becomes impinged by structural and social factors, conditions and limits of the in-country environment (Zheng, 2017) and that, due to emotions related to homesickness, anxiety and depression, they do not engage in social life of their host communities (Yun & Lê, 2012). But this research positions international students as being mainly reactive to the regulations and conditions imposed on them in the ‘gray zone’, and there is very little literature which signals that emotional responses can also help international students turn the ‘gray zones’ into spaces in which different ‘beings’ are possible for them. This happens when the students produce long-term imaginaries of self beyond the present context of education (Tran & Vu, 2017), which in turn can be explained through theoretical frames that ask, ‘what makes us governable and enables us to govern’? (Ricken, 2006, p. 541).

The analysis in the paper will therefore draw attention to the ‘how’ of power, by elucidating ways in which power is understood by international students in the study. The student interviews cited below show that this understanding does not only depend on the official structures set by the ‘gray zones’ of regulation, but also on the ways the students understand themselves. For many students in the study, the latter meant being an ‘outsider’ which became a lens through which they were interpreting what was possible in the ‘gray zone’ and what was ‘right for them’. While students’ ‘outsider’ status was of course shaped by the context of differing structures and regulations of the ‘gray zone’ in the first instance, the analysis below additionally reveals ways in which this status also played a role in understanding those structures differently. The structures of the ‘gray zone’ emerged in the study to be subject to complex power practices that were re-articulated through students’ subjectivity, suggesting that these structures are constantly open to negotiation, resistance and change.

The present paper therefore uses Ricken’s (2006) theorisations of subjectivity, built on Foucauldian understanding of power (Foucault, 1982), which capture ways in which subjectivity can re-articulate meanings of certain regulations and subject them to resistance. This means that subjectivity functions at two levels. The first one is related to enabling different structures in the ‘gray zone’ because the subjective position of international students makes them vulnerable to exclusion from equal rights and benefits. The second one is concerned more with the ways international students may behave towards and interpret the ways in which these differing rules withdraw them from equal treatment, as they simultaneously interpret their relationship to the subjectivity that was created for them by differing rules and regulations in the first place (Ricken, 2006). It is this second level of subjectivity that becomes a particularly useful analytical tool in this paper, as it shows how subjectivities of international students ‘interpretations become a frame that ‘makes a difference’ to their lives in the country of education and how they deal with discrimination and racism. This difference cannot be understood purely in structural terms. These arguments are supported in the paper through answers to the following questions:

1. To what extent is the role of structures in the ‘gray zone’ of regulation, as the main discursive practice governing international students’ lives in the country of education, mediated by students’ subjective interpretations of their relationship to this country?
2. Are there ways in which these interpretations can be seen to be prompting international students to exercise their rights and voices or to accept marginalisation?

The next section provides a short discussion of how subjectivity, as discursive practice associated with emotions, is understood in the paper and how this understanding feeds the kind of poststructuralist perspective that I argue is necessary to prompt fresh understandings of the ways in which lack of ‘nation-boundedness’ excludes. The subsequent section reviews the theoretical terrain for the paper, focusing on current debates about the ways in which nation-boundedness excludes through legal, socio-political and educational arrangements for international students. These arrangements are identifiable across the points that are raised in the analysis of the findings below, under sections of *Educational* and *Social Domains*. The analysis in these sections highlights the ways in which the effects of some of these arrangements can be understood differently, through studying decision-making of students that emerges to be prompted by emotions that underlie subjective interpretations of their relationship to the country of education. The conclusion develops a more complex view of the multiple ways in which not being bound to the nation of education excludes.

# Discursive Practice, Emotions and Poststructuralism

A discursive practice is understood in the paper in Foucauldian (1983) terms, as a process through which dominant reality comes into being. This process encompasses social, structural and subjective elements contingent on the sense-making of individuals which drives decisions that create possibilities for alternative behaviours and indeterminacy which counteract intended expectations of uniformity and consistency in representations of individuals ( e.g. Foucault, 1983). A new dominant reality, as will be shown below, was established for cross-border students in this study by some unspoken interpretations through which the students were seeking to manage their presence in the ‘gray zone’; when they struggled for acceptance and access to the same social benefits as the home students and when they were looking for ways to manage the sense of self through creating self-imaginaries of who they were for the country of education. Importantly, these self-imaginaries were different from ways in which the official rules and regulations of the gray zone inscribed it on them. Foucauldian (1983) perspective on discursive practice was therefore useful in understanding the need for this dual- representation, as his theorisations about the ways in which the interplay between formal agents and structures (such as the state, laws, institutional practices), as well as self-perceptions of individuals is used to inscribe power on oneself, helped in understanding the role emotions played in managing the discrimination fatigue the students in this study were experiencing. Unfortunately, these emotions, as will be explained below, whilst helping with the struggle of being an outsider, were also feeding further subordination of international students already established by the official environment of the ‘gray zone’. And it is in this sense that the findings in this study carry important theoretical implications.

The emerging role of emotions as a governing force therefore sits comfortably with some of the poststructuralist perspectives that position individuals as both objects and subjects of experience (e.g. Zambyalas, 2005; Davids, 2014). These perspectives focus the analysis on the discourse of experience, rather than the experience itself, and seek to understand how people’s position (and consequently power) is formed in the shifting space between narratives of subjectivity and ‘official’ narratives of their context (here established by the ‘gray zone’ of regulation) (ibid). The analysis in the paper reflects this focus as it identifies how emotions make international students engaged with the complex web of power relations in the gray zone and how the students express themselves against the backdrop of official rules, regulation and socio-political discourses that enable their discrimination. Such analysis provides fresh understandings of the ways in which not being bound to the nation excludes, drawing attention to factors beyond the current structural focus.

# So, what do we know so far about the ways in which not being bound to the nation of education exclude?

As outlined above, one view is that lack of nation boundedness excludes because it shatters the hypothetical protection the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* could guarantee for international students. Simon Marginson extensively discusses the relationship between ‘nation-boundedness’ and possibilities for greater protection and security for international studentsoffered by the Declaration in his work (Marginson, 2010; 2012; 2013). He, as well as others (e.g. Nunes & Arthur, 2013; Calder et al., 2016) argue that differing rules, laws and immigration regulations for home and international students de-power international people, as lack of the same privilege as home students and limited social capital makes it more difficult for them to exercise the universal human rights and to negotiate their experiences. For instance, the limits of the social capital are imposed on international students by the extent to which the ‘public and private discourse and institutional practices foster inclusion and integration of the foreign student ‘Other’, and the terms (whether culturally plural or not) on which integration is sought and achieved’ (Marginson, 2012, p.499). Outside institutions, lack of social capital affects international students in situations such as looking for accommodation in a private rental market, as differing regulatory conditions require international students to demonstrate their eligibility to rent in the country of education, creating barriers that deny them access to the same benefits as home students and affect their security (e.g. Deumert et al, 2005; Forbes-Mewett & Nyland, 2008).

Other aspects of not being bound to the nation of education that also exclude are related to international students’ cultural capital and the ways in which host country governments and communities manage cultural plurality (Helly, 1993; Rizvi, 2009; Lee & Rice, 2007; Burkhardt & Bennett,2015). These ways are usefully theorised by Jameson et al’s (2011) who make a distinction between *thin* and *thick* reciprocity. The former requires minimal commitment to the relationship with cross-border people, and only insofar there are mutual benefits but not mutual transformations. The latter, on the other hand, represents a relationship that ‘emphasises shared voice and power and insists upon collaborative knowledge construction (…) more democratic approaches to civic engagement and encourages all partners to grow and (…) to support one another’s growth (Jameson et al, 2011, p. 264).

*Thin* reciprocity has been mostly seen to characterise the approach to management of cultural plurality in England, with relevant literature from the field pointing out that reasons for the British engagement with international students are almost always related to economic and soft power benefits, and are rarely rationalised on the basis of mutual growth (Bolsmann & Miller, 2008; Lomer, 2016; Schartner & Cho, 2016). Benefits for international students are of course always highlighted in any descriptions of reasons for internationalisation, but it has been shown that they tend to reflect attitudes underpinned by perceptions of the British superiority and politically and socially constructed representations of international students as beneficiaries of the prestigious British education system (ibid). Perhaps for this reason, commitment to significant mutual transformations is rarely noted in relationships in British policies and internationalisation (Hayes, 2016) and when it is, it does not extend beyond official subscriptions to cultural plurality in institutional mission statements that rarely materialise in practice (e.g. Spiro, 2014). Research to date has in fact suggested that transformation in England is often one directional – i.e. that of international students, not vice versa (for latest literature review on this topic, see Harrison, 2015), imposing a ‘burden’ on international students to become ‘more English than the English themselves’ (Marginson, 2015, p. 8).

There are also analyses which suggest that the reasons behind the *thin* reciprocity are mainly socio-political, stemming from Britain’s history and imperial past, as well as more recently, from economically driven agendas for internationalisation of HE (e.g. Humfrey, 2011; Pietsch, 2012; ). This is of course not only specific to Britain, as it has been widely argued elsewhere that ways in which countries of education engage with international students always depend on their identities and are based on factors related to their histories, socially and politically entrenched attitudes towards international people, differing positions on a global higher education market and neo-economic agendas (e.g. Tikly, 2004; Madge et al., 2009; Hayes, 2017). All these factors contribute to rationales behind internationalisation of education, which subsequently govern international students’ lives and representations in the receiving countries (e.g. Knight, 2004; Teichler, 2004; McCartney, 2016). In England, these rationales seem to be mainly political and economic, related mostly to establishing Britain’s soft power abroad and driven by agendas of offering world-class education opportunities for the less privileged (Walker, 2014; Lomer, 2016).

Consequently, international students have been positioned as people in educational deficit, vectors of income and as learners whose differences have to be ‘managed’. National policy moves over the years have reflected these attitudes, denying international students the political voice and excluding them as people worthy of equal respect (e.g. Hayes, 2016). Thus, international students’ lack of ‘nation-boundedness’ has become a reason for their discrimination, contributed to their representations as ‘problems’ and prompted policy rationales for management of their cultural and learning identities (ibid). These rationales have been justified on the basis that ‘England’s world class education system is open to anyone *with the potential* to benefit from it (...), which is conditional on students receiving ‘effective support in order to achieve their educational goals and potential (...) because not all students will achieve their best within the same model of teaching’ (BIS, 2015, pp. 21-36).

Counter-narratives from international students to this agenda of ‘support’ suggest however that it has instead created the ‘outcast phenomenon’ (Clay, 2010). The term depicts situations whereby, due to their differences and some readings of the aforementioned need for support as legitimising actions towards eradicating difference , international students are often judged, have to constantly prove themselves and strive to overcome stereotypes about their cultures and learning backgrounds (ibid). This is further fed by the phenomenon known as ‘coloniality’ – that is, the logic of cultural, social and political domination over foreign students in an education system (Ghiso & Campano, 2013). ‘Coloniality’ prevents critical engagement with foreign students because it is based on the presumption of a ‘single path of human progress and of the universal value of Western knowledge’ (Stein et al, 2016, p.4). As a result, alternative perspectives of knowledge and modes of learning are viewed as ‘inferior’ and not worthy of equal respect (da Silva, 2015). Such views emanate from the same rhetoric as that cited from the BIS policy above - that is, ‘others’ can also be successful once their educational deficits preventing them from becoming more ‘bound’ to the receiving nation are fixed (da Silva, 2015). Perhaps that is why international students ‘have become largely unwitting (and potentially unwilling) participants in a process of intercultural exchange’ (Harrison and Peacock, 2010, p.885).

Democratic inclusion of international students’ identities has also been difficult outside the classroom. Despite government assurances that international students are protected by civil liberties, human rights, social justice and equality before the law, the same governments introduce differing social and educational regulations for international students that then feed certain representations of ‘foreigners’ into the social minds of local people. These regulations make groups of international students that are ethnically and racially different especially susceptible to various forms of microaggressions (i.e. intentional or unintentional but commonplace verbal, behavioral and environmental indignities towards ethnically and racially diverse people) which are legitimised by in-country agendas that compete at the expense of the emancipatory nature of multiculturalism.

Research focusing on international students’ experiences from critical race perspectives provides revealing insights into the scope and nature of these microaggressions. It shows that international students experience ‘microinsults’, through being subject to an environment that conveys insensitivity to their racial and ethnic identity or heritage (e.g. Harper et al, 2016; McGee & Stovall, 2015), ‘microassaults’, which refer to more explicit racial derogation through name calling or overt discriminatory actions( e.g. Brown & Jones, 2013) or , as shown above through the discussion of coloniality, ‘microinvalidations’ - that is behaviours that negate and nullify the feelings, knowledge and experiential reality of ethnically diverse persons.

All these forms of microaggressions were present in the narratives of the students in this paper, but it was also interesting to note that the levels of suffering from the ‘racial battle fatigue’ - that is, frustration, shock, anger, resentment, anxiety and/or helplessness in response to these microaggressions (Smith, 2007; 2011), were reduced. The levels of anxiety, distress and frustration were of course present in student responses to the discrimination they were facing, but their ‘fatiguing’ effects were mediated by emotive responses of the students that created perceptions of discrimination as a step towards their futures outside the ‘gray zone’. But whilst this sort of emotive lens might have created a concurrent reality for students that protected them from discrimination, it also prompted them not to exercise their rights and voices. This is evidenced in examples from the narrative interviews that are introduced below.

# Methods

In-depth biographical interviews with 20 students from 6 countries (China, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Afghanistan, Indonesia) were conducted. The students were randomly sampled from 2 English universities via a general email of invitation which was sent to all international students in social sciences. The universities were selected based on the author’s networks. The sample is convenient but it reflects the ethnic, academic (discipline and post- and under- graduate) and gender composition of the actual international student population in social sciences in the UK. The research did not seek to make generalisations but rather provide insights that might have wider implications.

The interviews were unstructured and were centred around student general experiences of studying and living in England. No specific interview questions were asked, but rather the students were asked to tell stories they thought were of importance for them and to explain why.

All interviews were conducted in English, by the author. The author did not have any direct involvement with the students and did not know them personally. Each participant was interviewed only once, but some interviews lasted up to 2 hours as the students were asked to reconstruct the entirety of their journeys through university. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed in full.

The analysis was focused on ‘critical events’ (Webster & Mertova, 2007), i.e. events that significantly impacted student living and studying experiences and that were illustrative of the extent to which these experiences might have been caused by the lack of nation-boundedness to England. The analysis focused on how students as individuals experienced life and study as an ‘outsider’, rather than trying to identify common themes across all participants. So rather than making comparisons, which could have affected the quality of the analysis as the universities and the students were highly diverse (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), the research focused on the meaning of the events that were recalled as a window onto the extent to which international students were pursuing their rights to be treated as ‘equals’. Individual codes identified in the process of analysis therefore captured this meaning and included, in cases cited below, ‘discrimination of students’ unique perspectives and learning behaviours’, ‘avoiding confrontation’, ‘accepting discrimination as a result of stereotyping’, ‘feeling inappropriate to complain’ and ‘walking away from discrimination as opposed to exercising equal rights’. These were then pooled together to focus on students’ reactions to the discrimination they were facing, which formed the basis for the arguments below. A summary of the codes and the analysis was sent back to the interviewees for participant validation. Many students have not responded, those who have, suggested no corrections.

While only selected quotes are presented below, they are consistent with most responses. The quotes present insights into two areas in which students in the research accepted discrimination as a result of an emotive response to the social and educational domains in which they were interacting. The first section of the findings describes reactions of students to discrimination in the classroom; the second focuses on instances whereby students self-marginalised their voices and rights in response to discrimination prompted by their status of ‘foreign’ and ‘alien’ residents. In the quotes below, ‘S’ represents ‘Students’, ‘I’ stands for ‘Interviewer’.

# Educational domain

Reactions of teachers to the presence of international students in the classroom were understood by the students as sources of cultural superiority. This understanding created situations whereby the students felt degrees of disrespect towards their perspectives and their ‘non-native’ status. It is impossible to know how much of what is reported reflects teacher discrimination due to students’ ‘foreign’ status, but it is clear that students’ emotive responses to such perceived discrimination resulted in marginalisation of their own voices.

S: Sometimes, I feel like I want to say something but then I don’t really have the chance to speak in the...like … seminars and …

I: Why did you feel you didn’t have a chance?

S I don’t know. I think people are just, like, talking like they were... And then, I felt like I have opinion about it as well. But then maybe sometimes, I don’t have the chance to say it (…) Because I feel like people who are brilliant in Politics talk so much. And then, we [international students] stay quiet, and then we just...We, like, nodding and …

I So...And you stayed quiet because you are an international student? Is it what you are saying?

S Yes, kind of.

I Yes, okay. And that was because you didn’t have the answer or there are other reasons for it?

S Sometimes, because I didn’t really know the answer. And then, I just felt like, maybe others, they all know about it and I don’t really know about it. And then, the teacher have to pick me about the question (…) Because most of the curriculums and policies we learn about is more UK-based. And then, I don't really know about the, like... For example, one incident happened and then this policy came up. And then, how the whole system works and...Yes.

I When you recall that situation when the teacher called your name because they wanted you to answer, what did you do then?

S I just smiled. I think that’s what most international students do. It was... Yes.

I And what did the teacher do?

S The teacher would be, like, ‘Oh just say your opinion and it’s fine’[mimicking teacher’s dismissive attitude ]. And then I was, like, ‘Oh I don't really know what to say’ but then I would just say something and then the teacher would go on to the next [student]. (…) I felt, like, they [home students] engaged more with the teacher. Like, the teacher will be more...Like, when the teacher asked me questions, I felt like my answers are not really valuable … Yes, as much as …

I As the others.

S Yes.

(International Relations, University B)

A common strategy among international students was to remain ‘invisible’, even if that meant being perceived as academically unsuccessful. The seminar setting in which the student below participated became a site for emotional struggle as fear from being judged for ‘non-nativeness’ prevented the student from sharing their perspectives with others.

I: Did you ever feel you were unsuccessful, you know, if you think about your engagement here, academically?

S: Inside I do feel I'm successful but from outside I think that like, these instructors think that I am unsuccessful because I didn’t participate in the class discussions. I mean because of like the, I don't want to make the other British people looking at me like ‘What are you talking about, I can't understand you’. I don't want them to think like that, that's why I always prefer to remain silent in the classes.

I: And so you say that inside you felt successful but you don't think that other people perceived you as successful because of that?

S: Yes.

I: Okay.

S: … because I don't want to be evaluated by my non-nativeness, I mean, I don't want to be...I don't want, that's the point, I just want to be equal with the other native students.

(TESOL, University B)

Previous research has documented passive attitudes of international students in the classroom and decisions to remain ‘silent ‘and ‘invisible’ (Lacina, 2002; Kang, 2016) but has not so far considered these decisions from the perspective of ‘nation-boundedness’; namely that awareness of being an ‘outsider’ may be the underlying reason to do so and that the emotional impact of this awareness may fossilise students’ marginalised position in education. Whilst trying to minimise the effects of this ‘burden’, the students in the research adopted strategies that created a feeling of internal satisfaction for themselves, which gave personal value to their chosen way of being in an educational setting, but one that at the same time reinforced common perceptions of them as being in educational deficit.

The next section encapsulates a series of ways in which the emotional impact of the ‘outsider’ status also ran in a range of social contexts. This impact was driving marginalisation of their needs and voices, prompting unwillingness to exercise rights and protections established for them by the country of education because of how they felt about being discriminated in the everyday. There is evidence here to suggest that coming to England as a ‘foreigner’ brought new reflections in students on ways to manage cultural differences and being an ‘immigrant’. For most students in the research, these ways included avoiding confrontation and choosing subordination over their rights to enjoy and participate in the life of the local community as ‘equals’.

# Social domain

Aware of cultural differences, some students avoided asking for accommodation of their specific needs in the local community, as they did not want to be perceived, in the words of the student cited below, to be ‘too picky’. Instead the students opted for options that enabled them to remain ‘unnoticed’.

S: Even when we go to a restaurant we have to ask, is there any animal fat involved in this food. You need to check if it's vegetarian and if it's liquor free, so you feel you're becoming too picky in a way in a restaurant when you ask about the ingredients and everything. And Beauty Salons for example you have to arrange for a place where it's private. If you're doing only your hair, sometimes they don't have private rooms for that, so you have to negotiate. So instead, you go to another beauty salon.

I: And people may not understand why you have to act like this.

S: Yes. Yes.

(Creative Writing, University A)

It was also interesting to note that students accepted discrimination, despite being aware of laws and regulations that could challenge some of the ways in which members of the public managed their presence in the local community. The situation below refers to renting private accommodation. Despite awareness of their rights to rent, this international student subordinated this right and submitted to the view that they were going to be discriminated because of some socially entrenched attitudes towards international students. The incident below points to conflicting effects between the stated possibilities and protections international students ‘right to rent’ may allegedly offer and the student’s interpretation of what is actually possible because of stereotyped public prejudices against ‘outsiders’. The student’s narrative demonstrates their understanding that the ‘right to rent’ is in fact an abstract right for international students, which never materialises in practice because of the ways this right enables landlords to exercise discrimination. The quote thus evokes interpretations that the ability of an international student to access social benefits is relational and depends, in the first instance, on the official structures that set the conditions for allegedly exercising this ability on equal terms, but also on tacit racism students experience in the everyday, which these structures enable but do not account for.

S: We couldn’t find anything … We went to, we saw the signs [advertising properties to rent], we travelled around and there were like hundreds of signs. We went to these offices [estate agents] and they said, no, we don’t have any. But, we told them ‘Your …’, I mean, there were …

I: ‘Your sign is just there!’.

S: They said ‘Oh no, we don’t have any …’ And somewhere honest with us, they said ‘Well, let us be honest with you. Maybe the landlord is not happy to rent the house to an international student’.

I: Yes.

S: I mean, I could say that … not many were really, they were not interested in like renting their places for students. For, like, a variety of reasons. What were the bad reasons? It could be the nationality.

I: But you know that there are laws that give you right to rent?

S: Yes, things might be much better in terms of like, legislations, regulations, laws, whatever but, you also deal with the human beings, people do have like, I mean stereotypes. Sometimes misconceptions.

The student explained that it was only in the country of education that international students accept such discrimination, through their own agency that

prompted them to subjugate to the penetrating role of regulatory structures and social attitudes. Arguably, the possibility of *not* being subjugated does not really exist because, as explained above, ‘outsiders’ do not get to exercise the same rights and benefits as citizens. The narratives cited below, however, additionally reveal yet another aspect that may contribute to this subjugation, which extends beyond interpretations that (rightly so) point to ways in which social justice for international students is prevented by ways in which applications of equality rights in some countries bypass tacit discrimination of international students. The aspects that are revealed here point to the role of ways in which international students understand themselves in relation to the country of education and how their subjective interpretations of ‘self’ as temporary outsiders, fed by complementary long-term imaginaries of their futures beyond the present context of education, make a difference to the ways they deal with discrimination. The students in the study explained that having experienced discrimination, they engaged in reflections on how best to manage the effects it had on them and decided, in all cases, it was best to accept them and ‘move on’. These decisions were driven by the temporality of their presence in the country of education, despite awareness of other options and encouragement from the public to make use of them. The account from the student below who talks about his wife shows evidence of such thinking.

S: She was walking, I mean think it was before the evening time to a shop, not far away from her accommodation and then there were like, a group of teenagers … and then one of them decided just to try something. He picked up, you know…it is not…sorry….

I: A stone? No?

S: No, no. You know a chestnut.

I: Oh yes …

S: Yes. And he threw that into her head, you know. People who were there ran behind the kid. Not the kid, he was a teenager, they caught him and they called the police and they insisted on the police, who were also very strict. Then his mother came … and she told ‘Oh, because he would have been taken to court’. She talked to my wife and my wife eventually agreed not to complain.

The student explained that this incident had a lasting effect on his wife who wanted to leave England. But the student was encouraging her not to give up and:

S: You know, to overcome this and say ‘Okay, yes, I am still going to continue …’. Because nobody can escape racism. You will always find some people who are extremists in the way they look at things.

(Education, University A)

The lasting effect of the abuse from members of the local community was also evidenced by the student cited below. Despite being deeply distressed, and aware of adequate laws, the student chose not to exercise their rights but instead ‘walked away’ from the abusive situation, on two occasions.

S: I still remember that we walked, I myself, along with like two of my class mates at that time walked like in two, three shops. They were at the shops, you know, selling things, you know, but they asked us to walk away from the shop. They refused to sell to us.

And the second incident happened to me while having a haircut. Once I mentioned that I was an Arab, you know, he stopped cutting my hair and he told me ‘Well, I am sorry I cannot continue this’

I: You are joking, really?

S: And this is true. I swear by God. I felt really bad about it but at that time you know … But anyway, I didn’t like it and I walked away.

I: Yes but you know it’s…you know racism is racism and this is something that is not acceptable.

S: But honestly, that, I mean, I forgive the person. But honestly there was really … I know, I know. I know the laws here, we are happy about the fact that the laws here protect people. I mean …

I It must have been really horrible

S: In the middle of having a haircut, you know.

I: Really …

S: It was really demeaning. I still remember the place of the… I mean the shop. But I forgive the person. I don’t want to. But I know where the shop is. I forgot so many things about [name of the city] but I still remember the shop.

(Education [another student], University A)

The findings from both sections reveal that the function of emotions was crucial for students as it became a discursive practice that enabled them to construct their own individual realities and gave value to their presence in the country of education, making it easier to undergo the agonising processes of discrimination. These emotions did not however drive them to pursue ways in which they could challenge the marginalisation they were facing, prompting fresh understandings of the ways in which lack of ‘nation-boundedness’ excludes.

# Conclusion

The paper broadly supports existing ideas about the ways in which not being bound to the nation of education excludes. The data reviewed above continue to show that international students’ problems stem from their ‘foreign’ and ‘alien’ status, as the issues that are revealed would not normally be faced by ‘home’ students; at least not for the same reasons. But the paper also offers a new insight, drawing attention to the fact that discrimination can additionally be intensified by emotions and subjectivities of student interpretations that are prompted in students due to their status as an ‘outsider’, ‘immigrant’ and as a ‘minority’. It is as if these emotions and interpretations become an additional function of discriminatory forces originally established by legal and structural dimensions of the social and educational domains in which international students interact. For the students in the research, emotions became a *discursive practice* in that they created a reality for students that prompted self-imaginaries of ‘self’ which, on the one hand, offered psychological asylum from the microaggressions they were experiencing, but on the other, engendered actions, performances and interpretations that further marginalised their already marginalised status. This evokes fresh understandings of marginalisation as being multilayered, taking account of the ways in which differing rules of the ‘gray zone’ and student subjectivities feed one another.

Thus, the answer to the first research question about the shifting boundaries between the ‘gray zone’ of regulation and emotions/ subjectivities as the main discursive practice, is that the latter become a concurrent reality that feeds marginalising effects of the former. Such conclusions, when used as an analytical paradigm, take account of the complexity of international students as emotional human beings, not simply as bearers of structures that are established for them, but without collapsing the importance of regulatory structures and fully acknowledging their penetrating role. This answers the second research question, showing how, through the influence of emotions, students can choose not to exercise their rights and voices and how they come to understand that certain rights exist for them only in abstract terms.

Considering emotions as a tenet of theorisations about ‘nation boundedness’, alongside existing legal socio-political and educational perspectives, can thus become a more revealing lens on the full extent to which not being nation-bound excludes. But this relationship requires further research, one that is approached from a post-structuralist perspective and one that focuses on two aspects. The first one should focus on further developing the role of ‘immigrant’ status in discrimination of international students but through lenses that reveal how international students’ subjective interpretations of their relationship to the country of education create possibilities for understanding the effects of structures in the ‘gray zone’ differently. The second should consider subjectivities of student interpretations as being prompted by the temporality of international students’ presence in the country of education. All students in the research were thinking of returning home, their decisions not to take legal actions against their perpetrators reflected decisions of people who were in transition and it was such interpretations of self that made these decisions justifiable. It seemed as if the temporality of student situation helped them manage the tensions between unequal and competing forces in the ‘gray zone’ in which they were interacting. The emotional and temporal lenses therefore need to be given greater prominence in research on ‘nation-boundedness’, in order to build an analytical frame that is capable of capturing the full extent to which lack of nation-boundedness excludes.

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