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Gendering International Student Migration: A Comparison of UK and Indian Students' Motivations and Experiences of Studying Abroad

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Abstract

This paper breaks new ground in two respects. First, it is comparative. Most studies of international student migration (ISM) that go beyond mere statistical comparison are based on single case-studies. We compare two ISM streams which have very different positionalities within the global system of international student movements: the UK and India. Results from online surveys show that, despite obvious differences between the two countries, students' motivations for studying abroad are quite similar. The second innovative feature of the paper is its introduction of a gender perspective into the study of ISM. Based on interviews with Indian and UK students studying in North America and elsewhere, we look for commonalities and differences in the lived experiences of social interaction within and outside the academic environment. We find that gendered differences feature quite prominently in the narratives of Indian students, but not in the UK sample.

Keywords

International student migration, UK students, Indian students, North America, gendered experiences of study abroad

Introduction: research questions for a double comparison

Until recently, international student migration (ISM) was an under-explored component of global migration flows and trends. However, the last few years have seen a rapid increase in the ISM phenomenon and there is now an extensive body of literature on the topic, including several books and edited collections (see, for example, Alberts and Hazen 2013; Baas 2012; Bilecen 2014; Brooks and Waters 2011; Byram and Dervin 2008; de Wit *et al*. 2008; Gürüz 2008; King and Raghuram 2013; Robertson 2013; van Mol 2014; Waters and Brooks 2011).

Very little of this existing research involves explicit comparison, except at the statistical level of comparing quantities and trends of internationally mobile students. The case-studies set alongside each other in edited collections are rarely analysed comparatively in any depth. In this paper we compare the backgrounds, motivations and experiences of two national groups of study-abroad students – from India and the United Kingdom. These two ISM flows are drawn from very different locations and developmental positionalities within the global system of ISM. India is the world's second-largest (after China) source country for ISM and is a rapidly developing and transforming, yet still, in some respects, underdeveloped former colonial country. The UK is the world's second-largest (after the USA) receiving country for ISM and a highly developed former colonial metropole, yet it also 'exports' students to other countries, especially the USA. Our comparison of the backgrounds and motivations of the two groups of students is mainly based on returns from online questionnaire surveys, described in more detail in the methods section of this paper.

In addition to the cross-national comparison, we also introduce a second comparative dimension, based on a gendered analysis of the research material collected. Answers to the online questionnaire are broken down by gender: perhaps surprisingly, gender differences are minimal. However, our second methodological approach, that of in-depth interviews with Indian and British students pursuing degree programmes mainly in North America, reveals more distinctive patterns. Gendered contrasts in experiences of studying abroad are quite evident in the Indian sample, but largely absent from the British students' narratives.

From the above scene-setting introduction, we derive the following research questions for our study:

- Do the school-background characteristics of students, and their motivations for going abroad to pursue higher education, differ across different types of origin country, taking the case of the UK and India as examples?
- Are there gendered differences in the characteristics, motivations and experiences of male and female students who study abroad?
- To the extent that they exist, do these gendered differences express themselves differently between student-origin countries with varying economic and cultural characteristics, again taking the UK and India as examples?

We shall describe the research methods used to gather data to respond to these research questions presently. First, we give a brief overview of the field of ISM, paying particular attention to those aspects of the phenomenon which are the most pertinent to our study.

ISM: defining and theorising the field

ISM is an important yet hitherto under-appreciated component of global migration. For example, it was only in 2008 that the International Organization for Migration's periodic 'world migration' reports recognised the importance of ISM in global migration dynamics (IOM 2008: 105–123). In recent years, global ISM has been growing at about 8 per cent annually, much faster than the total international migration, and fractionally faster than the growth in total tertiary student enrolment, 7 per cent per year. The 'stock' of international students (4.5 million in 2012) has more than doubled since 2000 (2.1m) and more than quadrupled since 1985 (1.1m).[1]

Table 1. Indian and UK students abroad: five main host countries, 2012

Indian students abroad		UK students abroad	
US	92,597	US	9,060
UK	22,155	Ireland	2,106
Australia	16,150	France	2,013
Canada	9,582	Australia	1,678
New Zealand	6,845	Germany	1,499

Source: OECD *Education at a Glance* (http://oecd.org/edu/education-at-a-glance-2014-indicators-by-chapter.htm).

As regards the two national groups which are the focus of our comparative investigation, India is, and has been for some time, the second largest source country of international students after China. India had 217,000 students abroad in 2012, compared to China's 761,000. The UK, meanwhile, stably holds the position as the world's second-largest host country of international students, after the United States (US 740,000, UK 428,000 in 2012). The UK is less important as a sending country, with around 30,000 students abroad in 2012. Table 1 shows the five top destination countries where Indian and UK students were studying abroad in 2012. Indian

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[1] These figures are from the OECD's education database. See OECD (2015: 29–32) for a summary on the OECD 'education at a glance' website for more details. Note that the enumeration of international students is far from straightforward, for two main reasons. First there are definition and measurement problems: international students are variously recorded by their 'foreign' citizenship or by their country of habitual or prior residence. Second, there is the issue of whether short-term 'exchange' students (such as Erasmus or 'year abroad' students) are included in the totals: on the whole they are not, but it is not always clear. For further discussion on data sources for ISM see de Wit (2008).

students are oriented to the anglophone countries of the developed world; UK students are split between overseas destinations such as the US and Australia, and European countries, including Ireland, France and Germany.

For the purposes of this study, we define an international student as someone who follows an entire degree programme outside his or her country of origin. Hence we are only interested in what is called 'degree mobility' and not in so-called 'credit mobility', whereby a short-term exchange student goes abroad and then returns to the country of origin to complete their qualification. Within degree mobility there are three common levels of study: undergraduate (usually three or four years), Master's level (usually one or two years) and PhD (usually three to five years). Some of these programmes may involve other activities such as business internships or (for doctoral students) teaching responsibilities.

How can ISM be theorised? More particularly, how is its theorisation distinctive from general attempts to theorise migration which tend to privilege economic approaches to account for labour migration? Perhaps the first point to make here is that there *are* some common elements to take into consideration: students *do* go abroad as rational economic actors seeking to maximise utility in its various forms. The key difference is that ISM is not *directly* driven by spatial differentiations in unemployment and wage rates, but rather by anticipated future economic benefits in terms of better incomes and higher-earning careers over the longer term. Another key difference, which applies, as we shall see, particularly in the case of Indian students, is that theirs is not usually an individually acted-upon agency. To a greater or lesser extent, they are 'steered' by their parents (and maybe other family members), who will often be making the key financial contribution.

Drawing on earlier attempts to theorise ISM (Brooks and Waters 2011: 10–18; Findlay 2011; Findlay *et al*. 2012; King and Findlay 2012; Raghuram 2013) we nominate four theoretical domains as having particular salience to our study. These are built into the key questions underpinning our study, and find their place as summarised options within the survey questionnaire and themes to be explored in the interviews.

The first theoretical frame is ISM as a *subset of highly skilled migration*. From a macro-economic perspective, there is evidence that countries like Canada and Australia seek to attract foreign students as a strategy for improving the supply of highly qualified human capital into their domestic labour markets. The flipside of this process is 'brain drain' from the source countries. This has undoubtedly become a serious issue for countries where there is a massive proportional loss of bright students to ISM, especially in key professions like medicine, science and engineering (as in several African and Caribbean states). It is less of a problem for India, where the ISM population is a very small share of total tertiary enrolment and where there are other benefits to be derived from return migration and from inward investment by non-resident Indians. For the UK, even more, talk of a brain drain of the brightest students is exaggerated due to the modest scale of the phenomenon, especially when compared to the inflow of foreign students, which is more than ten times higher.

From the perspective of the individual, ISM can be seen as an investment in the improvement of human capital – a rational strategy in order to compete better in the domestic labour market of the origin country following return 'home'. It could equally be seen as the first step towards a high-income international career, perhaps in a global corporation. On a wider scale, therefore, ISM contributes importantly to the creation of an international labour elite of skilled professionals, including academics, managers, business owners, dipomats and international civil servants (Szelényi 2006). There is, however, a more conceptual issue as to whether *students* can truly be regarded as highly *skilled* since they have not yet, in most cases, entered the labour market to demonstrate their skills. Szelényi (2006: 183) suggests that only graduate and postgraduate students form an integral part of the highly skilled.

Secondly, we see ISM as both *a product and an underlying mechanism of the globalisation of higher education*. As Sidhu (20006) has emphasised, the commodification of higher education is the consequence of global processes in which higher eduation is being sold within a global market place. The international marketing of higher education has become a multi-billion-dollar global business with powerful supply and demand factors: countries and individual universities seek the best students globally (also for their fee income); students themselves seek qualifications from the 'top' universities. In a recent paper overviewing existing attempts to theorise ISM, Findlay (2011) points out that most emphasis has been given to demand-side models based on student characteristics, behaviours and choices. He argues for more attention to be paid to the supply side of student international mobility, i.e. the role of state policies, universities' self-promotion strategies, recruiting agencies and other channels which direct flows of mobile students to certain countries and, within them, to particular institutions.

In fact, higher education is an issue of policy and practice across multiple scales – global, national and local. In the cases of both Indian and UK students, there are circumstances where the 'local' fails to cater for the needs of students: either there is too much competition for limited places, or the quality of education is perceived to be too poor, or the desired programmes of study are not on offer. Therefore students seek higher education in a broader geographical field – either elsewhere in the country or abroad. On the other side of the equation, the globalisation of higher education allows 'local' universities to compete in a global-scale market. Meanwhile, students who move internationally experience the 'local', in the form of their destination university and its immediate environs, within an internationally recognised university and accredited global university system.

It appears that the globalisation and internationalisation of higher education have proceeded alongside an increasingly transparent global differentiation and hierarchisation of the overal university system, resulting in greater 'value' being ascribed to degrees from certain countries and from particular universities within them (Yang 2003). Whilst there has long been a generally agreed global perception of the most prestigious universities (in the UK, Oxford, Cambridge, LSE etc; in the US, Harvard, Yale, MIT etc.), in recent years the publication of various world university rankings has provided allegedly 'objective' listings of the 'best' universities worldwide. These rankings have taken on a life of their own and there is no doubt that they are widely consulted by students when applying to universities both at home and abroad, even if what is considered a 'top' or 'world class' university is a complex and contested issue (Deem *et al*. 2008).

A final point to make about the combined globalisation and differentiation of higher education is that this dual process favours the promotion of the neoliberal, 'Western-style', anglophone realm. The dominance of English as the global academic language is deepened, matching its prominence in global business and culture. However, the interpretation of the global growth in international education and of international studies as somehow 'natural' and 'normalised' can be challenged by a theoretical reframing within a postcolonial optic which is sensitive to 'the multiple historical materialities of spatial relationships' (Madge *et al*. 2009: 35). The alternative, according to Madge *et al*., is to work towards a 'critically engaged and responsible pedagogy'. The core of this engaged pedagogy is the Janus-faced relationship of education to postcolonialism. On the one hand, teachers and students should recognise how the dominance of American, British and other top 'Western' universities brings them a kind of hegemonic power over global knowledge and the latest domain to be 'colonised'. On the other hand, it is only through the embedding of ideological and cultural diversity within teaching and learning that the potential to challenge and change established modes of thinking can be realised (Madge *et al*. 2009: 37; Rizvi *et al*. 2006: 257).

The third conceptual frame considers ISM as part of *global youth mobility cultures*, where the freedom to travel and to 'explore' different places and cultures is seen as a desirable lifestyle attribute for middle-class global youth. This conceptualisation takes its inspiration from the post-2000 mobilities paradigm in sociology, anthropology and human geography, which privileges the *movement* of people, things and images over their static distribution in settlements, classes and other 'containers'. A notable paradox is that the main protagonists of the 'mobilities turn' (principally Urry 2007; see also Adey 2010; Cresswell 2006) scarcely mention international student mobility as a relevant contemporary example of their genre of work.

Under the youth mobilities approach, ISM is seen partly as an end in itself: as an exciting personal experience, an 'adventure'. The study-stay abroad becomes a life-stage 'consumption good' corresponding to a 'rite of passage'. Whilst the academic qualification retains its importance (at least to the extent that it is important not to 'fail'), the key objective is the sensory and cultural experience of being in another place/country, with its different climate, scenery, historical patrimony, recreational opportunities, food and music traditions, and new opportunities for social encounters and friendships.

As Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) have pointed out, the greater the diversity of places that students have experienced, the greater their agency in terms of creative and individualised self-identification. The mobile student distinguishes him/herself from the routine modernities of a static student life by celebrating the international stage on which their study history and personal biography have been built. Following Bourdieu's (1986) well-known 'forms of capital', the mobile student's international experience is embodied in a specific form of cultural capital which we can tentatively call mobility capital (Murphy-Lejeune 2002) or, perhaps, transcultural or intercultural capital. This perspective also tends to construct internationally mobile students as an elite category, which leads us to the fourth and final framing – resurrecting *the importance of a class analysis*.

Despite the proclaimed outdatedness of 'class' as a crucial category in contemporary fluid and mobile societies (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002 call class a 'zombie' concept; see also Urry 2000), many authors insist on the continued salience of social class as an analytical construct. For instance, writing about Asian migrations, Fielding (2016: 128) asserts that, without a social-class analysis, migration risks becoming a 'chaotic concept'. He goes on to state that 'class location … determines the choices that individuals have when engaging in migration. Location in a higher class gives the person more choice about leaving, more choice about destination, and more choice about the manner of insertion into the destination society' (2016: 128).

There is abundant evidence not only that access to university education is socio-economically selective in most societies but also that access to an *international* education from the general pool of students is biased in favour of the more privileged, wealthy and highly educated classes. For Europe, the *Euro Student* report, based on large-scale survey data across several countries, concluded that 'students from low-income families make substantially less use of the opportunities for studying abroad than do those from families with higher income' (Schnitzer and Zempel-Gino 2002: 115). Within this general statistical correlation between ISM and family income, key operational factors were pre-university international experience (travel, holidays etc.) and better knowledge of foreign languages.

However, social class is not a static concept: class boundaries are mobile and permeable, and social status, especially of the elite and middle classes, is constantly being remade. In the context of Hong Kong students' migration to Canada, Waters (2006) found that, within a general scenario of *embourgeoisement* and rising participation rates in higher education, studying abroad, especially at prestigious Western universities, was one way that the elite and upper-middle classes could maintain their distinction from the rising and expanding middle

class. And in an earlier round of our own research on the UK situation (King *et al*. 2011) it was demonstrated that propensity to study abroad was significantly associated with high academic performance, parental experience of higher education, and a background in private (i.e. fee-paying) schooling.

Although the above four theoretical frameworks – ISM as a subset of highly skilled migration, as a product of the globalisation and differentiation of higher education, as a part of a youth culture of mobility and adventure, and as a product and a driver of class distinction – have been treated as analytically distinct, in practice they generally act in harmony with each other. The result is the formation of a cosmopolitan elite who may become prominent in the economic, social, cultural and political life of their home countries, and/or business leaders and other international high-flyers in what Sklair (2001) has labelled the 'transnational capitalist class'.

Given the focus of this article, there remains the question of *gender*. A glance at the many journals which publish migration research reveals that it is no longer justified to bemoan the lack of attention paid to gender. There are hundreds of analyses of migration which employ a gender lens, but there are still some blind spots. One such is the lack of gendered analysis of ISM.[2] We could only find one study which matches what we try to do in this paper. In their study of Kazakhstan, Holloway *et al*. (2012) follow the standard Bourdieusian interpretation of ISM as middle-class reproduction through the accumulation of cultural capital by students taking degrees abroad but add a gendered analysis. Based on interviews with 20 Kasakh students enrolled for degrees in British universities, the authors find that the cycle of study abroad and return is played out differently by gender. Young men are expected to return to an advantageous position in the home-country labour market and are under pressure to secure well-paid jobs in order to prepare a stable platform for marriage. Young women face discrimination in the local labour market and will have to negotiate employment success within multiple constraints, including those relating to norms of virtuous behaviour, heterosexuality and family formation in this largely Muslim country. This means that their ideal life-path is that they must 'marry well' to a husband with a higher earning capacity than themselves and, ideally, a positive attitude to women's employment (Holloway *et al*. 2012: 2292). This resonates with some aspects of our Indian data, as we shall see.

Survey methods

The research results presented here derive from two separate though interlinked projects. First we describe the projects and then in more detail the research instruments.

The first project, entitled 'Motivations and Experiences of UK Students Studying Abroad', was funded by the UK Department of Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) and carried out in 2008–09. It surveyed UK-origin students undertaking complete degree programmes (bachelor, master or doctoral level) abroad, chiefly in North America, the main destination for UK out-moving students, but also in Australia and several European countries. The project comprised four methodologies:

- a metadata analysis of sources of statistics on ISM, with special reference to the UK's outwardly mobile students;

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[2] This is not to overlook important and innovative studies in an East Asian context of the gendered family strategies surrounding ISM, notably so-called 'astronaut' or 'seagull' split transnational families, whereby the 'study mother' moves abroad to support her student son or daughter, whilst the father stays behind to run his business or enjoy better or stable employment (see Huang and Yeoh 2005, 2011; Waters 2002). Also of relevance to our ISM study are gendered analyses of academics' international mobility (e.g. Jöns 2011).

- a paper questionnaire survey of the attitudes and intentions of 1,400 final-year school students towards studying abroad;
- an online questionnaire survey of 560 UK students enrolled in universities in the USA, Australia and several European countries; and
- face-to-face interviews with 64 UK-origin students studying abroad, chiefly in the US.

Publications arising from the project include the report to BIS (Findlay and King 2010), a specific study on school-leavers' attitudes and plans for study broad (King *et al*. 2011) and papers on the student experience of pursuing higher education abroad, again chiefly in the United States (Findlay *et al*. 2012; King *et al*. 2013). Full details of the various research methods used in the project, including the questionnaire and interview schedules, are given in Findlay and King (2010: 46–67).

The second project was a doctoral thesis on Indian student migration (Sondhi 2013). Although this was an independent study, some of its methods were deliberately patterned on those of the UK study in order to ensure some cross-project comparability. Hence a similar online questionnaire was used to elicit responses from Indian students studying for a degree in another country (n = 157). Face-to-face interviews were undertaken with 43 Indian students who were either studying abroad in Canada (n = 22) or had returned from studying abroad to India (n = 21). In addition, 22 face-to-face interviews were conducted in New Delhi with the parents of students who were studying abroad. The Indian online survey and the interviews with Indian students and parents were carried out in 2010–11.

All the online and interview surveys were broadly gender-balanced numerically. The general purpose of the interviews was to flesh out the more detailed reasons behind the questionnaire findings, and to ask new questions to explore gendered differences in the motivations, behaviours and experiences of studying and living abroad.

The online questionnaire

The compilation of the online questionnaire benefited from previous experience with surveying UK Erasmus students who were abroad in Europe (Findlay *et al*. 2006; King and Ruiz-Gelices 2003). The Erasmus questionnaire was suitably modified to apply to students who were abroad for entire degree programmes rather than as shorter-term exchange students. As stated above, the Indian questionnaire schedule followed the UK one's main structure and list of questions, with a few exceptions.

The survey collected information on the following themes:

- life at present (courses followed, part-time work if applicable, evolving identity);
- school background (public or private, grades achieved, languages taught or spoken, school-based preparation for study abroad);
- decision to study abroad (check-list of factors to be rated on a four-point scale from 'very important' to 'not applicable');
- experience of studying and living abroad (friendship patterns, evaluation of the study-abroad experience, problematic aspects); and
- general information about the respondent (age, gender, nationality/ethnic heritage, parents' education and occupation).

Given the focus of this article, we will mainly concentrate on comparing, across nationality and gender, the responses to questions relating to motivation for study abroad. Four key questions about motivation, derived from in-depth scrutiny of existing literature on ISM motivations (see King *et al*. 2010), were listed in both surveys:

- I was determined to attend a world-class university.
- I want an international career and this was a first step towards it.
- I saw studying abroad as a unique adventure.
- My family was very keen for me to study abroad/in a particular country.

In the UK survey, two other questions were included:

- Rising fee levels in the UK made me explore other study locations.
- Limited course places in UK universities to study my chosen degree subject.

And in the Indian survey, the following question was added:

- I saw study abroad as a first step towards living outside India after graduation

The methods of distribution for the questionnaire survey could not be matched, but we believe that this is unlikely to significantly affect the results since both survey strategies elicited responses from a range of countries roughly in proportion to the available statistics on the distribution of Indian and UK students studying abroad. The sample numbers are also not a close match, but are sufficiently large for reasonably robust comparison.

The UK questionnaires were forwarded to students by the large numbers of universities which were contacted where it was known, or there was good reason to believe, that there were sizeable clusters of UK students. By no means all universities approached were cooperative, but most were. Whilst a small number of universities returned large or moderate numbers of completed questionnaires (Trinity College Dublin, Harvard University, New York University, University of Southern California, University of Sydney), questionnaires were also returned in small numbers from students in many other universities (see Findlay and King 2010: 52–53 for the full list). The Indian questionnaires were distributed via a more varied range of channels. The survey was hosted on the SurveyGizmo web platform and distributed to selected university international offices, Indian student associations in the US and Canada, personal networks and facebook (Sondhi 2013: 62–64). For both surveys, a few questionnaires were completed as a result of face-to-face meetings.

Interviews

Face-to-face interviews were carried out with just over 100 British and Indian students, both undergraduates and postgraduates, and across a range of subject areas. Most of the British students were interviewed in the north-eastern United States and in California. The Indian students were interviewed at universities in the Toronto area and (for returnee students) in New Delhi, where a sample of parents of study-abroad students was also interviewed. For logistical reasons of time, distance and cost, it made sense to cluster the interviews in key university cities.

The interviews were semi-structured, built around a number of key themes and questions, but with plenty of opportunity for the informants to tell their 'stories' in their own way. We sought to cover the same thematic structure as the questionnaire, with the added dimension of opening up a discursive space for gendered experiences to emerge without, however, explicit probing for fear of eliciting stereotypical or pat answers. Most interviews lasted around one hour, and were recorded and transcribed, subject to the usual consents being given, which was always the case. Given the large numbers of interview narratives collected, we will be very selective in quoting case-studies and interview extracts, seeking to give as representative a view

as possible, based on our knowledge of the wider sample of voices and the broad themes which consistently emerge.

Students were contacted via a variety of access routes: personal networks of the researchers and their colleagues, universities' international offices, student associations, Facebook groups, social events and some snowballing. The campus environment makes it relatively easy to set up meetings in neutral spaces such as coffee-bars and other common socialising areas.

All the interview samples were gender-balanced. There was, however, one key difference between the two groups surveyed: a much higher proportion of Indian students – about three-quarters – were postgraduate students; for the UK students, the undergraduate/postgraduate split was close to even. This represents the reality of these two ISM flows and is not a result of sample bias. For further details on the interview surveys, access strategies and other logistical aspects of the fieldwork, see Findlay and King (2010: 24–26, 66–67) and Sondhi (2013: 66–82, 250–252).

Online survey results: motivations for study abroad

The questionnaire survey yields relatively robust data for comparing selected characteristics about the two groups of students, especially their main motives for deciding to pursue higher education abroad. For this preliminary analysis we compare questionnaire results from 553 UK students studying in the US, Ireland, Australia, France and Germany (265 males, 288 females) with 157 Indian students in the US, Canada, the UK, Australia and Germany (87 males, 70 females).

Table 2. School background and financial sources of Indian and UK students studying abroad (percent data)

	India	UK
Type of secondary school attended		
• state school	0	54
• fee-paying (private) school	98	33
• international school	2	6
• other	0	6
Source of financing for study abroad		
• parents	41	38
• grant or bursary	22	21
• self-financing	22	21
• bank loan	8	7
• employer	3	2
• other	4	11

Source: Authors' survey data.

The first comparative table (Table 2) shows two features of the students' background: the type of school attended and the main source of funding for their university studies. The markedly different school backgrounds are clearly evident: whereas none of the Indian students had attended the national state-school system, more than half of UK students had followed the state system. Nevertheless, privately educated UK students accounted for one third of the survey respondents, nearly five times the share that these schools account for in the total UK secondary-school population (7 per cent). If international schools (which are usually fee-paying)

are included in the non-state educational sector, then four out of ten UK students come from the private or 'independent' sector (which includes the counterintuitively named 'public schools'). In India, private schools are the norm for the children of upper- and middle-class parents, who aspire for their offspring to proceed to higher education, including abroad.

On the other hand, there is a rather striking similarity between UK and Indian students' main source of financing their studies, with the figures distributed in a parallel way between parental support, grants and bursaries, and self-financing through part-time work and savings. The data here are not split by gender as the patterns are similar between male and female students.

Table 3. Online survey results: percentage of respondents rating study-abroad decision factors as 'very important' or 'important'

Decision-making factors	India			UK		
	M	F	MF	M	F	MF
'Very important'						
• world-class university	58	58	58	54	56	55
• international career	58	54	56	32	36	34
• unique adventure	47	40	44	48	52	50
• family encouragement	15	13	14	8	15	12
• rising fees in the UK	-	-	-	19	30	24
• limited courses in the UK	-	-	-	14	25	19
• migration from India	22	14	20	-	-	-
'Very important' and 'Important'						
• world-class university	82	82	82	88	88	88
• international career	74	74	74	68	69	68
• unique adventure	84	84	84	87	89	88
• family encouragement	31	30	31	27	28	27
• rising fees in the UK	-	-	-	27	42	34
• limited courses in the UK	-	-	-	37	49	43
• migration from India	43	33	38	-	-	-

Source: Authors' survey data.

Table 3 presents the core data for our analysis of motivations for studying abroad, based on the main hypothesised reasons evident from previous literature and our own thinking about the UK and Indian situations. The various factors are those set out in the prior section on methods. Taking the four-point response scale of 'very important', 'important', 'not important' and 'not applicable', we plot two sets of results, those for 'very important' in the top part of the table, and those for the combined ratings of 'very important' and 'important' in the bottom half of the table. There are some striking similarities in the figures, both between countries and between genders, and also some interesting differences. Perhaps the most remarkable similarity is the consistency of responses to the first factor, 'I was determined to study at a world-class university', rated uniformly at upper 50s on the 'very important' score and in the 80s for the combined 'very important' and 'important' categories. The percentages are almost identical between male and female respondents across the board.

The second factor listed in Table 3 refers to the route that studying abroad provides for accessing an international career. Here there are noticeable differences between the Indian and the UK students, but minimal variations by gender. Whilst 56 per cent of Indian students saw this as a 'very important' factor, only 34 per cent of UK students did. This 22 percentage-point

difference narrows to only 6 when the 'very important' and the 'important' scores are combined, indicating that, for UK students, this operates more as a secondary factor in their thinking whereas, for Indian students, it functions alongside the desire to attend a top university as a prime factor. The Indian survey data also indicate that there is a good deal of interest in using the student-visa route as a means of facilitating longer-term migration out of India. One in five Indian respondents saw this as a very important factor governing their decision to study abroad, and nearly twice that number when the 'important' category is added, with male students recording higher scores than females on this factor. To conclude on this point, it seems that, whereas the well-established Indian global business and professional diaspora provides an exemplary and attractive setting for Indian students to want to settle abroad, compared to the more limited opportunities in the Indian graduate labour market, for British students their envisioned career trajectories are more likely to involve a return to the UK's buoyant yet globally connected labour market, rather than the wish or necessity to settle abroad.

Seeing study abroad as a 'unique adventure' also scores highly for both genders – slightly higher for UK than for Indian students. 'Family encouragement' to study abroad is the fourth factor common to both questionnaire surveys and records lower frequencies of 'very important' and 'important' ratings. The only gender contrast here is the higher rating recorded by UK women for this being 'very important' (15 per cent vs 8 per cent for men). We can think of no obvious explanation for this except to suggest that female students are more likely to be sensitive to the encouragement of their families than men.

The two remaining elements in the table are those included only in the UK questionnaire. The survey was implemented at a time when there were ongoing discussions about substantially increased fee levels in English and Welsh (but not Scottish) universities – initially to £3,000 and then to £9,000 per year. This factor was seen as 'very important' for one quarter of respondents (but 30 per cent of females). Limited course places in the UK for the chosen subject of study constituted a relevant factor for 19 per cent ('very important') and 43 per cent ('important' added) of UK respondents, again with higher scores for female respondents.

One obvious and, therefore, interesting pattern across all the figures in Table 3 is the recurrent contrast in male vs female response frequencies. For the Indian survey, it is the *male* respondents who seem more willing to score the factors as 'very important' or 'important'; for the UK sample the reverse is the case, with consistently higher percentages posted by the *female* respondents. For the time being, we can only wonder why this contrast emerges.

Mapping motivations: insights from interview data

The statistical comparison of UK and Indian students' outward mobility revealed that the motivations for studying abroad are rather similar, almost uncannily so. At first sight, this is rather surprising because one might expect different motivations on the part of students coming from different socio-economic and cultural contexts. All four main motivation factors – to study at a world-class university, to access an international career, to experience a unique adventure, and family encouragement – show similar patterns of cross-national response, also by gender. However, we also need to explore the interview narratives in order to unpack the structures that lead to these apparent similarities. As we shall see, this exercise points to particular framings of ISM by youth and their parents which reflect a differential balance between individual initiative on the one hand, and the wider social imaginaries of elite and middle classes on the other.

As discussed in our theoretical overview of ISM, existing research links motivations to study abroad with the desire for social and cultural capital accumulation, the end-goal of which is the reproduction of existing socio-economic status and further upward social mobility. For internationally-minded students and their parents/families, this is largely achieved through

studying at high-prestige universities. This 'world-class' education yields two obvious benefits: it can give students an advantage in the 'home' labour market over those who are 'locally' educated and who lack this international exposure, and it can be a very helpful step towards establishing an international career, either in the country of study or in another country, or indeed at home in a globally oriented business or corporation. Evidence accumulates that certain kinds of employer value highly the international, intercultural and multilingual experience that study abroad can bring, perhaps even more so if it is combined with 'local' knowledge. However, it is important to acknowledge the existence of systemic barriers to entry for non-native graduates in the labour markets of destination countries, even if the discriminating nature of such practices is beyond the scope of this discussion.

Attending a 'world-class' university

According to Findlay *et al*. (2012: 120) and Yang (2003), the internationalisation of higher education has proceeded alongside increased differentiation of the university system across the globe. Certain countries are able to position themselves as purveyors of a world-class university education. They do this partly out of their long-standing reputation for academic quality and prestige and partly by reference to international league tables that universities scramble to increase their rankings on, despite misgivings about the true meaning of such metrics-based tables. And within these countries, international and national league tables differentiate gradations of 'elite' universities and 'the rest'.

For the consumers of a world-class education, there are several benefits. The most obvious one is a leg-up in the career stakes. It is well-known that a degree from 'Oxbridge' or from Harvard and other 'Ivy League' schools, or from one of the French '*grandes écoles',* can be an entry-point to the best careers in government, academia and other key professions in the respective countries. As Brooks and Waters (2011), Findlay *et al*. (2012), Waters (2006) and others have shown, it is a means of distinguishing oneself in the pursuit of superior status and difference, not only for the individual but also in terms of reproducing and enhancing the family's social class position.

In the Indian case, acquiring a world-class education abroad is a pragmatic response to structural barriers within the Indian higher education system. The problems here are threefold. The first issue is socio-demographic: a rapidly growing youth population with middle-class aspirations has led to an increase in demand for higher education, putting pressure on the existing structures of education and making the system even more competitive than previously, especially for the country's top universities and specialised higher education institutions – a syndrome noted by Waters (2006) in the case of Hong Kong students moving abroad to study.

The second issue is about the experiences of students in Indian universities, where facilities are often poor and lectures overcrowded. Students following university education abroad value the more interactive mode of small-group teaching and the specific value of Master's and doctoral programmes which are not available in India or, if they are, they are considered of lower quality and prestige than postgraduate qualifications from 'Western' countries.

The third issue is about the rapidly evolving nature of the Indian economy and its neoliberal turn with increasing privatisation, stalled public funding for higher education, and the establishment of private universities and of campuses built by overseas universities (Agarwal 2009). The opening up of Indian markets and the economy to the world has led to demands from the Indian labour market for highly skilled and trained workers within the STEM fields, particularly IT, and for expertise in business studies, commerce and economics.

Whilst the existing system has supported demand in STEM subjects, it lags in matching demand for business studies education, including specialised training in subsectors within this

general field. In the following quote, Tarun (Indian, male, Master's student in Canada) describes his personal take on the need to go abroad to further his education, picking up several points raised above:

> I come from an engineering background… I worked on a project in [names multinational corporation] for four years. That's when I met people from Europe, Canada and the US… they told me that there's a good education over here. It's not like lecture-based as happened in India, it's more interactive… And then after a time I thought I should go for my MBA. At the time I started to look for good schools in different parts of the globe. I didn't want to stay in India because I wanted to get a global perspective. And how I ended up in Canada was I was more involved in CSR [corporate social responsibility], very much involved in non-profit. And [names university] has a very high rank in the world for non-profit and CSR.

Tarun's quote reveals that CSR was not offered as a programme at Indian universities, but that some North American universities offered a Master's degree that was recognised globally, hence these universities attained the status of 'world class' in that particular field.

For UK students, the targeting of a world-class university abroad was more a reflection of a risk-spreading strategy and, for some, the specific desire to mitigate the fear of failure to get into Oxford or Cambridge by applying instead or as well to other universities which have a global brand recognition, especially from a UK perspective (Brooks and Waters 2009). Susan, an MBA student at a prestigious university in California, put it like this:

> I decided I wanted to go overseas, and I would study for an MBA. I wanted an MBA which people would not think was from some tiny university in the middle of nowhere, [I wanted] an MBA which was actually recognised in the UK. So I knew I had to go for one of the big American universities. I chose just Harvard initially because that's the biggest name for business schools in the UK… But then I thought that's a risky strategy, to only apply there… so in a second round I also applied to Berkeley.

As Susan's interview extract shows, the 'MBA' image produced by a combination of accumulated fame and the marketing strategies of universities and MBA schools has successfully permeated the everyday consciousness of the elite and semi-elite students who aspire to a career in business, especially international business. Her belief was that a qualification from a top American university was the only alternative to a top UK university and that she needed to avoid getting a degree from 'some tiny university in the middle of nowhere' – presumably here referring to both the UK and the US. However, global brand recognition can be highly selective and does not always reflect national ratings. As Waters and Brooks (2009) show, not all 'top' US universities have brand recognition amongst UK employers. While Harvard, Yale and MIT may exist within the wider consciousness due to the spread of Western media to the UK and elsewhere (and through Bollywood movies etc.), other universities, including some in the Ivy League, do not possess this global recognition, despite being well-esteemed in US national and regional settings (Sidhu 2006).

International career

Closely allied to the desire for a world-class education and university experience was the deployment of studying abroad as a deliberate strategy for enhancing access to an international career. Our student interviewees, both Indian and British, thought that an internationally recognised degree from a prestigious university would allow them to better compete in an

internationalised labour market, partly through the intrinsic value of the wider experience of living and studying abroad for one or, more often, several years. On the one hand, students generally gained confidence from rising to the challenge of studying in a foreign country; on the other hand, they believed that employers, too, would value the fact that job applicants had deliberately set out to be more adventurous in this way, and that this increased self-confidence and sense of adventure would carry over into the world of work and business.

For UK students, a common pattern was to combine an undergraduate degree in the UK with a postgraduate degree in North America: this was seen as a way of opening the door to an international career, including the idea of staying on in the country of study. However, the online survey showed marked differences by destination in this regard. Taking the three main destination countries (combined n = 426), students were much more oriented towards living abroad after graduation if they were studying in Australia (71 per cent 'definitely' wanted to live abroad) compared to Ireland (33 per cent), with the US occupying a middle position (49 per cent).

Amongst the Indian students, informants pointed to the merit-based system of employment hiring in the US, Canada, Australia and the UK, which provides Indian graduates with the opportunity to secure jobs commensurate with their educational qualifications, skills and experience. This was contrasted with the obstacles and constraints intrinsic to the Indian labour market, which was still seen as very hierarchical – based on caste, class, gender and 'connections'. In the following interview extract from Nisha (female, PhD student in Canada), we hear a rather typical story of disappointing experiences in the Indian labour market interspersed with repeated episodes of emigration to places where work and study opportunities were interpreted as superior to those in India.

> I left India in 2000 when I moved to the US for my Bachelor's. In 2004 I went back to India for a year… I wanted to test the waters. But I was extremely unhappy wth the salary and my treatment in the workplace… and the value which my degree and knowledge were given. I moved back to Canada. I completed my Master's and now work simultaneously as a consultant for several NGOs and immigrant servicing agencies and for my PhD. Canada has really accepted me for who I am; my skills and expertise have been valued enormously… as well as financially… My research focuses extensively on India and ideally I would like to return there one day, although I am worried about the limited opportunities outside academia, with my arts background… as well as the lack of respect and poor treatment I may face in a non-academic setting, and the poor pay in government sectors.

This longish quote also draws attention to the gender inequalities which are still deeply imbricated in the Indian labour market, and to which we will presently return.

Whilst Nisha was keen to return to India, even after one failed attempt already, other participants saw study abroad as a more pre-planned step towards settling abroad – some with a specific target as the study-abroad country, some with a more open mind geographically. This is a pragmatic and strategic choice towards establishing a particular career trajectory and establishing a combination of local and international students and experiences. In the following quote we see how the combination of a UK first degree and then a postgraduate degree abroad is an ideal choice, given the intention of Sarah, the interviewee, to work outside the UK.

> I will most likely be working overseas, so if that's the case I need to go to an institution that has an international reputation. I had no interest in continuing at Oxford or Cambridge. So I only considered [names well-known Australian university] because I

didn't consider any other university in Australia to be world-renowned. A lot of the literature I was reading was written by people at [names university].

In the case of both UK and Indian students, then, not only do degrees from particular 'prestige' universities carry the internationally recognised weight of global recognition, but also universities are embedded in local and national contexts. This means that the students generate social and human capital that is both local and global, and gives them potential access to labour markets both in the country/region where their chosen university is situated, and in the international/global market; for some, that prestige can be carried back home should they decide to return to seek employment or for personal reasons.

Adventure

The third common motivation, with rather similar survey values between the UK and Indian samples (Table 3), is the opportunity that study abroad offers for travel and adventure, albeit within the relatively 'safe' environment of the university setting. This desire is partly embedded, again, in the drive to distinguish oneself from others by gaining the advantages discussed above. But it is also a desire to learn about another culture, to find out what one is capable of and to belong to the 'mobile' or 'travelling' youth culture. Those going abroad to study are intrinsically aware that they are migrating to another place with a different culture and, on the whole, they are keen to learn and to gain tacit knowledge of that other, new, place. Hence study abroad is seen as an opportunity for experiential learning, with the clear potential of becoming a transformative experience; a new departure as an individual separate from their family, previous friends and the 'known' environment of the home country in general. Richa, an Indian postgraduate student in the UK, described how her student migration was a turning-point in her thinking – about herself and the 'global exposure' she was seeking:

I went on summer school during my undergraduate [degree], and I had a great time! I realised that there was something in my life that was missing: this global exposure. When you are travelling in India you are travelling with your family, your friends… But when you are studying with other people, hanging out with them, living, eating and talking with them everyday, you get to know their cultures. You learn about lives outside of yourself. So this was a changing-point in my thinking – about why I should go out [of India] to study.

Similarly, Fiona (UK undergraduate studying in Australia) articulated her desire to 'experience another culture', as well as harking back to her father's spending his 'gap year' in Australia:

I just wanted a big change. I've always been interested in Australia because my dad lived there during his gap year when he was my age, in between school and going to university… So I've always been interested in coming here to study; I wanted to experience another culture, and everything.

What we see in these and other quotes is the desire to carve out a unique identity for oneself, based on rising to the challenge of being internationally mobile – what Murphy-Lejeune (2002) has aptly described as 'mobility capital'. Sometimes this is facilitated by family links and assistance – as Fiona, above, hints at, and as we explore further in the next subsection – but on other occasions it is more a reflection of the wish to put some distance between oneself and one's family and to create a narrative of full independence.

It is also clear that prospective internationally mobile students not only construct for themselves the identity of the 'youthful adventurer' but they are also consumers of marketing and propaganda images produced by different countries' tourism agencies and by the universities themselves. Universities' marketing strategies build the image of the international student as a 'youth traveller': even the 'Asian learner' can be an explorer (Singh and Doherty 2008). These marketing packages put out by universities' international offices are complemented by global media portrayals – of the quaint English village or life in 'London town'; of the American dream, typified by images of New York, Florida or California; or of the relaxed and laid-back Australian lifestyle, with its surfing beaches and 'barbies'. Of course, the spaces that students do end up occupying lie in the interstices between the 'imagined' and 'real' everyday life of the host country, and 'campus life', especially for those who stay in university accommodation, can be far removed from the grittier aspects of life in New York, Toronto or London.

Family links

The final common factor in our comparative analysis is family connections. Although we treated this as a separate factor in the survey, in practice it intersects with other elements in the decision to study abroad, not least in the way that this can make it a family decision rather than an individual one, even if this does not discount the circumstance where the basic decision is taken by the student, who then receives family endorsement and perhaps financial help.

From the interviews, the family dimension emerged in three separate ways. First, it can be clearly seen as an 'investment' by the family in order to ensure a successful future for the student son or daughter. Second, this investment may also be geared to the reproduction or advancement of the family's social class and cultural capital (Waters 2006). Third, study abroad may be mapped on to family migration and holiday patterns of the present or past generations: both the British and the Indian diasporas have a global distribution which provides a range of possible student migration opportunities, mainly within the Anglophone world of the former British Empire. The following two quotes illustrate different aspects of the 'family narrative' of ISM: the first reflects the way that destination choice builds on a history of family holidays, followed by the support of the mother in scouting out opportunities on the ground.

> We often came here [to the US] as a family when I was growing up. We'd come out in the summer for three or four weeks, and we travelled the East Coast… I just loved the mentality and the whole thing about America. You know, that vibe you get when you are here, it's so positive and like, you know, anything you want you can get it. I really thrive on that. So when it came to making important decisions, like when I was doing my GCSEs, at the age of 15, 16, I thought of going to university in America, I wanted to do something different… So I did a lot of research; Mum and I went and researched universities in America. We decided on location, where I wanted to go, East or West coast, nothing in the middle… so we narrowed it down a lot… I wanted vigorous academics, I liked the competitive environment… (Britney, UK undergraduate at university in Southern California).

For the Indian example, we draw on a parent interview with Sheeba, a mother in New Delhi whose daughter had just finished her Master's in the US. It gives an original insight into the parental hold over their offsprings' international education, which rarely comes out in studies of ISM which are based on student responses and narratives.

My brother studied abroad, also my husband. And I always had this idea that my children… I wanted my children to do their graduation [undergraduate studies] in India and then go [abroad] for their postgraduate… to get that international exposure. My son's going to graduate in Law here in India, then LLM abroad, hopefully in Oxford or somewhere like that. My daughter has just finished her Master's in the US.

Maybe we risk making too much of this point, but it is noticeable that, in both the above quotes, it is the mother who is the dominant figure in guiding the children's educational pathways abroad. This provides a link to the final main section of the paper.

Gendered experiences

Table 3, based on returns from the online questionnaire, revealed minimal gender differences in responses to the relative importance of the four common factors discussed above, especially when the 'very important' and the 'important' response categories were combined together. For the first four decision factors, the two main gender differences that the table picks up are for the 'unique adventure' factor (rated as 'very important' by more Indian males than females, but by more UK females than males) and 'family encouragement' to study abroad (rated as very important by more Indian males than females, but by more UK females than males). The strategising of study abroad as a step towards longer-term migration abroad was more important for Indian males than females, according to the survey data, although some of the interview data nuanced this simple contrast, as we shall see presently.

When we excavated the interview transcripts for gendered patterns and differences, the first thing we noted was that the UK students' narratives revealed very little about the ways in which UK outward ISM might be interpreted as a gendered phenomenon, beyond the well-documented fact that females were more likely to go abroad to study languages and arts subjects, whereas males would be more likely to study sciences. This reflects gendered patterns of enrolment on different degree types in the UK higher education system rather than any filtering or selection through the mechanism of study abroad. We can attribute this lack of gender contrasts in UK students' accounts of their academic and social life abroad to the fact that most UK students move to countries such as the US, Canada, Australia etc. with similar and broadly egalitarian gender regimes.

For the Indian students, however, migration is from a more 'traditional' society with more entrenched gender norms (intersecting with caste, social class, religion etc.), so that the move to 'the West' embodies a bigger cultural journey, especially in the area of gendered expectations and behaviours. In the rest of this section we focus on three key themes from the Indian field data:

- the differential intersection of gender and social class in terms of students' backgrounds;
- experiences of gendered spaces of socialisation whilst abroad; and
- gendered attitudes towards and experiences of return home to India.

Gender, class and study abroad

Results from the Indian online questionnaire (n = 157) reveal the expected difference in subjects studied by gender. For instance, 53 per cent of male respondents studied STEM subjects, compared to 30 per cent of females, whilst 47 per cent of females studied social sciences (including media, film and literature) compared to only 15 per cent of males. This is broadly in line with the gendered patterns of subject choice nationally and, indeed, to some extent, globally.

More interesting is the relationship between gender, study abroad and parents' social class (here proxied by education) in India. As Table 4 shows, significantly more female students came from highly educated parental backgrounds than males, whose parents were of more diverse educational backgrounds (chi-square test for the male vs female component of the table, df3, significant at p <0.01). Nearly three-quarters of female respondents had both parents university-educated, compared to just over half of males, whilst male respondents were more than twice as likely to have neither parent university-educated. Our interpretation of this is that only girls/women whose parents are more educated, liberal and well-off are 'allowed' or 'encouraged' to study abroad. There is an especially strong relationship between student women and their mothers' education. Interpolating from Table 4, we see that 80 per cent of female respondents have university-educated mothers, compared to 54 per cent of males who are studying abroad. On the other side of the interpretive coin, the data suggest that men are much less likely to be in a position of disadvantage about studying abroad because of their parents' lack of higher education. Having said that, it is clear that, overall, the respondents come from broadly middle-class backgrounds. Even if their parents are not university-educated, they have the financial ability to pay for private-school education and to support their children at university, even abroad.

Table 4. Indian study-abroad students by gender and parents' education (percent data)

University education	Males (n=87)	Females (n=70)	Total
Both parents	51.7	71.4	60.5
Mother only	2.3	8.6	5.1
Father only	23.0	7.1	15.9
Neither	23.0	11.4	17.8

Source: Sondhi (2013: 106).

There are abundant interview data to support these patterns and intepretations. What is revealing from these interview narratives, however, is the often delicate and protracted process of negotiation that takes place between parents and their university-age children about the combined decisions to go abroad. Sometimes the trigger-point is the student winning a grant or scholarship so that the release from the financial burden on the parents gives the student more agency.

However, students' accounts of their motivations and decision to study abroad can often hide the gendered relations and tensions within the family, as well as the gender inequalities that exist across other scales in India. This is where the parents' interviews can be very revealing, not only about attitudes towards their offspring studying abroad and the negotiations that take place around this but also about the degree to which the particular family holds to the traditional – but still powerful – patrifocal model of the Indian family. According to Mukhopadhyay and Seymour (1994: 10), patrifocality 'represent(s) a very prominent and culturally sanctioned system of ideal relations and beliefs to which most Indians have been exposed and that provides a set of guidelines for social action'. Mukhopadhyay and Seymour privilege the term patrifocality over patriarchy. The latter refers to the hegemonic dominance of men in all spheres and settings, whereas patrifocality refers more to male dominance in the family hierarchy, acknowledging gender-differentiated power relations and divisions of responsibility within and across gender and generations. According again to Mukhopadhyay and Seymour (1994), the inherent characteristics of patrifocality are the centrality of men in Indian politics, society and the family, the importance of the welfare of the family over individual interests, gender-differentiated social roles and authority structures, and the control

and regulation of sexuality, especially of women, in order to maintain family honour and the purity of class, caste and lineage.

Patrifocality also configures differential access to spatial mobility for sons and daughters within national and transnational space. Sons are more readily permitted to move to another Indian city, or abroad, for their higher education; daughters are much more controlled in this regard, except in the context of movement from their natal household to the marital household upon marriage (Radhakrishnan 2009). However, this is far from the whole story, and the interview data revealed other variations on this theme, such as a readiness amongst liberal families to let their daughters travel abroad for university education, partly for genuinely educational reasons and sometimes on the supposition that these young women would be 'lost' to their parents when they got married anyway. Conversely, there were cases where there was extreme reluctance to let a son move abroad for fear that he would not return to take the responsibility for caring for his parents in their old age.

It would take many interview case-studies of parents and students to empirically illustrate all the above points, so let us take just one. We choose this one because of the contrast in the views of the mother (opposed to the move of her son abroad) and the father (supportive) and because of the difference in the narrative offered in the interview and the actual practices that took place. The speakers are Ashwini (mother) and Rajesh (father). They could be described as lower-middle-class, not university-educated, and neither of them had travelled outside of India. Like many of the interviews with parents, the conversation was conducted in 'Hinglish', a mixture of Hindi and English.

> *Ashwini*: A parent's soul does not allow to send their children abroad… Initially we were not interested to let him go. First of all, it is shocking, at least to me. Fathers are more broad-minded. I didn't want him to go… I said 'If you let him go, he's not going to come back'.

Ashwini saw herself as a strict, and therefore good parent: 'If you are a strict parent, do not send your child, just don't allow them to go at all'. Rajesh countered by relating the story of one of their neighbours who refused to grant their son his wish to study abroad, as a result of which the son became unhappy and depressed. Ashwini reacted:

> Don't say that! No, no, not that… I would say, first of all, don't let your child go; if he's in your control, keep it that way… Freedom is there [abroad], there is no fear or concern of parents… when they are there they think… this is freedom… they don't come back.

Ashwini's anxiety reflects two things, one obvious, the other less so. The obvious message is her fear of losing control over her son's behaviour and whereabouts, and her extreme concern, repeated over and over, that he will be seduced by the 'freedom' that he will experience in 'the West'. But Ashwini's knowledge of life in the 'West' is second-hand and not critically evaluated by her, since it is mainly garnered from Indian, American and British media. In Doreen Massey's words (1994: 149), Ashwini and Rajesh are on the 'receiving end of time-space compression': affected by but not fully understanding the cacophonous mobility of ideas and images around the world through global media and instant communication, and confused by the dissonance between their own history of immobility and their son's desperation to leave.

The unspoken fear in Ashwini's narrative is her deep concern that their son will will not be able to care for them in their old age and therefore fail to fulfil his assigned role in Indian families of guaranteeing his parents material and emotional support when they need it. This reflects not just the parents' fear of neglect and loneliness in their old age, but perhaps even

more the perception of others that they themselves had failed to bring up a good and dutiful son (see Derne 1995; Osella and Osella 2006).

Yet despite this initial outpouring of reluctance and opposition, the parents' actual practice was different. As the next quote from Rajesh shows, they ended up by completely supporting their son through the bureaucratic process of undertaking international student migraton and getting him enrolled at a university in the UK.

> He went with our permission. I got him through all the hurdles, I got him all the certificates, all the paperwork. I got him the financial loans. I did all his formalities. He didn't just go on his own; he went with our consent… When he was of marriage age, he said: 'Papa, I will marry whomever you suggest'… He is very responsible.

In this quote Rajesh continues to use the language of control over his son ('permission', 'consent'), which is in line with the patrifocal ideology of the Indian family, even as his actions support the son's move to study abroad. At the same time, Rajesh also constructs an image of his 'good son' within the patrifocal system by drawing attention to his obedience and responsibility, while simultaneously presenting himself as a strict but fair parent who supports his son's desires, also with an eye on the economic pay-off to study abroad, which Rajesh talked about in another part of his interview, not quoted here.

This example takes us far away from the simple binaries of gender and opens up some of the gendered and generational complexities that are exposed in family discussions over studying abroad. Another way of reading the joint interview of Rajesh and Ashwini (and those of other parents) is that their narrative combines the dominant discourse of a particular middle-class identity of being a 'good parent' with 'Indian' values producing good, dutiful, loyal children, with a simultaneous performance of a liberal, new-India identity with global travel, study and business links (Fernandes 2006).

Gendered spaces of socialisation abroad

The second arena in which Indian international students experienced gender-differentiated outcomes is in their everyday lives abroad, within both the university community and the wider society. We pay particular attention to the *gender performances* of Indian students and their evolving *gender identities*. We utilise Judith Butler's concept of 'matrix of intelligibility' that constructs a coherent gender identity discourse, which varies across space and time as regards what is 'acceptable' or 'expected' and what is not. Gender identity is construed as a set of interlocking relationships between sex, gender and sexual practices and desires (Butler 1999: 24). The Butlerian idea of intelligible and unintelligible matrices of gender is important since the international student moves across and through different spaces subject to different and sometimes hegemonic norms of gendered behaviour. Again using Butler's vocabulary (1993, 1999), are the Indian students' gender performances intelligible in the new academic and social spaces that they inhabit in Canada? If their transposed gender performance does not fit the gender-expectation norms of the host society, how do they proceed? Do they accept the expected gender performances of the Canadian youth-culture setting and adapt them into their everyday life, or do they reject the norms of the local setting and seek out other spaces in which their performances are intelligible? We illustrate the subtleties behind these processes and questions by focusing on two case-studies: Prita, an undergraduate student in her early 20s, and Mayank, a PhD student in his early 30s.

Prior to coming to Canada to study for a degree in economics, Prita had completed one year of university in Bangalore, where she had become interested in theatre work so, upon arrival at her new university in Toronto, she immediately sought out and joined the campus

theatre group. As this extract from her interview shows, she enjoyed the 'theatre' part of the experience, but was very uncomfortable with other aspects of the expected performance of femininity in that particular social space:

> I really like the theatre … [but] in the theatre club all my friends were from here [i.e. 'white' Canadians] … I was the only brown girl. So it was really hard … everything so different … I guess the way that they were brought up here was very different from the way I was brought up. I was brought up as a secluded Indian girl and they were more open and outgoing in that sense… They were always going out drinking and partying … crazy and wild … and all these things were new to me… I didn't really want to get into those things.

Within the theatre group, the signifiers of the dominant performance of femininity included going out clubbing on a regular basis, drinking alcohol and [hinted at rather than stated explicitly in Prita's narrative] the norm of sexual relations. This led to a cultural dissonance with what Prita was comfortable with.[3]

As a result of resisting this pressure to follow a specific heterosexual feminine performance that she felt was being forced on her, Prita chose to leave the theatre group and, in her second year, joined a more familiar group, the Indian students' association, where she found a more congenial 'matrix of intelligibility'.

> I felt that I needed to connect with people … so that's why I joined the [Indian] student club, and I made a lot of friends that way… We share the same background so it's easier to connect. I was more comfortable with this crowd; I wasn't really comfortable with the other group because I didn't really know what was happening…

Prita went on to stress that she was more comfortable, especially, with Indian men as they were familiar with and understood her sexual 'limits' and respected her wish to remain uninvolved sexually – unlike her theatre-group peers who were unable to understand her chaste outlook on personal relations.

Our second case-history, Mayank, is an example of how performances of Indian masculinity did not always fit into the 'Western' and, specifically, 'white Canadian' narratives of heterosexual masculinity. Mayank contrasted what his experience was of 'doing friendship' in India with what he found was acceptabe or not acceptable, or misinterpreted, in North America (Mayank had worked for a period in the US before doing his PhD in Canada).

> I think that [in India] there is a level of physical contact [between male friends]… Here you have to be careful of that… I think that all of us [in India] used to hug each other, fool around with each other … it was a typical kind of young thing. We weren't really aware or thought that our physical contact might be considered … might be gay.

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[3] This is not a reaction limited to female students who traverse international cultural boundaries of young-adult sexual behavioural norms. Young male migrants from 'sexually conservative' countries have expressed and experienced similar dissonance when faced with an environment where having extra-marital sex and/or multiple sexual partners was not only accepted but encouraged. Hibbins (2005) has written of the expectations for young Chinese professional migrants in Australia to be sexually active as typical of the pressures faced when encountering the hegemonic masculine work culture of Australia. For a parallel example of young Pakistani male labour migrants in Britain, see Ahmad (2009): in this case the inability of the migrants to share the sexual lifestyles of young Britons is partly due to their self-imposed and religiously guided principles, and partly because of their denigrated and subservient labour-market position and their living arrangements in crowded and shared accommodation.

Mayank (who, for the record, was co-habiting with his Indian girlfriend in Toronto – something of which both sets of parents were unaware) lamented the loss of the easy and relaxed physicality amongst his male friends in Mumbai. In Toronto he feels he has not been able to build close friendships with other men because of the different perceptions of male friendship behaviour. He related how, in Mumbai, he and his male friends were affectionate with each other, giving each other hugs, touching and holding each others' hands and arms and, to use his word, 'roughhousing' (rough and disorderly play). These actions were well within the standard performance and bounds of Indian masculinity but lay beyond the matrix of intelligibility of heterosexual Canadian male society. Hence he felt he had to moderate his male bonding behaviour, especially when with his Indian friends in shared social spaces with local Canadians.

Gendered experiences of return 'home'

The Indian patrifocal model of family organisation described earlier puts the responsiility for looking after elderly parents on one or more of their sons, who is/are therefore expected to stay close to the parents or, if studying or working abroad, to return to undertake this duty of care when the time comes, i.e. when material, physical and emotional support is needed. In actual fact, it is the son's wife who administers much of the day-to-day support that this familistic model requires, which is why it is seen as important not only for the son to return, but also for him to get married.

Although it may be more difficult for daughters to get 'permission' from their parents to study abroad (we saw earlier how it was young women with more liberal and highly educated parents who went abroad), once abroad, there is generally less pressure for them to return. This weaker pressure reflects two factors: first, as noted, they come from 'less traditional' families, where the patrifocal principle is less entrenched and, secondly, their future marriage will take them into the family umbrella of their husband's family where, as daughters-in law, their care duties will eventually be to his parents (Chopra 2005, 2008).

The Indian evidence (and also the narratives of the UK students interviewed) problematises the definition of return migration as the end-point of the ISM cycle. Return, especially at this relatively early life-stage, is not necessarily assumed to be permanent; it can also be for a visit or a sojourn, or it can be a prelude to another migratory move elsewhere. Return can also involve a difficult process of reintegration and adjustment after the experience of living abroad (Ley and Kobayashi 2009), especially for students who are moving between countries which are culturally very different.

The return process is structured by three main contexts: the labour market (a primary consideration especially for males, who are keen to establish a career in preparation for marriage and family responsibilities), age and the timing of marriage, and care duties towards parents. These structuring factors – the role of the patrifocal family and the gendering of labour market opportunities (to the general disadvantage of women in India) – meant that the return processes and modalities differed between male and female students.

On the whole, men considered return to India as permanent and an end to the migration adventure. Most former-student men interviewed in India had returned there with the intention of not leaving again, having secured good jobs and either got married or anticipating marriage sooner or later. Women, however, were more unsettled; for them return was more likely to be imagined as part of an ongoing mobility trajectory. Many actually lamented their need to return, and were looking for ways of staying abroad (those interviewed who were currently abroad) or moving abroad again for further study or a career (returnees interviewed). For women students, some had to return upon completion of their studies and their inability to get a job in the country of study (not all of which allowed graduating overseas students to enter the labour market there);

others due to the wishes of their parents, including pressures to get married. Thus, for women who returned in their mid-20s, this was often regarded as a temporary return to the parental home, until they moved to another household on marriage.

Different return typologies also reflected the extent to which the interviewees had settled into the Canadian university and social context, or had remained somehow 'out-of-place'. Here we again pick up Butler's powerful notion of 'matrix of intelligibility' to illustrate the extent to which the participants had felt 'in' or 'out' of place whilst abroad – or, to use another pair of conceptual analogies, whether their (self-)designation as out-of-place 'strange bodies' (Ahmed 2000) increased their 'homing desire' (Brah 1996). As in the previous section on gendered experiences in Canada, we illustrate some of the above with two carefully chosen participants, one male and one female, adding a couple of quotes from parents to complement the overall picture.

First, we hear from Nitin, a PhD student and teaching assistant. In the following quote, Nitin's desire to go back to India is palpable, and takes shape against his multiple experiences of feeling out of place in Canada. Even after four years in Toronto, he feels he cannot communicate in a mutually intelligible way with others who are not Indian, and he had hardly ever ventured further than the university precinct and the downtown core.

> I don't want to stay here. I want to go back after I finish… I feel out of place here. I don't get the jokes, I don't get their references. And they don't get my references. For example, I can't use references to cricket as examples in my teaching. They just won't get it. And, I just don't get baseball. Also, I can't talk to them about my parents and marriage; they won't get it… But then I can talk to my Indian friends and they understand. I don't have to explain everything, we share the same culture and family concerns.

In contrast to Canada, Nitin envisioned India as a familiar space where he could make friends and relate to others easily. His circle of close friends in Toronto was very limited. Like Mayank, Nitin found it challenging to navigate across different constructions of masculinity and, in particular, he missed the physical and emotional closeness that exists amongst men who come from cultures of strong homosociality. In Toronto, Nitin was indeed an 'estranged body', a body 'out-of-place' (cf. Ahmed 2000).

But Nitin's desire to return to his family and friends in India – to where he can feel 'in-place' – is far from straightforward. Nitin's parents, whom he includes in his references to home, live in the southern state of Kerala, but most of his similar-age friends reside in Delhi, where he went to university, or are now scattered elsewhere in India or abroad. For Nitin, then, home is ultimately an elusive place and concept.

Overall, the women's 'narratives of return' reveal a greater struggle to fit back into home spaces. The disjuncture that appeared through the comparison of everyday life 'away' and 'at home' led many interviewees, especially those who had recently returned, to want to go abroad again, some of them with tones of desperation in their voices. Two recurrent reasons for not wanting to return to India or, for those who had returned, for wanting to leave again, were the fear that they would not be able to secure a satisfying job, and the contrasts in personal freedom between university life abroad and life under the surveillance of parents, neighbours and the wider society in India. Women, especially those trained or aiming for a career in the academic, scientific, business and medical fields, felt that they faced too many obstacles and too much discrimination in a professional world dominated by men and patriarchal values. These gender inequalities in the Indian labour market emerged constantly in the interviews with women both in Canada and in India.

Vani, aged 23, had returned from a one-year Master's degree in London and was still looking for a job in India. Hence she was still financially dependent on her parents. She found

it difficult to adapt back to the regimes of her parental home and made some acute observations on the contrasts between her utilisation of mundane public spaces in London and Delhi.

> When I was in London, if I wanted some chocolate in the middle of the night, I'd just put on a jacket and walk down the road to the shop. I can't do that here … I have a curfew here; I have to ask permission to go outside.[4] Even for getting a bar of chocolate.

And about the wider public-space atmosphere in Delhi:

> People in India, if they think you look strange, or doing something different, they will stare. Just stare… Men in India – they just stare, they follow you with their eyes; it's very uncomfortable.

In the end, however, Vani feels she has no choice but to respect her parents' worry over her roaming instinct, partly because she realised that they are well-intentioned and partly because she is indebted to them for their financial support for her study abroad. Hence her relatively young age, her continuing financial dependence on her parents and her current lack of a job and an income are all factors which combine to give her very little room to negotiate a freer lifestyle. In her words: 'I don't mind it, it's reasonable, because they are responsible for me. I don't have a job, and they paid for it all [referring to her education]'.

Finally, in this subsection, we contrast two typical cases which differentiate between the parents' perspective on return for their sons and for their daughters. In the first extract, taken from a long (nearly four hours) interview with the Guptas, the mother, Sunita, summarised their desire for their son to return.

> We want him to settle here. Our daughters are settled in their homes [i.e. with their husbands] and we only have one son. If we had two sons, then one at home and one living away would be fine. But we only have one. So we prefer it that he comes back here and gets married. That way we'll have a daughter come and live with us. This will keep us occupied. He'll have a wife; we can have a time pass.[5] She'll take us out to shops and other places and we'll take her out. They'll have kids. So we will be busy. Otherwise life will be boring.

Contrast the above with the case of Deepika, below, who had studied abroad for several years and now, aged 26, had returned to live with her parents for a while. Here there is a definite wish on the part of the parents for the daughter to return, but not the expectation that she would stay for very long, since parents wanted their daughters happily and successfully 'married off'.

> My parents wanted me home for a bit. So that's why I'm at home now… I was away for a very long time: seven years moving around, including my undergraduate. So they [parents] were, like , 'Come home, stay home for a bit'… They were, like, 'You are going to get married [eventually]; you are not going to live here [for ever]. So, you might as well spend some time now'.

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[4] This is because the family home is in a smart gated community in New Delhi and she would need to call the family's driver to take her anywhere – even to buy a bar of chocolate!

[5] This is a vernacular phrase, said in English, to express the idea of passing time doing some activity to curtail boredom and keep busy. The interview was in mixed Hindi/English.

Conclusion

Let us return to the three research questions set out in the introduction in order to review and evaluate the key findings. The first question was about variation in the *background characteristics and motivations for studying abroad across the UK–India comparison*. Based on results from the two online questionnaire surveys, summarised in Tables 2 and 3, and their associated discussion in the first empirical section of the paper, we find remarkably little difference. Both the Indian and UK students' backgrounds were predominantly middle class or higher. The main difference is the gendered one for Indian students, whereby male students are drawn from a slightly wider socio-economic background (as measured by the proxy of parental education, Table 4). For both sets of students (Indian and British), there were three key determinants stimulating students to pursue higher education abroad (Table 3):

- the desire to study at a prestigious or world-class university;
- the acquisition of an international education in order to build a successful career as a highly skilled graduate, either in the home country or in the global labour marketplace; and
- the wish to study abroad as an imagined unique adventure and a potentially transformative experience.

The respondents' ratings for each of these three factors (as 'important', 'very important' etc.) proved to be surprisingly similar between British and Indian students, and with minimal gender differences, too. The main differences, which were still rather modest in scale, were between Indian respondents' greater emphasis on careers, and British students' slightly higher rating of the 'adventure' factor.

Taken together, these results speak directly to the existing theoretical framings of ISM as a sub-type of high-skilled migration through a quest for a world-class education, as a part of adventure-oriented youth mobility cultures, and as a mechanism of class difference and elite reproduction. All three frames illustrate the ways in which ISM unites local with global dimensions of higher education within a broader globalisation scenario.

From what has already been synthesised in relation to answers to the first research question above, we have already partially answered the second research question, which was about *gendered differences in the characteristics and motivations* of the two groups of study-abroad students. However, when we turn to the interview data and to accounts of *experiences* rather than motivations, we find more nuanced results emerging from the narratives of the students, especially from the Indian participants (including parents), which revealed extended intra-family negotiations over the decision to study abroad.

This leads us to the most complex and extensive set of findings, which was in answer to the third question – *gendered differences in experiences of students from different national backgrounds*, taking India and the UK as comparators. Reading the transcripts of the British students' interviews failed to elicit any marked or consistent 'gender stories'. We ascribed this to the fact that the interviewees were in countries (the US, Australia, Ireland etc.) where the 'performances' of gender in student-inhabited spaces were broadly similar to what had been experienced in the UK. In the Indian students' narratives, however, the gender themes were much more evident. Abroad, they mainly revolved around performances of masculinity and femininity in which the interviewees were victims of 'matrices of unintelligibility' whereby they felt out of place in the social setting of a Canadian university, with its norms of expected behaviour, so different from what many of the Indian students were comfortable with.

Further gendered contrasts emerged upon return to India. Male students who, in general, had felt more out of place abroad than their female counterparts, were oriented towards a permanent return, built upon their anticipated roles as successful careerists and providers for

their families when they got married. Female students, who tended to have adjusted better to life abroad, faced more difficulties upon return, even to the point of feeling out of place there and wanting to re-emigrate as soon as possible. Their sense of displacement derived partly from continuing gender-barriers in the Indian high-skill labour market, and partly from the pressure and expectation to soon get married and lose the freedom they had enjoyed whilst abroad. This differentiation in return perspectives has some parallels in the Kazakh case researched by Holloway *et al*. (2012).

To sum up: this paper has employed a multi-method, multi-sited comparative research design to explore a dual comparison of UK and Indian student migration, incorporating also a gender lens. It is one of the first such studies of its kind. Given the scale and variety of ISM worldwide, enormous scope exists for further comparative work, particularly that which brings students into cultural realms which are very different from those left behind. The extent to which gender shapes and organises student migration decisions and flows, and the ways in which the experience of studying for one or more years in a 'different' culture and academic system reshapes gender identities, are important topics for further research.

Acknowledgements

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