**Cosmin Ionuț Nadă**

# THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS A 'TYPICAL' STUDENT

## A narrative approach to the experience of migrant students in Portugal

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## Abstract

The main objective of this thesis is to qualitatively explore and interpret, in its complexity and diversity, the (learning) experience of foreign students in Portugal. While foreign students' experiences may encompass a significant panoply of distinct aspects, this research is focused on three specific dimensions.

Firstly, students are defined and conceptualised as part of the international migration phenomenon, which allows the empirical exploration of their experiences not only in regard to their student status (in university contexts), but also in regard to their migratory status (in the socio-cultural environment in which they are inserted in the host and home countries).

Secondly, this thesis is focused on the outcomes of student migration, especially in terms of multicultural learning, seeking to understand *if* and *how* the experience of migration can enhance learning. The focus, therefore, does not lie with students' academic learning but with the learning acquired through the actual experience of studying and living in a different country.

Thirdly, in line with the theory of transformative learning, this research seeks to understand if the learning experienced by students during migration was transformative, and how transformations occurred and developed over time.

In order to provide depth to the understanding of students' experiences, a biographical narrative approach was employed and twelve narratives were constructed and analysed interpretively. The findings presented in this thesis result from a solid set of data, which totalled 12 different participants and 41 biographical sessions. The interpretative strategy was guided by the assumptions of narrative analysis and was focused on the singularity of each migration account. After exploring and understanding each narrative individually, an interpretative analysis across all twelve narratives was conducted and some relevant themes were selected for discussion.

The findings indicate that migration and learning are intrinsically connected. The participants reported positively on the learning outcomes of their international sojourns, suggesting that the experience of living in a different country provides migrants numerous opportunities to learn. Students appeared to be engaged in transformative learning processes, which indicates that migration can promote significant changes in the way students make sense of the world and of their own biographical trajectories. Regarding the phenomenon of student migration, the results give account of an exceptional diversity of experiences, suggesting that there is no such thing as a 'typical' student, especially if researchers employ methodological tools capable of accounting for the complexity of this phenomenon. Some recommendations are also given to Portuguese universities regarding institutional strategies directed to their increasingly diverse student bodies.

# Résumé

L'objectif principal de cette thèse est d'explorer et d'interpréter qualitativement, dans sa complexité et sa diversité, l'expérience d'apprentissage des étudiants étrangers au Portugal. Alors que les expériences des étudiants étrangers peuvent englober une large gamme d'aspects distincts, cette recherche se concentre sur trois dimensions spécifiques.

Premièrement, les étudiants sont définis et conceptualisés dans le cadre du phénomène de la migration internationale, ce qui permet l'exploration empirique de leurs expériences non seulement en ce qui concerne leur statut d'étudiant (dans les contextes universitaires), mais aussi en ce qui concerne leur statut migratoire (dans le contexte socio-culturel où ils se trouvent dans le pays d'accueil et celui d'origine).

Deuxièmement, cette thèse se concentre sur les résultats de la migration des étudiants, en particulier en termes d'apprentissage multiculturel, afin de comprendre *si* et *comment* l'expérience de la migration peut améliorer l'apprentissage. Par conséquent, l'accent ne repose pas sur l'apprentissage scolaire des étudiants, mais sur l'apprentissage acquis grâce à l'expérience réelle d'étudier et de vivre à l'étranger.

Troisièmement, conformément à la théorie de l'apprentissage transformateur, cette recherche essaye de comprendre si l'apprentissage expérimenté par les étudiants pendant la migration était transformateur et comment les transformations se sont produites et se sont développées au fil du temps.

Afin d'approfondir la compréhension des expériences des étudiants, la méthode du récit biographique a été employée et douze récits ont été construits et analysés de manière interprétative. Les résultats présentés dans cette thèse résultent d'un solide ensemble de données, qui ont totalisé 12 participants différents et 41 séances biographiques. La stratégie d'interprétation était guidée par les hypothèses de l'analyse narrative et axée sur la singularité de chaque histoire de migration. Après avoir exploré et compris chaque récit individuellement, une analyse interprétative a été menée sur l'ensemble des douze récits et certains thèmes pertinents ont été sélectionnés pour discussion.

Les résultats indiquent que la migration et l'apprentissage sont intrinsèquement liés. Les participants ont été satisfaits par les résultats d'apprentissage de leur séjour international, suggérant que l'expérience de vivre dans un pays différent offre aux migrants de nombreuses occasions d'apprendre. Les étudiants semblaient s'engager dans des processus d'apprentissage transformateur, ce qui indique que la migration peut favoriser des changements importants dans la façon dont les étudiants donnent un sens au monde et à leurs propres trajectoires biographiques. En ce qui concerne le phénomène de la migration des étudiants, les résultats donnent compte d'une diversité exceptionnelle d'expériences, suggérant qu'il n'existe pas d'étudiant «typique», surtout si les chercheurs utilisent des outils méthodologiques capables de tenir compte de la complexité de ce phénomène. Certaines recommandations sont également données aux universités portugaises en ce qui concerne les stratégies institutionnelles destinées à leur corps étudiant de plus en plus diversifié.

# Resumo

O principal objetivo desta tese centra-se na exploração e interpretação qualitativa, na sua complexidade e diversidade, das experiências (de aprendizagem) de estudantes estrangeiros/as em Portugal. Ciente de que as suas experiências podem conter uma panóplia de diferentes aspetos, esta investigação está centrada em três dimensões específicas.

Primeiro, as experiências de estudantes migrantes será abordada na sua ligação com o fenómeno da migração internacional, o que permite a exploração empírica das suas experiências, não apenas em relação ao estatuto estudantil (em contextos universitários), mas também em relação ao estatuto migratório (no ambiente sociocultural em que estão inseridos).

Segundo, esta tese está centrada nas consequências da migração estudantil, especialmente em termos de aprendizagem multicultural, procurando compreender *se* e *como* a experiência da migração poderá aumentar a aprendizagem. Ou seja, o foco não reside nas aprendizagens académicas mas na aprendizagem decorrente da própria experiência de viver num país diferente.

Terceiro, em linha com a teoria da aprendizagem transformadora, esta investigação procura compreender se as aprendizagens experienciadas por estudantes migrantes durante a migração foram transformadoras, e como essas transformações se desenvolveram ao longo do tempo.

Procurando alcançar uma compreensão profunda das suas experiências migratórias, uma abordagem biográfico-narrativa foi utilizada e doze narrativas foram construídas e analisadas interpretativamente. Os resultados aqui apresentados resultam de uma base empírica sólida, que totalizou 12 participantes e 41 sessões biográficas. A estratégia interpretativa foi guiada pelas assunções da análise narrativa, focada na singularidade de cada relato migratório. Depois de compreender cada narrativa individualmente, foi realizada uma análise interpretativa de todas as narrativas e alguns temas relevantes foram selecionados para discussão.

Os resultados indicam que a migração e a aprendizagem estão intrinsecamente ligadas. Os participantes apresentam uma perceção positiva sobre as aprendizagens decorrentes das suas estadias internacionais, sugerindo que a experiência de viver num país diferente proporciona a migrantes numerosas oportunidades de aprendizagem. Os/as estudantes aparentaram estar envolvidos/as em processos de aprendizagem transformadora, indicando que a migração pode promover mudanças significativas na forma em que estudantes migrantes fazem sentido do mundo e das suas trajetórias biográficas. Relativamente ao fenómeno da migração estudantil, os resultados dão conta de uma diversidade excecional de experiências, sugerindo que não há um perfil de aluno 'tipo', especialmente se a investigação recorre a instrumentos metodológicos capazes de dar conta da complexidade deste fenómeno. Com base nestes resultados, também são fornecidas algumas recomendações para as universidades portuguesas, relativamente às estratégias dirigidas à crescente diversidade dos seus corpos estudantis.

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# Introduction

## *The research genesis – some autobiographical notes*

When I began writing my PhD proposal, I experienced considerable struggles in finding a proper research subject for my thesis. I read about many different topics and, for several months, I was not able to come to terms with any of the subjects I was reading about. Such an odd struggle given that the most appropriate research question was not only right in front of my eyes but somehow embedded in me! Being a foreign student myself, I was always interested in knowing more about people *like me.* I met other foreign students, we exchanged views over the struggles that we were experiencing and also about the wonders of living and studying in a foreign country. I eventually decided to bring this personal interest into the research field and I wrote a PhD proposal focused on the experience of foreign students in Portugal.

Throughout the years I have spent abroad, I also became aware that my experience in Portugal was not related solely to my student status. Along with being a student, I was also a migrant, and I had to deal with all the challenges related to life in a foreign context, given that my quotidian was not confined to university or classroom settings. In fact, besides studying in a foreign university and in a foreign language, I was also living in a different city, in a foreign country, in another culture. However, in most of the research literature focused on the experience of foreign students, there were little to none references to migration. Indeed, even though foreign students do cross international borders and move to foreign countries, in some cases for extended amounts of time, they have been scarcely considered in the field of migration studies. According to King and Ruiz-Gelices (2003: 230), "the standard academic literature on migration pays virtually no attention to students as migrants: an ironic situation given that most migration scholars encounter students on a daily basis".

The reason for which I decided to begin the introduction section of my thesis with a short story inspired in my personal experience is rooted in what I consider one of the most innovative aspects of this research. Having understood that many foreign students are migrants, I decided to conceptualise them in accordance to their migratory status, believing that this decision could bring new and diverse perspectives into this field, and enacting a more extended understanding of students' experiences. Considering them not only as students, but also as migrants, could allow a more inclusive approach to their experiences, which is not confined to the academic aspects and takes into account students' life trajectories as a whole. One of the pivotal concepts of this thesis is, therefore, the concept of migration.

Before describing the second pivotal concept of this thesis, it is crucial to clarify that my decision to conceptualise students as migrants does apply exclusively to those foreign students who are enrolled in a full higher education degree in Portugal (Bachelors's, Master's or PhD). In other words, the experience of Erasmus students or other students involved in short-mobility exchange programmes lies beyond the scope of this thesis (this clarification is key to understanding the specificity of this research). At the same time, it is important to clarify the reasons for which I will often call upon my personal experience throughout this thesis. The decision to make use of episodes inspired in my own narrative, as means to report on my research assumptions, procedures, and results, is rooted in the methodological assumptions that guide my research practice. This thesis reports on the biographical and narrative research that I conducted in the last four years and, according to Clandinin and Connelly (2000: 40), a narrative inquiry "characteristically begins with the researcher's autobiographically oriented narrative associated with the research puzzle (called by some the research problem or research question)".

In order to introduce the second pivotal concept of this thesis, I will make another reference to my experience as a migrant student in Portugal. I initiated my migratory adventure six years ago, when I finished my Bachelor's and, due to several reasons, I was vehemently rejecting the possibility of taking a Master's degree in my home country, Romania. Not long after my arrival in Portugal, I started to realise that I was experiencing significant learning. It might not seem particularly surprising, since I migrated in order to take a Master's degree in Education, a field I did not know very much about (my previous Bachelor's degrees are in the field of Communication Sciences and International Relations). I was, therefore, learning quite a lot in terms of academic content, albeit it was not my experience with formal learning instances that most caught my attention. Another type of learning was starting to emerge, along with an increase in the time that I was dedicating to introspection and reflection upon my experience abroad. In a rather short amount of time, I experienced significant growth in personal terms, became a more tolerant person, significantly changed the way I saw myself, the world, and changed not only some of my beliefs, but also many attitudes and behaviours. Again, I would meet other migrant students and notice that their accounts were very similar to mine, replete with learning experiences and changes of all sorts. When I consulted the research literature on migrant students, I understood that my impressions over the learning potential of migration were being shared by other students and researchers alike. Indeed, some scholars (Murphy-Lejeune, 2003; Morrice, 2014; Webb, 2015) suggest that the experience of migration enhances learning in significant ways.

Even though I was experiencing learning through migration first-hand, I still had my reserves about the learning potential of migration. In fact, in most research literature on foreign students, the beneficial outcomes of studying and living abroad are rather aggrandised. Completing a degree in a foreign university appears to be highly valued in some cultures and institutions (Kosheleva, Samofalova, Holtman, & Kopotilova, 2015), and even some international organisations, for instance the EU, highly regard the learning potential of living and studying in a foreign country (COM, 2009). Students also receive many messages reinforcing how wonderful studying abroad can be, especially in advertising materials of mobility exchange programmes. An example is the slogan of the Erasmus programme: *Enriching lives, opening minds*. Only within these four words, lies embedded the assumption according to which studying and living in a foreign country has beneficial outcomes. Although I also feel, based on my own trajectory, that living abroad is an amazing experience, replete with learning opportunities, I cannot help but wonder if the positivity surrounding this issue has not been rather exacerbated. Once again, I turned to research for an answer and I decided to empirically explore this issue in the case of migrant students, thus the second pivotal concept of this thesis: learning. More specifically, the focus does not lie on migrant students' academic learning, but on the informal learning, which may result from the actual experience of living and studying in a foreign country.

As explained above, this thesis is based on two conceptual cornerstones: migration and learning; and its main objective lies with the understanding of foreign students' (learning) experiences during their migration to Portugal. In accordance with this rationale, the following main research question was formulated:

❖ How different students experience migration to Portugal and learning in a foreign context?

The main research question was then divided into three subsequent questions: Why students wanted/needed to migrate and how their adaptation to the host country developed? Did students experience learning as a result of their experience abroad, and how that learning emerged and developed? Were students engaged in transformative learning processes during their international sojourn, and experienced significant changes in their worldview and in the ways they make sense of their experience?

Through the first research question, I seek to understand the phenomenon of student migration and its impact in people's lives. Based on my intention to empirically explore students' experiences in an holistic way, migration will not be approached as an isolated event but as a process, seeking to understand *how* students migrated rather than *why* they did it, in line with the analytical proposal of Carlson (2013).

The second research question deliberately leaves room for doubt, suggesting that students may, or may not, experience learning as a result of their experience abroad. One of the main rationales behind this research question is to understand if and how learning emerges during an international sojourn.

The third research question expresses my intention to achieve an in-depth understanding of migrant students' learning experiences, analysing them through the lens of the transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1990). Through this research question, I seek to understand if students are involved in transformative learning processes, and address the way in which they make sense of their personal transformations.

Certainly, all these research questions were not fixed but constantly subjected to doubt, and suffered several reconfigurations throughout the whole research process, in order to inform a more inclusive perspective on students' migratory experiences. In other words, "the underlying research assumptions and the research question itself were 'open' to allow participants' life stories to emerge of their own accord" (Yuen, 2008: 297).

## *Positioning the research within different theoretical perspectives*

The idea of conducting this research did not emerge solely from my own migratory experience but was also the fruit of a particular social context. At a global level, the number of foreign students increased significantly over the last decades (Barnett, Lee, Jiang, & Park, 2016). The most significant increase in the number of foreign students was registered in English-speaking countries (Altbach, 2004), therefore this topic has received attention mainly in those countries, such as: the UK (Montgomery, 2010); the USA (Hendrickson, Rosen, & Aune, 2011); and Australia (Sakurai, McCall-Wolf, & Kashima, 2010). Only recently, it has been noted that non-English speaking countries are also increasingly attracting foreign students (Rienties, Beausaert, Grohnert, Niemantsverdriet, & Kommers, 2012). In the case of Portugal, immigration increased substantially in the last thirty years (Casa-Nova, 2005; Araújo, Tereshchenko, Sousa, & Jenkins, 2015) and, notwithstanding its lack of centrality within the field of international education (as opposed to English-speaking countries), Portugal also registered a significant increase in the diversity of its higher education student body. More specifically, the number of foreign students almost doubled in ten years' time, from 2001 to 2011[1]. The International Organisation for Migration (Koser, 2010) also noted that students have begun to pursue education in different countries and not only in the traditional destinations, and this rise in foreign students' numbers

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[1] as reported by the DGEEC – Portuguese National Directorate of Statistics regarding Education and Science

is contributing to the emergence of increasingly diverse universities. According to Leong and Liu (2013), cultural diversity supported by capitalism is penetrating all corners of the world through the globalisation process.

Given historical facts, most of the foreign students who come to Portugal are from former Portuguese colonies, such as Angola, Brazil, and Cape Verde. Only recently, more and more students from other countries also started to enrol in Portuguese higher education and, in 2015, people from 161[2] different countries were studying in Portugal. In fact, if all foreign students were grouped into one university, that would be the fourth largest higher education institution in Portugal, only slightly smaller than the University of Coimbra. Despite its centrality, this phenomenon has been rather understudied.

For this reason, this research seeks to understand not only students' experiences of studying and living in a different country but also how Portuguese universities, according to students' perceptions, deal with the increased diversity of their student bodies. In order to approach diversity in higher education contexts, I opted to conceptualise this issue within the framework of multiculturalism. Even though this concept can refer to numerous different aspects related to the presence of cultural diversity in a particular context, in this thesis the meaning of multiculturalism is twofold. On the one hand, Portuguese universities can be considered multicultural given that cultural diversity is nowadays a trait of their student bodies, thus multiculturalism assumes the meaning of a demographic feature (Bolaffi, 2003). On the other hand, I also consider multiculturalism in its 'programmatic-political' meaning (Inglis, 1996), looking to understand, based on students' experiential accounts, how universities react towards an increasingly diverse student body.

Besides the research conducted in the English-speaking countries mentioned above, in most journals published in English, evidence about foreign students in non-English-speaking countries is rare (for some exceptions refer to: Stronkhorst, 2005; Bessey, 2012; Song, 2013). Since multiculturalism takes many forms depending on the context in which it is addressed, the study of multiculturalism also implies understanding the changes that arise in particular contexts and different countries in the world (Nye, 2007). According to Tiryakian (2003: 27), "different countries will react differently to new multicultural and multiracial demographic realities". Moreover, Nye (2007) stresses that the study of multiculturalism does not usually include non-Western perspectives. Therefore, there seems to be an assumption according to which non-Western or less prominent countries are neither multicultural, nor important enough to be

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[2] as reported by the DGEEC – Portuguese National Directorate of Statistics regarding Education and Science

worthy of study. Regarding the issue of multiculturalism within universities, the same assumption persists, since the majority of research is conducted among the most internationalised universities (mainly from English-speaking countries). By considering multiculturalism issues in the rarely approached context of Portuguese higher education, this thesis can contribute to a better understanding of diversity issues within universities that are seldom approached in the research literature.

The main theoretical contributions that I draw upon, in order to approach the issue of diversity in higher education settings, belong to scholars who reflect upon the concept of multiculturalism more generally, such as: Castles, 1997; Stoer and Cortesão, 1999; Parekh, 2002; Tiryakian, 2003; Nye, 2007; Tarozzi and Torres, 2016. Using the theoretical insights provided by their work, I then make use of this concept in order to address the experience of foreign students in Portuguese higher education, regarding multiculturalism both as a part of students' quotidian experiences of dealing with the cultural diversity that surrounds them, and also as a strategy used by institutions in order to address their increasingly diverse student bodies. In this sense, it lies beyond the scope of this thesis to discuss multiculturalism as a social movement or social theory (Tarozzi & Torres, 2016). Instead, my focus lies with the understanding of 'everyday multiculturalism' (Butcher & Harris, 2010), more precisely with the way in which foreign students position themselves towards their multicultural experiences.

Even though this thesis is anchored in Educational Sciences, many of the theoretical perspectives that guide it have been developed in the field of Sociology. As explained above, the two pivotal concepts of this research are migration and learning, and the main research aim, to understand the (learning) experiences of migrant students in Portugal, summarises the way in which Education and Sociology meet in this research, on the same theoretical and empirical grounds. Through a conceptual intertwining between migration, learning, issues of diversity and multiculturalism, this thesis is intrinsically linked to the central problematic of Sociology of Education, which focuses on the cultural discontinuity that marks the relationship between educational institutions and their students (Young & Muller, 2010). In other words, the decision to conceptualise foreign students as migrants, and the aim to understand their learning experiences throughout their migratory trajectories, is the clear expression of the encounter between two disciplines: Sociology and Education. On the one hand, foreign students are addressed through a sociological lens, as migrants who cross both geographic and socio-cultural borders (Webb, 2015). On the other hand, foreign students are addressed through an educational lens, as individuals engaged in multiple and complex learning processes (Murphy-Lejeune, 2003). The relationship between migration and learning lies, therefore, at the core of this research.

In my attempt to explore this relationship between migration and learning, I have been strongly influenced by the work of three contemporary sociologists: Alain Touraine, Anthony Giddens, and Claude Dubar. Their theoretical and conceptual insights aided me both in the empirical exploration as in the formulation of my research questions. In this sense, I draw on the work of Touraine in order to question the way in which individuals act towards an increasingly *de-modernised* society, marked by continuous change, rather than by a constant social order (Touraine, 1998a). However, being able to successfully deal with change and instability is not only a demand of a particular developmental phase of our society, but it is actually embedded in the process of identity construction of any human being (Dubar, 2006). By acknowledging that change follows human beings throughout their lives, it is important to interrogate how individuals are able to make sense of their lives in an uninterrupted chain of changes. The answer lies in Giddens' stratification model, and especially in his assertion that engaging in daily routines provides individuals a 'protective cocoon' or 'carapace', which protects them from the chaos that lurks behind the trivial aspects of the quotidian (Giddens, 1991: 40). Relating these concepts to the experience of migration, I acknowledge that moving to a foreign context can lead to the rupture of one's daily routines (Cwerner, 2001), and I address the effects of such ruptures in the lives of migrant students. Ultimately, due to its capacity to disturb familiar perceptions and offer the necessary conditions to engage in re-evaluations and self-discovery (Brown, 2009), I seek to understand if and how the experience of migration can further enhance students' learning. Therefore, in this research learning is not primarily addressed in the context of students' academic degrees, but within their migratory experiences in general, as an outcome of their migratory experience as a whole. In other words, my research interest does not lie with students' learning experiences in classroom contexts. Instead, starting from the assumption that learning is ubiquitous (Webb, 2015), what I seek to understand is *if* and *how* do migrant students learn from the actual experience of living and studying in a foreign country.

Regarding the concept of migration, I draw on the field of migration studies in order to discuss the experience of foreign students. My main theoretical guidelines are rooted in the work of those scholars who specifically address foreign students as migrants (as for instance: King & Ruiz-Gelices, 2003; Raghuram, 2013). Furthermore, I discuss some ideas inspired in migration theory, especially through the work of Papastergiadis (2000) and Castles (2010).

After reviewing two of the most salient theories currently used in order to explain migration, the 'push and pull' model and the structuralist perspective, I conclude that both these theories are incapable to provide a suitable analytical tool for understanding the student migration phenomenon, especially due to their excessive focus on mechanistic explanatory models, based on a dichotomy between causes and consequences (Papastergiadis, 2000). Attending to

Bakewell's (2010) assertion, according to which the development of a coherent migration theory is being hindered by another dichotomy – structure/agency – I seek to understand student migration through an analytical tool capable of surpassing such dichotomous and reductive views.

Therefore, I rely on a third theoretical model applied to student migration, which belongs to Carlson (2013), and is not yet fully recognised in the research literature dedicated to migration. Through this model, a *processual* one, instead of looking to understand *why* students migrate, I seek to understand *how* they do it (Carlson, 2013), a strategy that reflects my effort to consider students' experiences holistically, without simply disconnecting them from their wider life-courses (Findlay, King, Smith, Geddes, & Skeldon, 2012).

Besides acknowledging foreign students as migrants, it is important to take into account also their student status. An analysis informed solely by the theoretical contributions of the field of migration could not be sufficient in order to explain the experiences of this particular group of migrants. Thus, the research contributions of the field of international education and, more specifically, the research literature dedicated to the experience of foreign students, are paramount to the development of this thesis. Even though I draw on numerous different studies focused on the student experience, some authors influenced this thesis in significant ways, as for instance Catherine Montgomery (2009, 2010), Josef Ploner (2015), and Loraine Brown (2008, 2009). Through their innovative approaches to the experience of foreign students, these authors provide the means to surpass the polarisation of perspectives which exists in most research literature, rooted in the potential benefits and drawbacks of studying abroad (Leask & Carroll, 2011). On the one hand, embarking in higher education in a foreign country is depicted as a highly advantageous undertaking, replete of positive (learning) outcomes, especially due to students' exposure to diversity and multicultural interactions (Dunne, 2013). On the other hand, the value of such an experience is questioned by many scholars who consider that being exposed to cultural diversity will not lead, by itself, to the learning outcomes frequently ascribed to a period of study abroad (Otten, 2003). Other authors notice that the research literature provides widespread evidence of the limited contact between students from different cultural backgrounds (Kimmel & Volet, 2012). In this sense, part of the research literature dedicated to the experience of students who live and study in a foreign country reduces the experience of these students to the presence or absence of multicultural interaction, implying that the learning outcomes of studying abroad will simply not emerge if students do not interact cross-culturally. Drawing on Montgomery (2010), I start from the assumption that learning can occur even when contact between those students who belong to different cultural groups is scarce,

and I seek to conceptualise migrant students' learning in an holistic way, without reducing it to the level of multicultural interaction in which students are engaged.

The holistic approach to the learning experiences of migrant students that I employ in this thesis is rooted in the theory of transformative learning proposed by Jack Mezirow (1981). Since Mezirow's initial proposal, this theory became one of the dominant discourses in the field of adult education (Newman, 2014), and even led to the creation of a journal dedicated to its discussion: *Journal of Transformative Education*. Even though it has been applied, by very few scholars, to the particular case of migrant students (Ritz, 2010; Kumi-Yeboah, 2014), there are many similarities between the problematic of this research and the assumptions which underlie the theory of transformative learning. As mentioned above, understanding how the experience of migration can lead to learning lies at the core of this thesis. According to Mezirow (1981), transformative learning is triggered by a 'disorienting dilemma', followed by a transformation in our meaning perspectives, which are frames of reference uncritically acquired in our childhood. Since disorienting dilemmas are very similar to culture shocks (Taylor, 1994), changes in our meaning perspectives are more likely to appear as a consequence of the challenges posed by migration, when exposure to other cultures can shift habits of mind (Cranton & Kasl, 2012). I argue, therefore, that the theory of transformative learning is capable of providing a suitable analytical lens for understanding the learning experience of migrant students. Moreover, considering that the research literature on migrant students frequently overlooks their learning processes and the ways in which they may change as a result of their experiences abroad (Erichsen, 2011), applying the theory of transformative learning to the case of migrant students can also contribute to the knowledge production in this field and augment our understanding of their learning experiences.

In methodological terms, this thesis is anchored in the ontological and epistemological assumptions that underlie narrative research. However, the term 'narrative' has been used rather loosely in the research literature and it is important to acknowledge that there are many different ways of conducting narrative inquiry. Due to the recent extension of this kind of inquiry among social scientists, under the umbrella term of 'narrative research' sit many different methodological approaches (Mishler, 1999). My own approach is rooted in the work of Donald Polkinghorne (1995), Catherine Riessman (2008), and Sheila Trahar (2006). In line with Trahar (2010: 38), I regard narrative inquiry as a suitable tool for conducting research 'across cultures', especially due to its ability to eschew certainty (Trahar, 2008), and to allow participants' stories to emerge naturally, unconstrained by pre-established theoretical labels (Trahar, 2014). Besides drawing on the research literature dedicated to narrative inquiry, I subscribe to Ferrarotti's (2003) views on the biographical method, and I also integrate in my research practice some

aspects rooted in life history research (based on the work of Araújo, 2000; and Plummer, 2001). In other words, I do not entirely subscribe to any existent view on narrative inquiry but, instead, I develop my own style of conducting narrative research, seeking to describe, throughout this thesis, the meaning assumed by the term 'narrative', and more specifically what narrative "means to *me* (at this point in time)" (Etherington, 2004: 71). In this sense, I regard narrative as a means to *construct*, rather than simply *collect* data, engaging participants in a process of co-construction (Riessman, 2008), valuing their knowledge (England, 1994), and encouraging them to become *researchers of their own lives*.

## *Thesis structure*

In Chapter I, entitled: *Foreign students – living on the edge between migration and education*; I present and discuss the theoretical perspectives that describe the two pivotal concepts of this thesis: migration and learning. The chapter starts with a section entitled: *Towards a definition of the Migrant Student*; in which I make an essential clarification of some terms, which have been rather ambiguously used in the research literature. In this section, I distinguish between international, foreign and migrant students, elucidating the characteristics of the population that constitutes the focal point of this research. Given that migrants' experiences are known to present significant diversity, in section 2, entitled: *Living in the student-(im)migrant duality*; I discuss the commonalities and the distinctions which exist between foreign students and other types of migrants. In section 3, entitled: *The unfulfilled goal of multiculturalism*; I discuss the concept of multiculturalism, explaining why I decided to employ it in the specific context of higher education. Since migration and learning are the two pivotal concepts of this research, in section 4, entitled: *Migrant students and multicultural learning*; I make an extensive theoretical discussion of the concept of learning, relating it with the migration phenomenon. In section 5, entitled: *The potential for transformative learning of the international sojourn*; I present different perspectives over the theory of transformative learning (Mezirow, 1990), and defend its use as an appropriate analytical tool in the field of student migration. Considering that migration studies have been confined to only two main general theories (allegedly) capable of explaining migration, in section 6, entitled: *A processual approach to the migratory experience of foreign students*; I analyse and then reject the use of those two theories in this thesis, defending instead the pertinence of a third theory, inspired in Carlson's (2013) research, which I consider capable of doing justice to the migratory experience of foreign students.

In Chapter II, entitled: *The narrative of the research – a methodological journey*; I describe, in detail, the research process that led to the construction of this thesis. In section 1 of this chapter,

entitled: *My own journey into the realm of narrative inquiry*; I clarify my ontological and epistemological assumptions, and the way in which they influenced my methodological trajectory. In this section, I also present different theoretical stances on narrative inquiry, positioning myself in regard to the array of different and sometimes diverging perspectives. At the same time, I explain the reasons that led me to choose narrative inquiry and why I consider it to be a suitable methodology for exploring migrant students' experiences. In section 2, entitled: *Participant selection process*; I clarify the way in which I purposefully selected the twelve participants of this research. Section 3 is dedicated to the: *Challenges, surprises and wonders of working with narratives*; a section in which I describe in detail my fieldwork experiences and the way in which I constructed (rather than collected) my data. How I interpreted those data is clarified in the last section of this chapter: *Interpretive strategy*.

Consistent with the idea that constructing a narrative is not a process of data collection but a process of data construction, in Chapter III, entitled: *Journeys of learning and migration – the twelve narratives*; I present, in their entirety, all the narratives that I constructed jointly with the twelve migrant students who participated in this research.

In Chapter IV, entitled: *A processual interpretation of migration in the singularity of each narrative*; I present the results of the interpretations made within narratives, rather than across them, with the intention to understand students' migration as a process (from section 1 to 12). In section 13, entitled: *Understanding students' experiences through the use of migratory profiles*; I clarify the way in which I developed twelve migration profiles based on the story line of each narrative, and give account of their theoretical and analytical relevance for the field of migration studies. In section 14, entitled: *Representing twelve migratory profiles through fictionalised accounts*; I present twelve fictional stories inspired in the twelve migratory profiles.

In Chapter V, entitled: *Thematic interpretations across the twelve migration narratives*; I present the results of a distinct interpretive endeavour. Instead of focusing on each narrative individually, in this chapter, I struggle to produce meaning across all narratives, by focusing on specific aspects of students' experiences. The main objective of this interpretive endeavour is to understand students' (learning) experiences in their diversity and complexity. In section 1, entitled: *Arrival in Portugal*; I focus the interpretation on the struggles and challenges that students tend to face at the beginning of their international sojourns. In the second section, entitled: *Mono/multicultural relationships*; I look at students interpersonal interactions, in the attempt to understand if they are inserted in a multicultural setting or if their experiences are confined to monocultural contacts. Linking the two main concepts of this research: migration and learning; in section 3 entitled: *Learning outcomes of migration*; I seek to understand

students' learning trajectories, assessing if their learning experiences can be enhanced by their involvement in migration. In section 4 entitled: *Institutional stances towards diversity*; I address, according to students' perceptions, the institutional strategies that Portuguese universities adopt in regard to their increasingly diverse student bodies. Section 5, entitled: *Social support*; discusses the informal support mechanisms on which students rely during their sojourns. Based on the central role of language in the experience of migrant students, in section 6: *Language*; I discuss the linguistic struggles faced by some students, while living and studying in a foreign language. Drawing on the theory of transformative learning (Mezirow, 1990), in section 7, entitled: *The transformative potential of migration*; I seek to understand if students are engaged in transformative learning processes, as a consequence of their international experience.

In the conclusions, I summarise the most important findings of this research, dividing them into nine different sections. In the first section, entitled: *The inherent complexity of student migration*; I focus on the contributions of this research for understanding the complexity embedded in students' migratory experiences. In the second section, entitled: *Surpassing the structure-agency impasse*; I discuss the potential of processual approaches to migration for taking into account the complexity of factors that influence the migratory experience of students, instead of focusing exclusively on issues of structure and agency. In the third section, entitled: *The experience of migrant students beyond 'push and pull' factors*; I criticise voluntarist models of explaining migration, suggesting that migrant students' experiences are too complex to fit reductive 'push and pull' theoretical models. In the fourth section: *Two related, yet distinct phenomena: mobility and migration*; I argue that, in order to avoid conceptual confusions, research on study abroad should attend to the difference between migration and mobility. In the fifth section, entitled: *Foreign/international students and the relevance of migratory profiles*; I defend the importance of another conceptual distinction: between international and foreign students; and I seek to make a contribution to the theory formation in the field of migration, through the proposal of twelve migratory profiles based on students' narratives. In the sixth section, entitled: *Migration – a (transformative) learning enhancer*; I discuss the link between migration and learning, and clarify the learning outcomes of engaging in an international experience. The seventh section: *The relevance of narrative inquiry for understanding student migration*; is dedicated to a final reflection of the whole methodological journey, arguing for the use of narrative approaches in the field of student migration. The aim of the eighth section: *Empirical-based recommendations for creating a multicultural university*; is to provide Portuguese universities with a set of recommendations on how to deal with their increasingly diverse student bodies. Finally, in the last section, entitled: *Final remarks*; I summarise the main findings of this thesis and its knowledge contributions for the field of student migration.

# I. Foreign students – living on the edge between migration and education

## *Introduction*

Even though records of individuals travelling abroad to study go far back in history (Altbach, 2004), the scale of student migration in the 21st century reached unprecedented proportions. According to Chen and Barnett (2000), in the 1960s, there were only 238,000 international university students worldwide and, by 1995, their number had exceeded 1.5 million. Beine, Noël and Ragot (2014) noticed that only between 2000 and 2008 there was a 70% increase in the number of foreign students worldwide. For instance, in 2011, there were 3.15 million foreign students enrolled in 122 different countries (Barnett et al., 2016). Just one year after, in 2012, the number had grown to more than 4.5 million foreign students globally (Caruso & De Wit, 2015).

Regarding the specific case of Portugal, it is important to emphasise that, in spite of the recent increase in the numbers of migrant students in this country (on which I previously reported here: Nada, 2012), research on this topic remains rather scarce. While looking for research focused on the experience of migrant students in Portugal, I was unable to find any research paper focused on this topic[3]. The scarcity of research conducted in the Portuguese context raised an extra challenge in the process of writing this chapter. Since I did not have the possibility to refer to many research findings rooted in the Portuguese context, in order to build my theoretical framework I had to rely mainly on the theoretical and empirical contributions of international research literature. While some of the findings of the research conducted in other countries may also apply to the Portuguese case, others may be applicable solely to those contexts. Even though I frequently refer to scholars who conducted research in countries like the USA or the UK, I do not imply that their findings should be taken as fully valid for the Portuguese context. Readers should bear in mind that Portugal is a 'catching-up' country in regard to the internationalisation of its higher education system (Horta, 2010: 64). Therefore, some findings reported in the international literature might be not directly applicable to the specific case of Portuguese higher education.

A similar drawback that I experienced during the process of writing this chapter is related to the issue of time. As research tends to be context-dependent, research findings and observations

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[3] In terms of academic productions, I identified only one PhD thesis (Pacheco, 1996), and six Master's dissertations, including my own (Neves, 2010; Kanzok, 2011; Nada, 2012; Rocha, 2012; Alves, 2013; Oliveira, 2013).

are also bound to the factor of time, and are meant to "speak to certain people, times and circumstances" (Plummer, 2001: 20). For this reason, it is important to take into account that the observations reported in the research literature dating from several decades ago may not be entirely applicable to our present times. In order to surpass this limitation, I sought to build my theoretical framework based on classical authors – which I consider crucial for the development of the key concepts underlying this thesis – and also on up-to-date bibliography, consulting the latest issues of international journals dedicated to the field of migration, learning and multiculturalism.

Before presenting the main theoretical perspectives explored in this thesis, terms such as 'foreign/international students' or 'migrant students' need to be conceptually clarified. The research literature presents a large set of different definitions that can lead to conceptual misunderstandings and hinder the knowledge production in the field of student migration. In the first section of this chapter, I will summon different and even opposing conceptualisations of migrant students in order to elucidate the characteristics of the population that constitutes the focal point of this research.

As the title of this chapter suggests, I argue that foreign students constitute a peculiar type of migrants who live on the edge between education and migration. Therefore, the commonalities and distinctions between foreign students and other types of migrants will be discussed. Based on the idea that two different migratory groups should not be analysed through the same theoretical approaches, I defend the creation of a distinct space, within migration studies, dedicated to the analysis of student migration.

Given the main objective of this research, to understand the experience of migrant students in Portugal, it is important to consider their experiences not only within their day-to-day lives but also in the context of broader societal phenomena. Since the issue of diversity in contemporary societies is a topic that encompasses student migration, I choose to discuss students' experiences in the light of the theoretical contributions of multiculturalism. In the third section, I present the concept of multiculturalism and discuss its multiple meanings, relating it to the specific context of higher education.

Since this research is not focused exclusively on students' migratory experiences but also on their learning experiences, the concept of learning and its relationship with migration will be also addressed. Through a revision of different theoretical perspectives on the learning outcomes of international experiences, I have identified the existence of polarised perspectives in the research literature dedicated to this topic. Migrant students' learning seems to be primarily approached through binary classifications limited to positive vs. negative experiences.

In an attempt to surpass such dualisms, I discuss the relevance of the theory of transformative learning (Mezirow, 1990) for analysing migrants students' learning experiences. Through this discussion, I argue that the theory of transformative learning is capable of analysing learning in an holistic way, avoiding the reproduction of polarised perspectives, which have been growing in most research literature dedicated to the learning experiences of migrant students.

Since literature on international migration is rather silent in regard to the experience of foreign students, in the last section of this chapter, I will discuss the relevance of conceptualising this group of students as migrants. Unfortunately, the limited number of scholars that conduct research on migrant students tend to adopt theoretical stances which do not seem to take into account the diversity of experiences of this particular group of students. For this reason, in the last section of this chapter I will discuss two of the most widespread theories of migration, along with their conceptual weaknesses. After rejecting the use of these two theories in the current research, I borrow from Carlson (2013) the idea of a processual view over migration, considering it capable of doing justice to the diversity of experiences that migrant students tend to present. Complementing this view with several contributions from migration studies, I achieve a theoretical model that I consider more adequate to deal with the empirical complexity of the data reunited in this thesis.

## 1. Towards a definition of the Migrant Student

The recent increase in the numbers of international students worldwide led many scholars to focus their attention on this (until recently) understudied population. Nowadays, research on international students varies across disciplines and focuses on very different aspects of this phenomenon, ranging from: the reasons to study abroad (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Li & Bray, 2007); to students' cross-cultural adaptation (Lewthwaite, 1996; Ye, 2006); or identity formation (Koehne, 2006; Brown & Brown, 2009). International students are frequently considered within the widely spoken topic of internationalisation of higher education (Knight, 2004; Montgomery, 2009; Caruana & Ploner, 2010), and its marketization (Teichler, 2004; Sidhu, 2006).

Given the recent rise in refugees' numbers and the 'European migration crisis', it becomes clear that researchers need to broaden their understanding of migration by considering other types of migrants who present different life trajectories and bring new practical and theoretical dimensions into the field. Despite the significant amount of research on international students, their relationship with migration as a broader phenomenon is seldom addressed (Baláž & Williams, 2004). More recently, King and Raghuram (2013) noted that student migration continues to be an under-researched phenomenon within the field of migration studies. The lack

of interest that many researchers show for this topic is particularly surprising, if we consider the significant increase in the number of migrants coming to Europe for educational purposes. According to Parusel (2012: 9), "today, moving to the EU for study purposes forms one of the most common migration channels alongside labour migration, family ties or migration on humanitarian grounds (asylum)". In this thesis, I argue that the international student is, in fact, engaged in migration and constitutes a specific type of migrant. By locating students within the field of migration, I intend to shed light on this migrant whose motivations and life trajectories are blurred in most literature that frequently refers to 'the' international student (Rienties & Tempelaar, 2013), as if this category could embrace the reality of all migrant students. As observed by Morrison, Merrick, Higgs and Métais (2005: 328), international students are "too often lumped together uncritically as a group".

In order to be able to address international students in the field of migration, it is mandatory to clarify which are the types of international students that I consider as migrants or, in other words, whose (learning) experiences I seek to understand through this research? Back in 1953, the United Nations released their *Recommendations on International Migration Statistics*, in "an effort to harmonize national practices and achieve better comparability among different countries' migration data" (IOM, 2009: 8). In the latest revision of this document, the United Nations (1998) divide migrants according to the duration of their sojourn, distinguishing the short-term migrant (less than 12 months abroad), from the long-term migrant (more than 12 months abroad). According to this broad definition, all international students could be considered migrants. The first division that I draw is between the students taking a full higher education degree in a foreign country from the ones who go on short exchange programmes, such as Erasmus. Hence, my definition of migrant students only encompasses the case of those students who are enrolled in a complete higher education degree in a foreign country, long-term migrants, whilst the students engaged in bilateral programmes are considered separately as exchange students (or short-term migrants, following UN's distinction). I argue that this is the first step towards a more clear definition of international students viewed as migrants, since the experience of being in an exchange programme is different from the experience of moving to a different country for more than one year (Gargano, 2009). Moreover, Carlson (2011a) emphasises that the two types of students are exposed to profoundly different experiences abroad, hence the importance of distinguishing, when conducting research in the field of student migration, between exchange students and migrant students.

Another important aspect for this discussion is the "conceptual difficulty in distinguishing between different forms of movement" (Papastergiadis, 2000: 37), and especially in separating temporary mobility from migration (OECD, 2011). According to Bilecen (2009: 6), "the primary

ambiguity in the literature is how to address international students, in the frame of mobility or migration?". As argued above, due to the significant differences between the experiences of an exchange student and a full-degree international student, I consider that exchange students should be addressed in the frame of mobility and international students in the frame of migration. This leads to the acknowledgement that exchange students should not be addressed as migrants, but simply as mobile students in accordance with the specificity of the mobility exchange programme they are in. This proposal is consistent with King's and Raghuram's (2013) view on longer-term moves, and with the recommendations of the International Organisation for Migration, according to which: "students sent abroad for short periods (…) should not be recorded as foreign students in the host country" (IOM, 2008: 107).

This conceptual differentiation is also sustained by the existence of academic degrees that stipulate in their requirements that each student should study abroad for a determined amount of time, in order to be eligible for degree completion. According to Brodersen (2014: 96), for some students, "international study exchanges may be part of or in continuity with their university curriculum". The UN definition is, therefore, too broad, blending two distinct groups of the student population. However, it is frequent for scholars (Murphy-Lejeune, 2003; Findlay, Stam, King, & Ruiz-Gelices, 2005; Höhn, 2005; Bessey, 2012) to include exchange students under the larger umbrella of migration, and some refer to mobility and international migration interchangeably (van der Velde & van Naerssen, 2011). 'International student' is a problematic term (Madge, Raghuram, & Noxolo, 2009) and when, they use it, most scholars do not refer to the same population, augmenting the conceptual confusion. The necessity to draw a clear line between exchange students and international students was also noticed by Findlay et al. (2012) who distinguished between 'credit mobility' (exchange programmes) and 'degree mobility'.

Along with these conceptual varieties, little is said about the migratory experience of international students, as if they were not a part of the international migration movement. According to King and Raghuram (2013: 128), "it is remarkable how so many of the standard textbooks on international migration either fail to mention student-migrants or dismiss the phenomenon in a few lines". Even though it is generally accepted that international students are migrants, their migratory status is often ignored. International students are approached as migrants in very few studies and reports (as for instance: Baláž & Williams, 2004; Parusel, 2012; McGill, 2013; Mukthyala, 2013; Méango, 2014; Beine et al., 2014). Some researchers view students as temporary migrants (Hazen & Alberts, 2006), whilst others consider them as migrants only if they decide to live in the host country after graduation, more precisely "when the shift from student to migrant occurs" (Robertson & Runganaikaloo, 2014: 211). Although the amount of studies about international students has grown and brought new insights for the

understanding of this phenomenon, most scholars fail at defining in a clear way their target population. This leads to conceptual confusion and diminishes their contribution to the knowledge production in the field of migration. Too often, the concept of international student is used as if it were consensual across disciplines and countries, and the presence of different definitions raises a problem of consistency, since "the same discussion might simultaneously draw on two different definitions to suit the author's purposes" (Anderson & Blinder, 2011: 5).

Countries also define and statistically regard students in different manners (Sidhu, 2011). The two major global destinations for international students, the United States of America and the United Kingdom (UNESCO, 2009), have different conceptions regarding the (im)migrant status of their international students. In the US, international students apply for a *F-1* or *J-1* visa, which belongs to the non-immigrant category (McGill, 2013), whilst in the UK, international students are regarded as immigrants as long as they do not come from an EU country (Consterdine & Everton, 2012). In Portugal, only the students who do not come from EU countries (neither from: Norway, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Switzerland) are considered as international students (European Comission, 2012), and need to obtain a visa from the local immigration service.

Indeed, definitions of migrant students vary enormously across countries (Lanzendorf & Teichler, 2002). For instance, Germany regards some of its students as foreign even if they are Turkish permanent residents (Sidhu, 2011). Other countries across the world present very diverse traits such as ex-colonial links and different citizenship conceptions that preclude the existence of a universal definition, so "estimates of numbers of students emigrating for purposes of study vary enormously, according to the source" (Foskett & Maringe, 2010: 5). The effects of the absence of a universal definition cannot be disregarded, since "different definitions have significant consequences for data, both in terms of numbers of migrants (stocks and flows) and for the analysis of the impacts of migration" (Anderson & Blinder, 2011: 2).

Considering this multitude of conceptualisations, how should migrant students be defined? According to the length of their stay? According to their citizenship or according to the purpose of their migration? The latter interrogation raises a different question: are all individuals who hold a foreign citizenship than that of the country in which they study to be considered international students, or only the ones who migrated specifically with the intention to study should be considered as such? Literature on this specific question is scarce, but some authors address this issue by differentiating between international students and foreign students. On the one hand, both UNESCO (2009) and the OECD (2013) consider as international students only individuals that engage in migration with the purpose of education. Foreign students, on the other hand, "represent non-citizens, who are enrolled in an educational institution without

necessarily crossing boarders in order to study" (Aksakal & Schmidt, 2015: 6). If international students only engage in migration with an educational purpose whilst foreign students migrate for a variety of reasons, international students are, in fact, a subgroup of the broader category of foreign students (OECD, 2013).

Even though this separation between foreign and international students according to the purpose of their migration exists, it has not been used in a consistent way in the research literature. For instance, Johnson (1985) regards foreign students simply as home students of foreign origin, and Raghuram (2013) considers as international students only the migrants whose rationale for migration was linked to education. Dissonant of this conceptualisation is United Nations' position who defines foreign students as if they were international (compared to the previous definitions), and do not even mentions the term 'international student' in its *Recommendations on Statistics of International Migration* (United Nations, 1998). This distinction between foreign and international students is also difficult to draw since the purpose of migration can be assessed only through students' expressed intentions. In some cases, students could omit their migration intentions especially in the case of the 'study-migration pathway' (Hawthorne & To, 2014), when students use international education as a tool for economic migration (Foskett & Maringe, 2010).

Evidently, to reach methodological consistency, it is crucial for researchers to clearly define the specific type of student that they are addressing. According to Anderson and Blinder (2011: 5), "the definition of 'migrant' is not simply a technical problem, but has an important effect on migration data and analysis generated from such data". Unfortunately, most researchers tend to disregard the importance of this issue and, in the research literature dedicated to migrant students, there are several examples of contradictory conceptualisations. For instance, in the research conducted by Roga et al. (2015), the main objective was to understand the way foreign students chose their destination country and higher education institutions. Following the distinction between foreign and international students, in order to be conceptually consistent, their study should not have been focused on foreign students but on international students, since the formers did not engage in migration with the purpose of education. The issue of the choice of destination is therefore relevant for international students whilst for foreign students it is simply a non-issue. Richters and Teichler (2006) make the separation between foreign and international students by looking at their 'genuine mobility', in a sense that the migratory project of international students started only because of their intention to study. It is not clear though why foreign students' mobility is considered to be less 'genuine'. Certainly, scholars are entitled to their own view and can disagree of existing definitions, but only as long as they make a clear stance regarding the reasons for which they opted for a particular way of defining migrant

students. With this discussion, my intention is not to question the validity of the research realised in this field but to call for the necessity to clearly position students within the complexities of their migrations. At the same time, I do not argue that we should embrace a universal definition of migrant students. That would be utopic, since migration is known for its significant complexity of processes, contexts and actors (Arango, 2000). However, the impossibility to reach a universal definition does not justify its complete absence. In order to strengthen their research designs, scholars should clearly define what they mean when they refer to international, foreign, and migrant students.

Given my main research question, in this thesis I will focus only on migration dynamics (minimum one year abroad) and not on short-mobility movements (exchange students). I will consider both the migration of individuals who went abroad specifically to enrol in higher education (international students), and the migration of individuals who are currently students but did not specifically left their countries with the purpose of education (foreign students). Considering that both international and foreign students are engaged in migration, I will refer to these two categories using the term 'migrant student'. After clarifying the concept of student migration, I will discuss, in the following section, the implications that being both a migrant and a student can have in the lives of migrant students.

## 2. Living in the student-(im)migrant duality

Before presenting the main argument of this section, I will make a brief clarification on the use of the word 'immigrant'. According to Anderson and Blinder (2011), dictionary definitions state that immigrants are people who plan to remain in the host country long-term, whilst migrants are regarded as temporary residents. Acknowledging that the life course of all individuals is replete with subjectivities and unexpected turning points, I cannot agree with a conceptual distinction based on people's intentions to remain in a country forever, or only for a limited period of time. How researchers, and even the individuals themselves, could possibly know what future awaits them, or know how their intentions could change over time? Even though the term 'immigrant' gathers plenty negative connotations (Núñez, 2014), I will use this term in order to refer to the non-student migrant population. Cognisant of the elitist connotation that the concept of 'migrant student' exhibits as opposed to 'immigrant student', it is only for the sake of a clear distinction between migrant students and other types of immigrants that I will refer to the subjects of this research as 'migrant students' and not as 'immigrant students'. This choice of words is not intended to suggest that migrant students are somehow better than other types of immigrants, as society often perceives them (Findlay, 2011).

The decision to conceptualise foreign and international students within the framework of migration raises several challenges. Besides the lack of a general accepted definition of migrant students, research on their experiences tends to be confined to university or other academic spaces. I argue that research on the experience of migrant students should also encompass aspects of their daily life as foreigners living in a different culture. In other words, their experience needs to be addressed not only according to their student status but also in accordance to their migrant status, and subsequent migratory trajectory. I consider this decision to be an epistemological stance that leads to "the appreciation that students are complex subjects who are much more than just students whose only function is life in higher education" (King & Raghuram, 2013: 131). The peculiarity of migrant students' experiences resides precisely in the necessity to live accordingly both in a different academic environment, as in a different culture and society. Thus, two different processes of adaptation develop simultaneously, adding extra challenges for these students.

The multiple challenges faced by migrant students are well documented in the research literature. Most of the difficulties encountered by migrant students start to develop once they enter in contact with a new environment and its consequent 'strangeness'. According to Gill (2007: 171), students "often find themselves confronted directly with 'strangeness' in the host country". Coping with a new and unknown cultural context can range from basic difficulties linked to simple day-to-day activities, to more severe situations. Frequently, based on their 'outsider status' (Peacock & Harrison, 2009) migrant students experience feelings of isolation and loneliness (Sakurai et al., 2010). If continued for long periods of time, such feelings can preclude students' adaptation or even lead to serious health conditions. According to Mori (2000: 139), "their lack of familiarity with their surroundings can lead to a period of homesickness, during which they suffer from painful feelings of isolation and loneliness. In some severe cases, their profound sense of helplessness and hopelessness may be an indication of depression". The diversity of difficulties faced by these students is successfully summarised by Toyokawa and Toyokawa (2002: 363) who enumerate: "culture shock, language difficulties, adjustment to unfamiliar social norms, eating habits, customs and values, differences in education systems, isolation and loneliness, homesickness, and a loss of established social networks". Besides culture shock, some authors also identify a 'learning shock' (Gu, 2005), experienced by some students due to the unfamiliar educational culture encountered in the host university.

Even though they are frequently mentioned in the research literature, one could argue that these difficulties are not specific to migrant students but are also experienced by their local peers. Indeed, enrolling in higher education is "a difficult enough 'rite of passage' for students

in their own countries" (Baker & Hawkins, 2006: 22), therefore migrant students are not the only ones who experience struggles during their university years. However, previous research noticed that the difficulties faced by all university students can become particularly overwhelming for migrant students (Carroll & Ryan, 2007), since they have to deal with "added stressors of second language anxiety and adapting to a new educational environment" (Smith & Khawaja, 2011: 702). For instance, Baker's and Hawkins's (2006) findings confirmed that migrant students usually feel an increased level of stress for studying abroad and not in their home countries.

From all the issues mentioned above, I regard language as one of the most prominent elements in migrant students' adaptation. This assertion is consistent with the findings of previous research, which ascribed significant importance to language in student migration (Yang, Noels, & Saumure, 2006; Brunton & Jeffrey, 2014). According to Kosheleva et al. (2015: 40), "one of the fundamental aspects of successful training in the recipient country is knowledge of the language of studying". In academic terms, not knowing the language of studying can negatively influence students' understanding of class contents, both oral and written, which will eventually affect their grades and feelings of achievement. Zhang's and Goodson's (2011) findings indicate that language proficiency has a direct impact on students' sociocultural and psychological adjustment. The impact of language is not only noteworthy in academic terms, but also in relation to students' experiences outside university settings. In the wider society, low level of language proficiency can hinder students' interactions with the local population. Cammish (1997) considers language to be a core problem, and Masgoret (2006: 312) regards the facility to speak the local language as "one of the most important factors in determining effective communication with members of the host community, and arguably the most central one". Learning the local language can improve students' adaption to the host country since "language learning and cultural learning mutually support each other" (Huang & Chang, 2011: 137). The implications of language do not end in the academic and social experiences of students but extend to the profound level of identity. As noticed by Alred (2003: 22) "language is the principal means by which the process of identity formation takes place".

Adding to the challenges directly related to their student status, migrant students also face similar struggles as the ones faced by other immigrants. Both students and immigrants can experience high levels of unfamiliarity when crossing borders since, unquestionably, a border is not solely a geographic or political division. When crossing geographic borders, socio-cultural ones are also crossed (Webb, 2015) and, in such crossings, many aspects of people's previous lives become unreachable. This leads to "disorientation, stress and anxiety and to a sense of loss of the individual's habituated comforts within their home culture" (Gill, 2007: 171). It is widely

documented that "people experience stress due to challenges arising from exposure to a new cultural environment" (Tian & Lowe, 2014: 285), and that leaving the familiarity of one's way of life requires several adjustments (Mukthyala, 2013). According to Ploner (2015: 16), "student mobilities appear to be enabled and constrained by many of the same factors as other forms of migration and share similar mooring strategies".

Shared by migrant students and immigrants alike is also their potential exposure to racism and discrimination, reinforcing the negative feelings that life in an unknown cultural context can cause. At first sight, one might assume that the university environment would protect migrant students from such behaviours. According to Walton-Roberts (2011: 471), "the university can act as a socio-spatial buffer to discriminatory behaviours and thus, be perceived as a safe space for international students and immigrants". Even though migrant students might be subjected to less negative attitudes than other types of immigrants, discrimination and racism incidents have been reported both outside and inside the campus (Lee & Rice, 2007). King and Raghuram (2013: 131) consider that migrant students "are also becoming the targets of increasing suspicion", and report on the growth of physical attacks towards migrant students in many countries.

Despite these common struggles, migrant students are surrounded by a fairly positive public image and frequently experience less difficulties than other types of immigrants. According to Gargano (2009: 338), migrant students' experiences "are inherently different from other groups of border crossers, such as immigrants, refugees, or expatriates". One possible explanation for this distinction lies in the strong link that most students establish with their universities. Contrary to other categories of the migrant population, foreign students have an institutional link to the host country which can augment their sense of belonging and offer helpful support mechanisms, frequently denied to other categories of immigrants. In other words, universities provide a 'bubble' in which students study, socialise and live (Gu, Schweisfurth, & Day, 2010: 16). Such 'bubbles' are double-edged swords since, on the one hand, they protect students from many issues that other immigrants struggle with and, on the other hand, can generate a strong propensity for isolation from the wider population. Moreover, the distinction between the experience of migrant students and the experience of other immigrants is frequently rooted in the idea that universities constitute open environments that readily welcome and even cherish cultural diversity. However, according to Lee and Rice (2007: 395), the assumption according to which "people connected to the university are more open to diversity than in the larger society" was not supported by empirical research, which has shown that universities are not racism-free spaces. Moreover, Cui and Kelly (2013: 172) warn that "we need to realize that often universities are still sites where whiteness can be reclaimed".

Despite their shared struggles, migrant students "possess a number of characteristics that differentiate them from regular economic migrants" (Sykes & Chaoimh, 2012: 4). For instance, the less problematic image that societies tend to attach to migrant students, as compared to other types of immigrants, may be rooted in the idea that their presence is transitory (Findlay, 2011). At the same time, societies and governments tend to associate migrant students to the privileged category of 'highly skilled migrants', which bears a clear distinction from 'other' types of immigrants (Shachar, 2012). According to Robertson and Runganaikaloo (2014: 209), "international graduates of local universities are often seen to fit the neoliberal model of the 'desirable worker' or even 'designer migrant'". Although I understand the reasons that underline this association, I consider it to be rather outdated. A direct consequence of the massification of higher education (Mok & Neubauer, 2016) is that migrant students do not belong exclusively to a restricted elite population but come from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds. Favell et al. (2007: 16) consider that migrant students are generally defined as part of an international elite, in "a stylized contrast to the disadvantaged, lower class, typically ethnically distinct, putatively "proletariat" migration". However, recent research indicates that increasing globalisation favours not only the movement of global elites but also the rise of international migration among the middle class (Luthra & Platt, 2016). The issue of social class among migrant students requires further discussion about the (in)voluntary nature of migration and the way in which students' 'choices' of going abroad affect their experiences (an extended discussion on the topic of 'choice' in student migration and its research implications can be found in section 6 of the current chapter).

In spite of the specificities that characterise the conceptual category of migrant students, I argue that this population should be approached in ways that go beyond reductive categories such as 'migrant' or 'student'. In fact, they are "individuals with multiple identities" (Morrice, 2014: 157) and their migratory experiences need to be acknowledged in their complexity. In this thesis, I seek to avoid an excessive focus on pre-established conceptual categories, approaching the experience of migrant students as a whole. In the following section, I draw on the concept of multiculturalism in order to address the peculiarities of the relationship between migrant students and their host higher education institutions.

## 3. The unfulfilled goal of multiculturalism

As shown in the previous section, migrant students and immigrants face many difficulties in the receiving country. Some of these difficulties are shared with the local population, whilst others are specific to migrants and raise extra challenges to them. On the top of these challenges that

all migrants face, local residents frequently blame them for the problems that exist in their societies. Contrary to the ideals of multiculturalism, all across the globe dominant political discourses see "migration as a problem that needs to be 'fixed' by appropriate policies" (Castles, 2010: 1567). Currently, these tendencies have been spreading and, in many developed countries, an increased support for populist, extreme-right political parties has been registered.

Similar to other immigrants, migrant students are often seen by their universities as problems in need of solutions, rather than as valuable resources of diversity and multicultural learning. Since many institutions consider that migrant students require more attention than their local counterparts, many researchers have been exclusively focusing on their needs. According to Lillyman and Bennett (2014), the majority of current literature tends to be negative in regard to migrant students' experiences, presenting a 'deficit view' (Carroll & Ryan, 2007), or a 'deficit model' (Montgomery & McDowell, 2009). Among other theoretical perspectives, this problem-oriented view, existent among higher education institutions and researchers alike, is also an issue of multiculturalism. In the following paragraphs, I will discuss different perspectives on multiculturalism and establish a link between the ideals of multiculturalism and what I consider to be a better and a more inclusive way of welcoming migrant students.

Frequently theorised in the last decades and broadly used in social science research, multiculturalism has become a multi-layered and highly controversial concept. According to Levey (2012: 223), "the term 'multiculturalism' has become so mired in controversy and is so maligned in public debate that its semantic capital, as it were, has been spent". For this reason, it is necessary to discuss this term within the panoply of different views on multiculturalism. In other words, it is important to clarify the meaning that this term assumes throughout this thesis. Firstly, multiculturalism refers to a demographic feature of society, more precisely to "the coexistence of a range of different cultural experiences within a group or society" (Bolaffi, 2003: 83). Throughout the years, cultural diversity has been growing in several regions and countries in the world, especially on account of the increase in migratory movements registered on a global scale. According to Kymlicka (1995), we are living in an 'age of migration' and, in a more recent report, the United Nations (2013) identified 232 million international migrants in the whole world. These numbers are significant, especially if considering that "a hypothetical 'migration country' would be the fifth largest country in the world" (van der Velde & van Naerssen, 2011: 223).

Notwithstanding, the increased presence of multiculturalism, both in the political field and in academia, goes beyond its demographic meaning. For Castles (1997), multiculturalism appeared in the 1970s as a model for responding to the requests of the increasing immigrant population.

Since it emerged, multiculturalism's 'melting pot' logic was substituted by metaphors such as 'salad bowl' or 'glorious mosaic' (Glazer, 1998), suggesting that immigrants do not need to erase their previous characteristics in order to be able to join the new society. Along with the shift from an assimilationist view to a more inclusive paradigm and the increased democratisation of the world, social demands by immigrants and other (ethnic) minorities began to bloom. In this way, the concept of multiculturalism was placed in the political arena, where it gained a new meaning. According to Inglis (1996: 16), the meaning of multiculturalism encompasses at least three different matters: "the demographic-descriptive, the ideological-normative and the programmatic-political". In order to be able to construct meaning(s) of multiculturalism that go(es) beyond its demographic features, different definitions of the concept need to be considered. For instance, Tip et al. (2012: 22) consider that "multiculturalism describes a policy which values and fosters a culturally plural society". At the same time, Bolaffi (2003) warns that multicultural policies could, in fact, constitute an obstacle to true multiculturalism. Clearly, political intentions and their effects in society do not always coincide. These tensions lead to another dimension of multiculturalism: the ideological one.

According to Nye (2007), multiculturalism appears as an ideology or social programme to be 'for' or 'against'. However, when combined with the cultural diversity existent in the world, multiculturalism exceeds the borders of a simple ideology and appears as a necessity. In Arasaratnam's view (2013: 683), "there is consensus that multiculturalism is an ideology as well as a pragmatic imperative". In the title of his book, Glazer (1998) announces somehow sarcastically, somehow nostalgically, that *We are all multiculturalists now*. Indeed, multiculturalism is here to stay and, instead of discussing the existence of multiculturalism, theoreticians should focus on a much more difficult task: identifying ways to improve its practical applications. Even if multiculturalism "is unavoidable in the contemporary world' and 'is not an optional extra" (Nye, 2007: 118), critics of multiculturalism are numerous. Different levels of criticism can be found ranging from the ones that simply discard the idea of a multicultural world, to others that believe the concept has been inappropriately theorised and used. Based on political ideologies, different types of criticism of multiculturalism take shape. Torres (1998: 200) discusses the liberal and neoconservative critiques, along with other critiques from the left wing, underlining that "mainstream multicultural traditions do not challenge the capitalist organization of society". Whilst Zizek (1997: 44) simply takes multiculturalism as "a disavowed, inverted, self-referential form of racism", Tarozzi and Torres (2016) notice that criticisms of multiculturalism are numerous and that some scholars are discussing the emergence of a post-multiculturalist stance. For Castles (1997: 21) the problem lies in the fact that "multiculturalism has developed in an ad hoc way as a strategy for integrating immigrant

communities into a basically unchanged society". In my view, multiculturalism cannot end in the integration of diversity within the existing system but should promote systemic change in order to better accommodate diversity.

Other critics of multiculturalism, even if supportive of its main ideals, point to conceptual inconsistencies that are believed to be embedded in its own construction. Instead, they propose the term 'interculturalism', as a solution to most of the contradictions brought by the concept of multiculturalism. Even if some theoreticians support interculturalism, and several public institutions use the term in their legislative documents (for instance, the EU), the comparative discussion between interculturalism and multiculturalism is rather controversial. According to Stoer and Cortesão (1999), the term 'multicultural' refers to the acknowledgement of different cultures and the comprehension of their specificities, whereas 'intercultural' refers to the recognition of each culture and mutual enrichment through increasing interaction. This separation is also visible in the linguistic construction of the two terms, since 'multi' merely points to the existence of diversity whereas 'inter' implies a certain degree of interaction.

Still, several authors refuse to give value to interculturalism taken as a concept, considering interaction between cultures to be one of the main principles of multiculturalism (Levey, 2012). Lentin (2005) regards interculturalism as an updated version of multiculturalism, whereas Meer and Modood (2012) consider interculturalism to lack a strong political discursive force, being unable, intellectually, to eclipse multiculturalism. Moreover, Santos (2002) defends a 'progressive multiculturalism', and Wieviorka (2012) sees multiculturalism as a concept that needs to be re-enchanted and refuses to consider interculturalism as an eligible substitute. He also reminds that multiculturalism could be regarded not as the problem but as a possible answer to diversity (Wieviorka, 1999). Certainly, the problems presented by this concept cannot be disregarded but should be considered in order to reach a more consistent theorisation. I take Tiryakian's (2003: 24) definition as a confirmation of the fact that multiculturalism is a more complete concept than interculturalism, since the former constitutes "a normative critique of the institutional arrangements of the public sphere that are seen as injuring or depriving a cultural minority of its rights". Indeed, I consider the ability to denunciate and reduce inequalities rooted in non-dominant cultural traits to be the main legacy of multiculturalism.

Given that today, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, several parts of the world are being ravished by destructive and bloody conflicts, some of them religious or racially driven, it is easy to note that there has been a failure in reaching multiculturalism's goals. However, I argue that this harsh reality is not a sign of multiculturalism's failure. In fact, multiculturalism did not fail, as some political leaders have previously claimed, but most countries in the world

have failed to achieve multiculturalism. According to Nye (2007: 118), there is no such thing as the "'failure of multiculturalism' but rather is a failure to develop the context of multiculturalism effectively". Therefore, in this thesis, I do not regard multiculturalism as a static concept but as a complex and dynamic strategy for coping with diversity, adapted to the different contexts in which it is used. Multiculturalism goes beyond a simple theory or a doctrine and appears as "a perspective on human life" (Parekh, 2002: 336). The controversy regarding the pertinence of multiculturalism is difficult to comprehend if we take the unavoidability of diversity as a fact. According to Papastergiadis (2000: 94), "difference is no longer to be seen as something that is 'out there' or 'back then', because it is already part of the 'here and now'". In other words, multiculturalism is not merely an ideal but a factual requirement for a peaceful society. Gabb (2006: 358) considers that "a multicultural modus vivendi is inevitable if the world is to progress in achieving the social harmony we so fervently desire".

Bringing the discussion back to migrant students, several parallels can be drawn between multiculturalism and higher education institutions. A significant increase in the numbers of students who go abroad has been registered since the '70s (Méango, 2014), therefore universities cannot continue to ignore the resulting cultural diversification of their campuses. Moreover, they should take cultural diversity as a fact, especially considering that international education lies at the formation of university itself. According to Lee and Rice (2007: 383), "cross-border education has existed since the earliest formations of higher education, beginning with the University of Paris opening its doors to scholars outside France to train its students in the 13th century". Nowadays, the internationalised university has ethnic and cultural diversity embedded in its student body, which does not reflect solely the global flows of migrant students but also the increased domestic multiculturalism (Caruana, 2014) and '*intra*national diversity' (Dunne, 2013). As much as I see multiculturalism as a requirement for a peaceful society, I also see it as a *sine qua non* condition for an internationalised and successful university. Certainly, "globalisation cannot be completely avoided", and history demonstrated that "when universities shut themselves off from economic and societal trends they become moribund and irrelevant" (Altbach, 2004: 6). Nevertheless, as I stated above, migrant students are often approached through a problem-centred perspective, indicating that numerous universities are failing to promote multiculturalism at an institutional level. In some universities, migrant student are even "differentiated as 'special needs' or 'non-traditional' students, with an assumed range of difficulties to be addressed" (Hughes & Bruce, 2013: 107). In order to surpass such restrictive perspectives, I advocate that the "blame-the-student theory" (Biggs & Tang, 2007: 17) needs to be abandoned and replaced by a more inclusive way to approach migrant students. In recent literature, it is possible to find examples of how to conceptualise diversity in higher education

without holding migrant students accountable for all their problems. For instance, both Montgomery (2010) and Ploner (2015) seek to comprehend the experience of overseas students in the UK and manage to offer a diverse picture of students' lives without reducing their problems to mere technicalities to be handled at the institutional level. For instance, Montgomery and McDowell (2009: 461) consider that a migrant student is often viewed, based on anecdotal perceptions, as someone "who requires support and is deficient in study skills, language, and background knowledge".

Even though many researchers have been improving their conceptual constructs of migrant students, I argue that most research is still captive within "a problem framework that presents them as having a set of identifiable and correctable problems rather than focusing on any inadequacies within the host community" (Lee & Rice, 2007: 388). Such perspectives can be regarded as assimilationist, since they presume migrant students are the ones who need to adapt, while the host university can simply remain unchanged. In other words, the logic of the 'melting pot', detected back in the 1930' (Bisin & Verdier, 2000), seems to be alive and well even in contemporary universities. In order to leave behind such assimilationist stances, universities should start regarding diversity as an empirical condition (Higbee, Lundell, & Duranczyk, 2003) and not as something exotic (Hermans, 2005). One fundamental condition for switching from an assimilationist stance to a multicultural position implies to stop "treating difference as a deficit" (Asmar, 2005: 291), but as an extra educational resource (Dunne, 2013). Asmar (2005) also warns that diversification of student demographics poses new and complex challenges to teaching and learning practices. According to Gabb (2006: 358), "there is without doubt much anecdotal evidence of the stress experienced in the multicultural classroom environment by both staff and students alike".

Yet, if universities actively seek to implement multiculturalism on their campuses, I argue that the positive effects of cultural diversity can overshadow the challenges faced by teachers, students and non-academic staff. According to Shaw (2009), student diversity has been empirically associated with academic benefits for all students, since "international and multicultural student campuses represent ideal social forums for promoting cultural understanding; fostering tolerance of diversity; discovering alternative ways of thinking; and developing inter-cultural skills" (Volet & Ang, 2012: 22). However, multiculturalism does not occur spontaneously (Papastergiadis, 2000), and "the opportunities offered by a diverse educational context are not self-evident and self-fulfilling" (Otten, 2003: 13).

As shown above, not only higher education institutions but also researchers should change the way in which they conceptualise migrant students if they are to surpass assimilationist

approaches. According to Lee and Rice (2007: 404), "previous research has documented the tremendous difficulties that international students encounter but frequently fails to critically examine the underlying reasons as to why international students struggle in their host environment". Whereas a significant amount of research has been analysing migrant students' difficulties and struggles, in this thesis I propose a rather positive approach to students' migratory experiences. Without denying the harshness implied by the abandonment of one's home and the challenges that arise from living and studying in a foreign country, I will seek to approach the experience of migrant students holistically (both in academic contexts, and in their daily life), giving special attention to their learning experiences. For this reason, in the following section, I discuss the meanings that the concept of learning assumes in the context of migration.

## 4. Migrant students and multicultural learning

With the aim to surpass the widespread negativist views over the experience of migrant students, in this section I will not focus solely on their problems and struggles. Instead, I will switch the focus towards the positive aspects of students' experiences and towards the numerous potentialities for learning offered by an international sojourn. By approaching migrant students' experiences in this alternative way, I intend to contribute to the knowledge production in the field of migration and education, a field that has been ignoring the educational outcomes of students' experiences. According to Monkman (1999: 367), "migration is a life-altering experience in the lives of many adults and children in the world today, yet most educational studies do not acknowledge its impact beyond recognising changing demographics and narrowly-focused educational needs related to language and job skills". Unfortunately, the state of research, described by Monkman almost 20 years ago, does not seem to have changed significantly over the years. More recently, King and Raghuram (2013) observed that student migration continues to be a rather neglected field in migration studies.

In order to avoid an excessive focus on the difficulties that students face, I intent to relate their migratory experiences with the learning processes they are engaged in. I start with the broad argument that learning through experience can be regarded as an intrinsic feature of human life. According to Field (2000: 45), "we learn as we breathe, all the time, without giving it any thought". Even though learning is ubiquitous (Webb, 2015), the international sojourn seems to have a direct impact on students' learning outcomes (Commander, Zhao, Gallagher, & You, 2016), and the positive consequences of living abroad are broadly recognised in the research literature. According to Morgan (2010), travelling has an implicit educative benefit, since during an experience abroad "a great amount of learning takes place out of necessity" (Erichsen, 2011:

129). Similarly, Hayes (2007) considers that migrants have an opportunity to explore personal and social issues that would not have been as easily available in their places of origin. According to Chao, Kung and Yao (2015: 81), "exposure to unfamiliar cultures might sensitize individuals from their own cultural assumptions that have gone unnoticed and expose them to alternative ways of thinking and acting".

Indeed, many scholars attach very positive outcomes to the international sojourn, as for instance Murphy-Lejeune (2003: 101) who regards life abroad as an "extensive natural learning situation which stimulates many more aspects of learners' personalities than are usually catered for in educational institutions". In the same line of thought, Webb (2015: 63) considers that "migrants, especially cross-national migrants moving from one country to another, have to engage in learning to understand new culturally situated knowledge and practices and develop new skills to adapt to life in the new social space". Similarly, Kennedy (2010) observes that moving overseas offers opportunities that are not equally available to those who remain in their home countries. The value of a period of study in a different country is also highly regarded at the political level in places such as the EU (COM, 2009), or the US (IIE, 2007). Given that businesses are becoming increasingly global in scope, the skills that migrants acquire during their experiences abroad are also regarded as economically useful by many employers (Liu-Farrer, 2009). Engaging in an international experience is also highly valued in academia (Bauder, Hannan, & Lujan, 2016) and, according to Dunne (2013: 567), "there is an abundance of references to the potential benefits which can be fostered by interaction with cultural diversity".

Specifically regarding migrant students, the learning opportunities provided by the international experience are also regarded optimistically in the research literature. According to Osborne (2012: 1037), students "come equipped with a social identity provided by their former life, which, however, most of them have never examined or questioned before". In other words, it seems that migration enhances students' reflexivity and enables them to question taken-for-granted assumptions. The richness of the international experience resides precisely in the confrontation with 'otherness', when taken-for-granted aspects of students' selves and environments are more readily questioned (Alred et al., 2003). Other authors extend to the broader level of society their optimistic views over the effects of living and studying abroad. For instance, Hofstede (1991) considers that contact between individuals from different cultures is helpful in the process of deconstructing negative stereotypes, and Montuori and Fahim (2004) regard it as an opportunity for elevated self-understanding. Three highly positive perspectives over the learning potentialities of migration are brought by Grillo et al. (2011) who argue that migrant students should be considered a 'public good', by Sidhu (2006) who regards international education as a suitable antidote for terrorism, and by Gudykunst (quoted in Brown & Brown,

2009) who regards the international sojourn as a central element in the reduction of world conflict. Similarly, some scholars argue that cross-cultural interactions can improve international relations on a global scale (Hechanova-Alampay, Beehr, Christiansen, & Van Horn, 2002) or even "help combat the risks of isolationism, protectionism and xenophobia which arise in times of economic crisis" (COM, 2009: 2).

However, not all scholars are that optimistic and some of them question these positive perspectives over migration and its learning outcomes. Part of the research literature questions the very learning potential that other scholars attached to the international sojourn, warning that migration cannot be regarded as a panacea which could instantaneously solve all global problems. For Turner (2009), the idea according to which exchange between different students allows all to gain important life lessons needs further interrogation. In fact, exposure to cultural diversity does not automatically lead to positive learning outcomes (Otten, 2003), but "physically being abroad merely provides an opportunity" (Chang, Yuan, & Chuang, 2013: 272). According to De Vita  (2007: 75), "the ideal of transforming a culturally diverse student population into a valued resource for activating processes of international connectivity, social cohesion and intercultural learning is still very much that, an ideal".

The assumption that the mere presence of diversity within campuses provides significant learning outcomes to students has been subjected to questioning (Peacock & Harrison, 2009), and authors like Leask and Carroll (2011: 648) believe that universities have been "'wishing and hoping... and dreaming' that benefits will flow from cultural diversity on campus". A similar view is presented by Stronkhorst (2005: 282), who argues that "for more than 20 years, the benefits of international mobility for students have been taken for granted. Now, policy makers and educators have started to realize that internationalization and globalization do not magically happen by sending ever higher numbers of students abroad". Shaw (2009) also noted that research had empirically concluded that bringing together students with diverse cultural backgrounds is not enough to attain the numerous benefits frequently mentioned in the research literature. For instance, the research results of Chao et al. (2015: 81) indicate that "contrary to the optimistic view presented earlier, individuals who are exposed to more than one cultural meaning system do not necessarily acquire diverse perspectives and become more receptive to foreign ideas".

Most of the scholars who contest the learning outcomes of the international experience tend to do so by underlining the widely acknowledged lack of contact between local and migrant students. For instance, Matthews and Sidhu (2005) identify marks of separation and disconnection between the two groups and, in several empirical studies, multicultural contact

on most campuses proved to be rather a desire than a reality. According to Otten (2003), migrant students do not tend to involve themselves in friendships with local students or live in 'international reservations'. Ward (2001: n/p) considers that the presence of migrant students, "even in large numbers, is insufficient in itself to promote intercultural interactions, to develop intercultural friendships and to result in international understanding". Indeed, the paucity of contact between students from different cultural backgrounds is widely documented (Kimmel & Volet, 2012).

Similar to the researchers who present an exaggerated optimistic perspective on the experience of migrant students, the researchers who contest the benefits of the international sojourn tend to fall into the opposite extreme. When students' experiences are marked by monocultural contact, most researchers consider the lack of multicultural contact as a synonym for a negative experience as a whole, somehow unworthy of the learning outcomes generally associated with the international sojourn. Such assumptions are highly problematic for several reasons. Firstly, they assume homogeneity within the two groups and fail to consider the cultural diversity found not only inside the group of migrant students but also among local students (Asmar, 2005).

Secondly, in order to be able to discuss students' experiences and to determine if they are engaged in multicultural interactions, the concept of culture needs to be considered in its complexity. According to Dunne (2013: 567), the problem of most research done in this field is that the concept of culture is defined merely in its relationship with the nationality of students through a 'passport approach', in which only the "contact between students of different nationalities is designated as intercultural contact". Clearly, such an approach fails to consider the fact that many cultural differences do exist not just *between* but also *within* cultures (Carroll & Ryan, 2007). Asmar (2005: 292) considers that "students do not exist in a compartmentalised space, for they mix both with local students representing difference, such as those from expanding migrant communities (including overseas-born permanent residents), and with 'mainstream' students". I regard this approach with distrust since it seems to embrace essentialist perspectives, failing to consider that: "frequently, the cultural gap between a local community and its minorities is greater than that between them and its "international" learners, who often come from other Western nations or Westernised elites" (Haigh, 2009: 272).

Thirdly, by concentrating solely on the international-local dichotomy and subsequent mono/multicultural interaction, other forms of learning are overlooked. Research developed by Montgomery and McDowell (2009), and Montgomery (2010), revealed that multicultural learning occurs even when students do not mix across different national groups.

Other authors approach the interactions between local and migrant students through the 'contact hypotheses' (Allport, 1979), also known as 'intergroup contact theory' (Chang, Denson, Saenz, & Misa, 2006). Research about this theory has revealed quite pessimistic results, indicating that "rather than intercultural encounters automatically increasing intercultural competence, they can reinforce stereotypes and prejudices" (Caruana & Ploner, 2010: 11). Similarly, Chao et al. (2015: 81) consider that, regardless of their level of multicultural exposure, the individuals who hold essentialist beliefs will "turn their backs on foreign ideas and hold onto their own cultures vehemently". In this case, multicultural contact seems to have the exact reverse effects if compared to the positive outcomes mentioned above. Also fundamental in the analysis of interactions between people with different cultural backgrounds is the concept of *homophily*, "the tendency of people with similar traits (including physical, cultural, and attitudinal characteristics) to interact with one another more than with people with dissimilar traits" (Centola, Gonzalez-Avella, Eguiluz, & San Miguel, 2007: 905). This concept could explain the tendency for social segregation among groups of migrant and home students that has been reported on university campuses around the world (Caruana, 2014). The concept of *homophily* suggests that human beings present some kind of tendency to engage in monocultural interactions. Noteworthy is also the fact that essentialist thinking was considered to be a human condition (Phillips, 2010). Since people seem to favour contact with similar individuals over contact with individuals who present different traits, "homophilic behaviour represents one of the major, apparently a priori, barriers to intercultural contact" (Dunne, 2013: 569).

Even though many researchers have analysed students' experiences merely in relation to the type of interactions they engage in, it cannot be denied that the issue of mono/multicultural contact plays an important role in students' migratory experiences. Volet and Ang (2012) warn that the educational benefits provided by multicultural contact should not be underestimated, whilst Sakurai et al. (2010: 177) consider that "the paucity of contacts and personal ties between locals and international students is a non-trivial issue". At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that there is much more to students' interactions than causal variables or 'natural' tendencies. Consequently, the learning outcomes of the international experience should not be conceptualised exclusively based on the type of interactions that students engage in, but according to a complex interplay of different factors. Instead of focusing only on the level of contact established between migrant and local students, in this thesis I will analyse international students' trajectories biographically and regard learning as an holistic process (Morrice, 2014). According to Gill (2007: 179), multicultural learning is "essentially about change, moving places, encountering people, learning across cultures, and above all, about becoming more aware of the self, Other and of the interconnectedness and interdependence of all".

As shown above, the learning experiences of migrant students tend to be reduced to polarised perspectives, based on positive or negative outcomes that scholars attach to the international experience (Leask & Carroll, 2011). According to Sidhu (2006: 36), "many of the studies on the learning needs of international students share similarities in that they operate on essentialisms and binary thinking". In the same line of thought, Weller (2015) observes that simple binaries encourage reductive and inadequate ways to analyse the complex experiences of migrant students. In this thesis, I do not argue that studying abroad is a fairy-tale like experience, capable of magically enhancing students' learning, nor do I argue that all the potentialities of the international sojourn are simply erased if students do not interact cross-culturally. Even though multiculturalism can be a two-sided coin (Chao et al., 2015), research should not over focus neither, but concentrate on a median level, the level in which we can observe how students lead their complex lives and construct meaning of their international experiences. A means to achieve an appropriate analysis of migrant students' learning experiences is provided by the theory of transformative learning, discussed in the following section.

## *5. The potential for transformative learning of the international sojourn*

Previously, I argued that learning through the international sojourn has not been approached in complex ways in most research literature. In order to avoid polarised views over students' experiences, in line with Kumi–Yeboah and James (2014), I consider that a useful lens to analyse them is offered by the theory of transformative learning. By approaching the learning experience of migrant students through the assumptions that underline the theory of transformative learning, this thesis can also contribute to the knowledge production in the field of international education. According to Erichsen (2011: 110), "the majority of the literature available on international students does not address the learning process and how students change while studying abroad".

In order to understand the link between the experience of migrant students and transformative learning, I summon the concept of identity and discuss the societal changes that led to its reconfiguration. In Touraine's (1998b) view, social organisation is becoming increasingly disconnected from culture, causing a separation between the symbolic and instrumental world. Starting from this separation, he considers that human society is experiencing a moment of *de-modernisation*, in which the world is "best defined by multiple processes of change, rather than by a social order" (Touraine, 1998a: 169). Such changes are not, by any means, negligible. For instance, at an individual level, *de-modernisation* can shake individuals' mechanisms of self-identification and self-understanding. As stated by Touraine (1998a: 170), "in this world each

individual runs the risk of having his or her existence reduced to a series of events, of having to zap from one situation to another, and thus of losing the overall unity of his or her personality". Then, how can we construct and maintain a coherent identity in such an unpredictable environment?

Nevertheless, individuals' struggles to maintain their identities are not related only to the societal changes recorded by Touraine (1998b). Identity is, in itself, a contradictory concept, stuck in between differentiation and generalization, between difference and common belonging (Dubar, 2006). According to Dubar (2006), the paradox of identity lies precisely in the dualism between what is unique and what is shared with other individuals. Similarly, Boutinet (1989) considers that the capacity to recognise oneself lies in the successful junction between two antagonist feelings: the desire for difference and the desire for sameness. For this reason, identity crises seem to be a recurrent feature of human beings (Dubar, 2006), given that they are not always related to historical, social or economic contexts but can originate from individuals themselves. Giddens (1991: 32) observes that "transitions in individuals' lives have always demanded psychic reorganisation, something which was often ritualised in traditional cultures in the shape of *rites de passage*".

Specifically related to migration and the changes implied by a total immersion in a different cultural landscape, Murphy-Lejeune (2003: 106) observes that "entry into a new cultural world is comparable to a rite of passage". By admitting that identity crises are constitutive elements of human beings and not just incidental and isolated events, the ubiquity of change along the life course of all individuals needs to be acknowledged. How can humans conceive life in an unceasing chain of changes? Giddens' (1991: 35) stratification model offers an answer for this question by assuming that being human implies to "know, virtually all of the time, in terms of some description or another, both what one is doing and why one is doing it". But, if change is ubiquitous, how can one be constantly aware of what is being done? How to control a change that, at first sight, appears to be uncontrollable? In Heidegger's view, (quoted in Montuori and Fahim, 2004: 257).

> We are not Cartesian observers of the world, standing outside looking in. We are thrown into a world where much of what goes on is experienced at a prereflective level. The classic example is that one does not pause to think and observe a tool such as a hammer while one is using it. One simply uses it. It is only when the tool breaks down or when our action somehow does not achieve the desired result that we reflect on it.

In a similar perspective, Giddens (1991) defends that every human being monitors, through *reflexive awareness*, all the activities that he or she is involved in. I wonder then, in the case of a simple activity such as walking, if the movement of putting a leg in front of the other is

constantly and consciously monitored, how can we engage in other activities while walking? Giddens provides an answer to this question by introducing the idea of activities that simply 'go on' and happen at the level of a *practical consciousness*: "most forms of practical consciousness could not be 'held in mind' during the course of social activities, since their tacit or taken-for-granted qualities form the essential condition which allows actors to concentrate on tasks at hand" (Giddens, 1991: 36). Following this reasoning, the author introduces the concept of *ontological security*, sustained by routines, which is a feeling that any individual has, allowing him/her to 'go on' with daily activities and to feel protected by a "carapace or protective cocoon" (Giddens, 1991: 40). Going on with daily activities without suffering fragmentations requires the accomplishment of a certain degree of continuity. In Giddens' (1991: 40) words, "on the other side of what might appear to be quite trivial aspects of day-to-day action and discourse, chaos lurks". Hence, an individual's *protective cocoon* can break when significant change affects one's routines.

Relating these thoughts with the experience of migrant students, the research literature indicates that migration has, indeed, the ability to break well-established routines. Especially the initial phases of migration are often tough moments in which migrants can feel displaced, uprooted and forced to assist to the rupture of their daily routines (Cwerner, 2001). According to Carroll & Ryan (2007: 23), "being cut adrift from one's culture could also mean a huge sense of insecurity". Migrants' ontological security can therefore be questioned during migration, since moving to a different culture leads to the realisation that students' lifeworld is no longer in line with the external context (Erichsen, 2011). Comparable with Heidegger's example of a broken tool is the effect that a multicultural encounter can have, offering "an invaluable opportunity to discover dimensions of who we are that may otherwise go completely unacknowledged" (Montuori & Fahim, 2004: 256). The effects of migration extend also to the level of identity, considering that sojourners have the opportunity to acknowledge and revise their self-understanding (Brown & Graham, 2009). Consistently, Brown's (2009: 517) findings indicate that the international experience "offered the foundation for re-evaluation, for freedom from cultural and familial expectations and for self-discovery that routine tends to prohibit". According to Alheit and Dausien (2002: 15):

> In a certain sense, we 'move' within our biographically acquired landscape of knowledge, without consciously reflecting on every step we take, every twist in the path and every signpost along the way. In many cases, we do not turn to such elements in our biographical 'background knowledge' until we find ourselves stumbling, or at a crossroads, or we feel as if the ground is slipping away from beneath our feet.

Other similarities can be found between the concept of identity and the experience of migration. According to Giddens (1991: 54), "a person's identity is not to be found in behaviour, nor – important though this is – in the reactions of others, but in the capacity to keep a particular narrative going". As shown above, besides the identity crises that are embedded in the biographical trajectory of each individual, other identity crises can emerge precisely in situations that hamper the maintenance of the continuity of a narrative or, in other words, when routines are broken. Dubar (2006) provides several examples of such situations, as for instance a divorce, job loss or, as referred above, other changes inherent to the development of any human being. Generally, these are imminent situations, sometimes unpredictable, and beyond a person's ability to control. Migration can also constitute such a situation, imminent in the case of refugees or other types of forced migrants (Gill, Caletrío, & Mason, 2011), and not mandatorily imminent in the case of migrant students. Involving oneself in migration, either voluntarily or not, is therefore equivalent to a possible fracture of one's routines and subsequent *protective cocoon*. I argue that learning arises precisely from this process, given that migration enhances the occurrence of situations in which "individuals find that their familiar patterns of behaviour, value systems, belief, certain practices (e.g. in doing business), symbols and other artefacts no longer function" (Weber, 2003: 199). Similarly, Morrice (2014) considers that such moments create a sense of dislocation and discontinuity with migrants' past, wherefore generating opportunities for intense reflection and eventually learning. Webb's (2015) findings indicate that some migrants embraced the feelings of discomfort, since they recognised that disturbing familiar perceptions could lead to learning.

The transformative effects of migration are visible through the reconfigurations that individuals need to make in order to regain the familiarity of their previous routines, lost once they abandoned their home environment. According to Ethier and Deaux (1994: 224) "the ways in which the person had previously maintained the identity are no longer valid or useful in the new context, and the person must change the way in which he or she maintains the identity". Thus, it is not a coincidence that most studies dedicated to migrant students' experiences tend to be focused mainly on the challenges and difficulties faced by this population. Ultimately, "all individuals develop a framework of ontological security of some sort, based on routines of various forms. People handle dangers, and the fears associated with them, in terms of the emotional and behavioural 'formulae' which have come to be part of their everyday behaviour and thought" (Giddens, 1991: 44). Considering that, during migration, routines suffer great alterations, it is not surprising that students "encounter many challenges in the process of their adjustment to their host country" (Toyokawa & Toyokawa, 2002: 363). In conclusion, transitions between different cultural contexts weaken the ontological security frameworks developed by

individuals and face them with "the fundamental existential question about what constitutes the self" (Brown & Graham, 2009: 90).

Based on this complex relationship between identity, learning and migration, the relevance of the theory of transformative learning for analysing migrant students' experience becomes visible. The theory of transformative learning was raised in the context of adult education by Jack Mezirow (1981) and it has been employed by numerous scholars from different disciplines. More than three decades later, it is still considered a theory in progress (Lilley, Barker, & Harris, 2015). Even though "it is well acknowledged in the literature on the international sojourn that exposure to a new culture has transformative potential" (Brown, 2009: 504), the use of the transformative learning theory in this field is not frequent (for some exceptions refer to: Taylor, 1994; Lyon, 2001; Morrice, 2013).

According to Mezirow (1990), transformative learning occurs when there is a change in our meaning perspectives, which are frames of reference uncritically acquired in our early childhood. The unfamiliarity that migrant students encounter when they enter in contact with a different culture can force them to question such long-established frames of reference. According to Montuori and Fahim (2004: 254), migratory experiences "present opportunities for exploring values, traits, attitudes, and identity that may not have surfaced, or certainly may not have become as explicit and center stage, if the individual had stayed at home". Papastergiadis (2000) argues that the transformative effect of migrants' journeys needs to be acknowledged, and Morgan (2010) considers that engaging with unfamiliar places can cause disruptions to one's worldview and such disruptions are capable of engendering the process of transformative learning. According to Morrice (2014: 152), the process of migration is capable of disrupting "inherited frames of meaning and the accumulated biographical repertoire of knowledge and understanding; migrants are required to learn new behaviours, quite probably a new language, understand new rules and to adapt to new values and another type of social space".

Furthermore, Conklin (2004: 38) states that "we learn when shaken by new facts, beliefs, experiences and viewpoints", and Brown (2009) observes that changes are known to emerge from exposure to diversity and from being geographically and emotionally distant from the home environment. According to Waters and Brooks (2011), international education is often regarded as a life-enhancing and formative experience. Indeed, many studies have reported transformations in migrant students during their experiences abroad. In the research of Montgomery and McDowell (2009), students felt they had changed in result of their experience, and other authors found that "nearly all students described changes in themselves in positive

terms, the result of their exposure to difference brought by the multicultural setting and of the geographical and emotional distance from the home environment" (Brown & Graham, 2009: 90).

Change in our meaning perspectives is triggered by what Mezirow (1990) designates a *disorienting dilemma*, which underlines another conceptual similarity between migration and the theory of transformative learning. According to Taylor (1994: 158), "a disorienting dilemma seems similar in nature to culture shock". For Morgan (2010), culture shocks are disorienting dilemmas *par excellence,* and they can lead to perspective transformations, moments in which we become "critically aware of how and why our presuppositions have come to constrain the way we perceive, understand, and feel about our world" (Mezirow, 1990: 14). Indeed, studies from several countries report transformative learning in students engaged in international sojourns (Jones, 2013), and students themselves seem to value the potential for transformative learning offered by an experience abroad (Kelly, 2010).

Since living in a new culture offers individuals enormous opportunities for informal and incidental learning (Morrice, 2013), and cross-cultural contact is known to "result in shaken life assumptions" (Madison, 2006: 255), disorienting dilemmas are more likely to appear during the international sojourn when the experience of new cultures can shift habits of mind (Cranton & Kasl, 2012). Compared with other forms of migration, in the case of student migration, the transformative potential of the sojourn seems to be even greater, given that "by situating oneself in divergent cultural and academic settings simultaneously, great possibilities for epochal or incremental transformative learning arise" (Ritz, 2010: 159). In the same line of thought, Taylor (1994: 155) explains how migrants restructure their sense of self during the journey:

> As a sojourner travels to another culture to live for an extended period of time he or she often experiences a transformation. It occurs out of a necessity for survival, out of a need to relieve stress and anxiety often experienced as the stranger struggles to meet basic needs. This transformation requires the sojourner to look at his or her world from a different point of view – a perspective of the world that is often in conflict with personal values and beliefs.

Even though he does not specifically defend the pertinence of the transformative learning theory for analysing the experience of migrant students, Mezirow acknowledges its importance when he states that disorienting dilemmas might occur by "one's efforts to understand a different culture that challenges one's presuppositions" (Mezirow, 1990: 13). Through studying abroad, students not only learn new things but also learn in new ways (Vande Berg, 2007), and that is paramount to the emergence of transformative learning. According to Kegan (2000), transformative learning is not about the content of learning as much as it is about the forms in which we learn, about *how* we know and not solely *what* we know. The theory of transformative

learning can, therefore, constitute a useful tool for understanding the learning in which migrant students are engaged, beyond formal educational settings. In this thesis, the focus will not lie solely on the university setting but on the informal learning processes, which "are not necessarily intentional and which are a natural accompaniment to everyday life" (Alheit & Dausien, 2002: 4). This focus can also contribute to the knowledge production in the field of transformative learning which has been located mostly in formal educational settings (Taylor, 2007), whilst the learning that occurs in informal settings tends to go unnoticed, without being recorded in any way (McNair, 2009). According to Webb (2015: 66), "research is needed to understand the transformation learning of migrants, but such research should take into account the importance of non-formal and informal settings and social interactional relationships".

In spite of the opportunities for learning offered by migration, it is important to acknowledge that not all migrants may engage in transformative learning processes. The way in which students relate to their migratory experiences depends on a diverse set of personal, social and contextual factors, thus the learning outcomes of such an experience vary significantly between individuals. According to Smith and Khawaja (2011: 705), one migrant student "may appraise a life change as an opportunity whilst another may view it as a threat". Similarly, McCroskey and Richmond (1990) consider that people have different ways of dealing with an uncomfortable situation, some simply avoid it while others decide to confront it, some 'flight' and others 'fight'. Indeed, not all migrants undergo transformative learning as a direct result of their experience abroad. In Ritz's (2010: 163) research, participants experienced some level of disorienting dilemmas, "but none displayed signs of having critically assessed personal assumptions". Newman's (2012) critique on the conceptual looseness practiced by most transformative learning scholars needs to be considered since: "too often, researchers and scholars point toward changed behavior as evidence of transformation" (Cranton & Kasl, 2012: 396). Since this research seeks to understand migrant students' experiences as a whole, and not solely their transformative learning experiences, in the following section, I will discuss an analytical proposal rooted in migration studies, which I consider suitable for giving account of the complexity and diversity embedded in migrant students' trajectories.


## *6. A processual approach to the migratory experience of foreign students*

As shown in the first section of this chapter, student migration has registered a sharp increase in recent years. In relative terms, from all the distinct categories of migrants, the number of migrant students is the one that registered the most significant increase (Beine et al., 2014). Despite the growing importance of this phenomenon, student migration has been a rather

neglected topic in the field of migration studies (King & Ruiz-Gelices, 2003; King & Raghuram, 2013). Due to its relationship with the broader phenomenon of globalization (Foskett & Maringe, 2010), student migration could be mistaken for a relatively recent phenomenon, specific merely to the twenty-first and twentieth centuries. On the contrary, student migration is hardly a new phenomenon, given that "students have always travelled abroad to study, and scholars have always worked outside their home countries" (Altbach, 2004: 5). Historical evidence of migratory patterns of people looking to obtain a foreign higher education diploma can be identified back in the 12th century in France, or in the 19th century in Germany (García & Villarreal, 2014). According to Sidhu (2006: 3), "a historical analysis of the movement of scholars and students would show that cross-cultural and interregional exchanges are neither a novel nor a recent phenomenon". The longevity of this phenomenon renders even more incomprehensible its almost complete absence from the literature specialised in migration.

Why, then, most migration theorists chose to continuously ignore the long-lasting presence of migrant students in the global higher education scenario? Findlay et al. (2005: 192) noted that "researchers interested in human mobility, particularly those investigating international migration, have been slow to appreciate the importance of international student migration". Already twenty years ago, Li et al. (1996), observed that students rarely constituted the subject of migration research. Unfortunately, neither in the last decades this knowledge gap seems to have been fulfilled, given that research in this field continues rather infrequent. Beine et al. (2014) consider that student migration literature remains quite limited, and Findlay (2011: 168) observes that "students seem to be a virtually ''invisible'' migration flow". The fact that this population seems invisible in most migration research may lead to ample theoretical generalisations and mistaken comparisons between migrant students and other types of migrants. As shown in section 2 of the current chapter, besides numerous similarities, student migration is different from other forms of migration and presents particular traits that cannot be disregarded. This assertion is consistent with the view of Raghuram (2013) who defends that migrant students' analyses students should be given their own space in the panoply of migration research. Through this thesis, I seek to contribute to the knowledge production in the field of migration and to render visible a type of migrant that has been ignored for far too long. Thus, one of the aims of this research is to obtain theoretical and empirical insights that could enhance our understanding of this particular population.

However, locating students within the framework of migration is not an easy task. As I have argued in the beginning of this chapter, defining migrant students is not a simple matter, and one factor that hinders the formulation of a coherent definition of migrant students is the absence of a general feature that defines the migrant person. Since "there is no consensus on a

single definition of a 'migrant'" (Anderson & Blinder, 2011: 3), the same conceptual fluidity that characterises other types of migrants also applies to students. According to a report emitted by the Council of Europe (1997), most definitions mix together categories of migrants which present very different characteristics from one another, and Papastergiadis (2000: 51) warns that "there is a danger that the ubiquity of migration effects will render the term 'migrant' politically dangerous and conceptually useless".

Along with the difficulty to define migrant students, research in this field is forced to deal with the complexity that characterises the phenomenon of migration itself. For instance, Brettell and Hollifield (2000: 1) consider migration as an "extraordinarily complex phenomenon", whilst Collinson (2009) regards the dynamics of migration as complex and highly varied. Papastergiadis (2000) argues that there is no general theory that could explain the global flows of migration and, for Castles (2010: 1566), the reason why it is so "difficult to develop and agree on a conceptual framework for migration studies" lies in the complexity of all migration experiences. Unfortunately, social sciences have failed to adequately examine such complexity, by ignoring the multiplicity of types of movements in which people are engaged (Urry, 2007). Ciarniene and Kumpikaite (2015: 528) acknowledge the absence of a single general theory of migration and the presence of many fragmented theories, somehow unrelated to each other, which are "not able to provide theoretical background for assessing migration reasons and consequences".

In my view, the biggest flaw of most migration research resides in its excessive effort to identify the reasons that generate student migration. According to Carlson (2013: 168), "a recurring question with regard to international student mobility/migration is why students go abroad". Many scholars have been addressing student migration mainly with the intention to find an answer for this question and developed a theoretical model to do so. This model is related to the 'push and pull' factors which, supposedly, are able to explain migration, and are largely widespread in the research literature (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Li & Bray, 2007; Maringe & Carter, 2007; Doyle et al., 2010; Jon, Lee, & Byun, 2014; Ahmad & Buchanan, 2016; Ahmad, Buchanan, & Ahmad, 2016). In spite of its popularity among researchers, I argue that this 'push and pull' model promotes a reductive view of student migration.

Even though it may be adequate for addressing some aspects of the migration process, this model is incapable of grasping the complexity of migrant students' experiences. I argue that the main imperfection of the 'push and pull' model lies in its assumption that all students voluntarily engage in migration. This assumption reduces the complexity of this phenomenon to the idea of 'choice', as if migration were merely an option that all students had to make before leaving their countries. In fact, not only the 'push and pull' theory but "many theories of migration rest on

the assumption that migrants or potential migrants have a significant level of choice over their decisions to move" (Bakewell, 2010: 1690). Besides its inadequacy to explain the case of some particular types of migrant students, for instance refugee students, this model does not take into account the complexity underlying the idea of 'choice'. One might consider that all people have, at a particular moment in time, chosen to migrate. Through this perspective, even a refugee has had an option: to stay (and most probably die), or to flee (in order to save oneself). I strongly disagree with such a conceptualisation of choice, finding it too narrow and, therefore, inappropriate for describing the reality of many migrants.

In my view, the issue of choice can vary enormously from case to case, being also context-dependent. For instance, I would not address in terms of 'choice' to experience of a student whose parents vehemently insisted on the idea of foreign education, against the will of their daughter/son. As stated by King, Thomson, Fielding and Warnes (2006: 259), "migration must not be thought of as a single relocation decision by an individual at a moment in time". Another critique that I make to the 'push and pull' theory emerges from its strong relationship with the neoliberal paradigm. Indeed, this theory has been criticised for being excessively centred on "the (rational) economic decision-making of individual migrants" (Collinson, 2009: 4). In other words, such a theoretical model overlooks the influence of factors that may go far beyond students' control. According to van der Velde and van Naerssen (2011: 219), this model is anchored in "the neoclassical economic tradition based on decision making individuals that act as the ideal homo economicus". A similar critique belongs to Papastergiadis (2000: 17) who considers that: "by continuing to explain migration purely in terms of cause and consequence of other forces, the social scientists have remained dependent on an outdated mechanistic universe". Findlay (2011: 164) also highlights the weaknesses of "any research that presents the 'choice' of migrants as an ultimate explanation, without recognising the importance of the cultural, social and economic contexts within which 'decisions' are taken". The propagation of the 'push and pull' model in the research literature has been so significant that it became a predominant way of theorising migration (Raghuram, 2013). In my view, it is rather unfortunate that such a limited and reductionist approach to migration became predominant in the research literature.

In the attempt to surpass the limitations of these theoretical perspectives, some scholars have rejected the 'push and pull' model and adopted a structuralist stance to explain migration (Papastergiadis, 2000). According to this author, instead of focusing merely on the individual and singular choices of migrants, the structuralist approach situates their trajectories in the broader context of global and economic systems. Contrary to the previous model, this structuralist proposal encompasses more aspects of the migration phenomenon and appears to take into account the complexity embedded in the experience of migration. According to Findlay

(2011), the structuralist model does not consider merely students' choices but takes into account the different cultural, social or economic contexts that influence migration. Notwithstanding, Pásztor (2015) observes that current research in the field of student migration continues to ignore the importance that macro-context plays in determining who has access to an educational experience abroad and who does not. Acknowledging that student migration is not accessible to every individual, but depends on her/his background and context, the structuralist model renders the idea of individual choice insignificant in the whole process of migration. In spite of this contribution, I argue against the use of this model in the analysis of student migration, given that it perpetuates the main flaw of the 'push and pull' theory.

By concentrating merely on the reasons that led people to engage in migration, neither the first nor the second model are able to correct the "lack of attention to the process of migration itself" (Collinson, 2009: 3). Despite some improvements, the structuralist theory provides descriptions of migration that are not able to overcome cause/effect dichotomies. According to van der Velde and van Naerssen (2011), structuralist approaches to migration are embedded in assumptions formulated back in the 1880s. Given that globalisation has led to the rapid acceleration of migration rates and significant diversification of origin points (Benton-Short, Price, & Friedman, 2005), assumptions as old as one century could hardly remain pertinent for the analysis of contemporary migration. In van der Velde's and van Naerssen's (2011: 219) view, structuralist approaches to migration reduce migrants "to anonymous atomised entries, functioning in a 'force field' of, for instance, population growth, supply and demand on the labour market and regional economic disparities". Since they concentrate rather on the individual or the structural factors that influence migration, these two theoretical models resurrect the discussion involving the structure-agency binary. Bakewell (2010: 1690) considers that the emergence of a coherent theory of migration is precluded by a structure-agency impasse, given that "the extent to which agency or structure prevails remains a question of crucial importance in the analysis of migration processes".

By rejecting both the structuralist and the 'push and pull' model, I agree with Papastergiadis' (2000: 18) severe critique of social sciences, which seem to have "repeated the territorial competitiveness and binary oppositions that they were meant to critique". According to the same author, contemporary research in the field of migration lies on concepts that are rooted in these two theories, while a proposal for a new and more adequate theory of migration is still lacking. For this reason, I am defending the use of a third alternative, a model not yet fully established in migration theory.

In this thesis, I will not start, from scratch, the construction of a new model for analysing the experience of student migration, but I will adopt Carlson's (2011a, 2011b, 2013) proposal, legitimating its pertinence for analysing the complex trajectories of migrant students. At the core of his theoretical proposal lies an apparently simple change into the initial research question, which switches from: '*Why* students migrate?' to '*How* students migrate?'. According to Carlson (2013), with this shift, our attention is automatically redirected towards a processual perspective of migration. I argue that a processual approach to migration can constitute an improved version of the previous 'push and pull' and structuralist stances, capable of surpassing not only the narrowness of the idea of choice, but also the previously referred structure-agency impasse. As reported by Bakewell (2010: 1698), "while migration scholars often acknowledge the problem of finding the balance between structure and agency, far fewer offer any substantive guidance as to how to achieve this".

Acknowledging the influence that both agency and structure have in the process of migration, I argue that this processual model allows researchers to address migration as a continuum and "not as the result of a one-time choice" (Carlson, 2013: 168). Pásztor (2015) also considers that, through this processual perspective, it is possible to stand against the portrayal of migration solely in terms of individual choice. Moreover, changing the research question to '*How* students migrate?' contributes to a more complex conceptualisation of migration, helping researchers to take into account students' experiences holistically, without separating them from their wider life-courses (Findlay et al., 2012). In other words, this approach is capable of surmounting the analytical obstacle formed by the common idea of 'choice' (Carlson, 2011b), and uncover, instead, the complexities of students' trajectories, giving account of their "diversity of experiences" (King & Raghuram, 2013: 130).

Based on the necessity to conceptualise migration as a movement that unfolds not only in space but also in time (Cwerner, 2001), the analysis of the migration process needs to be grounded in the chronological aspects embedded in students' trajectories, and in the way migration is being (re)configured in time. It is crucial to address students beyond the 'student life cycle' (Ploner, 2015), acknowledging that their lives did not begin at registration and will certainly not end at their graduation. If the analysis of migration is confined only to their student status, their multiple identities (Raghuram, 2013) will be simply erased from the research process. Gargano (2009: 340) believes that "understanding the role of multiple identities and their influence on how students experience their world is essential for breaking the silence in the literature". In fact, these individuals are not only students, they are individuals who bear particular stories and different life-courses, they are "tourists, settlers, migrants, and it may even be argued transnational wannabes" (Baas, 2012: 18). Similarly, Peng (2016) considers that taking into

account students' multifaceted identities is a condition for reaching a better understanding of student migration.

Moreover, the analysis of students' experiences cannot be focused solely on those identity traits which are related to their migratory status. According to Cwerner (2001: 18), migrants "are also ordinary people whose experience in many respects does not differ from that of 'native' residents". Therefore, the processual approach that I defend in this thesis regards migrant students not only as migrants, nor only as students, but as unique individuals whose 'explosive subjectivity' (Ferrarotti, 2003) will break "reductionist approaches that focus on limited aspects of migratory experiences, blocking understanding of the whole migratory process" (Castles, 2010: 1569).

During the development of this research, I felt that existing approaches to migration still remain "somewhat unsatisfying" (Carlson, 2013: 169), and that the stories that people tell do not always adjust the existing theoretical labels (Trahar, 2014). Starting with the contested idea of 'choice', I realised that the motivations for migration expressed by the participants of this study were not consistent with the ones generally mentioned in the research literature: quality of education (Li & Bray, 2007), geographic proximity (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002), university reputation (Azmat et al., 2013). In this process, I realised that migration motivations should be understood in the broader context of students' lives and biographies, since migration is rarely a singular process (Collins, 2008), and it cannot be explained merely through economic reasons or through a list of causative factors (King & Raghuram, 2013). By employing a processual model of analysis, student trajectories can be considered in their totality, at the intertwining of numerous and diverse factors. I also consider this approach to be better suited for analysing student migration due to its capacity to locate the actual experience of students centre-stage, rectifying the generalised knowledge gap in social science literature, which has been largely neglecting the lived experience of migration (Madison, 2006).

Another issue that restrains the understanding of the experiences of this specific type of migrants is the deficit view that many researchers hold about migrant students (previously discussed in section 3 of this chapter). Alongside with this deficit view applied to students, there is a similar deficit construction of migrants who are frequently seen "as a problem to be contained and managed, rather than an asset or resource to be developed" (Morrice, 2014: 157). I argue that, through the use of this processual model for analysing students' experiences, I will be able to surpass such deficit views and address migrant students' experiences in their complexity and diversity. Furthermore, due to the holistic perspective that this processual analysis of migration can provide on students' migratory experiences, it can also constitute a

means to avoid the dangers of ethnic reductionism (Montgomery, 2009), and methodological nationalism (Beck, 2007; Sager, 2016).

As shown above, in opposition to the 'push and pull' and structuralist models, this alternative theory for analysing migration contains many potentialities for providing a broader and more complex view of the experience of migrant students. However, it is not my intention to suggest that such an approach can constitute some kind of theoretical panacea for the field of migration. As shown above, migration is a far too complex phenomenon to be fitted in a single theoretical 'box'. Therefore, I argue that there is no theory of migration capable of living up to the complexity of the phenomenon that it seeks to describe. According to Castles (2010: 1582), "the solution does not lie in seeking to formulate a single (or general) theory of migration, which would almost inevitably degenerate into banality and abstraction".

Given the complexity that characterises migration, the most adequate migration theory will allow subjects to construct meaning from their lived experience of migration, enhancing subjectivity throughout the research process, rather than treating it as a bias. The fact that student migration is still in search of a conceptual and methodological 'home' (Kehm & Teichler, 2007) is not mandatorily detrimental for the knowledge production in this field, since researchers are not forced to comply with previous theories, if those do not seem suitable for answering their main research questions. The theoretical scarcity currently found in the field of migration studies can provide researchers the necessary freedom to develop and propose specific theoretical frameworks, more adequate for exploring their specific research questions. The "growing awareness that migration is rarely a phenomenon that can be explained by monocausal models" (Papastergiadis, 2000: 24); led me to reject those theories of migration that do not seem to resonate with the objectives of the current research and, instead, adopt Carlson's (2013) proposal for a processual analysis of migrant students' experiences.

### Concluding remarks on the theoretical framework

In this chapter, I discuss the main theoretical perspectives that guide this thesis. Foremost, I underline the need for a clear definition of the main research population, as a means to strengthen the research design and to avoid conceptual confusions. Thus, the main characteristic of the specific group of students approached in this thesis lies in their engagement in migration. In other words, the experience of mobility students (involved in exchange programmes) lies beyond the scope of this thesis. Within the group of migrant students, I distinguish between foreign and international students, seeking to understand the migratory experience of both. That is, this thesis takes into account the narratives of those students who

engaged in migration with the specific objective to enrol in a higher education degree, and also the narratives of students who migrated for a variety of reasons and have, at a later point in their migratory trajectories, enrolled in higher education.

Contrary to most of the research literature dedicated to study abroad, I conceptualise students acknowledging both their student and migrant statuses. Through this approach, I seek to understand the ways in which the experience of migrant students could be marked by the fact that, besides being students, they are also (im)migrants living in a foreign country. Moreover, I am interested in understanding their experiences in the light of this duality of being simultaneously a student and a migrant.

Drawing on the concept of multiculturalism, I discuss the ways in which universities can deal with the increased (cultural) diversity of their student bodies. The research literature reveals that increasingly diverse campuses can constitute a difficult challenge for higher education institutions. However, if managed correctly, this diversity can provide numerous beneficial and learning outcomes for the whole academic community. Furthermore, multiculturalism does not provide only an adequate theoretical tool for addressing diversity issues in university settings, but can also contribute to the understanding of migrant students' lives, for whom the experience of diversity frequently constitutes a quotidian aspect of their international sojourns.

In the research literature dedicated to the experience abroad of university students, I identify the existence of polarised perspectives: while some authors focus on the challenges and difficulties encountered by migrant students in their new academic and social environments, others appear to ascribe much importance to the beneficial outcomes of engaging in international education. In this thesis, I seek to find an equilibrium between these perspectives, acknowledging that the experience of migrant students may be marked, simultaneously, by significant struggles and also by numerous learning opportunities.

In the attempt to understand the link between migration and learning, I defend the relevance of the concept of transformative learning (Mezirow, 1990) for addressing the learning experiences of migrant students. Also, after reviewing two of the most widespread theories in migration studies, I conclude that both are structured around the idea that migration emerges as a consequence of an individual 'choice'. Due to their inability to surpass dichotomous and reductive views, I defend the relevance of a third theory, rooted in Carlson's (2013) proposal for a processual analysis of student migration.

# II. The narrative of the research – a methodological journey

Imagine a world without narrative. Going through life not telling others what happened to you or someone else, and not recounting what you read in a book or saw in a film. Not being able to hear or see dramas crafted by others. No access to conversations, printed texts, pictures, or films that are about events framed as actual or fictional. Imagine not even composing interior narrative, to and for yourself. No. Such a universe is unimaginable for it would mean a world without history, myths or drama; and lives without reminiscence, revelation, and interpretive revision. (Ochs, 1997: 185)

## *Introduction*

In this chapter, I will describe in detail the methodological proposal of this thesis. Along with the clarification of my stance as a narrative inquirer, in the following lines I will discuss the different and sometimes contrasting views existent in the research literature dedicated to qualitative and narrative methodologies. Afterwards, I will defend the usefulness and relevance of biographical approaches in the field of student migration. Based on the theoretical perspectives that marked my research trajectory, I will conceptualise narrative not only as a method but also as an indispensable tool for all human life and experience. For this reason, instead of simply writing about methodology, throughout this chapter I will make use of storytelling and share with the reader some stories of my own, about the four-year process of obtaining data, analysing them and writing this thesis.

The first section is an attempt to take the reader on a journey to the remarkable world of narrative inquiry. In this section I will also clarify the ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions that guided the research. Section 2 is dedicated to the description of the process that led to the selection of the twelve participants and, in section 3, I will share my reflections on the fieldwork experience with narrative inquiry. Finally, section 4 is dedicated to the description of the interpretive strategy used in order to make sense of the twelve migration narratives that lie at the basis of this research.

## 1. My own journey into the realm of narrative inquiry

When I started this PhD, my knowledge about narrative approaches was little to none. Back then, I had previously worked with quantitative and qualitative research techniques, namely with questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. For some reason, yet unknown to me at that time, I found my experience with semi-structured interviews rather unsatisfactory. Today, I understand that such lack of satisfaction was rooted in my ontological and epistemological assumptions which, only later, I was in fact able to articulate and consciously reflect upon. Thus, when I wrote my PhD proposal, I rejected the idea of working with semi-structured interviews again and opted, instead, for interviewing in-depth. Throughout the first year of my PhD programme, the research problem and subsequent research questions suffered several reconfigurations. Considering that "questions should shape methods and not the other way around" (Plummer, 2001: 122), when I decided that my main research question was related to the way in which students experience migration and learning in a foreign context, I also felt the need to reconfigure my methodological proposal.

Given the specificity of my main research objective, to understand the (learning) experience of foreign students in Portugal, in its complexity and diversity, I knew that I needed to adopt a qualitative approach. However, not all qualitative methods appeared appropriate and, due to my main research question, I started to cast doubt upon the very idea of empirically exploring this question through in-depth interviewing. Back then, informed by the research literature on migrant students, I was starting to understand that their (learning) experiences are rather complex, thus difficult to address empirically. In line with Plummer (2001: 7), I was starting to see "experience and life as a fluctual praxis always in flow and ever messy". At the same time, considering that "the discussion of the perceptions, experiences, and learning processes within international contexts is developing, but the process is difficult to describe, interpret, and conceptualize" (Erichsen, 2011: 111), I began to understand that evidence on students' migratory experiences could not be readily available in their minds. Therefore, rather than plainly collecting data through in-depth interviews, I felt the need to stimulate students' reflexivity and to construct meaning through our interaction. For instance, students may not be fully aware of their on-going learning processes (Mezirow, 1990), thus they would find it difficult to provide insights about a process of which they are simply unaware. My choice of method was guided precisely by the intention to give participants the opportunity to reflect upon their experiences, and reach new understandings of their migratory trajectories. I decided to choose narrative inquiry, since it allows researchers to "get at information that people do not consciously know about themselves" (Duff & Bell, 2002: 209). After deciding to switch my methodological proposal from in-depth interviewing to narrative inquiry, I started to spend most

of my time reading about narrative inquiry (Clandinin, 2007), the narrative turn (Riessman, 2001), life history (Plummer, 2001), and the biographical method (Ferrarotti, 2003). In line with He (1998: 31), I recall that time of my life as "my honeymoon period with narrative inquiry".

Even though this 'honeymoon' period eventually reached its end, my fascination for narratives lasted, and it grew even bigger when I met the twelve migrant students who participated in this study and, together, we started to construct their migration narratives. Needless to say, this fascination for narratives is rooted both in my personal motivations and beliefs, as in the research literature dedicated to narrative inquiry. According to Etherington (2006: 83):

> Our choice of methodology is based on the personal beliefs and philosophies that inform our worldview (ontology) and our ways of relating to and understanding how knowledge is created (epistemology). Our research methods, whether these involve conducting interviews, having conversations, co-creating stories or creating knowledge in other ways, link with our motivations and philosophies.

After presenting the short story of my methodological 'marriage' with narrative inquiry, in the following lines, I will discuss the way in which this 'marriage' is supported by the existent research literature focused on qualitative methods. Research *on* and *with* narrative inquiry has registered a significant growth in recent years, and scholars tend to position themselves differently towards the specificity of this methodology. According to Mishler (1999: xv), "narrative research is an umbrella term that covers a large and diverse range of approaches, the result of a rapid expansion of this area of inquiry over the past dozen years". It would be impossible to review, in this chapter, all existent perspectives on narrative inquiry and analyse the ways in which they complement/contradict each other. However, some methodological clarifications need to be made in order to avoid conceptual confusions, especially considering that "narrative inquiry can mean different things to different people" (Smith, 2007: 392).

Although "the term 'narrative inquiry' is gaining precedence in the literature" (Trahar, 2008: 260), there is hardly any consensus in regard to the specific characteristics of this form of inquiry. As observed by Spector-Mersel (2010: 205), "reading through the narrative literature, diversity appears to be the name of the game". In a way, narrative is now a trendy concept in social sciences, and "there is a tendency for researchers to claim glibly to be working with narratives or from a narrative perspective" (Smith & Sparkes, 2009: 2). Throughout the research literature, narrative has become a used and abused term, sometimes even employed by researchers whose epistemological assumptions seem to be in direct confrontation with the assumptions that underlie narrative analysis (Riessman & Quinney, 2005). This led Riessman (1997: 157) to talk about a "tyranny of the narrative", and Spector-Mersel (2010: 219) to warn about the emergence of an "all included" view of narrative inquiry which blurs its conceptual frameworks

and augments "the vagueness around the core of narrative research". This lack of consistence that characterises the research literature on narrative inquiry is not rooted solely in the existence of a significant range of different perspectives on what actually means to conduct narrative research but also in a lack of consensus in regard to the very origins of this approach. According to Riessman and Speedy (2007: 428), "narrative inquiry in the human sciences is a 20th century development; the field has "realist, "post-modern" and constructionist strands, and scholars and practitioners disagree on origins and precise definition". Attending to the limitations embedded in the research literature on narrative inquiry, instead of engaging in a potentially endless discussion about the 'essence' of this approach, in line with Etherington (2004: 71), I think it would be wiser to describe what narrative "means to *me* (at this point in time) and the assumptions upon which my ideas and practices are based".

Even though narrative inquiry is frequently presented as a new and somehow revolutionary approach, and is a "form of qualitative research that is burgeoning within the human sciences" (Smith & Sparkes, 2009: 1), when reading about the characteristics of narrative inquiry, I cannot help but wonder what is actually new about it. In fact, attending to the characteristics that Clandinin and Connelly (1990) ascribe to narrative inquiry, this approach appears to be rather similar with Ferrarotti's (1983) previous reflections on life history and the biographical method. Bolívar and Domingo (2006: n/p) also observed that both the "biographical and narrative genres have the potential to represent lived experience in social life". As I will show below, my ontological and epistemological assumptions are predominantly inspired in life history research (Araújo, 2000; Plummer, 2001), and the biographical method (Ferrarotti, 2003). Hence, for me, a narrative constitutes a means to apply the principles of the biographical method and is similar, to a certain degree, to life history. The main difference between life history and narrative lies in the temporal and thematic restraints applied by narrative. Contrary to life stories, narratives are not meant to give account of a biographical trajectory in its entirety, from a person's birth and until the present day, but it is focused on a specific theme and period of time. In this case: the migratory experiences of foreign students, from the moment in which they started to nurture of idea of migrating, until present times. The main reason for considering this thesis both as an outcome of narrative inquiry and of biographical research is linked with the influence that the analytical contributions of the literature specialised on narrative inquiry had on this thesis. As I will further clarify, the interpretive strategy that I developed and employed in this research was strongly influenced by the work of three narrative inquirers: Donald Polkinghorne (1988, 1995), Catherine Riessman (1993, 2001, 2005, 2008), and Sheila Trahar (2006, 2008, 2010, 2014). Aware that the theoretical grounds in which narrative inquiry is rooted are rather slippery, I will

further discuss the decisions that I took during the research process, and explain how the twelve narratives were constructed and interpreted.

To me, one of the most important aspects of biographic and narrative inquiry lies in its capacity to surpass the typical process of *data collection*, engaging both researchers and participants in a process of *data construction*. Instead of starting from the assumption that my research subjects hold all the answers that I need in order to achieve my research aims, I assumed that those answers may not be readily available for me to collect them, as one would collect vegetables from a garden. First of all, it is necessary to plant the seeds, constantly water the soil, and patiently wait for the vegetables' growth, before actually being able to harvest them. Narrative inquiry constitutes, therefore, a means to 'grow' meaning rather than collect it, encouraging participants to reflect upon their own experiences and enrich the meanings they attach to their biographical trajectories. Narrative inquiry also distinguishes itself from other qualitative approaches due to its tight connection with human experience. According to Connelly and Clandinin (2006: 375), "narrative inquiry, the study of experience as story, then, is first and foremost a way of thinking about experience". Another important clarification regarding narrative inquiry is related to its relationship with storytelling. As observed by Wang (2017: 7), "narrative inquiry is not simply storytelling. Instead, it is a method of inquiry that uses storytelling to uncover nuances and enrich the analyses we can perform". Indeed, storytelling is just a small part of the whole process of conducting biographic and narrative inquiry. In this thesis, I used storytelling as a technique for generating and presenting data, albeit the overall development of the research went beyond storytelling. In fact, once the stories have been told, the researcher's work is far from being completed. Much work is required until coherent narratives begin to take shape and can be further interpreted.

Considering that "narrative research is not just a specific way of carrying out research, it is also a distinct way of viewing the social world and how we experience it" (Mitchell, 2013: 70), it is mandatory to clarify the ontological assumptions that guided my research. Both in my reflection, as in my practice as researcher, I regard reality as a fluid, ever-in-construction, and socially negotiated dimension. Especially in regard to the experience of migrant students, I believe that each student's reality is different and singular, thus requiring a methodological lens capable of identifying students' subjectivities and continuously fostering them. In this sense, I subscribe to Ferrarotti's (2003: 35) view, according to which "a person is never an individual. It would be better to call him [sic] a singular universe". Consequently, the fluidity and multiplicity of those 'universes' require a focus on students' lived experiences rather than on the idea of 'facts', as traditionally explored in social science research, inspired by the theoretical contributions of Durkheim (1982). Ontologically, this thesis does not assume the existence of such 'facts', nor

seeks to *collect* them. Instead, it assumes that migrant students' experiences are being constantly configured and re-configured, which renders them immune to a process of data *collection*. According to Mitchell (2013: 71), "narrative constructs and shapes reality rather than merely reflecting or mirroring it; narrative is reality and not just a representation of it". Indeed, students' experiences and realities are not simply sitting there, somewhere, patiently waiting to be *collected*. Instead, they are being narratively *constructed* and reconfigured throughout students' lives and sinuous trajectories; therefore, researching the diversity and complexity of migrant students' experiences requires a methodological tool capable of *constructing* meaning rather than simply *collecting* it. This dichotomy between data collection/construction is also intrinsically linked with the valorisation of the research subjects. In England's (1994: 82) words, "those who are researched should be treated like people and not as mere mines of information to be exploited by the researcher as the neutral collector of "facts"". In the light of these ontological assumptions, narrative inquiry appears to constitute an adequate methodological tool for addressing the research questions that I seek to answer in this thesis. According to Bochner (2001: 153):

> It is not the "facts" themselves that one tries to redeem through narrative tellings. Rather, it is an articulation of the significance and meaning of one's experiences. It is within the frame of a story that facts gain their importance. Life stories may be based on facts, but they are not determined by them.

Rejecting the centrality of 'facts' in the experience of migrant students leads to the acknowledgement that human lives and meanings are not fixed but permanently subjected to doubt. Considering that "one of the tenets of narrative research is that it eschews certainty" (Trahar, 2008: 245), through this kind of research it is possible to embrace, rather than minimise or even straightforwardly dismiss, the complexity and uncertainty underlying human life and experience. According to England (1994: 81), "the openness and culturally constructed nature of the social world, peppered with contradictions and complexities, needs to be embraced not dismissed".

In regard to my epistemological assumptions, if experience and reality are as fluid and in constant re-configuration as I argued above, is the production of valid social science knowledge simply unachievable? Perhaps yes, but only if we are to follow the guidelines of the traditional scientific method, inspired by the principle of objectivity, perpetuated through a standard vision of what is considered to be valid and solid research. However, "science, as we all know by now, is not nearly as clean, simple, and procedural as scientists would have us believe" (Kincheloe, 2001: 680). If human existence is marked not by objective realities but is formed by an infinite ensemble of subjectivities, how to scientifically (and objectively) address the lived experiences

of our research subjects? According to Ferrarotti (2003: 56), the biographical method is "subjective, qualitative, alien to any schema of hypothesis-testing", and therefore "*d'emblée* projected beyond the epistemological framework established by the social sciences". In my view, not only the biographical method but also the lived experience of social beings breaks the epistemological borders imposed by social sciences. In this context, I regard narrative inquiry as a tool capable of providing the means for a broader understanding of human experience, especially due to its capacity to challenge "modernist, traditional perspectives on truth and reality, the nature of knowledge, ways of knowing and the essence of self" (Eaves & Walton, 2013: 68). However, perhaps due to its own self-preservation instincts:

> Sociology did not accept the challenge which came from this epistemological diversity and which tried everything to restore the biographical method in the traditional schemas. And at what a price! Through a double epistemological and methodological circuit we have been forced to use biographical method while totally canceling out its heuristic specificity. (Ferrarotti, 2003: 56)

As I will further demonstrate, this thesis is an attempt to take the understanding of human experience beyond the epistemological boundaries that have been confining it, aiming "to produce different knowledge and to produce knowledge differently" (Lather, 2001: 200). The transcendence of the biographical method beyond the epistemological borders of social science leads also to the discussion of *truth* in narrative inquiry, and the subsequent realisation that narratives do not answer to the same validity requirements as other qualitative methods. Primarily, narrative inquiry needs to cower not from its intrinsic subjectivity, and should fearlessly dismantle the illusion of objectivity perpetuated by most social science research. In other words, "given that most social science seeks to tap the 'objective', the life history reveals, like nothing else can, the subjective realm" (Plummer, 2001: 20). Clearly, "narrative is not an objective reconstruction of life" – nor it is intended to be – "it is a rendition of how life is perceived" (Webster & Mertova, 2007: 3). Since people perceive life and give meaning to experience in different ways, the truthfulness of narratives is not to be assessed through a fact-hunt procedure, confirming if the narrated events *actually* happened. According to Amsterdam and Bruner (2000: 30), "stories derive their convincing power not from verifiability but from verisimilitude: they will be true enough if they *ring true*". Similarly, Feldman, Sköldberg, Brown, and Horner (2004: 152) argue that their "concern is not with whether the argument is right or wrong or whether the events in question actually happened but, rather, with the understandings that the storyteller is expressing through the story". Indeed, in narrative inquiry the valorisation of the subjective to the detriment of the objective softens the very idea of truth. For Plummer (2001: 20), it does not even:

matter if the account can later be shown to be false in particulars – most accounts, even so-called 'scientific' ones, are context bound and speak to certain people, times and circumstances. What matters, therefore, in life history research is the facilitation of as full a subjective view as possible, not the naive delusion that one has trapped the bedrock of truth.

In line with this epistemological position, I consider that the knowledge production on the migratory experiences of foreign students implies a complex process of meaning-making, which needs to be carefully and extensively described during all stages of research. In the particular case of narrative inquiry, "there is even more onus on the researcher to articulate transparently how they gathered and analysed the data" (Trahar, 2008: 260). For this reason, in order to aid readers in their quest, I will make several appointments on my ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions throughout the thesis, without confining these issues solely to this specific chapter. According to Plummer (2001: 208), "'research knowledge' only makes sense if we can acquire understanding about the active processes through which such knowledge becomes produced".

Through the review of the existent research literature on the experience of migrant students, described in detail in Chapter I, two main issues emerged. On the one hand, the research literature reveals a tremendous complexity of migrant students' experiences. On the other hand, most research conducted in this field seems unable to do justice to this complexity and, in spite of significant amounts of studies published in the last years, there is still a "lack of research that focuses on the experiences of students" (Trahar, 2014: 220). Considering my aim to conduct a research capable of contributing to the understanding of students' complex migratory experiences, more traditional research methods were unable to provide the necessary means to serve me well in my quest. Similarly, Webster and Mertova (2007: 4) noticed that "narrative inquiry has gained momentum in practice and research in a growing number of disciplines, partly on account of the constraints of conventional research methods and their incompatibility with the complexities of human actions". Unlike other conventional methods, narrative inquiry seems to be compatible with the study of experience, embracing rather than dismissing the complexity that underlies human action. The centrality of narratives in the study of human experience tends to be a recurrent topic in the research literature dedicated to narrative inquiry, given that "stories are the heart and mind of human experience" (Bond & Mifsud, 2006: 246). In Bruner's (2004: 692) view, "we seem to have no other way of describing "lived time" save in the form of a narrative" and, according to Phillion (2002: 20), "narrative is about understanding the complexities of experience, honouring the subtleties of experience, and understanding the dynamics between individual experience and contexts that shape experience". Narrative's

ability to take into account the complexity of human experience is therefore the main reason for which I consider it the most suitable methodological approach for this research.

## 2. Participant selection process

Before describing the way in which I selected the twelve participants of this study, it is important to clarify how that number firstly emerged. The decision to work with twelve different students is directly related to my research objective: to understand the experience of migrant students in Portugal and not only the experience of students enrolled in one particular university. Starting from the assumption that the experience of migrant students can also depend on the higher education institution in which they are enrolled, I needed to gain access to narratives belonging to students from different universities. Moreover, given the scarcity of research on migrant students in Portugal, selecting participants exclusively from one university would not have provided the necessary basis for grasping the learning experiences of migrant students in this country, since it would have limited the scope of the research to a single and regional case. Instead, I opted to conduct research in four public Portuguese universities, selected according to their total number of students, geographic position and number of foreign students enrolled. This choice was guided by the intention to understand the experiences of students enrolled in the largest universities in the country, located in different regions, and presenting diverse institutional specificities. The table below gives account of the numbers which contributed to my decision to consider these universities in the current research[4].

| University | Students | Migrant Students |
|---|---|---|
| University of Porto | 30772 | 1222 |
| University of Coimbra | 23408 | 2084 |
| University of Lisbon | 22190 | 1409 |
| New University of Lisbon (not included) | 18218 | 1174 |
| University of Minho | 18072 | 1035 |

Table 1 - Relevant numbers from the four universities considered in this research

All the data in this table refer to numbers obtained in 2013[5], the year in which made this selection of universities. In some cases, due to institutional rearrangements, the numbers are inconsistent with the present situation (for instance, the Technical Superior Institute from Lisbon became part of the University of Lisbon in 2013, leading to a significant increase in the total

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[4] For reasons of geographic diversity, the university presented in grey highlight was not considered in this research

[5] These numbers were made available by DGEEC – The Portuguese National Directorate of Statistics regarding Education and Science

number of students of this institution). With the exception of the University of Minho, the first three universities presented in this table are the biggest higher education institutions in Portugal (in terms of total number of students), and also the universities that attract more migrant students. The New University of Lisbon was not considered in this research, even though it has slightly more students than the University of Minho and also slightly more migrant students. I decided against the involvement of this university in the current research due to its geographical position. That is, instead of considering the experience of students enrolled in two universities located in the same city, Lisbon, I opted for exploring the experience of students enrolled in four different cities and regions of the country.

Cognisant of the time limitations that characterise a PhD research, I needed to make decisions not only in regard to the number of universities, but also in regard to the number of participants selected from each university. Attending to time restraints, the most pragmatic decision would have been to select only one or two students from each university and invite them to participate in this research, hence totalising four or eight migration narratives. However, rooted in my knowledge thirst and interest in understanding the phenomenon of student migration in Portugal, I opted for contacting three students from each university, reaching a total of twelve different narratives. I can see now that this was a rather unwise decision, influenced by my own inexperience with narrative inquiry. Generally, PhD scholars working with narratives limit their empirical universe to less narratives, as for instance three (Cavendish, 2011), five (Mitchell, 2013), seven (Fonseca, 2005), or eventually eight narratives (Mukthyala, 2013). Twelve narratives can be indeed quite overwhelming for a PhD project, especially due to the extensive amounts of data produced. As the reader will be able to notice throughout the thesis, there were many strings attached to this decision, and I definitely paid the price of my 'empirical expansionism'. Even though the twelve cases allowed me to achieve a broader understanding of migrant students' experiences in Portugal, I experienced many struggles in dealing with the significant amount of data generated by the twelve narratives.

At the same time, I came to understand that omniscient research is utopian, since there is no methodological approach capable of providing a complete understanding of a particular phenomenon, and the need to select participants is a living example of the limitations intrinsic to any scientific endeavour. Regardless of the field of study, the existent empirical universe cannot be explored in its entirety without selecting, choosing or sampling. As observed by Suzuki, Ahluwalia, Arora, and Mattis (2007: 299), "the researcher selects certain elements for observations and disregards others". According to Mays and Pope (1995: 109), "all research is selective – there is no way that the researcher can in any sense capture the literal truth of events". In this sense, it becomes clear that any research needs to select and, in such selective

processes, it will leave something aside. At the beginning of any research project, scholars leave aside questions that they will not be able to explore, leave aside theoretical perspectives that are not suitable for explaining a particular phenomenon. Once the research problem is defined, they will also leave aside those methods which do not seem appropriate for the empirical exploration of that particular subject. Similarly, in the data collection process, they will leave aside certain sources. For these reasons, I consider that the implications of the participant selection process, indispensable to any research project, need to be carefully addressed.

Moreover, I consider that descriptions of methods should be based on their specific relevance for answering a particular research question, rather than on the opposition with other methods generally regarded as inferior. In other words, "making a choice does not mean turning those who make a different choice into our enemies or rivals" (Bochner, 2001: 154). Indeed, all methods present strengths and weaknesses (Mays & Pope, 1995). Notwithstanding, in order to discuss the centrality of the participant selection process in narrative inquiry, I will draw on a comparison rooted in the everlasting debate around quantitative and qualitative research. Whilst in quantitative research data gathering descriptions are generally accompanied by a full description of the sampling process, in qualitative research it frequently constitutes an underdeveloped topic. Since qualitative research does not seek to generalise findings, many researchers may imply that the peculiarities of the sampling process are dispensable details. For instance, Koerber and McMichael (2008: 455) noted that "researchers limit their discussion of systematic sampling to quantitative studies and then state or imply that qualitative sampling is by nature unsystematic". Even if the concept of sample is methodologically incongruous with qualitative inquiry, the participant selection process should not be simply ignored or poorly clarified. As shown above, the decisions taken during the development of a research imply an inherent exclusion of certain topics, perspectives, voices and methods. Certainly, the impact of such decisions in the final outcomes of the research is significant and needs to be acknowledged. According to Suzuki et al. (2007: 296), "in the case of qualitative research, the sources from which we draw and the tools that we employ in data collection determine the data that we produce, the meanings that we craft from those data, and the knowledge claims that we make". For these reasons, in the following paragraphs I will seek to clarify the way in which I selected the twelve migrant students who voluntarily, good-heartedly and enthusiastically, accepted to share their migration stories with me.

As shown in the following table, the participant selection process was informed by a purposeful sampling technique (Patton, 2002; Braun & Clarke, 2013), based on the principle of maximum variation (Patton, 2002; Koerber & McMichael, 2008; Moore-Cox, 2013). In order to illuminate several different facets of migrant students' experiences in Portugal, this selection was guided

by the assumption that students present a significant range of different characteristics that distinguish them and shape the way in which they experience life in a foreign country.

| Student | Nationality | Geographic and ethnic diversity | Linguistic heritage (expected) | University | Faculty | Study cycle | Time in Portugal | Gender |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Aiko | Japan | Asia | Non-native Portuguese | Minho | Letters | Bachelor's | ≈ 3 years | Female |
| Alfonso | Spain | Europe | Non-native Portuguese | Porto | Sports | Master's | ≈ 2 years | Male |
| Amivi | East Timor | Asia | Native-Portuguese | Minho | Law | Bachelor's | > 10 years | Female |
| Brenda | US | North America | Non-native Portuguese | Porto | Letters | Master's | ≈ 2 years | Female |
| Chang | China | Asia | Non-native Portuguese | Coimbra | Economy | Master's | ≈ 2 years | Male |
| Corina | Moldavia | Europe | Non-native Portuguese | Lisbon | Education | Master's | > 10 years | Female |
| Jaidev | India | Asia | Non-native Portuguese | Porto | Fine arts | Ph.D. | ≈ 1 year | Male |
| Laina | Laos | Asia | Non-native Portuguese | Minho | Sociology | Ph.D. | ≈ 3 years | Female (transgender) |
| Naim | Turkey | Europe/Asia | Non-native Portuguese | Lisbon | Social Sciences | Master's | ≈ 3 years | Male |
| Rita | São Tomé and Princípe | Africa | Native-Portuguese | Coimbra | Dental Medicine | Bachelor's | ≈ 4 years | Female |
| Tânia | Angola | Africa | Native-Portuguese | Lisbon | Social Sciences | Master's | > 10 years | Female |
| Valéria | Brazil | South America | Native-Portuguese | Coimbra | Education | Ph.D. | ≈ 2 years | Female |

*Table 2 - The participant set and the diversity resulting from the use of the maximum variation technique*

According to Moore-Cox (2013: 95), the purposive sampling technique "is implemented when researchers want to understand how a phenomenon is seen and understood among different people, from different backgrounds, in different settings, with different expertise, and at different times". Therefore throughout the process of selecting the participants I sought to encompass the 'considerable diversity' (Gargano, 2009) that exists among migrant students. Establishing the criteria for maximising variation is actually the "trick" of a well-conducted participant selection process, and lies in the "ability to identify the relevant variations of

participants" (Campbell, 1999: 542). After carefully analysing the specificity of the target population, the nine different criteria shown in *Table 2* were established.

Considering the diversity of nationalities of migrant students in Portugal (161 as I already mentioned in the Introduction), I decided that all twelve participants should have different nationalities, therefore, *nationality* constituted the first criterion for maximum variation. With this criterion, I sought to avoid an excessive focus on students' nationality which seems to prevail in the research literature. We often read about the experiences of students who have been grouped and addressed according to their nationality, as for instance: Chinese students (Ye, 2006); Indian students (Baas, 2012); Turkish students (Tatar, 2005). According to Trahar (2006: 202), "much of the research that *is* conducted into the experiences of students and staff in international higher education communities leans towards a comparison of one cultural group with another". Bilecen (2009: 10) also noticed that "the student mobility literature is overshadowed by country comparisons and statistics analyses and the national and international level trends". Indeed, an extreme focus on students' nationalities perpetuates the existence of "methodological nationalism" (Beck, 2007; Sager, 2016), and "oversimplifies the experiences of educational sojourners" (Gargano, 2009: 340). Assuming that nationality is not the most salient aspect of students' identities (Gargano, 2009), and that other aspects could have an equal or even superior influence over their migratory experience, I avoided focusing solely on a particular national group. In this way, I was able to reach students who are frequently obscured and silenced in the research literature, being regarded as 'non-mainstream' or 'non-traditional' (Ploner, 2015).

Nevertheless, in spite of having different nationalities, students could come from the same region, such as Europe, so *geographic diversity* constituted the second criterion in order to maximise diversity. Taking into account the possibility of being subjected to discrimination or racism during their sojourn, and considering that the human body ca also provide a forum for social exclusion (Magalhães & Stoer, 2005), participants were diversified at the level of their *ethnic visibility*, a factor known to influence migrant students' experiences (Tan & Liu, 2014), and the third criterion for maximum variation. Given the colonialist background of Portugal and the importance that language assumes in the adaptation process of migrant students (Yang et al., 2006; Brunton & Jeffrey, 2014), this research takes into account both students from Portuguese-speaking countries and students with a different *linguistic heritage*, the fourth criterion. In addition to the fifth criterion, *university* (since four universities were included in the study), the students also come from different *faculties*, the sixth criterion, and *study cycles* (Bachelor's, Master's and PhDs), the seventh criterion. These last two criteria are based on the assumption that the way in which a host university welcomes migrant students can differ across

its different faculties and departments, and that the experience of a migrant student taking a Bachelor's degree can be different from the experience of a migrant student enrolled in a post-graduate cycle. Moreover, the eighth criterion is related to the *time of residence* in Portugal. To participate in this research, students needed to have arrived in Portugal for more than one year, since I considered that an inferior period would not allow them to acquire sufficient experience to construct a significant migration narrative. Finally, the *gender* issue, the ninth criterion, was paramount to this selection process, in order to ensure that the set of participants had a similar number of male and female students.

### 3. Challenges, surprises and wonders of working with narratives

In this section, I will give account of the difficulties experienced in identifying the twelve participants of this research and I will recount my experiences of working with them towards the construction of their migration narratives. Given that I live in the city of Porto and most of my friends and acquaintances live in the same city, when I started to look for potential research participants, I experienced many difficulties in identifying students from other cities. I remember that, at the very beginning, I contacted the Department of International Relations from the University of Coimbra, explaining what my research was about and describing the profile of the potential research participant. Not being able to disclose contact details of their students, the department suggested that I should go to a Portuguese class for foreigners, expecting to find there some migrant students willing to participate in my research. They talked in advance with the lecturer, who pleasantly allowed me to make a short incursion in one of her classes, in order to explain what my study was about and ask the potentially interested students to write down their contact details. So off I went to Coimbra, excited about the possibility of finding my first research participant. As previously agreed, I entered the classroom, gave a brief explanation of my study and distributed a form requiring students' contact details. While some of the students were filling the forms, I was chatting with the lecturer and she was explaining me that all her students were from China, where they were studying Portuguese and, through a bilateral agreement between Portugal and China, they were able to spend a few months in Portugal in order to study Portuguese *in situ*. My world fell apart. I experienced feelings of shame for taking lecturer's and students' time, and a feeling of frustration for understanding that my trip to Coimbra was going to be fruitless. Since the focus of my research is on the experience of migrant students enrolled in a full higher education degree in Portugal (Bachelor's, Master's and PhD), none of the students from that class were actually part of the phenomenon that I intended to study. Disappointed, I returned to Porto and scolded myself for not explaining well to the Department of International Relations the main characteristics of my research subjects.

In fact, during the four years of conducting this research, I came to understand that this episode was an indicator of an assumption that people often made about my research. Starting from my first year in the PhD programme, when questioned about the topic of my thesis, on the corridor or while socialising at a conference, I would briefly explain my research objective and people would excitedly say: "Oh, a research about Erasmus, so interesting!". Then, I would need to explain that no, it was not a research about Erasmus, but about students who lived in Portugal for longer periods of time, with the aim to obtain a whole university degree in this country. Frequently, people would appear surprised, and said: "I was not aware that there were so many students like that in Portugal". Such episodes were rather frequent, people would simply assume that I was studying the case of the Erasmus student and appeared surprised anytime I would argue differently.

Another episode that I remember clearly occurred during my PhD mobility, in 2016, at the University of Hull. I was chatting with a friend and she introduced me to a PhD student from the Middle East. He asked me about my research subject and, after my explanation, he exclaimed, with a very surprised and somehow condescending tone: "Who goes to Portugal to study?". I regard this episode as a very evocative example of the way in which my research subject was being perceived by others. Fortunately, after initially appearing surprised by the specificity of my research objective, many people also recognised the potential of my work for the knowledge production in the field of education and migration, precisely due to its specific focus on a population that many people and researchers seem to be quite unaware of.

These episodes are also evocative of the struggles that I experienced during the period in which I was looking for the twelve research participants. Especially after I went to Coimbra and attempted to find research participants in a classroom full of students whose experience simply lied beyond the scope of my research, I started to clearly specify that I was not interested in the experience of Erasmus or other mobility students. However, through my institutional and personal contacts, people tended to indicate me the contact details of mobility students and not migrant students. Identifying twelve suitable students who would agree to participate in this research was, therefore, a long process. For this reason, the time framework dedicated to fieldwork was of two years, having met for the first time with the first student in February of 2014, and for the last time with the twelfth student in February of 2016.

Before describing the particulars of working with the twelve students, I will make some clarifications on my research stance towards the participants and on the assumptions underlying the pragmatic aspects of working with narratives. For instance, the ontological and epistemological assumptions that guided my research advocate the centrality of the individuals

being investigated. Therefore, students constituted the primary empirical source and their views were valued and carefully considered in the data construction process and subsequent interpretation. Similarly to Asmar (2005), my student-centred approach was adopted consciously, with the intention to gain insights about migration directly from the individuals who are experiencing it.

As I argued above, through all my readings on narrative inquiry, I engaged in a theoretical 'marriage' with this methodology. However, in spite of its interesting contributions and reflections, the research literature provided no clear recipes and said very little about how to actually conduct narrative inquiry. In that sense, the beginning of the fieldwork "was a baptism in fire: just go out there, and do it" (Plummer, 2001: 118). One of my biggest concerns, before having started to work with the first student, was that I could reduce our biographical encounters to simple interviews, by asking many specific questions on account of the silence that, for some reason, I was expecting to receive from the students. Having never worked with narratives before, I was very anxious because I assumed that students would not talk "just like that" about their lives, easily sharing with me private feelings and experiences. In some way, I was actually afraid of asking questions, thinking that this may be an indicator of my failure as a narrative inquirer, of doing a simple interview rather than a biographical narrative. I commented on this fear with my supervisor and she explained that there was nothing wrong in asking for clarifications during a biographical encounter, and that asking some questions would not simply reduce that moment to a traditional interview.

During the first session with every student, I briefly explained the aims of my research and "asked a "generative" narrative question" (Riemann & Schütze, 1987: 353). The question assumed the form of a request, since I asked students to recount their lives from the moment in which they decided to nurture the idea of going abroad, but they were still living in their home country. In all cases, I was positively surprised by students' easiness to engage in storytelling, without expecting to be asked specific questions. Clearly, "people are storytellers by nature" (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998: 7), and "narratives will emerge naturally during in-depth interviews (if only researchers are prepared to hear them)" (Elliott, 2005: 29). With all the twelve students, narratives did emerge naturally and I was definitely looking forward to hearing them. Horsdal (2012: 2) notices that "there are fabulous storytellers around, as well as people who are hardly able to recount or make sense of what happened". Surprisingly, during this research, I only came across fabulous storytellers and I was positively impressed by the easiness with which they were sharing their stories with me. Since most of the biographical sessions occurred in Portuguese or English, some of the students did experience difficulties in expressing

themselves in a foreign language. Regardless, they were still able to engage in storytelling and showed much willingness to explain and describe, in detail, their migratory trajectories.

After explaining how they came to Portugal and providing some information about their experiences after arrival, most of the students would stop talking, assuming that they had recounted everything (or at least everything that they were willing to share with me). Afterwards, my questions emerged naturally, from the genuine interest in knowing more and better understanding their stories. During all biographical sessions, I sought to follow Maple's and Edwards' (2010: 34) advice, adopting "a position of respectful curiosity, prompting open sharing in such a way that you don't overstructure and guide the conversation, but instead allow participants to tell their own stories in their own unique ways". Even though I intervened here and there, I sought to make participants feel free to follow their own narrative path.

During the fieldwork, I sought to encourage participants to take the lead of their own stories, albeit our sessions were not completely unstructured. I knew that we were not sitting there just chatting, and I knew which my research objectives were. Informed by those objectives and also by the review of the research literature on the experience of migrant students, I developed a narrative sequence focused on a chronological approach to the migratory experience of students (refer to *Figure 1*, on the following page). This narrative sequence was constructed based on the assumption that "each person brings their own 'baggage', or past life experiences, to a situation" (Webster & Mertova, 2007: 28). Since I intended to understand their migratory experiences holistically, it was mandatory to know students' stories prior to their arrival in Portugal, and also to catch a glimpse of their future plans. It is important to clarify that this narrative sequence did not assume a central role in the construction of the narratives, nor it was shown to students during the different biographical sessions. At any moment, students were asked to follow it, but they were free to recount their experiences in the order that better suited them. Also, they were free to choose the topics they wanted to discuss. According to Horsdal (2012: 78), "from the beginning of the story until the end, it is completely up to the narrator to choose what to tell, in which order and how, it is completely up to the narrator to omit what she does not want to tell". Therefore, the narrative sequence presented below played solely a consultative role for me. During the sessions, I would check which aspects were being approached by the students, and which required extra clarifications and, in some cases, I asked students to develop more on particular aspects of their experiences.
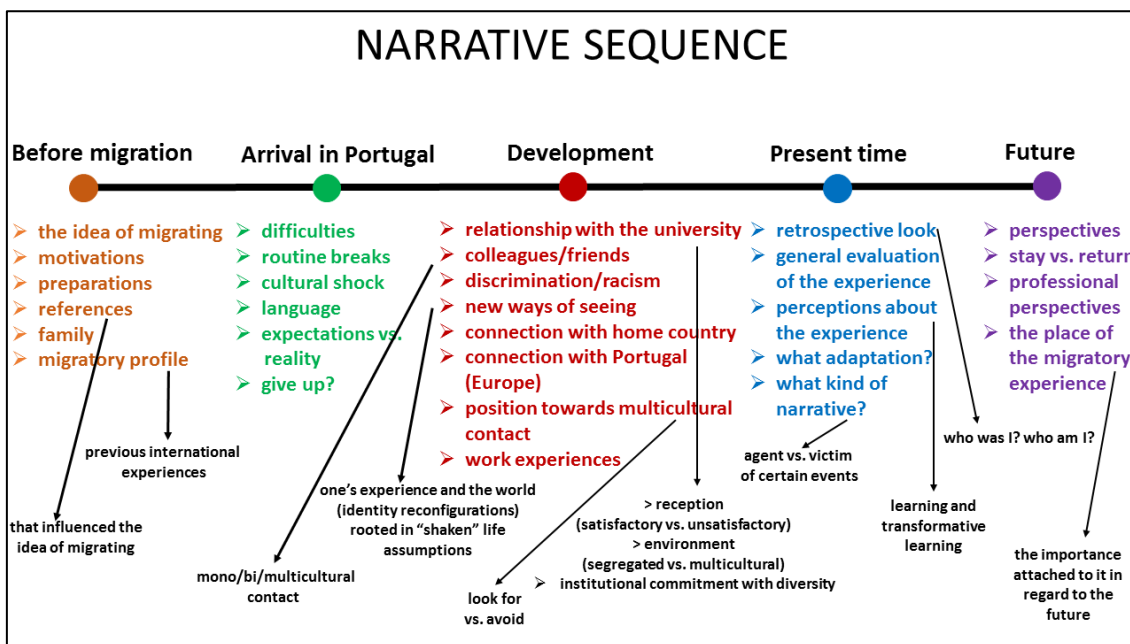
**NARRATIVE SEQUENCE**

| Before migration | Arrival in Portugal | Development | Present time | Future |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| ➤ the idea of migrating<br>➤ motivations<br>➤ preparations<br>➤ references<br>➤ family<br>➤ migratory profile | ➤ difficulties<br>➤ routine breaks<br>➤ cultural shock<br>➤ language<br>➤ expectations vs. reality<br>➤ give up? | ➤ relationship with the university<br>➤ colleagues/friends<br>➤ discrimination/racism<br>➤ new ways of seeing<br>➤ connection with home country<br>➤ connection with Portugal (Europe)<br>➤ position towards multicultural contact<br>➤ work experiences | ➤ retrospective look<br>➤ general evaluation of the experience<br>➤ perceptions about the experience<br>➤ what adaptation?<br>➤ what kind of narrative? | ➤ perspectives<br>➤ stay vs. return<br>➤ professional perspectives<br>➤ the place of the migratory experience |

previous international experiences

that influenced the idea of migrating

one's experience and the world (identity reconfigurations) rooted in "shaken" life assumptions

mono/bi/multicultural contact

> reception (satisfactory vs. unsatisfactory)
> environment (segregated vs. multicultural)
➤ institutional commitment with diversity

look for vs. avoid

agent vs. victim of certain events

who was I? who am I?

learning and transformative learning

the importance attached to it in regard to the future

*Figure 1. Five stages of migration and their underlying topics*

Students would generally approach most of the aspects related to the five migration stages I had established (Before / Arrival / Development / Present / Future), without specifically being asked to do so. Regarding some of the aspects contained in the narrative sequence, sometimes I would ask for extra clarifications. For instance, in the case of those students who come from countries in which Portuguese is an official language, not all would approach the role played by language in their migratory experiences. In that cases, I would ask them to recount some experiences related to the factor of language, in order to understand if being a native speaker of Portuguese eased their adaptation to the host country.

Besides the first biographical session, all students participated in subsequent sessions, with a minimum of two in the case of some students and a maximum of five sessions in other cases. All in all, I conducted 41 biographical encounters, with an average duration of two hours each, which resulted in 78 hours of audio recordings. As I mentioned above, the first biographical session was initiated with a request meant to generate a migration-focused narration. In some cases, during the first session, students were able to make reference to all the five migration stages mentioned above. In other cases, during the second biographical session, students would continue from the point in which the first session had ended.

Afterwards, I would transcribe the entire recordings, eliminating the repetitive parts and rearranging them chronologically, in order to facilitate the understanding of the sequence in which the events had developed. My first intention was to send students the written version of their migration stories, asking them to carefully read the text, and meet me again in order to discuss it. Taking into account that students could not have the available time to do such a

reading, I decided against the use of this strategy and opted for meeting with the students again and, instead, read to them, paragraph by paragraph, the entire text. This strategy was rooted in the assumption that "if story-givers are to make sense of and provide coherence to their lives, they must have sufficient opportunity to read, reflect upon, and find meaning in their stories" (Larson, 1997: 467). This strategy proved to be empirically productive, albeit rather time-consuming.

After reading each paragraph, I would invite students to correct it, add more information, or recount other stories they might have remembered of, as a result of listening to the content of that paragraph. Most of the times, the simple act of listening to their own words and lives, through my voice, prompted students to recount more and more experiences related to the specific topics we were discussing. In some cases, given the slowness of this process, in one session, I would be able to read and discuss with the students only a small part of the entire text. Therefore, I needed to invite them to participate in extra sessions, in which I would begin the reading from the last point discussed in the previous session. I consider that if I were to meet the students, 'collect' their story of migration and never discuss it with them, I would have put in jeopardy not only my understanding of their migration processes but the comprehensive outcomes of this entire research. With one exception, all students listened, through my voice, to their entire story and added significant information, sometimes even duplicating the size of their initial accounts.

The exception belongs to Aiko, a Japanese female student from the University of Minho. I met Aiko once, when she recounted me most of her migration story. Given that some migration stages were not approached, I invited her to do a second session, in which she recounted more about her migratory experience and answered my several requests to clarify specific aspects of her story. At the end of this session, I explained her that I would like to meet her again in order to discuss the text that would result from those two recordings. She declined that invitation, telling me that she very much enjoyed to share her story with me, albeit she did not want to discuss it further. In spite of my persuasive attempts, she maintained her position. According to Larson, "some respondents may not want to work through their personal narratives or will be happy with their original oral texts" (1997: 463). Thus, I accepted Aiko's position and constructed her narrative based solely on the two biographical sessions that she conceded me.

The decision to invite students to discuss their stories paragraph by paragraph emphasises another important aspect of narrative inquiry: its collaborative nature. According to Riessman (2001: 699), "the narrative excerpt could have been analyzed as an interactional accomplishment, that is, as a joint production of interviewer and respondent". As I argued above,

in narrative inquiry the data cannot be simply *gathered* but should be *constructed* along the dynamic established between participants and researchers. Consequently, all narratives presented in this thesis are 'interactional accomplishments', arising from several meetings with each student. For reasons of methodological consistency, I reject the term interview and use the term 'biographical encounter', or 'biographical session', in order to refer to the moments in which I met with the students and audio-recorded our discussions (for a similar approach to narrative refer to Araújo, 2004). I argue that realising several biographical encounters is mandatory for surpassing the traditional process of data *collection* and engage in a data *construction* process. By inviting students not only to recount their stories, but also to listen to their lives through my voice and reflect upon them, we engaged in a process of data co-construction. According to Webb (2006: 228), this process "stresses both the importance of the relationship and the acknowledgement of the expertise". Indeed, the relationship between researcher and subjects (Trahar, 2014) played an important role in this research. Regarding the need to acknowledge students' expertise and capacity of analysing and reflecting upon their own lives, I adopted a "researcher-as-supplicant" position believing that "the knowledge of the person being researched (at least regarding the particular questions being asked) is greater than that of the researcher" (England, 1994: 82). At the same time, during the several biographical encounters, I started to nurture intense feelings of respect and gratefulness towards the twelve students. In line with Horsdal (2012: 75), I believe that:

> "Respondents" or "informants" should not be regarded primarily as containers of information that we need in order to accomplish our research, but as human beings whose voices we are grateful to hear, and whose experiences we are grateful to share because they can expand our knowledge of the social, cultural and phenomenological world we inhabit.

These methodological choices allowed me to involve students' not only in the data construction process, but also in its subsequent interpretation, encouraging them to become researchers of their own lives. Through this methodological strategy, I sought to "rethink traditional monological practices in narrative inquiry and use dialogical processes that assist storygivers in untangling the complex meanings of their own lived experiences" (Larson, 1997: 456).

The fact that I was not merely collecting data but actually constructing it, jointly with the participants, was confirmed by almost all students who, during our biographical sessions, would often exclaim: *I never thought about this before!* Through our interaction, multiple doubts and questions emerged and students were able to think about aspects of their migration stories for the first time, ascribing new meanings to their experiences. At the end of our last biographical session, I asked students to comment on their experience of participating in this research. Some acknowledged the potential of narrative inquiry for encouraging and fostering reflection:

I never thought about these things, I never reflected on some of them by myself and, now that you are asking, I'm reflecting, I have a new found respect for myself. I think that a very good takeback from this experience is to realise that yes, I have been through a lot in my life and to respect that fact, and to put yourself into the perspective. (Jaidev)

It was a very good [experience], it was also a way to fulfil myself, remember some things and think about them differently. (Tânia)

There are a lot of things that… I kind of thought about them and I just assumed a certain thing, and haven't really thought more. But then you ask questions and I have to actually think about the things that I've assumed, and either justify them or say: "Actually maybe it's not quite like that". (Brenda)

For some students, engaging in narrative inquiry constituted also a means to find answers for questions that hovered over their lives for a long time:

Sometimes people do not think about certain things or, if they think, they don't persist [with that thought] in order to find an answer. Some questions emerge but then they remain unanswered. Meanwhile, I think that during this phase, so short, we only had few encounters, I managed to find […] answers for some questions. (Corina)

Particularly interesting is the way in which Rita metaphorically refers to the experience of participating in this research, by comparing it to the possibility of leaving her own body and starting a conversation with her own self:

Going through this experience, of doing this interview, it was funny and it ended up making me reflect a little bit: the way in which I got through certain things, the judgment I made of all these experiences that I had before, the way in which I acted and how I changed. […] It is like I had left my own body and started to talk with myself. It is like I see Rita here, in front of me, it's funny. It is something that makes me reflect upon the things that I lived and I am able to see the way in which I evolved. (Rita)

Some of the students also compared the outcomes of our biographical sessions with receiving counselling or therapy.

To listen to my thoughts in your voice is really interesting and it is also very reinforcing. The experience for me is like talking to a shrink, but for free. (Jaidev)

It was like going to the psychologist, talking about all the fragilities and all the difficulties, and the easy things also. What I accomplished, what I did not accomplish, what one wants to achieve, what one was not able to achieve, it was interesting. (Corina)

Is a little uncomfortable to talk about yourself so much but you also don't actually get the opportunity to do that so, sometimes, it is nice to just sit there and talk. I don't go to a therapist but I can kind of understand why people do, it is sort of nice to just talk about your experience and have someone else as a sounding board to say: "Oh that's interesting". (Brenda)

It seems like something that you would do at a psychologist, we go back, we go forth, then we stop at the present, is very cool. (Tânia)

Even though I am not a therapist, nor a counsellor, I find Etherington's (2004: 110) observation on this topic extremely relevant for reflecting upon my experiences of working with narrative inquiry, and upon students' perceptions over the biographical sessions in which they have participated:

I believe that although there are many similarities between my roles as therapist and researcher, there are also differences. The main difference being that as a therapist my purpose is to assist my clients re-search (into themselves and their lives) and in my role as researcher the positions are reversed – they are there to assist me in discovering something about a topic or concept that I am curious about. As a counsellor people seek *me* out: as a researcher I seek *them*.

Even though students were not there in order to be assisted in the process of re-searching their own lives, but they were assisting me in the attempt to understand their migratory experiences, throughout our biographical encounters, they did end up researching into themselves and their lives, reaching a broader understanding of their own experiences. Moreover, one of the reasons for which they shared their stories with me, with an easiness and willingness that surprised me, may be related to the fact that "the space awarded to the interviewee for the production of his or her narrative is rarely given in everyday life" (Flick, 1998: 103).

It's rare for someone to go and sit down: "Just tell me about yourself for hours". That doesn't happen very often. (Brenda)

"It's very nice, it's very relaxing in that sense, nobody wants to listen to your story, but here you are... wow! "Tell me your story, I want to put it in my research". All right! (Jaidev)

When I meet with you, there is a moment that I have specifically for reflecting, without other types of distractions. We are focused and actually reflecting. (Rita)

In spite of the positive outcomes that most students attached to their participation in this research, there were times, during the biographical encounters, in which I experienced intense restlessness, uneasiness and discomfort. I felt that I was riding an 'emotional roller coaster' (Tanner, 2009) and, quite frequently, I was thinking that I had no right to invade students' lives and require extra clarifications, especially in the case of emotionally sensitive topics. I recall that the toughest moments were the ones in which participants would burst into tears during the sessions. Such situations made me think that I had no right to be there, disturbing people's feelings and lives, that my presence was being excessively invasive. I also felt extremely uncomfortable in those moments in which students would share with me information that, in

my view, was extremely personal. For instance, some students would describe, in detail, medical conditions, interpersonal relationship problems or even intricate love affairs.

According to Plummer (2001: 224), "in practice life story research always means you are playing with another person's life: so you had better be careful. Very careful indeed". Certainly, there were numerous times in which I felt that I was playing with another person's life, and that increased my concerns towards the ethical aspects of doing research. My answer to those concerns was to reinforce the students' anonymity beyond the use of fictitious names, by omitting sensitive episodes from the final version of their narratives. I also became aware that students would not share sensitive information with me starting from the first biographical session, but only from the moment in which they started to feel that we had established a meaningful relationship. Indeed, many students referred to me as one of the friends they have in Portugal. Thus, I understood that some of their stories emerged as a consequence of our friendship and that, perhaps, some of them would even forget that our conversations were being recorded with a specific research aim. For this reason, I decided to delete, from the final text, all references to information which I considered excessively sensitive and was also, in most cases, not especially relevant for the research objectives. Even though I asked students to sign an informed consent at the beginning of our first recorded biographical session (see Appendix 1), I came to understand that "the relationship between participants and researcher is given primacy in narrative research, rather than the processes used in the research that have been agreed upon at the beginning" (Webb, 2006: 223).

Another important issue that I would like to address in this section is related to my own status within this research. Given that I am foreign student myself, and a potential participant of my own study, the peculiarity of this position has many research implications. For instance, since I have experienced migration to Portugal first hand, I could be tempted to consider that I knew everything about it, silencing or disregarding the perspectives of those students who recounted experiences that might have appeared very different from my own. A similar observation was made by Yuen (2008: 300), who also shared the same migratory status with her participants:

> Based on my personal 'border-crossing' experiences, I was also aware of the fact that those similarities I saw between my experience and the experience of the woman I interviewed could be seductive. I needed to make a reflexive effort to listen to the differences and not presume a theory of her experience or assume that her experience was the same as mine.

One of the ways in which I addressed the potential drawbacks of being a migrant student myself was to embrace a certain research humility, acknowledging that narrators know the "whole iceberg, not just the tip", thus "narrating subjects can see the gaps between the narratives produced and the lives lived. Researchers do not" (Larson, 1997: 466). Even though I had my

own set of migratory experiences, I accepted that other students' experiences could be different from mine and that students would know more about their own lives than I could ever possibly do. According to Hunter (2010: 50), "representing and interpreting another's voice is not a simple task and needs to be done with respect and humility". Besides being vigilant in regard to the tendency of hearing students' stories in the light of my own migratory experience, I sought to listen to students' accounts as if I had temporarily erased the knowledge that I had acquired from the research literature on student migration. In other words, I sought to begin "from a not-knowing, inquisitive position" (Wang, 2017: 7), so that I could embrace students' stories in their singularity. According to Bridges (2006: 98), "once we accept not knowing, really not knowing, then we can meet each other and the world with openness and innocence. Then we can create something truly fresh and valuable". Another way in which I sought to ensure that my own views and perspectives would not silence students' voices was to include in the final text of this thesis their entire migration narratives, "so that readers can, to a much greater degree, see the stories apart from their analysis" (Riessman, 2001: 701).

Nevertheless, during some of the biographical sessions, I also noted that my own migratory background helped students to connect more easily with me, influencing the way in which they decided to develop their stories. According to Etherington (2006: 84), "each story is told for a purpose and how it is told, and how it is heard, will depend on the listener as much as the narrator". Indeed, during the fieldwork experience, I often noticed that much of the storytelling depended on my own behaviour. In Valéria's words:

> You are a person who facilitates [this kind of work], because there are people who make you uncomfortable, you are not able to feel at ease with them, and you facilitated all this spontaneity. If you were somebody else, perhaps I would not have opened myself that much, I would have been more succinct. […] You have a lot of patience for hearing the person and repeat, and speak, and get back to the same point. Even for listening to others you need to be a good listener, to have patience until the person talks, sometimes even talking out of context… most of the people don't want to hear the *blah blah blah* of others, therefore, just the fact of having somebody who listens to us is interesting. (Valéria)

> If I am laughing with you it is because I like you, I feel comfortable in talking with you, it is because, in fact, I resonate with you. If not, I would not be here. (Tânia)

In other cases, the relationship with the students developed more rapidly due to the existence of a shared cultural background:

> If you were somebody else, it would have been different. Because you are Romanian and you are also an immigrant, thus these are two things that we have in common, especially the fact of being Romanian. I think that when one talks to someone and that someone understands certain things or almost everything, due to all the things that the person has been through,

one would talk more, feel more at ease. If I were talking with somebody that did not have this [migratory] experience, it would not be the same. If you were Portuguese I would not be able to talk about Portuguese people the way I did […] I don't know if I would have been able to speak so openly. (Corina)

As some students noticed, during all sessions, I sought to "go along with the narration all the way to the end without any kind of intervention or interrupting questions during its course" (Horsdal, 2012: 78). However, students would recount episodes related to particular topics and, sometimes, I would also recall and share with them a similar story of my own. Interestingly, there were times in which my story would remind them of similar experiences, encouraging them to engage in the narration of new and different episodes which, most likely, they would not have recalled by themselves. Ferrarotti (2003: 28) also noticed that "the form and the content of a biographical account change according to the interviewer". One of the students approached this topic and, through her comment, it is possible to observe how my interventions, during the biographical encounters, led students to express different ideas and reach new meanings.

> Sometimes you'll tell a related story from your life, or just [mention some] related theory about our lives in general, about people in our situation, and that will remind me of something else, so you can help provide more material than somebody who is just sitting there going: "Hmmm, hmmm"; and not actually contributing anything. When there is more give and take, then that can remind me of things and help me develop my ideas a little bit more. (Brenda)

Some readers may find the observations made in this section too personal, too emotional and somewhat unsuitable for a research report. However, in the case of narrative inquiry, I argue that such observations are not only useful but indeed necessary in order to give account of the entire research process. In this sense, I subscribe to Connolly's (2007: 246) view when she states that "we must "give permission" to researchers to confess – without fear of judgment by their peers – their own emotional reactions to the narratives that they gather, particularly when they are likely to experience role conflicts, ethical dilemmas, and their own emotional, compassionate reactions". Connolly's statement encouraged me to go beyond a simple and factual description of the biographical sessions opting, instead, for giving account of the intense emotional struggles which are intrinsic to narrative inquiry.

At the same time, in this section I sought to acknowledge the way in which my personal narrative influenced the way in which students interacted with me, recognising that "narrative inquiry is necessarily autobiographical" (Saleh, Menon, & Clandinin, 2014: 272). According to Trahar (2008: 245), "another significant difference between narrative and many other qualitative methodological approaches is the extent to which the researcher's story becomes intrinsic to the study". Indeed, during the four years in which I developed this research, and especially

during the times in which I worked directly with the twelve participants, my own migration story surfaced, and ended up being questioned and constantly re-configured. For this reason, it is important to recognise that my own story somehow became part of the final text, diluted in between the stories of the twelve participants, simultaneously influencing and being influenced by them. The openness with which I described, in this section, some of the most important methodological aspects of this research is rooted in my desire to aid readers in their understanding of the methodological journey in which I embarked in order to write this thesis. Besides sharing some of the challenges, surprises and wonders of working with narratives, I also seek to allow readers to see both my successes and failures, recognising "that there is no perfect inquiry process" (Larson, 1997: 463).

The most salient imperfection of my methodological trajectory is related to the issue of language in narrative inquiry, more specifically to the language in which the biographical sessions occurred. It is widely recognised that language assumes a crucial role not only in the experience of migrant students but in all human experience. Language is paramount to identity construction (Alred, 2003) and, according to Van Deurzen (2015: 82), "is what determines the strands with which we are attached to the world that moulds and nourishes us". Regarding the relationship between language and culture, Papastergiadis (2000: 127) observes that "cultures make sense of the world predominantly through the system of meanings that operate in language. These meanings are not fixed or singular. Meanings both shift and transform within a given language, and differ between languages. Not even a basic concept like time is identical in all languages".

Attending to this critical role assumed by language in the life of all individuals, to augment the cultural understanding between me and the twelve students and to enhance their capacity to interpret and reflect upon their own lives, all biographical sessions should have occurred in their native languages. In that case, I would have had to turn to professional interpreters, capable of translating the discussions between me and the students. Firstly, this would have been impossible in terms of financial resources, since I would have had to contact several different interpreters, in order to cover the native tongues of all participants. Secondly, having a third person present during the biographical encounters could have hindered the development of a relationship of trust between me and the students and, at the same time, could have affected students' feelings of comfort, discouraging them to openly share their personal stories with me. Thirdly, even by ensuring the presence of an interpreter during all biographical sessions, the issue of meaning-loss through translation would not have ceased to exist. According to Van Nes, Abma, Jonsson, and Deeg (2010: 313), "as translation is also an interpretive act, meaning may get lost in the translation process".

For these reasons, I regard the issue of language as an intrinsic limitation of conducting research across cultures. The strategy that I employed in order to minimise the effects of this language constraint was to provide students with the possibility of choosing the language they preferred to use during the biographical encounters. In most cases, students would be able to choose between English and Portuguese (and almost half of them were native speakers of one of these languages). Attending to my own linguistic heritage, in the case of Corina, a Moldavian student and a native speaker of Romanian, I mentioned that our biographical sessions could be conducted in Romanian. She nevertheless chose to speak Portuguese, perhaps as a strategy to reinforce her migrant identity and sense of belonging to Portugal. Only from time to time, she would make use of the Romanian language, especially when unable to find an equivalent term in Portuguese. In the case of the other students whose mother tongue was neither English, Portuguese, nor Romanian, some experienced struggles in expressing themselves, mainly when attempting to verbalise complex ideas related to identity issues or cultural aspects. Even though it would have been impossible for me to simply erase their linguistic difficulties, I always sought to assist them in their efforts by providing verbal and non-verbal signs of comprehension or requiring them to make an extra explanatory effort when I was unable to understand their ideas. The narratives of those students whose English or Portuguese skills were basic tend to be shorter and to have less reflexive depth. Also, my intervention in the final form of those narratives was more significant, since I had to rewrite (and interpret) several parts in order to make them intelligible to the reader.

Another important aspect of my methodological trajectory is related to the way in which the recorded biographical sessions were transformed into text. Regarding this issue, I subscribe to Birch's (2011: 45) perspective when she states: "narrative analysis involves immersion in the transcripts and I considered that this would be aided by undertaking the transcription myself; thus I undertook all transcription of the interviews". In the following section, I will provide extra clarifications on how narratives were constructed, based on the data recorded during the biographical encounters, and how my analytical framework was built.

## 4. Interpretive strategy

The way in which the twelve migration narratives were constructed and interpreted is intrinsically related to my feelings of gratitude towards the students. In line with Hunter (2010: 50), before I started the process of data analysis, I continued "to be grateful to my participants for entrusting me with their stories. In order to do them justice, I felt the need to find an analysis method that suited my data and that made the most of it". Indeed, most of the analytical

proposals that I was reading about in the research literature on narrative inquiry appeared incapable of doing justice to the significant diversity and complexity embedded in students' stories. For this reason, instead of adopting an already existent analytical tool, I needed to develop my own, combining several theoretical contributions from the field of narrative inquiry, until I felt satisfied with the hermeneutic and interpretive potential of my analytical framework. According to Hunter (2010: 47), "different researchers have their own style of narrative analysis". In fact, for reasons of methodological consistency, instead of discussing issues of analysis, it would be more appropriate to refer to my *interpretive* strategy. As Riessman (2010: 47) observes, "nature and the world do not tell stories, individuals do. Interpretation is inevitable because narratives are representations".

Before clarifying the way in which the narratives were constructed and interpreted, it is mandatory to make a distinction between different types of analytical approaches to narrative. Following Polkinghorne's (1995), division between *analysis of narratives* and *narrative analysis* (where, as mentioned, for reasons of methodological consistency we shall read *interpretation* every time it is written *analysis*), in this thesis I interpret the twelve narratives in three different ways, dedicating a separate chapter to each form of interpretation.

The first interpretive strategy that I employed can be found in Chapter III and it is focused on what Polkinghorne (1995) describes as *narrative analysis*. In his view, the outcome of this analysis is a story. As I mentioned above, my willingness to recognise students' capacity of interpreting their trajectories prompted me to invite them to become researchers of their own lives and authors of their stories, rather than confining them exclusively to their roles as narrators. Through this methodological strategy, during the biographical sessions, we ended up interpreting together their stories of migration, rather than solely constructing them. According to Trahar (2006: 203), "research that explores the narratives people produce will necessarily be *interpretivist* in nature, working from the premise that individuals and groups interpret the social world and their place within it. The question is less 'What Happened?' than 'What is the significance of this event?'".

As I explained in the previous section, during the first biographical encounters, I asked students to narrate their lives from the moment in which they started to nurture the idea of going abroad, thus our focus was on *what happened*. In the subsequent sessions, I read them about *what happened* and asked students to reflect on *the significance* of the events they had previously narrated. In this sense, I subscribe to Clough's (2002: 15) perspective when he states: "the separation of 'data' and 'analysis' troubles me, and it seems to me that in life-history it is almost a contradiction in terms to 'give' a life history and then analyse it when it should be seamlessly

self-analytical". Indeed, given the interpretive work that I conducted jointly with the students, the narratives presented in Chapter III are self-analytical and are also able to "stand on their own" (Clough, 2002: 15). Each story is an expression of the long interpretive work performed by his/her own narrator, by the very protagonist of the narrated life, the only person potentially capable of holistically interpreting his/her own experience. Even though I encouraged and contributed to students' interpretations, I only assumed a limited role in this process. In line with Horsdal (2012: 79), I consider that my role was "almost like of a midwife assisting in the delivery of life story".

However, after completing all the biographical sessions, my influence in the final version of students' narratives became more salient. Since I personally know all students and I am very much familiar with their stories, the texts which resulted from our several biographical sessions made sense to me, as they were. Notwithstanding, I was aware that the reader of this thesis would not be as familiarised with students' lives as I was, and could experience serious difficulties in understanding their narratives. According to Shukla, Wilson and Boddy (2014: 22), "stories are told within the context of perceived background knowledge, based on a judgement of which understandings might be shared, and what needs to be told or explained or justified". When I was reading and re-reading all the material, I came across many topics that appeared to have been developed based on the understandings that me and the students began to share, during the whole process of data construction. Thus, I intervened in the final text with the intention to clarify those aspects, and I started the process of moving "from transcript to story" (Feldman et al., 2004: 153). I removed most repetitive parts and, in order to provide a sequence to the final narrative and facilitate its comprehension, I rearranged chronologically (almost) all the topics approached by students. In this process, I noticed that not all students made sense of their lives in a chronological manner but tended to go back and forth in time as the conversation was flowing naturally. For this reason, in the process of transforming the rough transcripts into actual narratives of migration, I proceeded to chronological rearrangements only in those cases in which such rearrangements did not seem to contradict the way in which narrators gave meaning to their migratory experiences. This decision was not rooted solely in my fear of threatening the overall coherence of the narratives but also in my concerns for respecting students' knowledge and expertise of their own lives. It would have been in vain to engage students in the process of data construction and then follow a logic of absolute chronology, wiping out all the marks of the particular and individual ways in which each student structured his/her narrative.

Nevertheless, the treatment of the transcribed texts went beyond eliminating repetitions, clarifying the parts that could be less comprehensible for the readers, and seeking to follow, when possible, a chronological sequence. My most important interpretive task at that stage was to identify the main plot of students' stories and to make meaning of the most important events in their lives within that plot. As observed by Bruner (1991: 8):

> For narratives do not exist, as it were, in some real world, waiting there patiently and eternally to be veridically mirrored in a text. The act of constructing a narrative, moreover, is considerably more than "selecting" events either from real life, from memory, or from fantasy and then placing them in an appropriate order. The events themselves need to be constituted in the light of the overall narrative.

Similarly, Elliott (2005: 3) considers that "a narrative can be understood to organize a sequence of events into a whole so that the significance of each event can be understood through its relation to that whole". According to Riessman (2001: 699), even the apparently easy task of "deciding where the beginnings and endings of narratives fall is often a complex interpretive task". Indeed, I clearly remember about my struggle of reorganising the sequence of events into an intelligible whole, and I consider this as one of the most difficult interpretive challenges that I undertook during this research. One of the main difficulties was rooted in the clash between the organised way in which a narrative is presented and the fact that human experience tends to naturally flow in a rather unorganised way. In Polkinghorne's (1995: 16) view, "human experience does not match a carefully crafted, congruent story [… and] the very act of bringing these happenings into language imposes a higher level of order on them than they have in the flux of everyday experience". Creating a narrative from a transcribed text requires therefore construing "and reconstruing and reconstruing till our breath or our pen fails us" (Bruner, 1993: 38). Due to the high volume of written material, both my breath and my pen often failed me and this stage of creating an 'emplotted narrative' (Polkinghorne, 1995) proved to be a lengthy and (emotionally) demanding process. In order to get familiar with every student's story, I had to read, over and over again, all the material that resulted from the biographical sessions, until I would be capable of clearly recognising the main events of students' lives, how they emerged and how students positioned themselves towards them. Only after I would get to know their stories in detail, the plot would reveal itself to me. In line with Polkinghorne (1995: 16), at that moment I noticed that "as the plot begins to take form, the events and happenings that are crucial to the story's denouement become apparent".

Attending to the way in which they were constructed and to the methodological assumptions expressed above, I decided to include the narratives in the final text. I suppose that some readers may find rather awkward my decision to include the twelve narratives of migration in the actual

corpus of the thesis. However, it is important to note that the twelve narratives presented in Chapter III are not merely transcripts, but collaborative constructions based on a long and in-depth interpretive effort. According to Maple and Edwards (2010: 39), "unlike most quantitative and qualitative methods that clearly provide generalized steps for undertaking the analytic process, narrative inquiry looks to understand meaning within story". Since understanding and giving meaning to the transcribed texts lied at the basis of their construction, the narratives alone can be considered a form of interpretation. Contrary to some perspectives on narrative, which consider that a "personal narrative is useful only when it is subjected to some form of cultural criticism or when it is theorized, categorized, and analyzed" (Bochner, 2001: 133), in this thesis I argue that narratives can contain useful and insightful perspectives on the matter under research, regardless of the subsequent theorisations and analyses. This methodological decision of including the narratives in the actual corpus of the thesis is also consistent with my research position and with my constant effort to value the knowledge and learning potential of human experience. As Bochner (2001: 132) argues, "we shouldn't prematurely brush aside the particulars to get to the general. [...] When we stay with a story, refusing the impulse to abstract, reacting from the source of our own experience and feelings, we respect the story and the human life it represents [...]". The decision to dedicate a chapter to the twelve narratives alone, seen as a valid form of interpretation, embodies also my refusal to give in to "the impulse to abstract and explain", opting instead for "stressing the journey over the destination" (Ellis & Bochner, 2000: 744).

Even though I highly regard students' expertise of their own lives and I sought, through my methodological proceedings, to continuously value their capacity to interpret their experiences, I need to recognise the power imbalance that unavoidably marks our (research) relationship. In spite of their hard work and significant interpretive contributions, I acknowledge that, by all means, I am the one who has the upper hand, the one who ultimately shapes and re-shapes students' narratives in accordance to my own understanding of them. Certainly, the final configuration of the narrative "cannot impose just any emplotted order on the data. The final story must fit the data while at the same time bringing an order and meaningfulness that is not apparent in the data themselves" (Polkinghorne, 1995: 16). However, regardless of my efforts to invite students to become researchers of their own lives, this power imbalance comes with the territory. One way in which I could reduce it or even extinguish it were to list the twelve students as authors of this thesis, thus clearly recognising their role as researchers and acknowledging that, without their valuable contributions, this research would not have been possible in the first place. Obviously, due to formal and institutional constraints, it is not possible to submit to evaluation a PhD thesis written by thirteen different authors. In spite of lying

beyond the bounds of possibility, I decided to mention my genuine longing for being able to formally recognise the twelve students as co-authors of this work, as a means to give readers an idea of how much I value students' contributions.

Besides granting readers access to the joint interpretation resulting from my interaction with the students, I decided to engage in a second interpretive endeavour, whose results can be found in the content of Chapter IV. Like other methodological issues approached above, this interpretive proposal has its own story. Ever since I started to work with narrative inquiry, I asked myself, and have been asked in several contexts, about the way in which I would analyse/interpret my data. For approximately two years, I struggled with this question and sometimes even felt hopeless for not being able to define an appropriate interpretive framework. Still, there was one thing that I was certain about: I wanted and, to some extent needed, an interpretive strategy capable of doing justice to the richness of the twelve migration narratives and the peculiarity of the process that led to their construction. In the first years of my PhD, I was submitted to a rather dichotomous view on qualitative data analysis. I remember that, frequently, in conference or classroom contexts, when a student would present his/her research proposal, the same question would inevitably arise from the audience: *How will you analyse your data? Using content analysis or discourse analysis?* – as if these two techniques were the only known valid analytical approaches to qualitative data. For several months, I found myself trapped in this dichotomous realm, assiduously reading about content and discourse analysis. With every new reading, my conviction that none of these two forms of analysis were appropriate for my data grew even stronger. On the one hand, discourse analysis, as defined by Phillips and Hardy (2002), was not compatible with my ontological and epistemological stances, nor with my intention to understand human action and experience. On the other hand, content analysis, as understood by Weber (1990: 5), bothered me due to its main objective: to classify textual material, "reducing it to more relevant, manageable bits of data".

Given that, in the case of narratives, significant amounts of data are needed in order to understand the main plot, I was failing to see any relevance in the idea of breaking into bits the same narratives that I had previously struggled to construct as meaningful wholes. For instance, Polkinghorne (1988: 184) underlines the temporal dimension embedded in narrative and considers it "very different from the formal organisation that puts 'facts' into categories". Similarly, Riessman (1993) warns that narratives need to be preserved and not fractured during the interpretative process. Therefore, I understood that I needed an interpretive strategy capable of maintaining the internal coherence of a narrative, while respecting its temporal dimension. Instead of continuing my readings on discourse and content analysis, I started to read about research based on narrative inquiry, avid for understanding how those researchers

had actually interpreted their data. It was only then that I became aware of the existence of a third form of analysis, *narrative analysis*, and started to question the content/discourse dichotomy, finally freeing myself from the black and white methodological world I was living in.

As I explained above, narrative interpretation also lied at the basis of the actual construction of the twelve narratives. In fact, when I was constructing them, I was conducting a form of narrative analysis, without actually being aware of it. According to Gabrielson (2009: 36), "the narrative analyst is concerned with the structuring of the story and how events told by the narrator in story unfold temporally". Those were precisely my concerns when working on the transcribed texts, rearranging them in order to achieve a narrative form. However, even though the two interpretive strategies presented in Chapter III and IV rest on the same analytical assumptions, since "narrative analysis is an interpretive strategy focusing on and attending to plot" (Gabrielson, 2009: 36), the interpretive proposal that I make in Chapter IV presents some differences. Besides attending to the temporal character of narratives and to the centrality of the plot, this second interpretive strategy was developed in accordance to one of the concepts that lie at the basis of my research objectives: migration. Taking into account the specificity of the concept of migration, I sought to produce an interpretive tool consistent not only with the characteristics of narrative but also with the peculiarities of the migration process.

For instance, the fact that migration is a process that unfolds not only in space but also in time (Cwerner, 2001), reinforced Riessman's (1993) recommendation to avoid the fracturing of narratives during the interpretive process. In other words, students' backgrounds and previous migratory experiences cannot be simply detached from their biographies, nor disregarded in the interpretive process. At the same time, it is important to consider that their personal background might condition their experiences (Hazen & Alberts, 2006), and that migration is experienced in very different ways by different people. According to Scutt and Hobson (2013: 22), "allowing individual narratives space further allows us to recognise that if something is happening among a group of people, the same thing is not happening to each person". Attending to these theoretical and methodological peculiarities, in Chapter IV, I adopted a processual lens in order to look at migration (Carlson, 2013), seeking to understand how students' migration emerged and developed in time. This interpretive strategy takes into account specific key moments in students' narratives, in order to assess when particular events occurred and understand how they influenced migration. In this interpretive endeavour, migration was also approached contextually taking into consideration the specificity of each story. Since students come from twelve different countries, each national context was considered in the interpretive act, albeit without attributing it excessive importance, as that would deprive students of their

agency and give room to 'methodological nationalism' (Beck, 2007; Sager, 2016). Since the structure-agency dichotomy (Bakewell, 2010) can preclude a broader understanding of students' migrations, this interpretation was focused on students' biographies as a whole, alternating between structural and individual factors, aware that both could play significant roles in students' narratives.

More specifically, through this interpretive strategy, I looked at students' narratives individually, focusing on the whole text, rather than dividing it into themes or categories and interpreting those across narratives. Lieblich et al. (1998: 13) regard this model of interpretation as an holistic-form-based mode of analysis which "finds its clearest expression in looking at the plots". Indeed, the main characteristic of this interpretive proposal lies in its aim to find meaning within the plot of a narrative, interpreting the different events that, jointly, contribute to the development of that plot. Thus, through the interpretive strategy whose results are visible in Chapter IV, I sought to understand the migration trajectory of each student, in its subjectivity and singularity. Given that this research aims to understand the migratory experience of foreign students in Portugal, this form of interpretation allowed me to understand not only *why* students migrated but *how* the process of migration emerged and developed in time (Carlson, 2013).

Considering the significant quantity of data that resulted from the biographical sessions, interpreting each migration narrative in its singularity was a challenging undertaking. According to Webster and Mertova (2007: 114), "collection of data can easily lead to the collection of extensive amounts of data. Their transcription and subsequent analysis by current qualitative tool tend to encourage a narrowing view of the data and do not allow the story to evolve or identify those events that are critical". By rejecting other types of qualitative analytical tools and engaging in a narrative interpretation, I was able to identify the key events in students' lives and understand their relevance for the main story line. Through this holistic approach, I was also able to avoid the emergence of reductive views on students' migratory experiences, hence doing justice to the empirical richness of their narratives.

As I have already expressed above, I subscribe to Ferrarotti's (2003) view according to which human beings are defined by such a complexity that they should actually be regarded as 'singular universes'. Similar to the individuals who produce them, "life stories, like snowflakes, are never of the same design" (Borenstein, 1978: 30). These observations reinforce the relevance of an interpretation capable of valuing and understanding experience within individual narratives rather than across a multiplicity of cases. At the same time, the singularity of the twelve narratives leads to an extra epistemological challenge. If everything is singular, idiosyncratic and

specific only to that particular individual, how to produce knowledge capable of describing and understanding the migratory experiences of other (similar) individuals? Plummer (2001: 153) dismisses this challenge, considering it to be rooted in a misconception regarding the very nature of life history research:

> One of the most apparent attacks on life history research is that it fails to provide representative cases and thus hurls the reader into the eccentric world of the atypical – a story in itself, but no more. This completely misunderstand the nature of such research – where insights, understanding, appreciation, intimate familiarity are the goals and not 'facts', explanations or generalizations.

At the same time, Plummer (2001: 153) also notices that some generalisations are possible, even though they do not and should not constitute the main objective of a biographical inquiry:

> […] we can indeed use life stories and make some sense of representativeness. We might see this as a bonus. But at another extreme, *generalization really does not matter*. […] the problem of representativeness need not always be discussed in the same terms as statisticians might do. […] The question here may be quite simply put: what does the 'story' actually represent?

The 'bonus' that resulted from this second interpretive work is embedded in my proposal of twelve different migratory profiles, capable of attaining a certain level of representativeness. Based on the specificity of each narrative, I ascribed a migratory profile to each student which, in my view, is capable of reflecting his/her migratory experience. During the interpretive process, I identified, without expecting or initially intending to, a migration leitmotiv in every narrative. While I was repeatedly reading the narratives in order to understand their main story line, I noticed that students' accounts were assuming the form of "a vocabulary of motive" (Plummer, 2001: 159), and that each narrative reflected a different migration rationale. Even though the International Organisation for Migration (IOM, 2011) applies the concept of 'migration profile' to countries, I argue that 'profiles' could also be applied to individual migration accounts, with the aim to facilitate our understanding of the complex interlacement of rationales that mark student migration. Before exploring the relevance of such migratory profiles, readers need to understand in-depth the nature of my second interpretive strategy, thus more methodological and interpretive clarifications on these profiles will be provided throughout the contents of Chapter IV.

The results of the third interpretive approach that I employed in this thesis can be found in Chapter V. The epistemological assumptions underlying this interpretive proposal are fundamentally different from the previous two interpretive endeavours. Metaphorically speaking, this last interpretive chapter embodies my intention to cross the border from the realm of the individual, particular, subjective, and somehow the exotic, to the realm of the

general and collective. As readers might have noticed already, I methodologically belong to the first realm, albeit I am very much interested in visiting the neighbouring one, valuing and exploring its potential for the knowledge production, without dismissing it *a priori*. In other words, even though I highly value the contribution of singular cases and I dedicated most of the interpretive sections of this thesis to their discussion, I am aware that some topics can be discussed not only within but also across narratives. I argue that this discussion can enrich the understanding of particular aspects that assumed a central role in students' migration narratives. There are particular themes that all students approached and discussed in accordance to their own experience, and intersecting their views on those themes, looking to understand how they complement each other or even contradict each other, can provide new and different insights.

Recalling the distinction made by Polkinhorne (1995) between *narrative analysis* and *analysis of narratives*, my third interpretive strategy is focused on the latter. The main interpretive effort lies with the identification of "common themes or conceptual manifestations among the stories collected as data" (Polkinghorne, 1995: 13). Hereafter, those common themes were considered in the light of the theoretical contributions provided by the research literature. This interpretation process follows the guidelines mentioned by Riessman (2005) in her proposal for a *thematic narrative analysis*. In other words, through the narrative interpretations conducted in Chapter III and IV, I was able to present individual cases and understand their particularities (Shukla et al., 2014: 12), whilst through the thematic analysis conducted in Chapter V, I was able to draw "on individual cases primarily to represent themes across" the twelve narratives. Even though students approached a myriad of different themes with significant relevance for the understanding of their migratory experiences, due to time constraints and especially due to the page count applied to this thesis, I was forced to select only some of them, and this selection was based on the centrality that those themes assumed in students' narratives. For instance, most students' ascribed much importance to the issue of language, both in academic and wider societal contexts, to their interpersonal relationships and the social support they received as foreigners living and studying in a different country. They also reported significant difficulties in their arrival in Portugal, especially in the first few months, thus four of the themes that I selected for discussion and further interpretation were inspired by these issues. At the same time, in order to explore one of the essential concepts underlying this research, learning, and its relationship with the migration phenomenon, I decided to focus the thematic analysis on the learning outcomes of migration, and sought to understand if migration encourages the emergence of transformative learning (Mezirow, 1990). Finally, as a means to ascribe a pragmatic dimension to the knowledge produced through this research, one of the themes that I selected for discussion is related to the way in which the four universities position themselves,

according to students' perceptions, towards the increasing (ethnic and cultural) diversity of their student bodies.

Altogether, the interpretive framework of this thesis is based on three different approaches. Firstly, the process of constructing the twelve migration narratives has an implicit interpretive dimension. Secondly, I conducted an interpretation based on the singularity and peculiarity of each story, regarding migration as a continuum that unfolds throughout students' biographies. Thirdly, I engaged in a thematic interpretation with the intention to understand specific topics which seemed relevant across all narratives. I consider that this threefold interpretive strategy presents many advantages, being capable of doing justice to the complexity and diversity underlying the migratory trajectories and learning experiences of foreign students in Portugal. According to Shukla et al. (2014: 22), "the combining of thematic and narrative approaches allows us to move flexibly between the general (including the historical and societal) and the particular (including the personal and subjective)". The same authors observe that "thematic analysis is better suited than narrative analysis to providing broad overview of a dataset, while narrative approaches allow an extended focus on particularities, including particular cases" (Shukla et al., 2014: 5). Therefore, the combination of three different interpretive approaches allowed me to reach a wider view and a more in-depth understanding of migrant students' trajectories. Certainly, I do not argue that my interpretive endeavour and its subsequent results are perfect, nor the most insightful ones. Instead, in line with Feldman et al., (2004: 150), I consider that "by revealing the process of interpretation, the researcher demonstrates to the reader his or her assumptions behind the generation of theory and thus allows the reader to assess the validity of the interpretation". In the current section, I sought to ensure the 'accuracy of my intentionalities' (Silva, 2004), describing in detail my interpretive strategy, and providing readers not only the necessary knowledge to understand the following chapters, but also a means to make their own decision regarding the relevance and validity of my interpretations.

# III. Journeys of learning and migration – the twelve narratives

## *Introduction*

In this chapter, the twelve narratives of migration are presented in their entirety. For some readers, placing the actual narratives in the corpus of the thesis may seem rather unusual, since researchers generally present rough data in the appendix, and not throughout the actual thesis. However, attending to the methodological assumptions that guide this research, the twelve narratives which resulted from the different biographical sessions were not simply *collected* but were, in fact, *constructed* through my interaction with the twelve students who participated in this research. In other words, these narratives cannot be catalogued as rough data (as, for instance, an interview transcript would be) since they resulted from a joint interpretive effort which I undertook together with the narrator of each story. Therefore the twelve texts presented in this chapter constitute 'interactional acomplishments' (Riessman, 2001), and, following the guidelines of my interpretive strategy, they constitute a form of narrative interpretation (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990), and a clear reflection of students' struggles to give meaning to their own lives. In line with Plummer (2001: 153), I consider that each of the twelve narratives presented in this chapter "may explicitly be viewed as a unique and necessary story to be told: the aim is to grasp a unique experience for what it tells us about just that".

In order to aid readers in their strenuous task of diving in the twelve voluminous narratives, I decided to divide them into smaller sense units in order to facilitate the reading. Since all narratives tend to present events in a chronological sequence, most of these sense units were informed by the five different migration stages which I previously proposed (please refer to *Figure 1*, page 67). At the same time, some of the sense units correspond to the topics approached in the thematic interpretation conducted in Chapter V (for instance: language; mono/multicultural contact; learning outcomes of migration). Students' narratives are also divided in excerpts whose titles summarise, using students' own words, the main topic discussed in that particular paragraph. Similarly, the order in which the twelve narratives are presented in this chapter was not accidental. That particular sequence was established in accordance to the way in which, in my view, the twelve migration narratives complement each other. Even though they are all unique and marked by numerous idiosyncrasies, each narrative somehow ends up informing the following, creating a *grand story of migration*, and providing a more complex and broader view of the student migration phenomenon.

Another important aspect is that the twelve narratives were not constructed using the same linguistic basis. As explained in the previous chapter, I opted for giving students the possibility to choose the language in which they preferred to conduct the biographical sessions, with the intention to facilitate their narration and the subsequent reflections upon the narrated experience. For this reason, my fieldwork resulted in twelve migration narratives, nine written in Portuguese and three in English. Attending to the fact that this thesis is written in English, the first expected step would be to proceed to the translation of the narratives constructed in Portuguese. However, I decided against the idea of engaging in such a translation, for several reasons. Firstly, attending to the fact that I am not a native speaker of Portuguese, nor of English, I would need to require to a professional translator in order to aid me in the process of translating such an extensive quantity of text, implying the acquisition of a service for which I did not have the necessary resources. Secondly, even if I were able to rely on a professional translator, his/her translation would unavoidably subject students' texts to an additional interpretive process which would fall upon a text that, as previously shown, already embodies a form of interpretation *per se*. Thirdly, since meaning can get lost in the translation process (Van Nes et al., 2010), presenting the narratives in the actual language in which they were constructed is also a marker of my constant respect for students' expertise, migratory experiences, and especially for the ways in which they decided to give meaning to those experiences. For those readers who do not speak Portuguese, the three narratives in English appear in this chapter in the following positions: second, fourth and sixth.

Having provided the necessary information to guide the reading of this chapter, now "I wish to get urgently to the texts which I have written – I want them to do the talking – and to do so with a minimum of methodological apologia" (Clough, 2002: 14). Thus, for now, I will leave you in the company of:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| *Aiko,* | *Naim,* | *Corina,* |
| *Brenda,* | *Jaidev,* | *Rita,* |
| *Chang,* | *Alfonso,* | *Tânia,* |
| *Laina,* | *Amivi,* | *Valéria.* |

# IV. A processual interpretation of migration in the singularity of each narrative

## *Introduction*

In this chapter, the twelve narratives of migration are interpreted in their singularity and the interpretive strategy is based on Carlson's (2013) processual approach to migration. Rather than fragmenting the narrative into different parts and then interpreting them separately, in this chapter, I employ "the "holistic-form" model which looks at the structure/plot of the whole story" (Ahmed, 2013: 233). According to Polkinghorne (1995: 15), "the analytic task requires the researcher to develop or discover a plot that displays the linkage among the data elements as parts of an unfolding temporal development culminating in the denouement". For this reason, in the following pages, the main plot of each migration narrative is identified and interpreted within the complex biographical intertwinement of students' lives. At the same time, all migration accounts were profiled through the use of an adjective considered capable of summarising the story line of each narrative. Summarising the plots through the use of a single adjective does not mean that each migration account is restrained to that specific profile, or that the proposed migratory profiles can be entirely generalised to other migrant students. Certainly, "the objective of this approach is not to generate findings, which can be directly applied to other contexts but to obtain a detailed snapshot of the circumstances of this group of student-migrants" (Robertson & Runganaikaloo, 2014: 213). In fact, by conducting an interpretation capable of exposing the subjectivities contained in students' narratives, my aim is to challenge existing generalisations about migrant students, in line with Ploner's (2015) approach. Regarding the issue of generalisation, this research seeks to generalise towards theory and not towards populations (Bryman, 2012), since generalising towards populations would be methodologically inconsistent with the assumptions that guide narrative inquiry. As stated by Trahar (2014: 221):

> As a narrative inquirer, I am not seeking to generalise 'findings' to larger populations, nor am I always looking for themes that hold across several narratives. I am, however, interested to hear individual accounts and at the same time, am curious to detect what those individual accounts may reveal about wider social, cultural and historical narratives.

Therefore, the decision to ascribe a migratory profile to each student's account illustrates my intention to generalise towards theory and to contribute to the creation of a more appropriate analytical lens for understanding the experience of migrant students. Also, I do not suggest that such profiles can perfectly describe the migratory experience of similar students, in similar contexts. The same profile can indeed partially reflect the experience of migrant students with

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similar trajectories, but only if re-shaped in accordance with the idiosyncrasies embedded in each migration account. In this chapter, the interpretation of each narrative will be presented in a separate section, along with the profiles that I ascribe to each student. All profiles are based in the main plots of the twelve narratives, and their interpretive relevance will be presented in detail in section 13 of this chapter. The chapter ends with section 14, in which twelve fictionalised migration accounts are presented, as a means to summarise the characteristics of each migratory profile. In the attempt to ensure textual coherence, I translated the narrative excerpts presented in this chapter from Portuguese to English.

## 1. The 'fugitive' migrant

Aiko is South Korean, in her forties, she was born in Japan and never lived in South Korea. Before coming to Portugal, she used to work as a karate instructor. Currently, she is taking a Bachelor's degree in Portugal, a country whose language she claims to love. When she arrived, Aiko studied Portuguese within a language course specific for foreigners and, after one year, she decided to pursue higher education. Before that, she attended a pre-university course, during one year, within a Portuguese programme aimed at people who are older than 23, and intend to enrol in higher education for the first time.

Following the conceptual distinction between foreign and international students, Aiko suits the category of foreign students, since she did not migrate to Portugal with the intention to study. In fact, Aiko's migration to Portugal did not seem to have any defined objective:

> When I came here, I did not think about extending the period of my stay. I was a fugitive, I did not think. I was not thinking about going back to Japan, nor about continuing here, I did not even have any expectations. It was when I arrived here that I decided to continue studying Portuguese.

In this excerpt, Aiko deconstructs the reductive idea according to which migrants consciously 'choose' to leave their home countries, generally with a clear objective in mind. In Aiko's case, migration was not based on "a single relocation decision" (King et al., 2006: 259), but occurred in a context of a continued professional dissatisfaction and a sense of urgency to change her life.

> I was a karate instructor for sixteen years. […] I wanted to leave the company where I was working and quit karate but I could not leave in that moment. In 2011, I got hurt during training [… and] I realised that I didn't have passion [for it] anymore. Or maybe I had but I couldn't go on, my body and my mind would not let me. I was not able to choose that path so I chose another.

Even though the idea of leaving her country was strongly influenced by a professional dissatisfaction, the way in which Aiko chose a destination country for her migration was

determined by her first contact with the Portuguese language, which happened during a short trip to Brazil.

> I was already studying Portuguese in that moment when I decided to leave Japan. I started to study Portuguese in 2008. I went to Brazil in order to participate in a championship and I encountered there a language that I liked a lot. Then, […] since I didn't have any other [possible] exit for my life, I thought that studying language in Portugal could be an option.

Her quick sojourn in Brazil made Aiko interact with the Portuguese language and provided her a potential destination country for her precipitated migration. However, the feelings that Aiko holds towards the Portuguese language are rather peculiar:

> When you are in a romantic relationship with someone, you can't explain why [you like that person]. My relationship with the language is the same. I'm in a romantic relationship with the Portuguese language. For instance, the karate, if someone would ask me: "What is the charm, the beautiful thing of karate?". I don't know, but I liked it.

The first contact that Aiko had with the Portuguese language did not ensured, by itself, that Aiko would end up moving to Portugal. It was an online relationship that enhanced her wish to explore this country. Aiko considers that meeting a Portuguese man online and hearing European Portuguese for the first time was paramount in the process of deciding to come to Portugal. This highlights both the lack of planning and the spontaneity of her migration. At the same time, the excerpt below, emphasises the idiosyncratic fascination that Aiko holds for the Portuguese language, a fascination strong enough to shape her migratory trajectory.

> Back then, I had a Portuguese boyfriend, here in Portugal, but our relationship ended in July, before I came here, but we remained friends. We were having a long-distance relationship, I met him through the internet. If I would not found a Portuguese through the site, I would not even be here right now because I would never had heard Portuguese from Portugal. And I liked it very much, more than Brazilian Portuguese.

Regarding her life before migration, Aiko's sudden fugitive decision to move to a distant and, to some extent, unknown country, did not go unnoticed among her relatives:

> My mother asked me: "You couldn't work in Japan?". My poor mother. [In fact], I didn't have any idea about Portugal, it is not Italy, nor Spain. Even my friends do not know where Portugal is, it's normal for the Japanese, neither did I know exactly where it was. And my mother still doesn't know [exactly] where I am […].

Even though she does not have any previous international experiences, a cross-cultural aspect appears to have accompanied this student throughout her life. Aiko was born in Japan, albeit she is not legally Japanese but has a permanent visa that allows her to live in Japan. Due to this cross-cultural aspect embedded in her identity, this student considers herself to be more reflexive and vigilant regarding cultural demeanours and values, surpassing one of the obstacles

raised by one's own culture, which Hall (1959: 39) observed many decades ago: "culture hides much more than it reveals, and strangely enough, what it hides, it hides most effectively from its own participants". Not being a citizen of the country in which she spent all her life led Aiko to identify and analyse cultural aspects which, according to her, remain hidden to most Japanese people.

> I am Korean. I was born and raised in Japan. I don't know how to speak nor to write Korean. I am not able to read my own name in the passport but I have a South Korean passport. I never lived there. […] In Japan I always lived as a Korean and as a Japanese, fifty-fifty. For this reason, I have a notion, a concept of Japanese a lot stronger than the Japanese people, what means to be Japanese for instance? I know better because I had to think about that. What is Japanese? What is Korean? [… The Japanese] do not need to analyse it, is their nation. It happens a lot, the Japanese are isolated on the island, they don't need to think about other countries. In other words, I had to think for instance: What is my blood?

Considering her peculiar legal status in Japan, Aiko has been, to a certain degree, a foreigner during all her life. Although she does not recall having been discriminated against back in Japan, she acknowledges that some rejection towards the Korean population used to exist.

> Formerly, the Japanese discriminated against Koreans, they were not [considered] human beings, they treated them like animals, criminals. […] In Japan, I was never discriminated against, in any form, but one of my mother's Japanese friends used to say that I could not tell I was Korean because something bad might happen, for instance bullying, but I always said it and I was never discriminated against. The generation to which my mother belongs used to get that [discriminatory behaviours] a lot.

This idiosyncrasy found in Aiko's narrative, of being somehow a foreigner in the country in which she was born, could explain her intense aspirations to become integrated in the Portuguese society.

> I tried to integrate myself into Portuguese society and I had to do that out of the classroom because our group was composed of foreigners. I was in Braga [in order] to learn Portuguese not [in order] to make friends with foreigners. That is beautiful also but what I would like was to actually get integrated into the society of Portugal.

In spite of describing her migration as an 'escape', Aiko's decision to leave her home country was not completely haphazard. In fact, she appears to have experienced mixed feelings regarding her decision to leave. The burden of the decision to quit her job was even heavier due to Japanese cultural conceptions about work.

> To cut the tie with the company is considered treason for us, the Japanese. My boss already had the same experience with other employees that had left and he was always complaining and talking about that as if it were treason. [So if I quitted] I was going to do exactly the same thing, I was going to be a traitor. It's Japanese thinking. Thus, it was difficult to quit being a

karate instructor and an employee because I was also feeling responsibility towards the company.

Moreover, the process of migration described in this narrative did not seem to have been carefully crafted and planed, emerging as a consequence of Aiko's dissatisfaction with her current life.

> I wanted to run away from my life in Japan because of my job as an instructor, it was very stressful, I really wanted to run away [from it] and I did. […] It was an escape, a fugitive decision, I had reached my limit.

Given her unpremeditated, rushed, and somehow unusual migration, Aiko embodies the profile of the *fugitive* migrant. According to Benson and O'reilly (2009: 609), migration is "often described using language like 'getting out of the trap', 'making a fresh start', 'a new beginning'". What might appear as a gesture of renunciation or weakness can also be interpreted as a sign of agency and willingness to improve a displeasing state of affairs. As stated by Trifanescu (2015: 98): "more than running *from* something, such migration patterns signify running *towards* something". Aiko did, indeed, run simultaneously *from* and *towards* something and eventually achieved, in the destination country, what she considers to be a better life:

> I have a certain position here in Portugal, I don't know if that means to be integrated but I am a student, I am teaching [Japanese] classes, I have a home. Life is calm here, very calm, I don't want [to live] anymore in that big city, I already lived and I don't need that anymore. Now my life is good.

In the attempt to escape the constraints and drawbacks that she was experiencing in Japan, Aiko used migration as a "way of reacting to an unbearable situation" (Trifanescu, 2015: 97). Her long-term plans to remain in Portugal suggest Aiko's migratory project was a successful one.

> There aren't any future plans but perhaps they will appear. I want to stay here, only that. My vision [about the future], if I had one, would be to stay here in Portugal.

Aiko's migratory profile and the *fugitive* character of her migration clearly show that migrants should not be "reduced to anonymous atomised entries" (van der Velde & van Naerssen, 2011: 219), which migrate exclusively in result of external structural forces. As shown in this narrative, migration can occur based on a complex mix of inner subjectivities, personal desires, professional prospects and many more, and needs to be understood in accordance with the peculiarities of each biography.

## 2. The 'incidental' migrant

Brenda is in her twenties, originally from the US, and has already had several international experiences. She came to Portugal for no apparent reason and enrolled in a Portuguese language course. After starting to date a Portuguese man, she changed her plans of returning to her home country and decided to extend her stay in Portugal. She then enrolled in a Master's degree, not mandatorily with an educational purpose, but as a way to extend her visa and also with the intention to improve her Portuguese language skills. Nowadays, she intends to stay in Portugal long-term, due to her romantic commitment with a Portuguese man.

Regarding the distinction between foreign and international students, Brenda would fit the first category since her migration to Portugal was not moved by educational objectives. Her narrative contains several international episodes, revealing both easiness and eagerness to engage in mobility and migration, especially due to her familiarity with the German language:

> Pretty much my whole life has been focused on the German speaking world. I started learning German when I was eleven. I spent my third year of high school in Austria with a host family. Then I studied German at university in the US and, during my Bachelor's, I studied abroad in Freiburg, Germany, for one year.

Brenda also underlines the influence her family had in enhancing her repertoire of international experiences. According to Carlson (2013: 169), "research on student mobility has repeatedly shown that a higher social class background and prior (personal or familial) experiences of geographical mobility raise the likelihood of going abroad". This narrative clearly establishes a link between social class and this student's predilection towards migration.

> I would call my family probably upper-middle class. My father is a lawyer and he also comes from a family that did well. […] We are comfortable and have everything we need and we always went on vacations. […] In our family, we would go on lots of trips because, luckily, we had the financial means to do so, and they were able to send me to summer camps also, to pay the fees of exchange programmes. […] When I was about three they started hosting university international students for a week or two, until the student residences would open. Then, we would always take them out to dinner once a month, see how they're doing, invite them to our celebrations for holidays, for Christmas. So they were very open to international experiences.

Most of Brenda's decisions were taken in accordance with the moment and context in which she found herself in, thus her migration to Portugal cannot be understood without referring to her previous migratory background. This student's first migration, to Germany, came up as a consequence of an unexpected job proposal.

> On the last year of university I was trying to decide what to do afterwards and I wrote to the director of my study abroad programme in Germany. I asked him if I could help with the

orientation the next fall, so that would give me a reason to go to Europe. He wrote back and said: "You could do that, or you could just come and work here". That was 2008, the beginning of the economic crisis also hitting the US. Some of my friends who had graduated the year before were already starting to have some problems finding jobs and here was somebody offering me a job in Europe, in Germany!

In this case, Brenda's migration to Germany occurred somewhat unexpectedly and was reinforced by this student's adventurous plans. Also, the fact that Brenda had been engaged in other international sojourns in Germany positively affected her migratory experience. Generally, "people experience stress due to challenges arising from exposure to a new cultural environment" (Tian & Lowe, 2014: 285), albeit in Brenda's case the cultural environment was not entirely new. In fact, her migration to Germany and Brenda's subsequent struggles were softened by the fact that she had already lived in the same city during her Bachelor's.

> I'm really comfortable in the German speaking world, I've been learning the language since I was eleven and I travelled there several times, studied abroad and everything. Since I was going back to Freiburg, specifically where I'd studied abroad during university, it was pretty much coming back to a home. […] My adaptation there was not a problem, I'd already spent so much time in studying abroad and I probably got most of that cultural differences and adaptation knowledge when I spent a year in Austria, in high school.

However, while familiarity with the host culture helped this student to feel at home in her new environment, it was that same familiarity that triggered the desire for a fresh and different international experience.

> I have been involved with the German speaking world for so long that I also wanted to try something new and different.

Professional dissatisfaction rooted in the lack of possibilities for further career advancement also contributed to Brenda's willingness to leave Germany.

> Also, about a year and nine months after I went to Germany, I was kind of done with it. In fact, I really enjoyed being there but the job was only ten hours a week. Also, it was a very small office and, even though I wanted to work in [the field of] study abroad, in that particular job there was no room for promotion.

Besides the issues of career advancement, leaving Germany was also the result of a certain 'appetite for wandering' or 'travel bug' (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002), which Brenda regards as natural and somehow inevitable:

> I really did want to work in study abroad and I do like Germany even though sometimes I get annoyed with it and sick of it, you get annoyed and sick of anywhere really. If someone stays somewhere long enough, then it happens, it's like how you can get sick of your family: you still love them but sometimes you just need some time away; so that was my feeling about Germany at that point.

Even though the desire to leave Germany existed, when she decided to travel to Portugal, Brenda did not carefully weighed all her possibilities and, instead, acted like a 'backpacker'. According to O'Reilly (2006), backpackers embrace serendipity rather than detailed planning and are open in regard to the possibility of changing plans and itineraries. After meeting a Portuguese man online, Brenda decided to visit him and found out that she enjoyed Portugal very much.

> While I was in Germany, I was on an online dating site and I started talking to a Portuguese guy and eventually ended up going to visit him and I liked him a lot. I went back to visit a few times and I really fell in love with Portugal.

Consequently, the reasons that led Brenda to migrate to Portugal are not educational, nor professional. This student's choice of country is rooted both in serendipity and in the desire to travel more, without actually having a clear life objective. Travelling and eventually migrating just for the sake of experience is a rather peculiar scenario, which reinforces the uniqueness of Brenda's migration narrative.

> After almost two years [in Germany] I decided to move on with my life and do something but I didn't know exactly what to do so I decided to go to Portugal. Not really for a good reason.

This narrative confirms the pertinence of Carlson's (2013: 169) proposal according to which "the question of *why* students go abroad needs to be turned into *how* do they become geographically mobile". Certainly, theoretical models that seek to understand solely *why* students go abroad do not stand comfortably with migratory accounts in which migration appears *not really for a good reason*. The phenomenon of student migration is far too complex to be understood only in terms of reasons and motivations, thus other factors capable of influencing migration need to be taken into account. For instance, coincidence and serendipity, paramount in Brenda's narrative, have been identified as "aspects of dynamicity that are often under-recognised in the ISM [International Student Migration] literature" (King & Raghuram, 2013: 131). Reflecting upon her experience, Brenda suggests that the decision to come to Portugal was not taken based on an exhaustive assessment of her professional objectives and future strategies, acknowledging that, perhaps, *it wasn't the most thought out plan*.

> It's kind of funny that I left [Germany] because there wasn't much room for advancement in [the field of] study abroad, where I really wanted to work, and then I went to Portugal where I had no contacts, no leads on international education jobs, a place in which I could not really work in study abroad. Looking back, maybe it wasn't the most thought out plan. […] With the guy in Aveiro, our connection was kind of ending so I wasn't moving here for him. [… There was] that moment in which I thought: "I'm done with Germany, I guess I'll go to Portugal now".

In this excerpt, it is possible to note the singularity of Brenda's trajectory, especially through the easiness with which she appears to engage in migration. She also compares her life trajectory with the one followed by her friends who remained in the United States and acknowledges that her narrative of migration is a rather peculiar one. In spite of "the increased mobility of people in the global age" (Cohen, 2008: 145), Brenda's narrative is quite idiosyncratic, due to the casualness with which she seems to travel and live internationally.

> Even in our generation, it's still unusual to have many international experiences. I have friends from university that do travel a lot, but I come from a small town and a lot of the people I know, from high school, they're still right near that small town, they've all started families and have full-on jobs, and they bought houses. [...] Even in our generation, sure there's a lot more people studying abroad, but especially what we're doing, which is just picking up and moving to another country for an indefinite amount of time, I think that's still somehow unusual. Especially since we are doing this not for a really good reason.

Also noteworthy are the aspects which led Brenda to consider Portugal an attractive destination country. These aspects seem more adequate to describe the reasons for which a tourist would opt to visit Portugal, rather than the migration process of a foreign student.

> I'm from Wisconsin in the US, we have a lot of lakes but we don't have the ocean. I've always wanted to live by the ocean [...] and I liked the language, and the people, and the food, and the good but cheap wine, and the weather specially coming from northern US and then Germany. It's nice here.

Another important aspect of Brenda's migratory trajectory is the way in which she repeatedly refers to international traveling, without showing many concerns regarding the practicalities and financial requirements of such movements. Furthermore, she seems to be aware of her privileged social position, which provides her a means to move freely across the globe.

> My parents really helped out my brother and me with the university. A lot of students end up with huge amounts of student debt when they graduate university, and I was incredibly lucky to not have that. [...] Not having any student debt after university, I was much freer to do things, that definitely has a lot to do with how easily I've been able to move around.

Eventually, Brenda decided to apply for a residence permit in Portugal and, while awaiting for the decision, she travelled internationally for a whole year. Once again, this episode underlines Brenda's easiness to travel and the influence that her financial means have in the development of her international experiences. Also related to her privileged status is the fact that Brenda was able to afford a 'trial period' in Portugal before having to decide whether she wanted to actually move to this country or not.

> I didn't move here right away. Right after Germany, I came here for just a month and a half, just to try it out and make sure, at least for a month and a half, that I didn't already get sick of

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it. It was like a trial run and it's funny that it wasn't really a particularly spectacular time. […] After that period, I actually travelled around the world for a year. […] I was also trying to get a residence permit here in Portugal and I was having a lot of problems with that. It was taking a really really long time, so I ended up staying outside of Portugal even longer and travelling a little bit more around. […] In the end, the residence permit was actually rejected […] so I was about to give up and go back to the US […] and move on with my life.

Along with a privileged social status, Brenda's easiness to travel also derives from the peculiarity of her current professional activity: freelance translating.

This is part of the privilege of doing translation, which is so flexible that I can do it while traveling. […] My parents still give me gifts and help me out with some things, like my plane ticket back to the US, but mostly I make my own money. At that point, I was mostly supported by the translation.

When Brenda's short sojourn in Portugal was almost coming to an end, serendipity stroke once again, and reconfigured her migratory plans.

So I was pretty much planning on leaving in August but then I met Pedro and we had our first date on July 1st. We kept going out on more dates and spending a lot of time together and finally I said: "Ok, I will find a way to stay here". Because my tourist VISA was ending, I still had to leave for a few months and come back later, but I ended up getting a student VISA, to go to a Portuguese language course in [the city of] Braga.

The excerpt above "illustrates vividly how studying abroad resulted from the interactional dynamics within the respective relationship, rather than from individual decision making" (Carlson, 2013: 176). Similar to her unplanned arrival in Portugal, Brenda's reasons for enrolling in a Master's degree are also peculiar, especially because they do not seem to be directly related to an academic purpose.

I'm actually not really much of an academic, I don't really enjoy researching. I enjoy learning about things but I don't like sitting down and having to read certain books and writing papers. But I just knew that a Master's is an important thing to have, in general, in life, and I figured also that it would help me learn Portuguese because it was going to be in Portuguese. I would meet people, because I hadn't really met people in Porto, since I was in Braga all the time [because of the language course]. Then I could extend my student VISA as well.[…] Now, I have to submit my thesis and then I'll defend it on some point, but that will be pretty much the end of my career in academia, because I'm not interested at all in going on to a PhD. I'm not sure exactly what I'll end up doing after, I'm going to stay in Portugal, most likely. I have a Portuguese boyfriend and he is from here, and he has all of his family here and all of his friends and jobs so we'll most likely stay here.

Since she was already living in Portugal when she met her current boyfriend, contrary to those individuals who engage in 'transnational marriage migration' (Akifyeva & Erashova, 2015), Brenda's romantic connection constituted the fuel for her permanency in this country and not

the main trigger for migration. Given the specificity of Brenda's trajectory, I ascribed her the migratory profile of the *incidental* migrant, since her narrative clearly contradicts the idea that "international migrants take strategic decisions to move or stay" (van der Velde & van Naerssen, 2011: 223). This narrative shows that migration is not always a strategic move, nor a planned undertaking, but it is something that may happen incidentally. Considering that "migration requires resources" (Waldinger, 2013: 351), the type of *incidental* migration in which Brenda is engaged seems more likely to occur in individuals with higher levels of social and 'mobility capital' (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002).

## 3. The 'determined' migrant

Chang is almost thirty, from China and never lived abroad before coming to Portugal. After finishing his Bachelor's degree in China, in the field of Management, he felt the need to gain professional experience before continuing his studies. After working for three years, he realised that, in his field, knowing how to fluently speak a foreign language may constitute an advantage. After gathering information about several languages, he decided to learn Portuguese and came to Portugal with that goal. As he did not feel satisfied with his level of Portuguese after one year, he decided to stay in Portugal longer and enrol in a Master's degree.

Following the distinction between foreign and international students, Chang could be considered a foreign student since his initial motivation for migrating was not related to the desire to obtain a higher education degree, but to his motivation to improve his Portuguese language skills. His wish for acquiring language skills was not based on a personal interest for a specific language or culture, but it was rooted in the functionalist aspect of the potential professional advantage that Chang attaches to the knowledge of foreign languages.

> I was always interested in the field of internationalisation. I found out that, for this type of job, normally it is necessary to know well a foreign language. I speak English but not very well. It was in that moment when I felt the need to leave China and go to other countries.

The choice of which language to study was also marked by functionalist intentions, since Chang's main motivation was to improve his résumé and enhance his employability prospects.

> I found out that the Portuguese and Arab languages had few speakers in China and I ended up choosing to learn Portuguese. In 2008, I met some students that had studied this language and all of them were searching for a good job, a job with a good salary. I also had a boss who told me that this language was good for the future, he recommended me to learn this language. At the end, after thinking, after consulting information on the internet I also thought that the Portuguese language would bring more advantages in the future.

The way Chang decided about the destination country of his migration is also noteworthy, since he did not have any kind of previous connection to Portugal. His choice of country was determined by the language factor that, in this case, was also the main trigger of migration.

> First, I chose the language and then, after I decided about the Portuguese language, I started to study it, and after [that], I decided to come to Portugal.

Besides the language, Chang's preference for Portugal is rooted in his interest to know more about the European culture, revealing a certain fascination for Europe. The peculiarity of his migration narrative enriches our understanding "of international students' underlying values and motivations in pursuing their studies abroad" (Ploner, 2015: 17).

> Why Portugal and not Brazil? Because Portugal is in Europe and I wanted to know, go to Europe, to see more things. For instance, in the last century, I think that European countries are the places in which there are more advantages in this world. The Europeans know well techniques and have different thoughts than the ones from China. I wanted to know more about the differences that exist between Chinese and Europeans. For this reason, I chose Portugal and the Portuguese language.

Once he decided to learn Portuguese, Chang started studying it even before travelling to Portugal, revealing a rather high motivation for learning this language:

> Already when I was working in Beijing, I had started to study Portuguese. Only during the weekends. […] I also met a Portuguese guy in Beijing who wanted to study Chinese, hence we did a language exchange experience, nothing formal, only a friendship.

Given that Chang chose Portugal without having previously visited this country, his Portuguese friend from Beijing, along with two other Chinese friends who had studied in Portugal, provided him information about this country. He used that information to define certain details of his migration as, for instance, the choice of a faculty or a city.

> […My Portuguese friend] studied at the Faculty of Letters in Coimbra. […] For this reason, I already knew some things about the Faculty of Letters at the University of Coimbra. He spoke to me a lot about this faculty, told me it was a very good faculty and that there, [in Coimbra], it was safer. […] I also had two Chinese friends who had studied here and had done the same course, and they told me that the course of Portuguese for foreigners was good.

Since he had never engaged in an international experience before, Chang had to rely on the perceptions of others when deciding about the course of his trajectory. Regarding Chang's family, he describes it as very accepting, and somehow non-typical family, for what he perceives to be the 'standard' in the Chinese culture.

> This was the first time that I left China, I had never lived abroad before. My family was supportive regarding my departure […] because my parents are people of more open thoughts

and they want their children to know more so that in the future they can have a good job and live well. […] I don't know how it is in the case of Occidental parents but, for Orientals, parents like their children to stay with them, to not go too far and for too long. Not my parents, they think that their children need to have a future, possess a better life, therefore they can leave, they can go farther.

Chang's enrolment in higher education in Portugal was not included in his initial migration plans. The most important objective of his sojourn in Portugal, to learn Portuguese, was one of the reasons that also led Chang to opt for a Master's degree.

> In 2012, I enrolled in the Master's at the Faculty of Economy. When I left China, I didn't know that I was going to apply for this degree, I decided here. In fact, I was looking for a more practical field of study but, in 2012, I still did not know Portuguese, and Marketing I knew quite well, the theory. So I thought like this: I will learn the language through this field of study. I thought it was better to choose a field that I knew well because, despite having language difficulties, I would not experience much difficulty in terms of knowledge of the field of study.

Interestingly, enrolling in a Master's degree was not rooted in the desire to acquire academic knowledge. Instead, Chang opted for a field with which he was already familiarised, in order to ease the difficulties associated with studying in Portuguese. The motivation for enrolling in higher education in Portugal was also related to a certain interest for the local culture. However, much like his entire migratory project, Chang's interest for the culture and for meeting more Portuguese people is fuelled by a functionalist perspective, believing that such a strategy will further facilitate his adaption.

> I also thought that, by doing this Master's degree, on the one hand, I could practice the [Portuguese] language and, on the other hand, I could meet more Portuguese friends. I wanted to meet more in order to get to know well the culture here, the Portuguese life, in order to adapt well to life.

In addition, this student considered the long-term negative effects of being in a class formed by fellow co-nationals. For this reason, he opted for a Master's degree, believing that it would allow him to enter in contact with the local way of thinking about marketing and, therefore, with the *Occidental logics* operating in this field.

> I also opted for the Master's because I wanted to have more knowledge about Marketing, about the Occidental logics. The Portuguese for foreigners' course is only for foreigners, I can only contact with the way of thinking of the teachers because the other colleagues, most of them, are from China. For this reason, I think it is not very good for the future.

The causal links provided, throughout this narrative, between Chang's motivations and his subsequent actions and strategies, prompted me to profile him as a *determined* migrant. Most of his actions were influenced by an expected outcome, especially in regard to future carrier opportunities. For instance, Chang would not have come to Portugal if not for the idea that

Portuguese language skills would make his résumé more appealing for companies. In the excerpt below, it is possible to observe that Chang is determined to lead his life in accordance with the expectations he has from education, work and life in general.

> […] After I graduated, I started to look for a job and I found one. Since my field of study is management, is better to act in this field though working experience, rather than through the academic route. For this reason, I needed to have work experience, I did not want to do a Master's degree right away. […] I also wanted to use my own money, money made by me, in order to study, thus I chose to work. After working during three years, I already had work experience, I wanted to continue studying and I already knew the things that I wanted for me: which kind of life, of work, and of study, I wanted to choose.

Along with very clear and precise objectives, this student constructs a narrative marked by a strong sense of agency and accomplishment. In spite of all the difficulties, Chang's determination helped him to continue and not give up when facing hardship.

> In order to do what I did, I think it's necessary to have great courage. For instance, in China, if a family does not have friends or family in a foreign country, generally people don't go abroad. But I have courage, I have will, that's why I left China and I needed to work a lot. It is necessary to have courage in order to conquer any difficulty, that is my thought. […] I feel good, very good regarding what I did.

Chang's determination is also visible in the way in which he speaks about his expectations regarding the future. Assessing the value of the skills he acquired, during his experience in Portugal, he appears very confident regarding his career prospects.

> In spite of having had many difficulties in the beginning of the Master's, since I was the only student who was not a native Portuguese speaker, I think in the future I will have more advantages because I will know one more language than my colleagues. […] In China, a person with no work experience but able to speak Portuguese can find a good job, but I also have experience in Marketing. For this reason, I have more advantages than them, it's easier [for me] to find a good job in China.

The development of Chang's migratory process culminates in a desire for a transnational future, pending between Portugal and China, while excluding other possible destinations for a potential PhD degree:

> What I really want is to work for a Portuguese company that has commercial relations with China. This way, I could go to China several times per year to visit the market and, at the same time, I could visit my friends and family. It is better to live here but the Chinese market is a promising one. […] Formerly, I wanted to do a PhD in England or America, but I gave up that idea now because, in the future, I want a life in Portugal.

Considering his willingness to fight adversity and surpass the difficulties experienced during migration, the adjective *determined* adequately describes the migratory profile of Chang. His

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determination to learn Portuguese and acquire skills capable of distinguishing him from other candidates within the job market, is consistent with previous analyses of migrant students from China. According to Biao and Shen (2009: 514), "the dramatic social stratification within China makes people regard overseas education as a means of providing extra advantage in the fierce competition for scarce resources and opportunities". In the particular case of this narrative, migration emerged as a way to reach clear professional objectives within a 'job prospect' framework (Lam, Ariffin, & Ahmad, 2011).

## 4. The 'fighter' migrant

Laina, originally from Laos, is in her thirties, and had already a study abroad experience in Japan, where she completed a Master's degree. Given her gender identity, Laina was being frequently discriminated against in her home country and, for this reason, decided to quit her job as a university English teacher. Then, she started to work for World Vision and applied for a scholarship in Europe, in order to pursue a PhD. Her application was successful and she was assigned by the scholarship provider to do her PhD in a Portuguese university. While In Portugal, she underwent a sex reassignment surgery, finally completing the gender transformation that she was looking forward to doing for a long time.

Considering the conceptual distinction between foreign and international students, Laina would fit the latter category, since her motivation to come to Portugal was directly related to education. Given her modest financial background, Laina has always been interested in improving her education and explains her motivation to engage in migration through that educational interest:

> We were very poor. My mom and dad were working as teachers at primary school but they had to quit their job and they became butchers. In our family we use to raise pigs and we sold pork meat. […] I remember that we did that for our family survival and everybody had to be a contributor of the family, even though we were young. […] One of the main goals for leaving my country is that I want to improve myself. I'm a person that always wants to learn, to gain more knowledge. I remember my father said that education is the key for your life, if you are not educated then you will become miserable, you will not be able to solve your problems. That is the childhood memory that I picked up and I keep that as a life principle forever.

The desire to improve her education appears to have been paramount to the emergence of Laina's migration. In fact, in this narrative, migration is intrinsically linked to education and even determined by it, especially considering this student's dissatisfaction with the educational system from her home country. In other words, the perceived lack of quality of education in Laos incited Laina to seek better conditions abroad.

The point of migration to another country is that I want to gain more knowledge, to improve my education and I have been doing a lot of schooling and studying, I did my Master's degree in Japan. […] I graduated from university in Laos but the quality of education I can say that is very low and I need to learn more and more. Personally, I like to learn so that's why I decided to do this, I have always wanted to study. […] Regarding the quality of education, I knew, even before I came, that here it was better. I have been working with educational sectors in my country and I know exactly the quality there and I expect any other countries in the world to have a higher educational level than my country […].

Besides education, her migration was triggered by another stimulus, rooted in the fact that Laina does not identify with a traditional gender.

I'm relating my experience, my education, everything, to my personal life experience. I can say that everything that happens in my life actually relates to my gender. Back in my country, I am at home, but I feel like I'm not home at all. Due to the culture and tradition [… people in my country] think that this thing [being transgender] is something not acceptable and it's even sinful, so it's kind of difficult for me to be in my own country, my hometown even more. […] I can say that one of the reasons that I decided to go to study [abroad] it is to be away from my home because I don't feel comfortable there.

Living in a place where she could not feel accepted by society forced Laina to lead a secret life, hiding many facets of her identity, even from her family:

In Laos, I used to live my life secretly because I had something that nobody knew, that my family didn't know. For instance, I would buy female clothes and put them in the wardrobe and my mom did not know and nobody knew that I had female clothes in my wardrobe. […] I always hid myself from the society, what I felt inside could not be expressed outside, in the society. So I dressed female clothes behind a closed door, I put on lipstick behind a closed door, I put on make-up, powders and everything behind a closed door. I did everything behind a closed door.

The harshness of being transgender in Laos is summarised through the recounting of a strong emotional episode from Laina's past: a suicide attempt.

I was drinking a bottle of beer and, when I finished it, I broke the bottle and I cut my hand. As soon as I did the first cut, I thought about my parents and everything came up to my mind telling me: "Don't do it Laina, you can go through this and you have to live for your family, they are waiting for you, you are their expectation, you are their dreams. If you die, they will feel very disappointed and very sad"; and then I stopped, I did only one cut. I was thinking of giving myself multiple cuts but, then, I decided to go to the hospital by myself, nobody knows about this story.

At a first glance, Laina appears to be a 'typical student' (Tian & Lowe, 2014), since she is looking to complete a higher education degree in a foreign country, based on a perceived lack of quality of education in her home country. However, her narrative accommodates several idiosyncrasies.

For instance, Laina's narrative gives account of a very difficult life-course marked by discrimination and supressed feelings:

> So we can conclude that there are two main reasons for leaving my country. [… Wanting to] be away from home is the motivation for me to study more because if you want to be away from home, if you want to get a scholarship, you need to study more […] The reason that I would like to be away from home is to feel more accepted but, then again: if you don't study, how can you be away from home? You will not receive a scholarship, you will not be able to compete with other candidates. It's like you are in the middle of the river, you are in the boat and, if you want to go to the river bank, you need to move. If you don't do that, you're gonna stay in the same place, that's my explanation. If you want to reach the shore, you need to go, you need to move, you need to do something.

Also noteworthy is the fact that her motivation to leave her country was so high that this student did not even seem to have objections towards the idea of going to a country that she knew nothing about, as long as she was going to Europe.

> I was so excited when I heard that I got the scholarship, it was something that I really wanted. I did not know a lot about European culture but I knew inside, in me, that it's gonna mean great opportunities, I perceived that European people are more open minded. […] After knowing that I was going to Portugal, I asked myself: "Where is this country?"; and then I started to google about it, I didn't even know how to say correctly the name of the country. In Laos, when I told my co-workers: "I'm going to Portugal for my PhD"; everybody asked me the same question: "Where is that country?".

Addressing the way in which Laina 'chose' a destination country for her migratory project, it is important to stress that, initially, she did not intend to come to Portugal. Her arrival in Portugal was marked by the impossibility of going to the countries which she was initially interested in: Spain or Italy.

> I didn't choose to come to Portugal basically, the scholarship provided many countries and I actually chose another country, Spain as a first option and Italy. Portugal was the third option. Then, here in Portugal, they actually had professors to work with me so they sent me here, they did not have a professor in the field that I would like to study in Spain or Italy.

Even though the issue of gender identity is beyond the scope of this thesis, it is important to acknowledge the fact that Laina is a transgender international student. Her non-traditional gender influences not only her migration process, but her life trajectory as a whole. Migration emerged for Laina as a response to her need to find a place where she could feel at home. Indeed, according to Seymour (2016: 6), "for many transgender individuals, self-realization has been achieved by movement across geographical borders".

I just take this experience for granted, I go and then I can gain knowledge and improve my personal education, but it is true that I would like to be away from home, just because I don't feel home. I don't feel I am at home in my own home.

For all these reasons, it becomes clear that Laina does not represent 'the' traditional international student, commonly referred to in most research literature (Rienties & Tempelaar, 2013), as if all international students could be described through one universal category. Even though the quest for education weighed in the decision to engage in a PhD abroad, it was Laina's gender identity, and its subsequent negative consequences, that encouraged her to leave her country. Her eagerness to be away from her home country is also visible in the way in which she envisions the future, clearly rejecting the idea of going back to Laos. In fact, she regards herself as some sort of a 'gender refugee' who was forced to leave her home, due to a highly intolerant environment:

> My motivation to stay in Europe is more than a hundred percent. Or maybe I need to move to the United States, if it's possible, it's another destination that I have in mind. […] A long time ago people used to move, to migrate to other countries because of the political force and it's the same for me: I'm also forced to leave, the situation forces me to leave my country. I have that sense that I can't go back.

Albeit she considers that the environment in her home country is forcing her to continue migrating, Laina's view over the future is not marked by fear and abandonment but by a strong will to continue fighting for the sake of people like her, who are constantly discriminated against based on their gender identity.

> In the future, I would like to be in a foreign country where I feel more comfortable, where I feel more accepted but, at the same time, I need to do something, I need to fight for my people, especially people who are the same as me. I just want to comfort them, I just want to encourage them to be who they are. […] I'm going to stand up in the social and political field, to say to the society that transgender people are capable and able to be productive citizens. […] now I feel stronger and I want to prove [myself], I want to break the stereotypes.

As shown above, Laina's narrative is replete with barriers and struggles. Still, she reveals the capacity to remain positive, in spite of her sinuous trajectory, recognising the importance of hardship to one's personal development. Gladly, all her efforts seem to have paid off since, nowadays, Laina considers herself a happy woman:

> I realised that, in order for us to improve our self-esteem, we have to experience the difficulties, we have to overcome the fear and the obstacles in our life, and in turn, that fear and obstacles will give us strength to be who we are. […] I suffered myself for 34 years, living in a life that I did not want to, and then I completed my physical transformation almost at the age of 36 and I felt like it was worthy, nothing can compare to my satisfaction right now. And I don't regret about the fact that I had to suffer for so many years. That past experience, those

34 years, were so meaningful, and it actually makes me the person I am today. […] one of the reasons that I said that I love Portugal is because I consider I have found my happiness here in Portugal.

As shown in the excerpts above, the leitmotiv of this migration narrative is the idea of fighting and resisting adversity. Laina's motivations for engaging in migration go far beyond education, being more related to her gender, and to the way in which she reacts to the feeling of being an outsider in her own country. In this narrative, there are moments "when migration or flight seemed inevitable" (Hölscher, 2016: 55), reinforcing the potential analogy between Laina and a forced migrant. Even though she is not running from war, Laina is running from a life marked by discrimination, incomprehension, and struggle. Hence, this narrative is also about resilience and reveals an affluent "set of performances of coping with challenging circumstances" (Ploner, 2015: 14). Laina's narrative is peculiar not due to her non-traditional gender identity but due to her ability in surpassing the vicissitudes of being socially marginalised. For this reason, she embodies the migratory profile of the *fighter*, a profile capable of doing justice to her forceful motivation to surpass the limitations constantly imposed on her by society.

## 5. The 'rebellious' migrant

Naim is Turkish, in his twenties and had never experienced migration before coming to Portugal. Seeking to improve his English and to learn another widely-spoken language, such as French or Spanish, he was intending to have only a short international experience and return to Turkey to find a job. Within the framework of the European Volunteer Service, he ended up coming to Portugal, since there were no available projects in the countries he was originally interested in. After one year, at the end of the volunteer programme, he decided to continue in Portugal in order to pursue a Master's degree.

Naim suits the category of foreign students since his migration was not initiated with the purpose of enrolling in higher education. His initial motivation for migration emerged on a discovery basis, out of the desire to *know people from different cultures* and *different countries*. Besides his curiosity about other countries, Naim also sought the improvement of his language skills, based on the assumption that such skills would be useful in the future:

> I have never been outside of Turkey before. I was born there, I studied there, until the end of my Bachelor's. I did this [going abroad] in order to develop language [skills] and also to know people from different cultures, different countries. Besides English, I wanted to learn one more language that is spoken by many people, as French or Spanish. There are some languages that are important but only the people from that country speak them. Greek, for instance, it is a very important language but only Greeks speak it. As a second language, is not important.

Portuguese I think is the sixth more spoken language in the world, therefore Portugal was an alternative for me. [...]

Along with the objective to learn a new language and the curiosity to know other cultures, Naim explains his motivation to go abroad through a comparison between himself and his friends who remained in Turkey. He considers that his motivation for going abroad was *to do something different*:

I did all of this to create a life out of the standard. The most important reason was this one because you have a standard, always. [...] You get your house, you marry, until thirty, thirty one, everything will end. [...] Everybody does that [...] but I thought about creating one more way: instead of studying in Turkey, to study in another country. Instead of doing this work, to do other work. Instead of remaining in the same city, to go to other places, get to know more. That was a reason, to live out of that standard.

Naim also mentions the challenges posed by a life *out of the standard* and appears to be satisfied with the outcomes of his decision. In spite of the challenges that he started to face when he became internationally mobile, Naim ascribes an adventurous dimension to his migration and highly regards the value of living abroad.

In order to obtain this [life], now I don't have a house in Turkey, I am not married yet, I did not complete the military service yet, but at this point I gained other things and I am happy to have done this; [...] you only have one suitcase, you can go. If you have a fix job, if you are married [...] it's not easy to decide these things and my reason was this one: be freer and do different things that, for me, are the better things. It's a matter of mobility, now I have more.

Simultaneously, Naim acknowledges that the family support he received for engaging in such an endeavour is not very frequent for what he perceives to be the Turkish 'standard':

I am lucky with my family because they always support me. And this is not easy, especially in Turkey where families are more protective, they are afraid of sending their sons abroad. [...] I was lucky because I live with my mother and my older sister and they always supported me. [When] I decided to go, they said: "You know better and you will decide for yourself".

The European programme he was involved in also played an important role in Naim's migration. If programmes like the European Volunteer Service would not have been available in his country, the likelihood for Naim to go abroad might have been lower. In his narrative, belonging to a less privileged social class appears as an influencing factor of migration, when he explains the way in which the European programme worked in his case:

I searched for opportunities to pay less because is not easy to do something like this. I am from Turkey, [...] even if you go to a European country, you need a visa [...]. [The European Volunteer Service] also provides the income. It's not too much, only a scholarship, pocket money. Also, you don't pay for the house, the rent, and for food either. They provide almost

everything, also the price of the trip: the visa, the plane. It is like this for students that come from a family with a lower economical level, they make equality between the students.

Even though he didn't initially plan to study abroad, Naim's plans changed during his sojourn in Portugal. This narrative confirms Cwerner's (2001: 17) observation according to which "individuals planning to spend just a few months abroad end up staying for many years, often settling permanently in the country". In the excerpt below, the sequential nature of the process of migration is easily detectable.

> When you take a step, you get to a place and you decide to take another step that you could not take without taking the step before. Living here one more day, that creates another idea to do something else. [...] Taking a step creates other steps, other alternatives. When I finished my Bachelor's, I wasn't thinking it was possible to do a project like the one I did, I was thinking that, for financial reasons, it was not possible. Initially, I was not thinking about doing a Master's here, I didn't even know it was possible to take a Master's abroad.

This excerpt confirms the relevance of biographical approaches in the study of student migration processes. With a different methodological approach, the temporal dimension of Naim's trajectory would have been obscured, hindering an holistic understanding of this student's migration process.

Regarding the destination country, this student did not actually choose Portugal but his sojourn in this country was subjected to the timings and locations of the European projects he was applying for:

> I was thinking about going to Spain or France: Portugal was my third option. I only wanted to have an experience abroad, I didn't stay here because I really wanted to stay in Portugal, I stayed here because I was also [having an experience] out of my home country. In other words, Portugal was not my final objective. [...] Initially, I found a project in Spain but it would begin only after nine months from the moment I was searching, I couldn't wait that long. I also found a project in England [and it was] the same, [I needed to wait], and the project in Portugal was going to start right away, so I applied.

Another noteworthy aspect of Naim's narrative is the fact that he considered the 'perceived cultural distance' (Galchenko & van de Vijver, 2007) between his home country and a possible destination country, when taking the decision to engage in migration. Although he has never had an international experience before, instead of being interested in going to a country in which the 'perceived cultural distance' would be lower, Naim fulfilled his desire for adventure by seeking countries in which that distance would be greater.

> Firstly, I decided to go to Western Europe. Since I am from Turkey, and Turkey has an Asian and a European apart, I think the culture is similar to the Balkan countries. Therefore, in order to have a challenge, Western Europe could be better. For this reason, I searched for projects

in Spain, France, England and Portugal. […] The final objective was to live in another culture, especially in Western Europe.

Paradoxically, while seeking a greater cultural distance between his home and host countries, in the process of choosing a destination country for his migration, Naim also seems to have looked for familiar references:

Since I am from the coast of Turkey, near Greece, I am used to the Mediterranean life. In my city, the lifestyle is almost the same as the Mediterranean, therefore it was not going to be difficult for me to live with this climate. […] That was a factor that contributed to the decision to come to Portugal, I was worried about the climate also. I prefer to stay in those areas that have a coastal line because, when we are used to do something, our body is not ready to live in another climate. And it's not only the climate, also the food that you eat, you drink, the way of life.

Just as the decision to study in Portugal was influenced by his experience within the European Volunteer Service, Naim's future intentions are also determined by his international experiences. In the excerpt below, it is possible to observe that, during his first sojourn in Portugal, Naim's "taste for living abroad" (Parey & Waldinger, 2011: 119) was activated and led to his decision to engage in more international sojourns. While studying in Portugal, this student decided to go to Switzerland for an internship, where he spent approximately seven months. Due to that experience, Naim's plans for his academic trajectory now include the possibility of studying in Switzerland.

I am thinking about doing a PhD in my field. I did not decide about the country yet but I would like it to be in Switzerland, to return to Switzerland. I looked up the universities, they are good, and I also want to learn proper French. […] There, the quality of universities is better, I've been to conferences, I already saw, I've been in libraries, I also know some professors involved in projects, I have many friends that are doing a PhD there and it's better.

In order to understand the complexity of his trajectory, it is important to consider that Naim's migration developed from a temporary mobility, rooted in the desire for world discovery and skill acquisition, into a more extended form of migration. However, the main fuel for Naim's departure from home was the desire to be different and to rebel against those life-courses he perceives as mainstream. At the same time, perhaps due to the geographical distance and peripheral location of Portugal within Europe, coming to Portugal does not seem to be a commonplace choice for young people from Turkey. In spite of his peers' and friends' disapproval, Naim pursued his own ideals and decided to remain in Portugal after completing the volunteer project, and invest in the study of the Portuguese language.

When I decided to stay here in Portugal, everybody told me: "Why do you learn Portuguese?". […] As a Turkish person, you know, for instance, English, it is important for work and for other

things but Portuguese, for what? I never said it was in vain: learn Romanian, Greek, Turkish; it's always important. […] Sure that Portuguese is useful when you live here but you never know, it could be useful for something else in the future.

Given that the main fuel for Naim's migration was the desire to avoid what he considers to be a standard way of life, his narrative embodies the leitmotiv of the *rebellious* migrant. Consistent with Brodersen's (2014: 95) observation, in this narrative, being mobile appears as a factor "of social differentiation". Migration emerges in Naim's life as a distinguishing mark from the people who follow a 'standard' life trajectory and appear, in his view, to be rather antiquated:

The people who always do the same thing […] even if they are twenty-four, twenty-five years old, they act as if they were already forty, fifty.

Throughout the narrative, Naim explains the benefits of his alternative trajectory and makes use of a geometrical pattern to explain his motivations for rebelling against standardised forms of life. He stresses that the most important aspect of his experience is not related to the outcome, but to the process itself:

Eventually, perhaps all these paths will lead to the same place, we don't know, but I go through all these manners. By going through all these lines, these manners, you certainly gain more. You gain because you see more cities, more countries, you learn more languages and you have more life experiences […]. I would never say that, perhaps, I will not decide to do the same as the others. Maybe eventually I will decide to do the same, but the path that led me there was different. This is the motivation for doing this kind of experience and I am satisfied. If I could go back five years through a time machine, I would choose to do the same thing.
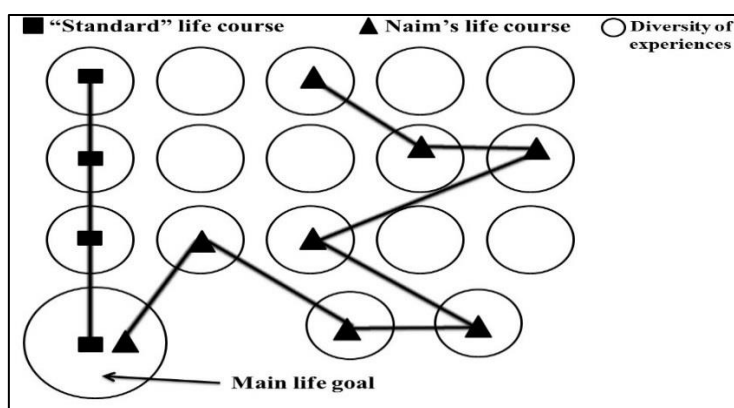


*Figure 2. Geometrical illustration of Naim's view over his life course*

The fact that, towards the hypothetical situation of being able to go back in time, Naim would decide to follow the same path, constitutes a clear mark of the successful denouement of his narrative. Not only Naim's trajectory, but also the way in which he gives meaning to that trajectory, can inform a broader view over migrant students' experiences. Naim's narrative shows that the motivations behind migration are highly complex and subjective, thus they

should be addressed in all their complexity and subjectivity, especially if we are to contribute to the knowledge production in the field of migration.

## *6. The 'effortless' migrant*

Jaidev is Indian, currently in his twenties, and had repeatedly experienced migration both inside his country and internationally. As early as seventeen years old, he left home with the intention to take a Bachelor's degree in the city of Chennai. After completing his degree, he worked in two other cities in India, and went to Milan for his Master's. In Italy, he also worked in the city of Vicenza before returning to India. While back in his home country, he was looking for PhD opportunities and, after a successful application, he came to Portugal to study design.

Based on the conceptual distinction between foreign and international students, Jaidev could be considered an international student since his (multiple) migrations were driven by education. Jaidev is a frequent mover who presents an extensive experience of living in different places, both internationally as in his home country:

> I've actually lived in two cities in Italy and, then, I went back to India for a while. I was working with the Ministry of Culture, on a consultancy basis, but then I got this PhD and I came here. So, all in all, I've lived in six or seven different cities in the last six or seven years.

Jaidev's own view over his migratory experience is rather peculiar, given that he ascribes little importance to the international episodes embedded in his trajectory.

> For me, it's not as greater deal the international aspect of it, for me is just another city. I don't know why, because I never thought about it in that sense, that I want to go abroad, or do something beautiful abroad. I never thought of it like that, I just applied, I got through, I went through the bases and I went through the official things which you have to get done, like the paper work and stuff. But I never had the motivation of going abroad as a core motivation. It has happened.

Carlson (2013: 171) encountered similar perceptions of migrant students who were "invoking the impression that it was, as it were, nothing extraordinary for them to study abroad". Jaidev also invoked several reasons for undervaluing the importance of the international facet of his narrative. He believes that, nowadays, having an international experience is something frequent, or even typical. The fact that a large number of people engage in migration worldwide leads this student to consider that his multiple migrations do not turn his life-course into a particularly exceptional one:

> So many people go abroad, there is a lot of international mobility in the world, especially among students. From my country, there are people from villages who go abroad because the educational system in my country is very tough, so only the best come through. People

actually manage to go to other countries because they are so good, for example the Microsoft CEO, Satya Nadella or Sundar Pichai, who is the new Google CEO. All these people come from villages so there is an international mobility. It's not extremely evident but it is there, so maybe I just got on to that current flow and it just happened.

In this excerpt, it is possible to observe that, on the one hand, Jaidev seems to render his narrative quite ordinary but, on the other hand, he tends to value his accomplishments and regard them with pride. For instance, when he speaks about the peculiarity of the educational system in his country, where *only the best come through*; or when he refers to largely renowned Indian people who *manage to go to other countries because they are so good*.

Another possible reason for Jaidev to ascribe limited importance to his international experience is related to his family background. Social class as a determinant factor in the process of migration (Pendergrass, 2013) is also visible in his narrative. He is a frequent mover who can easily shift between different cities and countries, and successfully adapt to new contexts. In his discourse, there are traits of a quite high 'mobility capital' (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002), and his narrative could hardly represent the reality of the majority of Indians.

I don't quite feel this international aspect of my experience, maybe because my family is also very very travelled, my friends are very travelled. […] Maybe because we have been brought up on Western media and Western ways, it wasn't really anything difficult for me to adjust. […] Since we speak in English and since I know about the traditions of this place, or of Europe, better than I know of certain traditions in my own country, it's easier for me to accept and adjust to it.

Jaidev also seems to perceive less 'cultural distance' (Galchenko & van de Vijver, 2007) between himself and Europe, than between himself and a Southern Indian city, perhaps due to the tremendous cultural diversity which characterises his country. Interestingly, similar evidence has been reported by Montgomery (2009: 264) who noticed that, for some Indian students, "working with other students from their own country represented a cross-cultural experience".

Maybe because I come from a capital city where there is already an existing diaspora and for me, personally, it was more of a culture shock to shift to a Southern Indian city than actually to shift to Europe. […] In fact, every time I go back home there is a new shock awaiting.

Considering the easiness with which Jaidev switches places, having the financial means to travel could appear as the main fuel of his migration, especially since it has already been reported that many Indian migrant students come from middle and upper-middle class families (Mukthyala, 2013). According to Cohen and Gössling (2015: 1), "social capital is increasingly based on one's power to be mobile and cultivate global networks". However, by considering not only the background of his family but also the way in which that background was built over time, it is possible to note that the history of Jaidev's family is marked by privation and struggle. Therefore,

the multiple migrations of this student did not emerge due to a high social status, but constitute a reflection of the upward social mobility registered by his family:

> If you told my family in '95 that this is where we would be today, nobody would believe you. We come from a very simple, very basic background, we are not from New Delhi, we are originally from Bengal and we were refugees who came to live in New Delhi, so we didn't have so many things, we had a lot of problems.

Certainly, Jaidev's migration to Portugal cannot be explained by invoking a unique reason. In fact, all his previous experiences influenced, in one way or another, his decision to engage in migration. Also, the specificity of his field of study and the fact that he obtained a scholarship were determinant in choosing the destination country.

> My field or my niche segment is design science, design thinking and design philosophy, and is very difficult to find these courses anywhere because they are not really treated seriously in many places of the world. They don't have a direct commercial aspect so it's very difficult to get these courses. Anyway, I found about three courses, one in Portugal, one in Finland and one in New Zealand. I chose Portugal because it is non-conventional with regard to design and I also got the FCT scholarship which made the thing entirely easier.

Along with the influence of family background, the numerous international experiences and the specificity of his field of study, Jaidev's migration to Portugal can also be approached in terms of coincidence, given that studying in Portugal occurred as a direct consequence of a random email advertising a PhD position in this country:

> I think in a way it was destined because, at one point of time, I was applying to all of places, I was not getting a lot of answers and I was frustrated for a while. One night, this email pops-up, from a network which I had subscribed, announcing a new job in the form of a PhD position with Portuguese scholarship: "Wow, this is too good to be true!" It had been published just three hours earlier and I think I would have been the first person to apply.

Even though the choice of Portugal *was destined*, Jaidev did not leave all the details of his destination in the hands of a hunch. Instead, he researched online about the University of Porto, before taking a final decision.

> [My PhD application in Portugal] was based on the email I got and also on some sort of gut instinct. Then, I researched on the university and realised it was a good university, not private, very well known, in a good city. I always do a background check, that goes with being a researcher as well.

Moreover, it is intriguing to note how Jaidev seems to have internalised migration. Perhaps due to his easiness to move, migration became part of his expected life trajectory to such an extent that he actually rejects the idea of migration:

> I don't actually feel that what I'm doing is migration. Neither I feel as an immigrant.

Regarding the future development of his narrative, most likely Jaidev's numerous international experiences will continue to grow after the conclusion of his degree in Portugal. He seems to have a peculiar 'appetite for wandering' or 'travel bug', as designated by Murphy-Lejeune (2002), which prevents him from settling.

> My future is moving, moving, moving. And I'm comfortable with that, I like that, I like living out of the suitcase in that sense. […] It is a human response, it's a natural human response to find your track of land and stay there and for me it also comes naturally that maybe one day I will do that. But then, very soon, I will get that sort of itchiness that I had enough of this. So every time I think: "That's it, I will settle"; boom! Something happens and next, next, next.

At the same time, Jaidev could be considered an 'existential migrant' (Madison, 2006) whose vision of life and future strategy is entwined with migration.

> I would love to do a post-doc, if I get a scholarship here, why not? But I think it's not gonna be here, maybe some other city, in some other place, in some other country, so education is a very good way to see the world and making full out of it. It's great.

Jaidev explains this itchiness he claims to feel when staying for a long period of time in the same place through the metaphor of the *modern day gypsy*:

> I think one of the reasons I feel comfortable in such a type of life, in moving so frequently, is that there are some people in every place you go, in every level, who are more modern day gypsies. There are gypsies still in modern times and they really belong either willingly or unwillingly, like in my case, to a sort of migrating fondness. If I would live in a place for more than four years I would get damn bored, because once I start getting comfortable I just start getting ideas, and that's something that I don't do with purpose. I don't know why it happens, but it happens […].

According to Jaidev, a possible explanation for this *migrating fondness* could be linked to his lifelong connection with creativity and the arts field.

> I am a creative individual, I've been involved in the creative field ever since I know and you need to get inspired on a continuous basis, unless you get inspired your creativity doesn't grow […]. So I need the inspiration over and over, and over again, or that zest so I think it has to do with inspiration, more inspiration, with getting more out of life and not to be confined to one space, and there are life experiences which affect your creative output.

Attending to the specificities of his narrative, it is possible to observe that the migratory process in which this student is involved could hardly be regarded as common or typical. The fact that Jaidev is a highly mobile individual goes beyond recent global trends of migration and needs to be explained through the interlacement of individual, structural and biographical factors, which make of this narrative an impressively unique migration story. The fact that Jaidev changes

contexts so easily and so frequently, led me to choose the adjective *effortless*, in order to describe his migratory process.

> What I do is I move from one place to another, I just chuck everything which was there previously like cloth, shoe, everything, I mean just start a new leaf in a new city and I think I really like doing that, to have this purge and then start a new chapter, and purge and start a new chapter.

Given his impressive and broad array of international experiences, especially at such a young age, Jaidev appears to be an *effortless* migrant who easily switches between places and countries. The easiness with which he is able to repeatedly engage in migration and construct a new life in a different context is successfully described by the metaphor of the *purge.* His narrative appears to link Jaidev to a mobile elite engaged in 'hypermobility' (Cohen & Gössling, 2015), albeit the subjectivities embedded in his life trajectory depict a more complex story. In spite of his hypermobility, Jaidev comes from a family with a background of forced migration, and subsequent social and financial hardship. In other words, his enhanced mobility is not solely the result of his current social status but also of his own efforts to encounter new funding opportunities, using education as a means to travel and live internationally.

## 7. The 'restless' migrant

Alfonso is from Spain, currently in his twenties, and went abroad for the first time during his Bachelor's degree, through the Erasmus programme. Although Portugal was not his first option, at that time, the only place available for a short-term mobility was at the University of Porto. After returning to Spain, he completed his degree in Sports, and was looking to pursue a Master's degree. He ended up returning to Portugal where he also received a job offer from the rowing club he got involved with during the Erasmus period, and where is also taking a Master's degree at the Faculty of Sports.

Attending to the difference between international and foreign students, given that Alfonso's motivation to migrate to Portugal was influenced by educational objectives, he can be considered an international student. Also, it is important to notice that the migratory project of this student did not developed independently from his previous international experience. The fact that Alfonso became an international student in Portugal, and not in another country, was influenced by his previous Erasmus experience in Portugal and by his wish to be financially independent from his family.

> The fact that I was combining the Master's with a job offer also weighed [in the decision to come to Portugal]. Obviously, it was something that needed to come together [the job and

the Master's] because, if I were to leave home, I needed to work. I didn't want my parents to cover my expenses […]. They already helped me during the Erasmus […] in the hardest period of crisis in Spain. I didn't like that and it was a rule that I imposed to myself: "If I leave home, my parents will not pay anything". […] So here the proposal was a package: to work and do the Master's.

In fact, when Alfonso was considering to apply for a Master's, oscillating between the idea of studying in Spain or in Portugal, his option for coming to Portugal was also determined by financial aspects. As shown in the excerpt below, for Alfonso, studying in a foreign country appeared to be cheaper than studying at home:

> Regarding the Master's, I had several in mind, one was here. I had seen Master's degrees in Madrid, also in Seville, but I didn't know what to do. My preference was to leave Spain, was to come here, or eventually go to Madrid. I was struggling with that indecision because I knew that the Master's from Madrid was very good, it had a lot of quality. […] one thing that made me come here was the fact that the Master's in Madrid was very expensive, around six thousand euros for one year and a half.

Before actually migrating to Portugal, Alfonso engaged in his first international mobility due to his interest in exploring the Erasmus experience.

> I am twenty three and I did my academic trajectory straightforward: I completed the Bachelor's, which is four years in Spain, and I just started the Master's, I didn't have any break, always uninterrupted. My first experience abroad was with Erasmus. […] When I was doing my Bachelor's, I saw that the Erasmus applications were open and I wanted to take advantage of that opportunity, I wanted to do an Erasmus, everybody said that it was an interesting thing to do, that it should be done at least once in a life time, so I applied: "Let's see what comes out of it".

Besides the desire to engage in a programme that *should be done at least once in a life time,* Alfonso was also interested in having a rowing experience in a foreign country, and chose the potential destination cities for his international mobility in accordance with that interest. Serendipity also played its role in the achievement of an Erasmus scholarship:

> I could have chosen from a number of cities but, when I made the choice, I was sure that I wanted to have a rowing experience in another country and I knew that in Rome it was possible and in Porto also, I knew rowing teams from here. I chose Rome and, as a second option, Porto. I was lucky because there were folks enrolled in the same academic year as I who had chosen roughly five cities and they were left aside.

According to the findings of Nachatar Singh, Schapper and Jack (2014), migrant students tend to seek countries with which they are culturally familiar. However, the narrative of Alfonso seems to describe an opposite tendency. The relatively high geographical and cultural proximity between Portugal and Spain appears to be, among Spanish students, a factor that diminishes

their interest for studying in Portugal. In spite of this view, Alfonso regarded Porto as an interesting destination.

> The choice of Porto does not seem very trend: it's Portugal, very near, you almost don't leave the country. I found it very interesting [… but], regrettably, people in Spain don't think that it's an appealing destination. It's like Portugal were just one more part of Spain, obviously that it is a distinct country but, since it is so near, it's small, it doesn't have any other exit other than Spain, those people who are used to jump from one place to another do not fancy it.

Alfonso's previous mobility experience, within the scope of the Erasmus programme, did not influenced only his decision to migrate to Portugal but eased this student's adaptation, diminishing the difficulty of the initial adjustment period, which migrants generally experience during their first weeks in the host country (Scheyvens, Wild, & Overton, 2003).

> When I came back here [to Porto], after the Erasmus, I felt again all that welcoming of the team, everybody helped me. […] When I arrived for the second time, I knew almost everybody and it was very quick, there was not even the case for a [process of] inclusion, [at work] my colleague immediately said: "Buddy, it's all yours".

With regard to the future, the narrative of Alfonso indicates that the two sojourns in Portugal whetted his appetite for further migratory projects, rendering him restless, and awaking his 'travel bug' (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002).

> I have no idea about what I will do next but, what I would really like, is to go to Australia, New Zeeland, United States. I want to continue visiting and living in more parts of the world, I am a very restless person. […] my preference is to go, discover more places. […] This is my mentality, to be changing, to be evolving, discovering new things, not staying always in the same place, in the comfort zone. It is something that keeps me alive, so to speak […].

At the same time, it is interesting to note that Alfonso considers the age factor, when planning his future sojourns indicating that, in his view, there is a right time to engage in international experiences:

> I think I am at the right age to do that, what I don't do now, until thirty, I will not do after. Then you find a girlfriend, you stay [in the same place], you already have other expectations. I think this is the right moment to leave, enjoy, the idea of leaving is important: to discover cultures, other ways of living, create a solid basis, a basis of people, friends, contacts.

The reason for which I consider Alfonso to be a *restless* migrant is the fact that, in his narrative, migration seems to be fuelled by an insatiable appetite for travelling. In the excerpt below, it is possible to note that this student does not find it easy to accept the idea of living in the same place forever.

> I spent a year here alone and I liked the feeling of being in charge of my stuff. I was already doing that at home but I really craved for discovering the world. I accept very well the folks

who stay forever at home, in their city, but I don't agree, that is not for me […]. I like discovering the world, the people, and I am already thinking about the time when my Master's degree will be completed: "Where I can go next?". I have a necessity that my parents don't like very much which is to be travelling. If I were able to stay for one year in every place of the world, I would be really happy.

In the attempt to explain his restlessness, Alfonso describes himself as an alternative person who was always somewhat different from the 'majority'.

I think it is due to my way of being because I have always been a little bit alternative. Even as a child, everybody was doing normal sports and I chose rowing, in my school from one thousand and two hundred pupils, I think we were just one or two practicing rowing. Everybody had their football team, or their team of this and that, and I was doing rowing. I always regarded myself, not as a strange person, but a little bit alternative one, I never did what everybody else was doing.

Even in the way he envisages the development of what he considers to be a fruitful international experience, Alfonso distinguishes himself from other students, criticising the way in which most Erasmus students act while abroad:

Erasmus students isolate themselves and almost create a new population, they are neither people from the country in which they are in, nor they are people from the country that they come from. It's like they have a diplomatic passport, they are special. Personally, I don't agree with that.

By providing a detailed description of this student's experience within the Erasmus programme and the subsequent migration to Portugal, his narrative contributes to the understanding of the student migration phenomenon in its relationship to student international mobility programmes. The trajectory of Alfonso does not solely confirm that "previous mobility experiences raise the likelihood of going abroad" (Carlson, 2011b: 3), but also provides an empirical framework through which we can understand how the process of migration is reconfigured and influenced by the participation in international mobility programmes. Considering Alfonso's need of being "on the move", and the plans to undertake "consecutive mobilities" (Brodersen, 2014: 99), the profile of the *restless* migrant is the one that better describes this student's migratory trajectory.

## 8. The 'polymorphous' migrant

Amivi is in her thirties, originally from East Timor, a country where Portuguese is one of the official languages. She initially came to Portugal as a member of a religious congregation, wanting to become a nun. After several years, while in Portugal, she decided to give up on the religious life and started to date a Timorese man. Then, she returned to her country where she worked as a Tetum-Portuguese translator in the district court of Dili, for two years. She ended

up returning to Portugal as a consequence of her boyfriend's insistence on living together. As the relationship did not evolve as expected, she decided to move from her boyfriends' house and chose a distant city where she started a Bachelor's in Law.

Amivi's suits the category of foreign students since her initial migration did not have an educational purpose. Given that she comes from a country in which Portuguese is an official language, it could be presumed that the language, which her home and host country share, could have played a central role in her migration process. Due to the specificity of the political situation in East Timor, that was hardly the case. In fact, Amivi had to learn Portuguese from scratch:

> When I was in the twelfth grade, it was forbidden to speak Portuguese, it was forbidden for twenty-five years. I was born in 1980, born and raised with the Indonesian language, it was always like that, I studied, everything was in Indonesian. Portuguese was forbidden, nobody could speak Portuguese.

This particular example reinforces the complexity of factors that need to be taken into account when analysing migration. Although Amivi comes from a country where Portuguese is now an official language, her migratory experience is marked by language struggles.

> My contact, my first contact with the Portuguese language was very difficult and I even said to my teacher that I didn't like Portuguese.

Instead of assuming that language plays an important role in the migration of all students coming from Portuguese speaking countries, the diversity of sending countries needs to be carefully addressed since quite often "much depends on the national contexts" (King & Skeldon, 2010: 1639). At the same time, by focusing merely on one structural factor of migration, language, Amivi's migratory trajectory could not be understood in all its complexity. Her narrative is rather peculiar, in the sense that she migrated to Portugal twice, and neither the first time, nor the second, had she done so in order to enrol in higher education. Hence, in order to understand Amivi's migratory process, is important to take into account the chronology of her trajectory. The excerpt below reveals that the idea of coming to Portugal emerged in the context of her desire to become a nun.

> I was studying in Dili, at the 'Heart of Jesus' High School. I had the opportunity to have a Portuguese language course with a religious woman, a sister. Then, she talked about the religious life, about the founder of the congregation and I started to like religious life. Therefore, I decided to come to Portugal to have an experience of religious life.

Complementary to her interest for religion, Amivi's motivations to engage in her first migration to Portugal appear to have been also related to a certain desire for self-discovery (Wilks & Neto, 2016).

> In that moment, in 2011, I talked with my family and they agreed with me, they let me come to Portugal, but not my mother. I insisted with her and she allowed me to come to Portugal in order to do an experience, how it is to really discover, know myself and know the *other*, live together in a community.

After several years of religious service, Amivi gave up on the idea of becoming a nun. Even though the main motivation for her first migration was rooted in her connection with the religious congregation, when that connection was lost, Amivi did not return to East Timor right away. Shortly after leaving the congregation, she started to date a Timorese man and moved to Lisbon, where she lived in several locations. There, she also lived at her boyfriend's for six months and enrolled in a Portuguese language course. Eventually, she returned to Timor.

> I went to Lisbon, I lived in the centre of Lisbon with a colleague, the rent of the house was paid by the nuns and we stayed there for two months. Then, they transferred us to [the district] of Massamá where we stayed for a year. […] I stayed for six months at my boyfriend's house and, then, I managed to obtain a room at the students' residence in Lisbon […]. After I left my boyfriend's house, I went to the Embassy of Timor to ask for a declaration in order to be able to study Portuguese at the University of Lisbon. So, I had a Portuguese language course from November 2009 until May 2010, until I returned to Timor [… where] I started to work at the District Court of Dili.

Once in Timor, the idea of a second migration to Portugal occurred to Amivi. Similar to the first time she came to Portugal, this migration did not have an educational objective. In fact, the reason for which Amivi returned to Portugal was influenced by her romantic relationship, confirming the idea that such links can exert influence over students' relocation decisions (Brooks & Waters, 2011).

> When I left the congregation, after three months, I met a Timorese and we started dating. When I went to Timor, we continued to contact with each other and he said: "You go to Timor and, if you find someone that you like more, tell me and I will do the same"; an open relationship. After that, he always called me and that relationship continued. […] When I was working as a translator at the court, I decided to return to Portugal because of my boyfriend.

Even though her enrolment in higher education did not constitute a migration trigger, and occurred after several years of living Portugal, Amivi had the intention to do a Bachelor's degree back in Timor.

> Before, I had the intention to go to university, I actually applied but I did not pass the exam. [...] In that year, in Timor there was a mess, in 1999, with Indonesia, because of the

independence, Timor asked for independence. For this reason, there was a quite difficult climate to apply for university.

Based on her initial migration, Amivi not only engaged in migration for the second time but she did so to the same destination, confirming Carlson's (2011b) findings regarding the likelihood to go abroad again when previous mobility experiences do exist. In other words, Amivi's first sojourn in Portugal seems to have influenced the destination of her second migration. Also noteworthy is the significance of Amivi's migratory trajectory when examined within the chronological line of her narrative.

> When I was in Timor, my mind was very far away from Timor, it was always wandering here in Portugal. So, [when I left again] I did not think about other countries to go to, beside Portugal, because I like Portugal very much. […] I was missing everything also, I was already used to live here, I lived here more than I lived in Dili, almost half of my life was in Portugal.

The way events unfolded in time is also crucial for understanding the narrative of Amivi, and especially the way she ended up enrolling in higher education. Due to the issues experienced in her relationship, she started to look for information regarding the possibility of becoming a student in Portugal. At the Timorese embassy, she was informed about a special regime aimed at students who come from Portuguese-speaking countries, which would allow her to choose the university she wanted to attend. Through this regime, she was able to enrol in higher education in a city that would ensure geographical distance from her boyfriend:

> We had a very serious problem in our relationship. We used to fight all the time, I could not take it anymore, I wanted to run away from him, so I needed to search for another path […]. Eventually, one day, I was planning to study, to take a degree in Law but, when I came to Portugal, I didn't have that intention. I returned [here] because of him. Due to this problem that we had, I decided to study. […] I really wanted to run away from him but I didn't have another way [to do it] if not continuing to study and coming to Braga. With the special regime, I could have chosen Lisbon, but I didn't want to. I chose Braga myself for that reason: I wanted to move away from him.

Besides the wish to live far from her boyfriend, Amivi's choice of a city and university was not random. On the one hand, it was influenced by the familiarity she felt towards Braga, a city in which she had lived for several years in the ambit of the religious congregation. On the other hand, the reputation of the university also influenced Amivi's decision:

> I also chose Braga because I think it is a very calm city and people are very nice, I had already stayed in Braga for four years during the time I spent in the congregation. I also think it is a very known university, so I choose the city of Braga to live, and the University of Minho to study.

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Another interesting aspect of Amivi's migration is the idiosyncratic link that exists between her home country and Portugal. In this narrative, it is possible to note that "relational ties created by colonial linkages" (Perkins & Neumayer, 2014: 247) seem to play a central role in the migration of students from former colonies. Even though East Timor is nowadays an independent country, one of the reasons that led Amivi to positively evaluate the way in which she was welcomed in Portugal was the easiness with which she was able to obtain Portuguese citizenship. Considering the Indonesian presence in East Timor as an illegal occupation, Portugal continued "to treat East Timorese as Portuguese citizens" (Piotrowicz, 1996: 324), creating a legal gap which allowed many Timorese to easily obtain Portuguese citizenship. Thus, the overall positive evaluation of Amivi's migratory experience is a marker of the identity links which bind her home and host countries.

> I developed affection for the country because I think that the Portuguese state welcomes the Timorese very well, we are even able to acquire Portuguese citizenship. I like it, I really love Portugal. If I were to choose where to live, I [would] want [to live in] Portugal, I don't want [to live in] other countries. Either I return to Timor or I stay here.

However, during her second sojourn in Portugal, Amivi engaged in migration to a different country. In order to obtain the necessary resources for tuition and living costs in Portugal, she decided to go to England where she worked in a factory. This new migration experience confirms Liu-Farrer's (2009: 199) findings, according to which students are generally addressed as part of the skilled labour category of migrants, whilst their "contribution to the low-wage labour market is often overlooked". Certainly, migrant students' experiences are marked by many subjectivities and turning points, and cannot be conceived only in the light of their academic skills. Notwithstanding the fact that research on student migration "shows that the students who move generally belong to the middle and upper classes" (King & Raghuram, 2013: 131), some students do struggle with economic difficulties and need to engage in low-skilled labour, in order to support their living costs:

> When my boyfriend and I broke up, the financial issue arose, because each month he used to send me a little bit of money. It was not too much but it helped to buy some things and, after we ended our relationship, who would give me money in order to survive? Hence, I ran to England, because of the money. I needed to pay my tuition, my room, because practically all my stuff remained here, my books, everything, the student residence is like my house. Even in my identity card, my address is here, at the residence.

Throughout the development of her narrative, Amivi's status did not remain immutable. On the contrary, during her multiple experiences of migration, Amivi passed from a 'religious' migrant, who came to Portugal in order to have an experience of religious life, to a 'relationship' migrant, who returned to Portugal for romantic reasons. She then became a Bachelor's student and even

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a temporary economic migrant in England. Attending to this multiple transformations found in her narrative, Amivi embodies the profile of the *polymorphous* migrant, frequently changing her migratory status in order to adapt to specific necessities. Her narrative stands as proof for the fact that migration cannot be explained by simplistic cause/effect dichotomies since it "is a complex engagement of personal motivations, economic prospects, geopolitical factors, and cultural transitions" (McGill, 2013: 178).

## 9. The 'ambivalent' migrant

Corina is in her late thirties, from Moldavia, and already experienced migration in her adolescence, when she enrolled in a Romanian high school. After returning to her home country, she intended to settle in Moldavia and work as a Romanian language teacher. Her husband, who had previously migrated to Portugal, asked her to temporarily join him. Even though she was expecting to have only a short sojourn in Portugal, Corina ended up engaging in a longer stay, which eventually became permanent. Only after several years of living in Portugal, Corina decided to enrol in a Master's degree.

Following the distinction between foreign and international students, Corina would suit the group of foreign students, since she did not migrate to Portugal with the intention to study. Besides coming to Portugal, Corina's trajectory contains another migratory episode: as young as fourteen years old, this student won a scholarship which allowed her to study in Romania, a country with which she had previous identity links:

> My first migration was to Romania. I was not even fifteen when I went, I was fourteen and a half. I applied there for a pedagogic high school and I was admitted. From the best students, they were choosing six to go and study in the city of Cluj-Napoca. [… That time corresponded with the period of] our independence, [when] the Moldavian language [became] the only official language, and Russian got left behind. It was that national awakening that I experienced […] in that year everything was like a revolution and that influenced me a lot. That means it was a different experience, it was not a typical migration to a foreign country because a link [already] existed, and my parents had always had the desire to define themselves as Romanians.

The peculiarity of Corina's first migration to Romania is also rooted in the factor of age. Living in a foreign country at such a young age seems to bring different challenges than migrating to a foreign country during adulthood. Also, Corina's sojourn in Romania is rather unique given the cultural and linguistic ties that bind the two countries.

> Going to Romania was, somehow, like returning to my origins [… I had] a soul connection with the language. On the one hand, I could even say that those were my origins because my grandparents were, in their passport, Romanians. Therefore we were formerly Romanians and

that was what I thought, what I heard from my parents, that our origins were Romanian. However, very few people thought like that in terms of national identity. Before going to Romania, I was the first one from my class who knew how to write with the Latin alphabet, back then it was Cyrillic, we used to write Moldavian but with the Cyrillic alphabet, Slavic.

Also noteworthy is this student's difficulty in deciding if her stay in Romania would qualify as migration, due to the short 'cultural distance' (Galchenko & van de Vijver, 2007) that she perceives between the two countries:

> Despite all this, my sojourn in Romania constitutes an experience of migration. Nevertheless, Romania is for me a not-that-foreign country as Portugal. Perhaps it could be quite excessive to say that it was immigration [what I did] in Romania, it was an experience of going to another country, but clearly Portugal was the country in which I really felt I was an immigrant.

Corina's last years in Romania were marked by optimism regarding her professional prospects in Moldavia, which led her to not even consider migration as a viable possibility for her future.

> I remember that, in the last year of my Bachelor's, me and my friends, we started to think where we would be working, how we would go back to Moldavia. Back then, I was thinking about continuing with my Master's, also in Romania, but I was not accepted, thus I returned to Moldavia. I was very optimistic, I was thinking that everything would turn out in the best possible way. Although there were friends of mine who were thinking about migrating and they were studying German, to me, [the idea of] migrating never occurred.

In order to understand Corina's migration to Portugal, it is important to consider the context in which she was living back in Romania and Moldavia. An unsuccessful Master's application in Romania contributed to Corina's return to Moldavia, where she experienced a strong clash between her professional objectives and the *in situ* reality. A profound dissatisfaction with her professional life contributed to her decision to travel to Portugal, at least temporarily:

> My first shock was when I returned to Moldavia and started to work as a teacher in a high school in the capital city. I, with the dream of teaching my students how to speak [Romanian] correctly, I ended up in a high school which had ceased to be a Russian school, and the students would enter the classroom and speak Russian. […] In fact, my emigration to Portugal should have been a consequence of this shock. It was a shock for me because, after my Bachelor's, I was envisioning myself as a teacher who would teach how to speak correctly Romanian and, then, I came across those students who spoke only Russian, neither they had the will to speak Romanian. So how could I apply my strategies to the practical field, everything that I have thought about? I needed to rethink everything.

Still, Corina's migration to Portugal cannot be explained only through the professional dissatisfaction that she was feeling in Moldavia. In fact, the main reason to go to Portugal was related to the fact that her husband was already living in this country, and could hardly travel internationally due to its illegal migratory status. Corina's arrival to Portugal was, therefore, influenced by her husband, while his own migration was encouraged by the presence of relatives

who were already living in Portugal, confirming the assumption according to which having relatives in the host country can constitute a migration trigger (Méango, 2014).

> As [my husband] already had relatives here in Portugal, off he went […]. After I returned to Moldavia, I had already started to work as a teacher, half a year before, when my husband thought about this idea of me going to Portugal. He was not able to come, because of the legalisation, only after one year and a half they would start to legalise the immigrants so he needed to be here, to not lose that opportunity, thus he invited me to come.

Besides the presence of her husband in Portugal, another motivation for Corina's decision to temporarily visit him was the willingness to improve her economic status, a common migration trigger which drives "people to look outside their country of birth for a better life" (Ciarniene & Kumpikaite, 2015: 527).

> Considering that among the factors of immigration, one is the improvement of life economically, the majority of people go abroad for this reason, and my reason was also this one. Since I was encountering here someone very dear to me, very close, this was one more reason.

After a short sojourn in Portugal, Corina returned to Moldavia, where she was waiting for her husband to return, without even taking into account the possibility of migrating again. Since her husband decided to extend his stay in Portugal, Corina's plans changed, and she ended up returning to Portugal again:

> [So] I arrived to Portugal, I stayed for one year and then I returned to Moldavia thinking that I would never go back. I had my son [in Moldavia] and I was waiting for us to settle there. [Life] was already starting to get better for me but, after that, my husband considered that we, [me and my son], should return to Portugal. So off I went and returned [here] with my son, he was two years old [back then].

Even when she returned to Portugal for the second time, Corina did not have plans to engage in long-term migration. What transformed her second sojourn in Portugal into a permanent migration was her dissatisfaction with her home country and the desire to assure an uninterrupted educational trajectory for her son.

> Our son was two years old [when I returned to Portugal], so when he would reach the age of enrolling in school, we would return to Moldavia. But that [ended up being] different. When I went to Moldavia for holidays, I was finding things to be worse there, I would convince myself that I should stay here, that [in Moldavia there] were no chances for me [to succeed]. […] The idea was to stay here [until he would be] six years old, gather a little bit of money and then go back. But there were some small question marks here and there because it was not only one year, they were two, three and, after all these years, [staying here depended] not only on my husband but also on my son. When we decided to stay here we were thinking about him, everything that we did back then was done thinking about him.

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Due to the continuous duality she feels as an international immigrant, undecided if she should stay or return, the adjective *ambivalent* better describes Corina's migratory profile.

> Every time I went for holidays, I felt more and more distant from that environment, from that country and now I feel even more distant, in spite of missing it. At that time, I already started to feel that distance, it seems I'm not from there. It's not like I feel that I am Portuguese already, but I was neither here, nor there, being an immigrant is sometimes like that.

In spite of the initial plans to confine her sojourns in Portugal only to temporary periods, Corina ended up engaging in long-term migration, and now she clearly envisages her future in Portugal, discarding the possibility of returning to her home country.

> I see my future here. Even when my husband sometimes says: "We need to go back". He has moments when he thinks like that and I always tell him: "No, I will stay here". If I think about it, it is here that I see my future, with my children. […] Our sojourn in Portugal started as temporary but, thinking about their future, I think it will become more like long-term, perhaps for a lifetime.

The ambivalence of Corina's migration is also visible in the way she refers to the hypothetic scenario of going back in time. On the one hand, she envisages her future in Portugal and, on the other hand, she considers that she would decide against the idea of migration if she were able to choose again, taking as reference her friends who were able to secure a better life, back in Moldavia:

> Am I sorry to have left Moldavia? No, I am not. Meanwhile, if time could go back, maybe I would not have left. I have colleagues, friends, in Moldavia, which managed to surpass that financial problem.

Also noteworthy is the fact that, in spite of her decision to permanently settle in Portugal, Corina constantly seeks to nourish her relationship with the original culture.

> A person who lives in a different country should be very interested in what happens in that country, given that he or she wants to integrate, but also [should] never forget about the country from which that person comes.

Even though she lived in Portugal for several years, Corina enrolled in a Master's degree many years after her arrival. Previously, she worked as a housekeeper, a profession that many Eastern European migrant women in Portugal practice (Araújo et al., 2015). For Corina, housekeeping was a harsh experience, since she felt that "her degree and her work experience were of no help in the new environment" (Rosulnik, Hladnik, & Licen, 2016: 40). The reason for engaging in low-qualified work was also based on her intentions to stay in Portugal only temporarily, save money, and return to Moldavia. In my interpretation, one of the reasons for delaying her re-entry in

higher education is based precisely on the uncertainty caused by her *ambivalent* migratory profile.

> I worked [as a housekeeper] during two years in the house of [a lady] with whom I got along very well and she used to tell me: "You can study, you can do something else"; but, at that time, I did not know yet that I would end up staying here, in Portugal.

Furthermore, this excerpt raises the question of a different type of migration process which tends to go unnoticed in the research literature. Frequently, researchers regard migrant students as potential permanent immigrants, who "adjust their status from visitors to immigrants once they have completed their degrees" (Hazen & Alberts, 2006: 202). In this case, the migratory process is conceived based on a student-to-migrant trajectory (Robertson & Runganaikaloo, 2014). Interestingly, Corina's migration narrative illustrates a completely inversed model: instead of going abroad to study and opting to remain in the host country after graduation (student-to-migrant), Corina engaged in migration and decided to study long after arriving in the host country (migrant-to-student). Both at her first and second arrival to Portugal, Corina had always pictured a life in Moldavia. However, as time went by, she started to have mixed feeling regarding her desire to return to Moldavia and ended up accepting the scenario of becoming a permanent (im)migrant in Portugal. As depicted in her narrative, Corina is an *ambivalent* migrant who oscillated, during many years, between the idea of staying and leaving.

## 10. The 'pre-established' migrant

Rita is African, in her twenties, originally from São Tomé, an island state where Portuguese is the official language. She already had an experience abroad of nine months in Morocco, and she is currently taking her Bachelor's degree in Portugal. After finishing high school, study abroad seems to be popular among young people in São Tomé. There are scholarships available from the government, and Rita managed to obtain one to study in Morocco. There, she did not enrol in higher education right away but she was advised to take a French language course. Also, the scholarship did not allow her to choose her Bachelor's, and she ended up being offered the opportunity to study Biology. Not being interested in this topic, she decided to take, in Portugal, the degree she aimed for, and moved to the city of Coimbra with her twin sister.

Following the separation between foreign and international students, Rita suits the second category, since her migration was driven by an educational purpose. Still, Rita did not plainly decide to go abroad but migration was somehow embedded in her trajectory. In fact, the development of the higher education sector in her country is limited, *therefore the majority prefers to study abroad.* Rita's migration does not appear to be a choice but something that she

always expected to happen, especially due to the particularities of the higher education sector in her home country.

> In São Tomé, it is already a habit to go abroad when we finish high school. […] To me, studying abroad has always been something that was already stipulated, to everybody.

Not only was the idea of studying abroad already part of Rita's objectives, but also the decision to enrol in higher education was intrinsic to her educational trajectory:

> I never thought to stop studying after high school. As I was growing up, I saw and heard people around me talking about [going to university] so I knew that, after high school, university would follow. Education would not stop there.

Besides the fact that, in São Tomé, *basically everybody studies abroad*, this student's propensity for migration was enhanced by a certain level of mobility capital inherited from her parents. Even though mobility capital is defined as "a form of human capital that arises from previous experiences of living abroad" (King & Raghuram, 2013: 132), this narrative shows that study abroad experiences of family members can also add to students' mobility capital and influence their migrations.

> My father is a civil engineer and my mother is an agropecuary technician. They studied abroad also. They studied in Cuba and then they did something in Brazil. The State itself encourages that and has various agreements with various countries. It is a habit, it has been years that the state has given scholarships to several countries, and everybody is ready for that.

Since studying abroad was something that was already stipulated for Rita, she did not experience any mixed feelings regarding her departure. On the contrary, she was actually looking forward to the moment in which she would leave her country:

> There is always that happiness about leaving. I remember that I was very anxious, I really wanted to leave, I was waiting for it, I wanted to breathe fresh air, I was a little bit suffocated at home. […] I know there are people who get very sad when they leave but I was absolutely happy.

Another interesting aspect of Rita's narrative is the fact that Portugal was not a completely unknown country to her. In fact, back in her home country, she had studied in a private Portuguese school.

> I did my secondary level at a Portuguese school. There are two Portuguese schools and education is the same as here, the schools are assessed by the Portuguese government and not by the one of São Tomé. We pay fees but all the investment comes from the Portuguese government. I don't know how much my parents used to pay but at the national schools people pay a lot less.

Through her experience in secondary school, Rita had access to some aspects of the Portuguese educational culture beforehand, which seems to have eased her academic adaption in Portugal. This observation is consistent with the relationship established by Bourdieu (1986) between cultural capital and academic success.

> So we always go abroad in order to study and, when you leave São Tomé and come here for university, it is [a] completely different [experience]. […] Since I attended a Portuguese school, I don't notice that [difference as] much as the other students do […] when they come here.

The fact that Rita studied in a private school underlines another determinant factor of her migration: social class. In spite of the scholarships provided by the state, the possibility of studying abroad is not accessible to all students from São Tomé, especially if their families do not have the means to support them during their international sojourns. Indeed, "existing scholarship on ISM [International Student Mobility] shows clear linkages between student mobility and social class" (Pásztor, 2015: 833).

> For the ones who do not have the means, it's complicated to leave because the aid provided by the State could help a little bit, but is rather annoying because the State sometimes fails and, when it does, parents need to have the means to intervene. If they don't, their children [will] experience very difficult situations.

In spite of the apparent commonness of student migration in São Tomé, Rita seems to be aware that foreign education is not accessible to all students, and regards it as a valuable opportunity:

> The ones who think otherwise [not to study abroad], it is because they don't have possibilities for more, but the idea of everybody is to go abroad. […] I never felt like giving up, drop out, because these are unique opportunities. I can't mess around, I was raised like this: to value what I have, especially since I don't have that much to mess around with.

Another important aspect of Rita's migration is related to the historical relationship between her home and host countries. Considering that "colonial powers have always favoured the migration of students from former colonies" (Beine et al., 2014: 41), Portugal's colonial past could be used to explain the migration of students from countries like São Tomé.

> Any person, when leaves São Tomé, more easily comes to Portugal because is a country with which we have more affinity. We belong to the PALOP [Portuguese-speaking African countries] therefore it's easier to stay here, […] it's like [Portugal] were the only door out. Thus one does not think much more [before choosing], it's indeed Portugal.

However, the historical link between Portugal and Rita's home country was not the only reason that led this student to move to Portugal. As shown in her narrative, she did not migrate directly to Portugal, but initially started to study abroad in Morocco. In the attempt to escape "the dead end of 'methodological nationalism'" (Beck, 2007: 687), which precludes "a study of human

mobility that is removed from the centrality of the state" (Kalir, 2013: 325), historical links should not be used to explain the migration to Portugal of all students who come from ex-Portuguese colonies. This example underlines the necessity to distinguish students from their nationalities and consider their personal stories as a whole. Notwithstanding, Rita acknowledges that:

> language has a lot of influence. Just the fact that we speak the same language, Portuguese, a person doesn´t feel so [marginalised], which didn´t happen back there, in Morocco.

According to Perkins and Neumayer (2014), language has a crucial role in students' 'choice' of countries. Also the importance of having relatives in the host country (Méango, 2014) is mentioned by Rita:

> Here there are also a lot of immigrants already. The majority of my family that left the country is here. So the idea is immediately [to come to] Portugal, mainly because of the language and also because of the relatives that are here. For example, I had my sister here.

If I were to interpret this narrative without acknowledging Rita's past, considering only her origins and the fact that she is currently studying in Portugal, I could assume that her 'choice' of country is rooted in the historical links that bind São Tomé and Portugal. In fact, Rita is a student in Portugal only because the degree she aimed for was not available in the country she originally migrated to: Morocco. Therefore, time is paramount for understanding her migration, since the initial phase of her experience abroad, the sojourn in Morocco, influenced her migration to Portugal. Even though proximity between Portugal and São Tomé mattered, Rita's second migration to Portugal was a direct consequence of events that occurred in Morocco, such as the impossibility to follow the degree she desired:

> I wanted to study Dental Medicine but their decision was that I should study Biology. […] Since I didn´t want to do that, […] I came here.

The influence of the way in which events developed in time is also visible in Rita's intentions regarding the future. Initially, she appeared to be interested in expanding her international experience:

> To work, I would go to Angola or, another option that I had in mind was England. […] I have a passion that is to know how to speak English fluently, so I watch a lot of shows in English. There is a lot of information in English and I think that I am losing a lot because I don't speak it well. […] I was thinking about living in an Anglo-Saxon country, where English is spoken, because I believe that is easier to learn English […]. Those are countries that are a little bit more developed, different from our reality, people are more liberal, can do more things, they are adventurous, creative and, in São Tomé, I don't see that.

However, after an unexpected pregnancy, Rita's plans changed substantially and the intention to explore Anglo-Saxon countries vanished. Still, Rita continues to reject the possibility of returning to her home country.

> Meanwhile I got pregnant and the plans change, changed with this pregnancy. I can't venture anymore, I no longer impose conditions. Now I need to get real and focus. I need to get a proper job, gain money, so that I can support the family that I will have. Since I will have a family, I need to think more about my boyfriend, which implies moving to Angola.

This change in Rita's future intentions visibly contrasts with her previous plans, when her main objective was to have more international experiences. A serious event in her life seems to have triggered a certain need for proximity to her family:

> Before, I was thinking about England [all the time]. If my boyfriend would really not want to leave Angola […] I was going to give up on our relationship. […] But, after something serious that happened in my family, I started to see things differently and to see how distance affects everything. I learnt to value more the people [in my life].

These excerpts suggest that different, and sometimes unexpected events, can lead to significant changes in students' trajectories. However, what turns Rita's narrative into a peculiar migratory profile is not the way in which she reacts towards unexpected circumstances, reconfiguring her life objectives, but the fact that migration was always present in the course of her educational trajectory. In other words, Rita did not actually 'choose' to migrate, nor she 'chose' her destination country. In point of fact, she also did not opted for a particular city or university, but accepted the decision taken by her older sister:

> The city of Coimbra, our older sister chose it for us because she already knew [Portugal], therefore, we did not have any problem with that, we trusted her. She did our registration and she preferred that we studied here, in Coimbra, she thought it would be better. […] Formerly, I was a very passive person, due to the education I had also, I do not impose anything, what they give me, I'll take it. Therefore, it was not a problem for me, and especially coming from my sister, it was somebody I trusted. For that reason, I did not have any problem in regard to the choice of the city.

The fact that Rita's migration was not the result of a choice, but was literally embedded in her educational path, confirms the necessity to look at students' stories as a process, considering not only their present accounts but all their biographical baggage. If this narrative were not considered through a processual lens, the peculiarity of Rita's migration might not have surfaced in the interpretation. Certainly, migration needs to be regarded in more complex ways and not simply as the result of a "fully rational decision" (van der Velde & van Naerssen, 2011: 219). Given the way in which her narrative developed, Rita's migration was not subjected to any kind of decision: the idea of engaging in migration was present throughout her life. Due to the

educational context from her home country and also to the migratory background of her family, Rita's migration appears to have been *pre-established*, since she never got to decide neither for, nor against the possibility of studying abroad. As shown in the excerpts above, the idea of engaging in migration with an educational purpose was simply embedded in Rita's expected academic trajectory.

## 11. The 'unwilling' migrant

Tânia, originally from Angola, is currently in her early thirties and already experienced migration to Portugal, during her childhood. In fact, she lived in Portugal almost the same amount of time that she lived in her own country. In Portugal, she completed a part of her basic education, the upper-secondary level, and also a Bachelor's degree. After that, she returned to her home country, where she started to work at the Ministry of Defence. While working there, the opportunity to do a Master's degree in Portugal arose and Tânia accepted the challenge for the sake of her professional evolution, albeit against her personal wishes.

Tânia's narrative could hardly fit the distinction between foreign and international students. On the one hand, she could be considered an international student, given that both her migrations to Portugal had an educational purpose. On the other hand, her migratory trajectory does not fit the theoretical stances which consider student migration as an individual 'choice'. Wilkins & Huisman (2011: 66) noticed that researchers have been attempting "to build models that can be used to explain student choice". In fact, Tânia's narrative would simply not fit any of these models, given that her first migration, even though educational-oriented, was not the result of her own decision. The complexity of her narrative requires an analysis of her migratory profile starting early into her life-course, as early as eleven years old:

> I had two [migratory] moments. I came here, very young, and I did what they call here basic education. That was a decision that ended up not being mine because, back then, I was very young. At that time, Angola lived a period of civil war and I ended up losing my father in that war, he was a military. My mother, our relatives, decided that it was better for me to come to Portugal, because education was different, with a lot more quality. Since here there was a boarding school, also military, nothing better than going [to Portugal], with a scholarship from the Ministry of Defence.

Tânia describes her first migration to Portugal as a very difficult moment not only on the grounds of age, but also due to the timing when she was sent to boarding school, shortly after losing her father in the civil war. Her memories of that period are marked by many shocks and struggles:

> The beginning was very complicated. It was a big shock, tremendous, you leave home, you don't know anybody here. The boarding school, back then, had around five hundred students,

a lot of people, a completely different system, it's very scary. […] At that time, I used to go frequently to Angola because I suffered a lot and I used to cry a lot. At eleven years old, I used to cry a lot, almost not slept at all, I really had a lot of adaptation problems. I used to think a lot about my brothers, my mother.

The harshness of migrating at such an early age is visible, and even emotionally tangible, in this narrative, especially when considering the extended period of time that Tânia needed in order to adapt to the new reality.

It was a great deal for a child of eleven years old. […] I think it took me around five years [to actually adapt]. It was very, very complicated, there were moments in which I was fine, others not that much, but they weren't five years completely bad. There were, for instance, moments near anniversaries, my mother's, my brothers', those were moments that saddened me a lot.

Besides the difficulty of being sent abroad at such a young age, Tânia also struggled with the rigid rules of the boarding school.

It was a very rigid education, military education: if you did not do like this or like that, you were immediately sanctioned, punished. It was a routine, it seemed that we were robots. From the time to get up, until we went to sleep, there was a time for everything, everything was calculated: a time for classes, a time for eating, a time for study, a time to go to sleep.

Meanwhile, the fact that Tânia studied in a military boarding school, where she spent most of her time, seems to have softened out the feeling of being alone in a foreign country. For that reason, transitioning to university was not an easy process for her:

When I went to university, it was another shock. In boarding school we were used to be in a protective environment, twenty-four hours protected, they did everything for us, we had everything there. Suddenly, you finish secondary education and you see yourself at university, it's a completely different world from the one you were used to. It was a very big shock, seeing so many people, and it's very much like: every man [sic] for himself.

Due to the protective environment offered by the boarding school, the struggles specific to life in a foreign country became more visible when Tânia enrolled in university. In that moment, the awareness of what it means to be an immigrant started to surface.

It was in the passage to university that I started to feel some of the things related to the fact of being a foreigner, being different. […] Everything makes you remind, makes you think: "Oh, ok, I'm a foreigner, I'm not from here". It is in the small things that you really get to perceive that you are not at home, that you are a foreigner, you are all by yourself and you need to take care of your own things. The boarding school camouflaged a lot that feeling of being a foreigner. Therefore, in that transition from boarding school to university, the world revealed itself. It revealed to us, foreigners, in a very bluntly way. Because, [at the end of the day], we were leaving the campus, afraid of this new experience, and we went home [where] we were alone. The other [Portuguese] colleagues, no, they arrived home and had that support [network] of parent or relatives.

After so many years of living away from her family, Tânia started to feel dissatisfied by her life in Portugal and decided to return to Angola. Interestingly, perhaps due to the long period of time that she spent in Portugal, her return to Angola is comparable to the engagement in a new migratory project. The struggles she experienced in order to adapt to her own country support this interpretation:

> I graduated and, luckily, I returned to Angola. I say luckily because I was really fed up of being here. It was sad because I left here some friends, but, for me family is above all, it was more important to be near my family than to continue here. [All in all], in Portugal there were ten years in boarding school and three more for the Bachelor's. [… When I returned to Angola] the re-adaptation was very complicated. It was, in fact, an adaptation because I did not know those realities, I had left that place when I was eleven.

Even though Tânia was eager to return to her home country, that did not stop her from engaging in a new international experience: a short mobility to South Africa.

> I work in the field of bilateral cooperation, so we have projects not only with Portugal but with other countries also. Thus, there was the need to learn how to fluently speak another language. So I started to search, I always liked to know more, to learn, and a course in South Africa popped up. […] There, I spent one year and I was always going to Angola, for every three months there, I would spent in Angola two weeks. It was a good year, went by quickly, it was a different experience, it is a country with a completely different history. […] I wanted to exit Luanda for a little bit, to take a break from that environment, and also the English language [at work] was indeed necessary.

Besides this short mobility in South Africa, and after thirteen years in Portugal, this student's plans did not seem to encompass any other migration intentions. Yet, a professional circumstance brought Tânia to Portugal for a second time. Even though she was not particularly willing to engage in migration again, for reasons of professional improvement, she decided to come to Portugal in order to study.

> When I returned to Angola, I started to work for the Ministry of Defence. I always had a trajectory related to the Ministry of Defence. So, we have a very strong bilateral cooperation with Portugal at the military level, and one of the aspects of that cooperation is correlated with training and education. Consequently, they started to create a project in which some teachers from here would go to Angola to give Master's classes. Back then, I thought it was interesting because they were supposed to come [to Angola], so there was no necessity for us to go [to Portugal]. Unfortunately, the project did not go further, something failed and, since I had already applied to that Master's, […] my boss thought it would be interesting for me to come here.

Leaving her home country during childhood and, then again, as an adult woman seems to have had a significant impact on Tânia's sense of self-perception. According to Morrice (2014: 157), "for migrants, the disjuncture between past and present, the old social space and new, involves

rethinking the self, identity and possibilities of being". Through her migratory experience, Tânia acquired a "divided identity" (Marginson, Nyland, Sawir, & Forbes-Mewett, 2010: 54), finding herself in a constant state of oscillation between the home and the host country.

> Sometimes I use to say that I will start living on the plane, that is how I really feel, people do not understand how much I miss it: when I am on one side, I miss the other. It is like a part of me has been erased, it is very strange and very difficult, I am really divided. I grew up here, I did everything here, I got to know everything here and, I arrive in Angola: ok, I feel at home; but the truth is that, if my family were not in Angola, perhaps I would not feel so much the need to go there. [...] Hence these migrations gave me a dispersed identity, I hardly manage to be in a place without feeling that I am losing a part of myself [...]

This excerpt gives account of the fluidity that characterises migrant students' identity, who are constantly searching for an equilibrium between the different places to which they belong simultaneously. According to Bauman (2011: 431), "'identities' exist today solely in the process of continuous renegotiation. 'Identity formation', or more correctly its 're-formation', turns into a lifelong task, never complete; at no moment of life is the identity 'final'".

Another noteworthy aspect of this narrative is the fact that, neither the first time she came to Portugal, nor the second, did Tânia do so according to her own will. In fact, migration was imposed to her twice: the first as a decision of her family, to which she did not have the means to resist, given her tender age; the second due to a work proposal which, in terms of future professional benefits, seemed wiser to accept at the time.

> I was unhappy [with the work proposal] because I already had my things there [in Angola], [I had] my family, I didn't want [to leave] anymore, I had spent too much time far away from my family. [...] When they told me about the Master's, [that I would need to do it in Portugal], I did not want to come anymore, but I was forced to embrace the project. Nowadays, if I were able to give up, I would do it, but unfortunately I cannot do that, it is a commitment which I made with my employer, with myself.

The reason for which I consider Tânia to be an *unwilling* migrant resides precisely in the fact that both her migrations to Portugal occurred against her own will. To some extent, she was 'forced' to migrate, albeit the adjective 'forced' could not be the most suitable to describe her migration process, given that it could lead to a conceptual confusion with the phenomenon of forced migration. The category of forced migrant refers to an intrinsically different form of movement from the one described in this narrative, and embodies the case of refugees and internally displaced persons (Hein & Niazi, 2016). Although not as tough as a process of forced migration, Tânia's narrative gives account of a peculiar migration process marked by an *unwillingness* to leave.

## 12. The 'trapped' migrant

Valéria is in her forties, from Brazil, and never experienced migration before coming to Portugal. Back in her home country, she was working as a university lecturer and she was feeling a certain professional pressure to complete a PhD degree. By chance, she met a woman in a plane trip who mentioned to her the possibility of studying in Portugal. After searching for more information about that possibility, Valéria decided to enrol in a PhD degree at the University of Coimbra, planning to continue her life in Brazil and come to Portugal only sporadically. During one of those sporadic stays in Portugal, she found out that her husband was being unfaithful and decided to get divorced. Dealing, from the distance, with all the personal and financial troubles caused by her divorce appeared easier to Valéria, thus her decision to move to Portugal for the entire duration of her PhD, and to bring her nine-year-old son with her.

Following the distinction between foreign and international students, Valéria would suit the latter group, since her arrival in Portugal had an educational purpose. However, her initial plans were to study in Portugal while continuing to live in Brazil, 'commuting' between the two countries. The reason that led her to actually become an immigrant in Portugal was the terminus of her marriage:

> I found out that I was being cheated on. […] When I was really sure that my husband was being unfaithful […] I went to Brazil. I spent there more or less one month, the [necessary] time for me to organise the documents for my son to come here and also [to make a] power of attorney for my father to represent me in the divorce [process]. […] Before my divorce, I was here but I would go back to Brazil frequently. The majority of my Brazilian colleagues, they come, they spend [here] one or two months maximum and then return to Brazil, they work there. Until [the divorce], that was also my idea. What prompted me to take up residence in Portugal was precisely the wish to be far from all the problems related to the divorce. I wanted to restructure my life, both my emotional life and a new life here.

Valéria acknowledges that dealing with her divorce while being aloof had positive effects on her. At the same time, she regards her migration in mystical terms, appealing to divine intervention in order to explain it.

> The fact that I was here, [in that moment], worsened and improved the situation at the same time. If I were there, I think that the mix-up would have been a lot bigger and the emotional impact of the divorce also. The fact that I distanced myself from some things happening there was extremely dignifying for me, it was easier, because what you don't see, you don't feel, you also don't get bothered and you don't get annoyed. I think that one of the things that made come to Portugal was God's writing: in order to save me from many things that, if I were there, they would have been more discomforting.

Even though Valéria's decision to leave Brazil and move to Portugal was influenced by her divorce, not all her migratory trajectory was determined by it. For instance, her decision to

pursue a PhD in Portugal was influenced both by serendipity and a certain romanticised image that Valéria had about the University of Coimbra.

> When I completed my Master's degree, I went to take care of bureaucratic issues at the university, in São Paulo, [...] and, in the plane, I met a lady who was the director of a foundation. [...] While chatting with me, she said that they had agreements with [institutions here] and told me about the PhD in Portugal. Well, I have never thought about doing a PhD outside of Brazil, especially considering the issue of diploma recognition, which is not easy. [...] Therefore, I met that lady and she told me about Coimbra. What contributed to the growth of that idea? Actually it was that romanticism from Brazilian soap-operas, in which all the doctors would come to Coimbra to study. Therefore, that [idea] persisted from my childhood imaginary and, in that moment, surfaced, and I just thought: "Why not a PhD degree in Portugal?".

Also noteworthy is the fact that Valéria seems unable to provide a clear reason for her migration to Portugal. The influence of Valéria's childhood imaginary about Coimbra was so significant that, when taking the decision to study in Portugal, she was oblivious to the existence of other Portuguese universities: the choice of Coimbra had already been made:

> If I stop to think about it, I don't even know why I came to Portugal. I always relate this to destiny, it was meant to be, or to that romanticism which was there since I was a child: there was always a doctor who came to study in Coimbra. In fact, at no point in time did occur to me another university. [...] By the way, not even in Brazil I got to look for, or apply to any PhD, amazing as that might seem. [... It was] God's writing: God writes straight with crooked lines. I can't even say that I applied for another PhD in this or that university and I got rejected, and that's the reason I came to Coimbra. No, it wasn't like that, I simply came to Coimbra, no reason existed beyond that magical reason of the romantic idealism. In my head, Coimbra was the top, the top among all universities in every aspect. I did not even check [its place in] the global rankings, the quality [of education]. I didn't check anything!

In the case of this student, the choice of university, the decision to move to Portugal, and the desire to enrol in a PhD degree were three separate processes fuelled by different motivations and circumstances. For instance, completing a PhD was not something rooted in Valéria's personal wishes, but appeared to be a necessary requirement for the improvement of her career.

> I was already giving lectures and, when you enter the classroom, the first thing that students ask you is about your PhD. Then, when you say: "No, I only have a Master's degree"; it's embarrassing. Because nowadays a Master's degree does not have the same weight [as it used to].

By all means, the migration of this student to Portugal was voluntary, incited by the wish to obtain a degree capable of improving her professional status. However, harsh and unexpected events in Valéria's life transformed her voluntary migration into a very difficult stage, especially in the period adjacent to her arrival in Portugal.

[…] My biggest crisis, when I arrived, was depressive. If I showed you the box which I have for storing pills, anti-depressants, you would do a double take. Already in Brazil, before my divorce, I went to the hospital due to anxiety problems, depression, I went to the emergency room around three times. […] Thus here I had a relapse, I think it was because of the loneliness and also because I was not quite understanding what I was doing here. I had that doubt, [asking myself]: "What is that I am doing here?". Then, the problems I had there, with the problems I encountered here would mix, [thus those were very difficult times for me].

Even after the arrival period, Valéria continued to experience many struggles. The fact that she signed a contract with her university, which is paying for the expenses of her PhD degree, prevents this student from returning to Brazil, forcing her to continue in Portugal and successfully complete her degree. For this reason, Valéria summarises the hardship of being in Portugal by comparing herself to a prisoner:

For me, is like being on exile, it is a prison, being here in Portugal is jail, it's like I am serving a prison sentence. […] I don't have where to go, first I need to fulfil this phase here. It's not possible to go forward, nor backwards […]

The reason I decided to describe Valéria as a *trapped* migrant resides in the intensity with which she expresses the harshness of her experience in Portugal. The metaphor of the prisoner clearly depicts the challenges faced by this student and the burdensome situation of being abroad against one's will. She is a *trapped* migrant because she regards the return to her country as a liberation but, at the same time, an untimely return would not be possible without serious repercussions on her professional life.

I was sent by my work, [my university], with a scholarship in order to complete this PhD. If I fail to do it, I'll [have to] answer before them, I can even lose my job because they pay me this scholarship, my whole salary, while I am here studying. If I arrive there without this PhD, they will say: "What did you do with all the resources we invested [in you]?"

The fact that Valéria is a *trapped* migrant is reinforced by the comparison between her life in Portugal and a long-term illness:

Right at the start [of my sojourn], people were more helpful in solving my problems in Brazil. Today, they are not anymore. […] I understand perfectly that people are tired of carrying water for me. […] I was analysing this [aspect] and sometimes I compare it with a long-term illness: in the beginning, the family is very sad when one of its members gets sick and they care assiduously [for that person], all family gets involved in the process and, then, the illness starts to prolong and the person to become weaker. It reaches a point in which the family is tired. When that person passes away, it's a relief. It is the same with me: my family is already tired of my PhD, my family wants it to end because they are tired of carrying water for me in Brazil.

Valéria relates the feeling of being trapped in Portugal with her age and the moment in which certain experiences happen, supporting Morrice's (2014: 157) observation according to which

"age and stage in the life cycle [...] will affect the way that migration is experienced and managed".

> For an adaptable young [person], who likes novelty, everything is marvellous, she/he will make friendships easily, go out with friends [...], be far away from parents' gaze. In my case, I am a mature woman, I am forty-six, therefore, for me to adapt to a situation with which I am not accustomed, to do such a change, radical change, people don't have a clue how difficult that is. [... If] one is young, irresponsible, there is beauty in irresponsibility. [For instance] I know girls here [in Coimbra] that were doing their Master's and had to go back to Brazil now, and they were crying because they were leaving. Those girls, they don't have a clue what is to really be far away from your dearest [ones]. Life is an adventure when you are young.

Due to all the problems and struggles experienced during her migration, Valéria not only perceives her sojourn in Portugal as a prison but she also appears to feel regretful for having enrolled in a PhD abroad.

> Today, if I were able to go back in time, perhaps I would not even do a PhD. If I knew that I would go through all this [...], perhaps I would not do the PhD, perhaps I would have only a Master's, I would give my classes and help my parents with their business.

Interestingly, inasmuch as she is a *trapped* migrant, Valéria also considers herself, to some extent, a *fugitive* migrant. In the excerpt below it is possible to observe that she generalises her experience towards other migrants, believing that migration is generally rooted in the desire to run away from something.

> I believe that most of the people who come here, who take up residence in Portugal, they are running from something. I am assuming that due to the people with whom I had contact [here]: they are running from a situation, from a dissatisfaction. Nobody moves here and is very happy in her/his country. If you take up residence in another country, it's because you are escaping something: an emotional issue, professional, financial, whatever. But you don't leave unless there is something very bad in your home country. When I left, it was due to a bad marriage. Even before discovering that I was being cheated on, in my sub-consciousness I wanted to run away. I wanted to do a PhD but I could have done a PhD in Brazil. I came here because I wanted to leave that bad moment, to take a breath of fresh air, be far away, create some distance [between me and all those problems].

Indeed, some parallels can be drawn between the *fugitive* and the *trapped* migrant. I interpret Valéria's decision to run away from Brazil as an act of resilience towards the unsatisfactory situations she was experiencing there. According to Trifanescu (2015: 97), "migration becomes a project, for self, and against imposed circumstances". Interestingly, Valéria rebelled against certain circumstances without actually constructing a migratory project beforehand. Instead, she configured it along the way, as a response to immediate life occurrences.

In conclusion, this student's migration to Portugal cannot be explained by one particular reason but through a highly complex interlacement of different aspects, such as: a failed marriage, a professional requirement to have a PhD, an emotional need to be away from uncomfortable situations, or even due to what Valéria defines as 'divine intervention'. At the same time, this narrative contains some opposing and even contradictory statements regarding Valéria's migratory trajectory. On the one hand, she sees her sojourn in Portugal as a *prison sentence* and, on the other hand, she claims that her decision to move to Portugal was *voluntary* and had positive effects, especially in regard to the negative feelings associated with her divorce. Moreover, she explains her decision to come to Portugal through the need to run away from her life in Brazil and through a certain fascination for the University of Coimbra and, at the same time, she claims that she does not actually know why she ended up coming to Portugal. Throughout the narrative, Valéria constantly adopts contrasting roles, she is both a prisoner and a person who is free to decide whether to stay or to migrate, she is both clueless and knowledgeable about the reasons which led to her migration. Trahar (2014) also notices that, occasionally, narrators take contradictory positions within their stories. Instead of interpreting such contradictions as flaws in individuals' understandings of their own realities, I argue that they should be interpreted as a confirmation of the capacity that narrative inquiry has for encouraging and fostering individuals' subjectivity. Even though Anzaldúa (1987: 80) mentions and applies "the development of a tolerance for contradiction and ambiguity" to a different context, I borrow her observation and relate it to the specific case of migration narratives. Due to the continuous changes they experience during their sojourns, I argue that a high level of tolerance for participants' contradictions, uncertainties, and confusions is paramount in the process of interpreting migrant students' narratives.

## 13. Understanding students' experiences through the use of migratory profiles

After presenting all narratives in their singularity and interpreting in a processual way each migratory trajectory, some observations can be made regarding all twelve participants and the way in which their narratives complement each other or, in some cases, contrast with each other. As shown in the previous sections of this chapter, all students present a peculiar migratory trajectory, replete with idiosyncrasies which render each narrative unique. In spite of this uniqueness, the narratives do not provide insights solely into the life of their authors, but can constitute a means to understand the complex experiences of other migrant students. In other words, I defend that a transition from the *particular* to the *general* can be achieved within narrative inquiries, in this case through the use of migratory profiles. As shown in the interpretation of each of the twelve cases, all narratives gave account of a singular, albeit

meaningful migration experience, described through the use of an adjective capable of summarising the main plot of each narrative. Eventually, these adjectives resulted in twelve different migratory profiles, which are capable of resuming the complexity of ways in which students relate to the phenomenon of migration. In this section, I will explain why I opted for the construction of such profiles, and, in the following section, I will give account of the characteristics of those twelve migratory profiles.

By proposing twelve different migratory profiles, I am not suggesting, by any means, that these profiles are the 'right' ones, the best possible interpretation of the extremely rich twelve migration narratives that I constructed jointly with the students. In fact, as I have shown throughout the previous sections of this chapter, in which I struggled to provide a processual interpretation of migration in the singularity of each narrative, I am aware that all interpretations belong to me, thus I cannot make any claims about their generality, superiority, nor inferiority, in comparison with other possible interpretations. This view is rooted in what (Etherington, 2004: 71) designates as "the basic tenets of postmodernity", referring to the fact "that there is no one 'right way'" of working with narrative inquiry. In the same line of thought, I consider that there is no right way, nor generally valid, of interpreting a narrative. However, in spite of their peculiar character, narratives cannot be constructed, neither interpreted, in a social vacuum. My proposal of twelve migratory profiles is an attempt to recognise this tight link that exists between individuals and society, locating the peculiarities of each story into the wider social world in which individuals create their stories and lead their lives. In other words, ascribing a profile to each migration narrative embodies my intention to cross the border from the individual realm into the social one. In line with Ferrarotti (2003: 26), I consider that "all behavior, every individual act, appears in its most individual forms as a horizontal synthesis of a social structure". Narrative accounts, therefore, allow us to understand individuals in accordance to the particular social context they find themselves in. Considering that narrative is also the perfect tool for understanding "human intention and action" (Larson, 1997: 455), and that "every individual act is the totalization of a social system" (Ferrarotti, 2003: 28), understanding the intentions and actions of one migrant allows us to glimpse upon the social structures that could affect the process of migration of other (similar) migrants.

Another fundamental aspect regarding my decision to create twelve migratory profiles is strongly related to my epistemological position. In fact, this decision may even appear contradictory since, on the one hand, I state that valuing diversity and subjectivity constitutes a guiding principle of my thesis and, on the other hand, it might seem that I am seeking to obtain general 'models' applicable to other migrant students, somehow mutilating the subjectivity inherent to the twelve narratives. However, this issue is not as simple as it may appear. Drawing

on peculiar and somehow unique stories, does not imply solely that the main focus of my research is to describe/understand specific cases in their individuality (or even in their exoticism). Considering the richness of the data, I consider that I can, and should, draw on the same narratives in order to generate knowledge and understanding that can be valid beyond those twelve individual cases. In this sense, I regard migratory profiles as a means to understand the collective through the individual, the general through the particular. As stated by Clough (2002: 3), narratives are simultaneously individual and collective, and "lived experiences are understood as being personal and unique but also as being constructed within specific social, cultural and historic contexts". Moreover, in spite of their apparent uniqueness and exclusive focus on individual aspects, "life stories are not inevitably connected with methodological individualism" (Laslett, 1999: 392).

The main question regarding the genesis of the migratory profiles that I propose in this chapter is linked with the issue of representativeness. Certainly, narratives are not meant to be representative of wider populations, in the same way as other types of data are. In fact, Ferrarotti (2003: 59) identifies a "central methodological problem of the level of representativeness of a biography, which may measure its utility for inductive generalizations". In his view, measuring narrative's capacity for making wider generalizations "corresponds to the epistemological negation of subjectivity" (Ferrarotti, 2003: 59). Given my epistemological and methodological assumptions, which I have clarified in Chapter II, epistemologically negating subjectivity does not sit comfortably with my stance as a researcher. For instance, even though I am aware that the stories we tell about our lives tend to be guided by universal themes and archetypes (Atkinson, 2007), I cannot agree with the observation of Borins (2010: 8), according to which "narrative studies start with the assumption that there are common archetypal narratives and that actual cases are close to the archetypes". I did not start my narrative study with such an assumption and I was not even looking or expecting to find any common or universal narratives. My expectation was to find a tremendous diversity and complexity of migration narratives, which I did. The twelve migratory profiles emerged only afterwards, from the interpretive process, and were shaped in accordance to the subjectivities embedded in each migration story.

Another necessary clarification regarding the twelve migratory profiles that I propose is that they should not "be considered exhaustive or valid in every sense; rather, they indicate general aspects which might be considered" (Almén, 2003: 31). In other words, the usefulness of these profiles does not lie in their universal applicability, since they clearly do not have one, but in their capacity of providing a set of characteristics which may, in some circumstances, apply also to other migration stories. This would facilitate the analysis of migration as a complex process,

not through the reduction of the complexity underlying migrants' lives, but through the use of an existent migratory profile who might indeed 'fit' into a particular migration story, and be furtherly reconfigured in accordance with the idiosyncrasies embedded in that story. Cognisant of the complexity of the process of migration, my proposal is not to make migration narratives 'fit' into a particular profile previously constructed, but to 'fit' one, or even more, profiles into a particular migration story, re-adjusting it as necessary, in accordance to the 'explosive subjectivity' (Ferrarotti, 2003) that characterises each human trajectory.

Even though each student engages in migration due to a unique combination of different factors and biographic motives, some students may share, at least in part, the same migration rationales. Grouping students in accordance to the shared aspects of their migratory trajectories, through the use of migratory profiles, could enhance our understanding of the highly complex migratory process in which they are involved. I consider these migratory profiles as an embodiment of the "heuristic passage which sees the universal through the singular, which seeks the objective by hinging on the subjective, and which discovers the general through the particular" (Ferrarotti, 2003: 30). Even though narratives do not seek representativeness in the statistical way, they provide a glance to wider societal aspects that are not confined solely to a particular individual narrative. In my view, narratives open a window through which we can peek upon the outside world and understand not only individuals but also societies and cultures. According to Ferrarotti (2003: 57), "a biography will be interesting as a meaningful example of certain aspects of the social". Narratives also provide numerous insights into the cultures whose sets of norms influence the life of the narrators, constituting "a source for understanding the workings of a life and the culture of which it is a part" (Plummer, 2001: 39). According to Horsdal (2012: 100), "turning the perspective toward the individual life story narrative we see […] how personal stories are immersed in cultural narratives".

Having clarified the assumptions that guided my decision to create twelve different migratory profiles, in the next section I will present the main characteristics of each profile, through 'fictionalised representations' (Clough, 2002; Trahar, 2010) of students' narratives. According to Duff and Bell (2002: 209), "no matter how fictionalized, all stories rest on and illustrate the story structures a person holds. As such they provide a window into people's beliefs and experiences". These fictionalised representations of the narratives are brief migration accounts, inspired in those elements that were central to the development of each plot, albeit free of those aspects that render the twelve narratives unique. In other words, the short fictionalised accounts that describe the twelve migratory profiles seek to give account of the peculiarities of each profile, while being encompassing enough to potentially describe the experience of other migrant students, with similar biographies. The sequence in which the migratory profiles are presented

gives account of the way in which they complement each other, through the common aspects contained in their story lines, or they contrast with each other, through their inherently different migration rationales.

## 14. Representing twelve migratory profiles through fictionalised accounts

<u>The fugitive migrant:</u> *Once upon a time, there was a migrant who simply ran. This migrant did not have any defined objective, nor expectations for migration. This migrant simply ran and was restless. He/she was not running from hunger, from war, as many are known to do, but on account of a profound dissatisfaction. This migrant was experiencing different forms of dissatisfaction: professional, personal, and even a generalised dissatisfaction with life, therefore, he/she was eager for a change. The migrant quitted his/her job, packed the bag, stuck all life inside and simply ran.*

*When this migrant decided to run, there was no time for a carefully developed plan, nor for choosing a destination country. Hence, this migrant spontaneously decided to go, and would even choose a country he/she might knew almost nothing about. Yet, the migrant embarked on a very long trip and eventually reached the destination. There, he/she found happiness and lived happily ever after.*

*This is the story of the 'fugitive' migrant, the one who was not satisfied with his/her current life, who actively sought change and who broke the oppressive structures which seemed to hold him/her down. The 'fugitive' migrants are the ones who depart somewhat unexpectedly, generally in search of something that is not yet defined, in search of something different.*

<u>The incidental migrant:</u> *Once upon a time, another migrant existed. Similarly to the 'fugitive' migrant, neither this one had a clear objective and, additionally, did not even know that he/she was going to engage in migration. This migrant had a relatively privileged social status and travelled abroad quite a lot, showing a certain casualness about travelling and living internationally. This migrant was somewhat similar to a tourist, albeit with a genuine interest for discovering and immersing oneself into the local culture(s).*

*After engaging in one or more temporary mobility experiences, not specifically with a clear and defined intention, this migrant rapidly got sick of that/those place(s) and wanted to leave. Even though the migrant was looking for a new experience, for something different, after several in-row sojourns abroad, he/she was ready to head back home. However, serendipity stroke and this migrant found a new reason for his/her stay in a foreign country and decided to take up residence there.*

*This is the story of the 'incidental' migrant, the one who was not initially considering migration but somehow ended up engaging in it. The 'incidental' migrants are the ones who depart with the idea of a temporary stay but somehow – due to romantic links, professional proposals, family issues and many more – end up deciding to stay. In this case, migration is not a planned undertaking, but something that happens incidentally.*

<u>The determined migrant:</u> *Once upon a time, there was another migrant who knew exactly what he/she wanted to achieve. Quite antagonistic to the 'incidental' migrant, in this case, migration appears as a means to reach previously determined goals. This migrant was moved mainly by professional motivations, by an entrepreneurial self, by the ambition to acquire knowledge and skills which would eventually provide better life opportunities. Due to his/her perseverance and clear goals, this migrant does not share many aspects with the 'fugitive' or the 'incidental' migrants.*

*This kind of migrant gathers information, makes comparisons, and consciously decides about the objectives and the destination country of his/her migration. Even though the main rationale for migration is to acquire skills, this migrant is also moved by the desire to discover cultures that are very distant from one's own, considering also cultural learning as a valuable and tradable skill, as a means to acquire cultural capital. This migrant has a strong motivation and does not give up easily, being even capable of engaging in migration alone, for the first time, and to a very distant country.*

*This is the story of the 'determined' migrant, the one who decides to migrate in order to improve life prospects, assuming the agency of his/her own narrative. The 'determined' migrants are the ones who depart with a very clear idea of their migration objectives, starting from the assumption that particular knowledge and skills can be acquired only through physically being abroad. Nevertheless, the process of migration of the 'determined' migrants can suffer changes throughout their biographical trajectory. New and unexpected events are generally assessed through a utilitarian perspective and further decisions are taken according to the possible implications for personal and professional prospects.*

<u>The fighter migrant:</u> *Alongside the 'determined' migrant there was, once upon a time, another migrant who also had much determination. This other migrant was rather used to be discriminated against, in his/her own country, on the grounds of various characteristics and identity traits. In his/her struggle to resist discrimination and free him/herself from the limitations imposed by the specificity of a particular national context, this migrant regarded education as a key to liberation.*

*Generally, this migrant comes from a modest social background and the main fuel for his/her migration is educational improvement. This migrant's experience is also strongly marked by previous harsh life episodes, rooted in social exclusion or in an inferior social status ascribed to him/her, in the home country. This kind of migrant has, in most cases, a narrative of struggle and hardship. He/she bears some similarities with the fugitive migrant, in the sense that he/she had the necessary courage to go to a distant and completely unknown country, running from a difficult life phase or from an oppressive environment. This kind of migrant does not generally feel at home in his/her own country and has the feeling that staying would not have even been an option. He/she also bears similarities with the 'determined' migrant, presenting a strong sense of ambition.*

*This is the story of the 'fighter' migrant, the one who engages in migration in a gesture of defiance towards his/her oppressed condition. The departure of the 'fighter' migrants appears as an act of resilience, as a means for them to achieve self-realisation through international migration, based on the assumption that*

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*self-realisation would not have been possible in their home countries. The 'fighter' migrants regard hardship and resistance to adversity as the means to personal improvement and evolution, and their migration narratives illustrate different ways of coping with challenging circumstances.*

The rebellious migrant: *Once upon a time, there was also another migrant. This one was very curious and adventurous, and was moved by the desire to do something different, to follow an alternative trajectory, to live 'out of standard'. This type of migrant was also interested in experiencing new cultures and ways of living and yearned for having more mobility.*

*Even though he/she does not mandatorily come from a privileged social background, this migrant manages to enhance its mobility through proactivity, seeking and engaging in different international programmes. This migrant is also rather adventurous in choosing new destination countries and in deciding about the future, continuously seeking to have more and more different experiences, albeit without disregarding his/her future career plans.*

*This is the story of the 'rebellious' migrant, the one who engages in migration as a form of rebellion against standardised forms of life. The 'rebellious' migrants feel the need to differentiate themselves from other people and their trajectories, which are frequently regarded as 'too mainstream'. These migrants conceive migration as a means to construct a different life trajectory that is generally considered to be more fulfilling, both personally and professionally.*

The effortless migrant: *Alongside the 'rebellious' migrant there was, once upon a time, another migrant who was also rather adventurous. This kind of migrant had many migratory experiences, and was able to easily travel and live in different cities and countries. He/she generally considers that there is nothing extraordinary about repeatedly living in different countries, assuming that many people do travel extensively in this age of globalisation and increased mobility.*

*This migrant does not mandatorily belong to a very privileged social class but tends to use education as means to travel and live abroad. However, being able to travel internationally with such an ease generally requires a certain degree of social and cultural capital. At the same time, for this type of migrant, the cultural distance between oneself and a foreign country can be bigger than the distance between oneself and the home country, revealing a quite international-oriented upbringing.*

*This is the story of the 'effortless' migrant, the one who engages in migration with ease, and sometimes without even realising it. Through their numerous experiences abroad, the 'effortless' migrants develop a sort of 'migrating fondness' and regard their futures as endless cycles of international experiences, failing to even envision the possibility of an eventual settling. The 'effortless' migrants regard themselves as 'modern day Gypsies', being unable to achieve life satisfaction without continuously being on the move.*

The restless migrant: *Similar to the 'effortless' migrant, once upon a time, there was another type of migrant. This migrant was young and was moved by the enthusiastic desire to 'discover the world'. This kind of migrant had many difficulties in accepting the idea of living in the same city forever, and considered*

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*him/herself a somewhat peculiar person, with different interests and aspirations, when compared with the 'majority'.*

*This migrant bears some similarities with the 'effortless' migrant, given that he/she also uses education as a means to travel and to spend time abroad, and generally does not come from an unprivileged social background. The main distinction between this type of migrant and the 'effortless' migrant is that, for the latter, international experiences are not carefully planned, neither hoped for, but appear to just happen, whilst this migrant actively seeks to augment his/her repertoire of international experiences.*

*This is the story of the 'restless' migrant, the one who likes to be on the move, to engage in consecutive migratory phases and to continuously challenge oneself, venturing beyond the protection provided by comfort zones. For the 'restless' migrants, travelling is something that 'keeps them alive', albeit they do not consider continuous travelling to be suitable for their entire life-span, but only for specific moments of their trajectories. In other words, for this kind of migrants, there seems to be a right age to be 'restless'.*

The polymorphous migrant: *Once upon a time, another type of migrant existed. This migrant engaged in migration repeatedly, in order to fulfil diverse objectives. In the case of this migrant, migration can occur for several reasons: as a self-discovery trip, due to a romantic relationship, as a means to improve economically, and many more.*

*This migrant does not seem to carefully plan his/her different migrations, but seems to decide in accordance with a particular moment and with the necessities felt in that moment. This kind of migrant is capable of rapidly switching between different migratory statuses and reasons to be abroad. He/she is also capable of going, back and forth, between the home and the (different) destination countries. This migrant can switch his/her status from, for instance: a migrant to a student, and then from a student to an economic migrant, and vice versa. He/she also tends to engage in many different activities without always completing each one of them.*

*This is the story of the 'polymorphous' migrant, the one who frequently transforms and adapts oneself along the way, in order to better respond to upcoming necessities. For the 'polymorphous' migrants, different rationales justify different migrations and their narratives are marked by the presence of many turning points, moments in which the course of things can drastically change.*

The ambivalent migrant: *Once upon a time, there was another migrant who did not even realise when he/she became a migrant. This migrant engaged in migration assuming that it would only be a temporary sojourn. In this case, migration had very clear (economic) objectives and also a clear date for its terminus. However, due to diverse situations, this temporary migration overpasses its expected terminus and slowly assumes a more permanent form.*

*In this case, temporary migration is generally caused by a (professional) dissatisfaction in the home country and can be encouraged by the presence of relatives or friends in the host country. The passage from a temporary sojourn to a permanent one is a complex process that occurs gradually, due to a diverse*

*set of reasons and occurrences. This migrant is generally well integrated into the host society, albeit still maintaining a strong link with his/her origins.*

*This is the story of the 'ambivalent' migrant, the one who lives emotionally divided between his/her home and host countries. For the 'ambivalent' migrants, comparisons between the home and host countries tend to happen throughout their sojourns. Another characteristic of these migrants' experiences is the constant tension they feel between staying and leaving, a pending duality. These migrants generally have difficulties in taking a definitive decision of either staying in the host country, returning to the home country or migrating to a new destination. The 'ambivalent' migrants generally struggle with identity inconsistencies and a feeling of belonging nowhere.*

<u>The pre-established migrant:</u> *Once upon a time, along with all the migrants described above, another type of migrant existed. This migrant was rather unique, in the sense that he/she never got the opportunity to actually choose between staying at home or going abroad, but migration was somehow embedded in the 'natural' development of his/her life-course. This migrant generally comes from a country in which engaging in international education is a quite widespread habit, where friends, colleagues and relatives tend to study abroad or have already done so.*

*Since the idea of migration did not actually occur but was, to some extent, always part of this migrant's future objectives, the moment of departure is not envisaged as a difficult moment, but as something expected and yearned for. At the same time, in spite of the existence of scholarships and other types of financial support mechanisms, having international education embedded into one's life course generally requires a certain level of social privilege.*

*This is the story of the 'pre-established' migrant, the one who did not decide about migrating, but has 'always' expected to study abroad. In the case of the 'pre-established' migrants, the decision of engaging in migration did not belong to them but, most likely, to their families, and is generally linked to the level of development of the higher education sector from their home countries (for instance, some tertiary education degrees do not exist in all countries). Therefore, these 'pre-established' migrants do not generally play an active role in the decision to study at home or abroad, but submit themselves to someone else's decision regarding their own educational trajectories.*

<u>The unwilling migrant:</u> *Similar to the 'pre-established' migrant, once upon a time there was another migrant who also did not have a saying in the decision to leave or to stay in the host country. Contrary to the 'pre-established' migrant, who typically agrees with the idea of going/studying abroad, this other migrant generally goes abroad against his/her own will.*

*Most frequently, the decision belongs to the family and this migrant is sent abroad at a tender age with an educational purpose (for instance to boarding school), albeit it can occur in adult age also (when the person is send abroad as a consequence of someone else's decision, especially in work-related environments). This kind of migrant tends to experience mixed feelings regarding his/her identity, acquiring a divided self and a feeling of being a foreigner in all contexts, of living 'in between'. As opposed*

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*to other migrants who have the possibility to choose between leaving and staying, these migrants do not generally have an option, since migration is literally imposed on them.*

*This is the story of the 'unwilling' migrant, the one who did not choose to migrate but was compelled to do it. The 'unwilling' migrants' power to decide about their own trajectories tends to be limited, thus migration is not always in line with their personal wishes and objectives. The impact of migration on their further live-trajectories is significant and this 'unwillingness' becomes the main trait of their narratives. It is important to note that the profile of the 'unwilling' migrant does not encompass the case of forced migrants (as for instance refugees or asylum seekers). Being 'unwilling' to engage in migration does not equal to being forced into it.*

<u>The trapped migrant:</u> *Alongside the 'unwilling' migrant, once upon a time, stood another type of migrant. Contrary to the 'unwilling' migrant, this other migrant engaged in migration voluntarily. However, the experience of migration did not go as expected and, due to particular restraints (mostly at the professional level), this migrant was unable to return. Generally, this migrant takes the decision to migrate in a precipitate way and, during the sojourn, understands that he/she was not, in fact, ready to engage in such an endeavour.*

*Even though they are not forced to migrate, these persons are generally forced to stay, experiencing a strong feeling of confinement during their international sojourns. The idealised image of the return to the home country becomes the main desire of this migrant, and the whole sojourn is structured towards that goal.*

*This is the story of the 'trapped' migrant, the one who went abroad voluntarily, is eager to return, but is not (yet) able to do so. For the 'trapped' migrants, the idea of migration generally emerges from a desire for personal or professional improvement. Due to diverse factors, the international sojourn does not evolve as expected, and they experience a feeling of being 'trapped', generally rooted in the impossibility of going back without suffering consequences, especially related to contractual clauses which, previous to migration, they have agreed with. In some cases, the main barrier that hinders the return to the home country may be emotional (as for instance the fear of being perceived as a defeated migrant who returned in advance because he/she was unable to conquer the goals which initially motivated the migration). The experience of these migrants can be adequately described through the metaphor of the prisoner, since they are enclosed in the walls of their sojourns, 'trapped', and unable to go back until successfully achieving the main objective of their migrations.*

# V. Thematic interpretations across the twelve migration narratives

## *Introduction*

In this chapter, the twelve migration narratives will be interpreted thematically, with the intention to understand how students' experiences complement or contrast with each other. The main objective of this interpretive effort is to provide a broader understanding of students' migratory experiences. Rather than drawing on each individual case separately, in this chapter I interpret, across narratives, different relevant aspects of students' lives in Portugal, seeking to give account of their diversity of perspectives. These aspects were chosen in accordance to the importance that students ascribed to them throughout their narratives.

The first section of this chapter is dedicated to the discussion of the period of time in which students arrived in Portugal, providing a more inclusive view on the struggles and challenges which students tend to face at the start of their sojourns. In the second section, I looked at students interpersonal interactions in the attempt to understand if their migratory experiences were marked by monocultural segregation or by multicultural contact. Linking the two main concepts of this research: migration and learning; in section 3, I seek to understand students' learning trajectories, discussing the potential for learning provided (or not) by the experience of migration. In the following section, I address, based on students perceptions, the institutional strategies that Portuguese universities employ in order to deal with their increasingly diverse student bodies. Even though most students appear to be rather unsatisfied with the support received from their higher education institutions, they tend to attach significant learning outcomes to their experiences as migrant students in Portugal. In the attempt to understand this discrepancy, I turn to students' experiences with social support mechanisms in order to understand how learning can occur in an environment marked by multiple struggles and difficulties. Attending to the central role that language assumes in the narratives of most students, I focus this thematic interpretation on the issue of language, seeking to understand how students' experiences were influenced by their level of knowledge of the Portuguese language. In the last section, I will discuss students' transformative learning experiences, using the theory of transformative learning (Mezirow, 1990) as interpretive lens.

## *1. Arrival in Portugal*

Adapting to a new country and to an unknown environment is a difficult process for most migrants. Many struggle with difficulties "such as gaps in language proficiency, acculturation, visa insecurity and concerns about family migration and discrimination" (Sykes & Chaoimh, 2012: 7). As noticed in the research literature, the first moments after arrival are particularly challenging, since students make contact, some of them for the very first time, with a different reality. As observed by Murphy-Lejeune (2003: 105), "newcomers face practical demands of all sorts which put pressure on them". According to Gresham and Clayton (2011), at the beginning of their sojourn students need to deal with a set of different immediate demands, such as adjusting to a new academic environment, a new community and a new country. However, the twelve narratives suggest that this idea is rather simplistic, showing that the moment in which students arrive in Portugal bears many different nuances. In point of fact, for some students, their initial moments in Portugal did not seem to constitute a challenging experience, whilst for others, even trivial tasks and day-to-day activities proved to be difficult to handle. For instance, Naim mentioned the difficulty in obtaining and being able to make proper food.

> In the first week, I was not able to eat well. It's different. And I needed to find out where was the market in which I could buy food, how could I prepare it. (Naim)

Similarly, Alfonso referred to *simple facts*, with which he was familiar back in his home country but not in the new context.

> The first time I came, for instance a simple fact such as knowing where is the supermarket, a store for household items, a drugstore, I didn't know. They are very basic things which back home, in Seville, I knew that I needed to go there. Everything was a surprise [when I arrived here], albeit I liked the adventure. The first month was a little bit like that, with each day that goes by, let's see what happens. (Alfonso)

Interestingly, this student regarded the difficulties specific to his arrival in Portugal as an adventure, enjoying the experience of being constantly taken by surprise.

Frequently mentioned in previous research, but not fully supported by the narratives presented here, is the idea that the arrival into a new country is generally marked by cultural shock (Brown & Holloway, 2008). In most of the narratives, students did not appear to have experienced cultural shocks. For instance, due to the perceived cultural proximity between Portugal and Brazil, Valéria felt at home during her first days in Portugal.

> This old part of Coimbra is identical to the old part of my city. Therefore I virtually felt at home, it felt like I was walking through the old part of [my city], São Luís. I didn't have any shock, the food was also very similar to the food from Brazil and, especially, to the food from the Northeast, [which is my region], because we had a very strong Portuguese influence. (Valéria)

A similar perception was shared by Naim when he arrived, since he encountered many similarities between his country and Portugal.

> When I arrived in Portugal I thought: "This looks like a city from Turkey". For me, living in Portugal was not very difficult because, even though is not the same as Turkey, it's alike, very similar to my hometown, the faces, the food, many things. For this reason, Portugal was a good option for me. (Naim)

In spite of the absence of a cultural shock and the existence of a certain feeling of familiarity towards Portugal, some students did struggle with their first moments after arrival, especially due to the harshness of leaving loved ones behind.

> I started to go to classes but I will not say that it was easy. It is very difficult for you when you have a family, a son, to leave and be so far away [from them]. There are people who manage to let loose rapidly but I can't, I was always very attached to my family. I used to cry a lot, a lot, and, several times, I ended up at the Hospital of Coimbra because of depression. (Valéria)

Other students did not appear to be particularly overwhelmed by their arrival into the new context, especially due to the existence of previous international experiences. As stated by Laina, since she had already experienced migration to Japan, when she came to Portugal, she did not *actually feel anything special.*

> I arrived on September 10th. My first impression when I arrived to Portugal was not really special. Since I experienced travelling to Japan, I didn't actually feel anything special on the first day here. I just felt tired after a long journey, it was a very long journey, more than 24 hours the whole trip. (Laina)

Similarly, in the case of Alfonso, who came to Portugal twice, the second arrival was not as overwhelming as the first one.

> In the beginning, when I arrived, obviously that it was a little complicated: not knowing the city, not knowing Portuguese. […] It was complicated because it was necessary to find accommodation […]. But after being at home already, with everything in its proper place, it wasn't that serious, it wasn't complicated, there were just new things, things that I was not used to. That didn't happen now, the second time I came, when I came to work and to do my Master's, I already knew how it was going to be. (Alfonso)

Contrary to Alfonso, Naim came to Portugal for the first time, without having lived abroad before. However, the harshness of moving to a new context seems to have been alleviated by the fact that his entry in Portugal was mediated by the organisation that received him, in the ambit of the European Volunteer Service.

> My experience is also different from other students because, before I arrived, I already had a room, given that the organisation took care of that. They picked me up at the airport, there was a car in which they put my bags, we went to this place and they told me: "This is your

room, this is your bed, tomorrow at this time you come here and you will do this, this is your desk in the organisation's office". It was easy. For me, to live in Portugal was a soft transference, a soft enter. If I didn't have a house, a room, nothing, if you need to make arrangements for everything when you arrive it becomes a lot more difficult. (Naim)

In this excerpt, it is possible to note that Naim appears to be aware of the difficulties associated with moving to a different country, even without having been forced to experience them directly. Interestingly, only one year after coming to Portugal, when the volunteer project he was involved in came to its end, this student struggled with a set of difficulties that other students generally experience during the period adjacent to their arrival.

If you come here for the first time in order to study and you don't have nothing, it is very difficult but, for me, because of the project it was easier. When the project ended it was indeed more difficult because, when you are in the project, it is like you are in an aquarium, you have everything, but then you go to the open sea. You arrive in Lisbon, you need to find accommodation, make money, everything. And especially as a Turkish person without a visa, it is more difficult. With the project, everything is ready for you, it's easier. (Naim)

Naim was not the only student who experienced a *soft enter* in Portugal. Other students, even without belonging to any organisation, did not seem to experience many difficulties during the arrival period. Based on his extensive array of previous international experiences, Jaidev somehow already knew what to expect.

I did not really feel any cultural shock. […] I cannot really speak about a cultural shock because it has to do also with my [personal] history, my experiences in different cultures and different types of cities. So I was just open to new experiences. (Jaidev)

At the same time, due to the knowledge he acquired through his previous migratory experiences, this student was able to prepare, in detail, for his arrival in Portugal.

There are certain things which I usually make it a point to ensure before I leave my country. I make it a point that I don't end up in soup when I reach a new place. In that sense, I had everything figured out. […] even before coming to Porto, to the residence, I actually mapped out where are the supermarkets, where are the fruit shops, where is the hospital. So I came here and I was already 'zoned'. I knew all the day-to-day things like: where to get my recharge, what card to buy, how to get all the documentation and so on. Those are the most overwhelming things when you come to a new place, is the documentation and where to get your food. […] And this is the boulevard, the fundamental part, if you don't get this right… it's fundamental to eat, sleep, internet. If your basic needs are not fulfilled then you don't get to fulfil the other needs so well. So I completely made sure before coming here that I have sorted out my basic needs beforehand so that I would not have problems into the other ones. I knew which street to take, I had made all my diary, I had made sketches. (Jaidev)

Another example of a *soft enter* belongs to Brenda. Although she had never lived in Portugal before, she seemed to be rather familiarised with the specificities of this country.

Before I actually moved here, I had come here to visit a few times and I was visiting a Portuguese person. Sometimes, we would hang out with his friends and his family and he would show me around town and we would talk about issues here. So, by the time I actually moved here, I already did have some experience here and I had an idea, I wasn't coming in completely blind. (Brenda)

Another peculiar case is the one of Amivi. Even though she lived for several years in Portugal, when she enrolled in university and moved to a different city, she experienced intense feelings of loneliness.

At the first moment, I was alone, I was studying and I was feeling very lonely, therefore, I needed to go the balcony all the time to smoke, in order to forget a little bit [about the loneliness]. […] I filled that void of loneliness with cigarettes, with my friends, even the ones from far, talking on the phone. This happened during a month, afterwards, I started to create friendships with other colleagues. (Amivi)

Particularly noteworthy, in this excerpt, is the way in which Amivi refers to friendship as a means to combat the loneliness which tends to affect most international students (Lin & Kingminghae, 2014). Indeed, most of the narratives show that, through friendship and social support, students were able to overcome the difficulties related with their transition to Portugal. According to Sawir, Marginson, Deumert, Nyland and Ramia (2008: 172), "relations with locals might be the key to moving forward on loneliness". Interestingly, most of the students appeared to have had established some form of contact with people living in Portugal, prior to their arrival, receiving support from them in the initial moments of their migration. For instance, Aiko used to date a Portuguese man online and, even though their virtual relationship ended before her arrival, she was still able to count on his support.

When I arrived, my ex-boyfriend waited for me at the airport and took me directly to my student residence. He had arranged everything already: residence, university, the documents for the visa. (Aiko)

The initial adaptation of this student to the new context was therefore visibly softened by the support she received from a local who, prior to her arrival, had already ensured accommodation and taken care of the bureaucratic burdens. Aiko also referred to a rather ludicrous episode in which she felt very hungry and was unable to find a place to eat.

In the first days, as I didn't know the city well, besides the [university] refectory I didn't know where I could eat or buy something [to eat]. […] Given that I did not speak [Portuguese well, back then], I couldn't ask for information and I was really hungry. […] Therefore, I sent a message to this friend telling him that I did not have anything to eat and he took me to a take-away. (Aiko)

A similar experience belongs to Rita who was welcomed by her relatives. When she arrived to Coimbra, this student did not have to worry about accommodation, given that her sister, who was already living in Portugal, had already rented a place for Rita and her twin sister.

> In Lisbon, we were welcomed by an uncle and our sister came to meet us here in Coimbra, where we already had accommodation, she had already rented it for us. When we came to Coimbra we only needed to install ourselves. (Rita)

Indeed, having relatives who live in the destination country appears to soften the struggles that students generally experience when moving to a different country. For Corina, being able to interact with relatives was an important aspect of her initial moments in Portugal.

> I arrived to Portugal and it was not a shock for me because I instantly liked this country. Also, because of my husband who was here and, at that time, I had more relatives here with whom I interacted in the first moments. (Corina)

Laina also received support during her arrival in Portugal, albeit not from relatives. An old friend from Laos picked her up at the airport and even offered her accommodation. According to Baker and Hawkins (2006: 21), if students "are fortunate enough to have family or friends waiting for them as they arrive at the airport to begin their studies and assist them in acculturating to their new surroundings, then they are already 'connected'".

> The first day that I arrived, I had somebody waiting for me in Porto, actually a friend from Laos [… and he] took me to the train station. I travelled alone to Braga, where I didn't know anybody [else] and he told me: "You just get off at the final station". From the final station, he wrote the address because I was going to stay with him, and I carried that address with me and I handed it to the taxi driver who took me to the place and, when I arrived there, I pressed the doorbell and there was another guy from Laos at home. (Laina)

In Laina's view, the support she received from her friend was significant, especially in the beginning of her sojourn in Portugal.

> My friend helped, I got help from him because I did not know anything, I didn't even know how to manage to walk from the place where we lived to the university. I used to ask him so many things that I did not know back then, he was a great help. (Laina)

Even without mentioning other forms of support at arrival, some students remembered the fact of having had somebody to pick them up, a courtesy capable of easing the fear of arriving alone in an unknown place, in which students do not generally have an already established friendship network.

> Sure that moving from Lisbon to here was not easy, I didn't know anyone, [in fact] I only knew one Timorese. I arrived alone but I was welcomed by that Timorese friend who was studying here and he came to pick me up. (Amivi)

Similarly, in Brenda's narrative, it is possible to notice the importance of having at least one friend or acquaintance in the destination country.

> Actually, first I stayed with my friend in Aveiro for a few days, he was pretty much the only person I knew in Portugal […], he helped me find an apartment downtown. (Brenda)

However, even without knowing any person in the new context, some students felt welcomed when they arrived in Portugal. For instance, Chang was offered a ride by a lady he met during his train trip from Lisbon to Coimbra. He was also supported in regard to the details of the trip by his landlord, who even came to pick him at the train station.

> […] I arrived to the train and I met a lady who was also coming from the airport. […] When I arrived to Coimbra, her husband came to pick her up and gave me a ride to the central station, it was very late already, almost midnight, and therefore, there were no more available options for transport. […] The landlord with whom I had already booked the apartment came to pick me at the central station. He had also helped regarding many things such as how to plan the trip: the train, plane, airport, several things. (Chang)

Another student who did not have any acquaintance or friend in Portugal was Jaidev. However, this student received a *grand welcome* to Portugal, organised by his PhD colleagues. In the excerpt below, it is possible to note that, due to his previous international experiences, this student took some cautions regarding his trip, in order to ensure an incident-free arrival in Portugal.

> I arrived in March last year. It's a rather familiar relation with my colleagues, they are really supportive and a bit crazy: that comes with the field. I've had a good experience ever since I've landed here. When I arrived, almost the entire batch came to pick me up and it was a grand welcome. […] We were exchanging emails, just to let someone know that I'm coming, I sent details, in case of emergency, I always do that. I tell at least someone, in the city or place I'm going to, all the details regarding my flight. (Jaidev)

Two of the students who already had an experience in Portugal presented different perceptions regarding their two distinct arrivals. On the one hand, Alfonso struggled with some difficulties when he first came to Portugal, since he didn't have any acquaintances in Porto. The second time he came, he was even able to find a cheaper accommodation due to a Portuguese person who had befriended him during the first sojourn.

> The house [in which I am living now] belongs to my best friend here, is a house that her parents owned and the amount that I am paying [for the rent] it's more reduced than if it was for a stranger. (Alfonso)

On the other hand, Tânia received much support at her first arrival in Portugal, when she was sent to boarding school by her family, and struggled the second time she came since the people she used to know had, in the meantime, left the country.

> Here, I met other girls who were more or less in the same situation, they had also lost their parents in the war and we ended up establishing a good friendship. […] We were all going through the same experience, we had similar ages, and we used to protect each other because everything was so new, so different. We were mothers and older sisters to each other. […] When I arrived to Portugal for the second time, it was horrible! Since I didn't have anybody here anymore, all those relatives who were here are now in Angola. […] Therefore I arrived, I went to an inn and I had to start looking for a place to live. (Tânia)

The excerpts above reveal an astonishing diversity of experiences in regard to the arrival of these students in Portugal. While some experienced a feeling of familiarity towards the host country, others felt rather disoriented in their new environment. Similarly, some regarded with excitement their upcoming sojourns, whilst other suffered from loneliness. Not all narratives are consistent with previous research literature that tends to ascribe many difficulties to the initial phases of students' sojourns (as for instance: Murphy-Lejeune, 2003; Gresham & Clayton, 2011). Many narratives reveal that factors such as: cultural proximity, the presence of relatives in the host country, the existence of previous international experiences; can contribute to a less distressing arrival in the new country.

Thus, the arrival into a foreign country appears to be dependent on a diverse set of factors. For instance, engaging in an international experience through an organisation, as in Naim's case, seems to protect students from those difficulties generally associated with the beginning of an international sojourn. As stated by this student, during the period in which he was a volunteer in the ambit of an international programme, he was living in an aquarium, somehow protected from the outer world. The metaphor of the aquarium reveals, besides a certain feeling of comfort and security, a significant potential for isolation from the local community. The same feeling was experienced by Amivi, during the years in which she was part of a religious congregation, when she was living in a 'bubble' (Gu et al., 2010) in which her interactions were limited to the contact with other nuns, resulting in isolation from the local community. However, in spite of these differences, one pattern emerges from the twelve narratives. In regard to the arrival period, all students refer to the support they had received either from friends, relatives or members of the local community. This finding suggests that social support, especially in the

initial phase of their sojourns, is an important aspect of migrant students' experiences. A more extensive discussion on this topic can be found in section 5.


## 2. Mono/multicultural relationships

The interpersonal relationships established by migrant students during their sojourns are a crucial aspect of their experiences. According to Rosulnik et al. (2016: 38), "the change of the environment cuts off previous daily social relations and calls for establishing new ones". Moreover, engaging in interpersonal contact can be beneficial for students, aiding them in their adaptation to the host country. Urban and Palmer (2014: 321) observe that "cultural learning happens mostly through interpersonal relationships". However, during the sojourn, students can establish different types of relationships that will have diverse impacts on their lives. Four decades ago, Bochner, McLeod and Lin (1977) suggested that migrant students tend to engage in three types of relationships: monocultural (between co-nationals); bicultural (between migrant and local students) and multicultural (between different migrant students). In spite of being a rather outdated typology, many researchers still refer to students' relationships in those terms, acknowledging the characteristics of each type of contact. For instance, cross-cultural friendships are associated with many benefits for migrant students, which can manifest at several levels: psychological, social, and academic (Williams & Johnson, 2011). Monocultural interactions also present their benefits, helping students to feel less confused by the loss of familiar references that generally occurs during migration. As observed by Moglen (2017: 34), "for someone who is joining a new cultural environment, the strategy of befriending co-nationals may be a wise choice". According to Ethier and Deaux (1994), interacting with people with similar backgrounds is rooted in students' need to reach a certain level of comfort. Other researchers consider that both friendships with co-nationals and fellow migrant students can constitute a "source of important social support" (Smith & Khawaja, 2011: 707). As I stated in Chapter I, this research is not focused solely on the type of relationships that migrant students establish during their sojourns, but seeks to achieve an holistic understanding of their experiences. Notwithstanding, the importance that students' interactions assume throughout their trajectories cannot be dismissed, thus this section will be dedicated to the interactions in which migrant students are involved, attempting to deconstruct some of the reductive ideas proliferated in the research literature dedicated to this topic.

The type of human relations that students establish during their international experience presents different patterns across the twelve narratives. Amivi relates more with other international students and has limited contact with Portuguese peers, whereas Rita seems to

have more contact with locals rather than with international students. In fact, from all narratives, only one student, Amivi, has hardly any contact with Portuguese students. Before enrolling in higher education, Amivi had been in a religious congregation for more than five years, a period in which she did not have any significant contact with the local population. She was living in a 'bubble' (Gu et al., 2010), in which her interactions were limited to colleagues from the religious institution.

> [During my time in the congregation] I didn't have any friend outside, any Portuguese out of the congregation, all of [my friends] were colleagues belonging to other congregations. […] Outside the congregation, I didn't have any friendship back then. I didn't know the world out there, what was happening in Portugal, how was the life of the people. (Amivi)

At the university, the majority of her interactions were limited to colleagues from her own country. Only after several months, Amivi started to hang out with students from other countries:

> Before May, I used to relate myself only with Timorese people. (Amivi)

The fact that Amivi used to have significant contact solely with Timorese people is not detrimental *per se*, especially in the initial phase of the experience abroad, when she was still adapting to the new context. According to Brown and Graham (2009: 81), "students have particularly intense emotional experiences at the start of term when they would be attempting to adapt not only to a new sociocultural environment but also to unfamiliar academic situations". However, as Geeraert, Demoulin and Demes (2014) noted, the contact with co-nationals can be very welcoming and can provide a certain sense of adjustment, but over time it may reduce the opportunity for cultural learning. According to Sakurai et al. (2010), the scarcity of links between local and international students is not a trivial issue. For instance, Amivi's monocultural interpersonal network could preclude the potential advantages provided by multicultural contact and even delay her process of adaptation to the new context. Interestingly, in spite of the negative evaluations of her interactions with fellow students, Amivi seems to successfully interact with people from the local community, acknowledging nonetheless the superficial level of those relationships.

> The experience with my colleagues is negative indeed, but outside [the university] I don't have any difficulties in talking to a person. […] I have more contact with people on the street, at the supermarket. […] We are not friends, I will not befriend [them], I am only [their] client. But there is this contact, this close conversation. Sometimes the older women don't have any difficulty in interacting, talking, and asking: "How are you?" (Amivi)

In the attempt to explain the perceived distance between her and local students, Amivi calls upon the factor of age, and also on the strangeness potentially felt by her colleagues when interacting with ethnically diverse colleagues.

> Perhaps our colour is strange to them, I don't know, because students are very young also. Perhaps it was because they saw this group of dark-skinned people among them, it might be strange to them. (Amivi)

Even though Amivi spent several months interacting exclusively with people from her own country, after an unpleasant episode involving the Timorese group, she started to interact with people with different cultural backgrounds, acknowledging the value of such interactions:

> Regarding people from other countries, I began to get to know them more, create these friendships, it's fantastic. To know other realities, share ideas, it's quite interesting. (Amivi)

Amivi's observations are consistent with Gill's (2007: 175) findings, according to which "living and interacting with 'strangers' built a bridge to otherness and provided opportunities for developing skills and competence for intercultural encounter". Regarding the lack of meaningful contact with local students and the superficial character of her contact with the host society, Amivi's case constitutes an exception among the twelve narratives. Even though Peacock and Harrison (2009: 490) state that "the research literature suggests that international students and domestic student populations do not mix easily", excepting the case of Amivi, all the other narratives appear to contradict this monocultural tendency. Most of the students reported a significant level of contact with local people and also with fellow international students. For instance, Corina was able to surpass, over time, the clear separation that she felt between immigrants and the local population, separation which, according to this student, was being encouraged by the immigrants themselves.

> In my first years [in Portugal], I could even say that I went through a process of isolation. Back then, almost all the immigrants that I knew were very isolated from the Portuguese. "Oh, did you notice that the Portuguese are like that?". Therefore it was always the Portuguese, one group, and us, another group. They did something, we did something different. It was so sharp this difference and they [my immigrant friends] didn't even want to get closer [to Portuguese people]. (Corina)

In spite of an initial period marked by isolation from the local population, Corina was able to establish meaningful relationships with her employers, during the times in which she worked as a housekeeper, a period marked by many struggles for her. The interaction with her peers from university appears to have been successful, rendering Corina quite content with her friendship network.

My adaptation was extended and, during these years in which I worked [as a housekeeper], I got to know people who were very human, I always got along very well with the owners of the houses in which I used to work. They are my friends even nowadays because they saw in me more than a housekeeper. […] I get along well with all my colleagues [from the Master's programme also], I have many friends now. (Corina)

In direct opposition to the case of Amivi stands Laina's satisfactory description of her relationship with local students, in spite of some initial communication problems caused by language barriers.

My relationship with my colleagues is wonderful, they're wonderful. In the beginning it was a little bit difficult because I could not communicate with them, they did not speak English, but everybody is so nice and they are so friendly. (Laina)

Also in direct opposition to Amivi's case is Rita's testimonial regarding social interaction. This student claims to have very limited contact with people from her own country or other international peers opting, instead, for interacting with locals.

I hang out very little with people from São Tomé. Then other nationalities like Angolan, a little bit, because of my sister, but I think that I hang out more with Portuguese people. (Rita)

Similar to Rita's case is Alfonso's, a male Spanish student, who appears to have a friendship network composed solely by locals:

In fact, all the friends that I have now here are Portuguese, I don't have friends from any other country but I also don't mind about that. (Alfonso)

However, this easiness in establishing meaningful interactions with local people does not seem to be shared by all students. For instance, Naim noticed increased difficulties in taking his relationship with local students to a less superficial level. Indeed, previous research indicates that students with different cultural backgrounds rarely engage in meaningful interactions (Colvin, Volet, & Fozdar, 2014).

With the colleagues, I did not create many friendships, they are more classroom-like relationships. We still stay in touch but we don't actually meet. Here and there we write to each other and send a message, only that. (Naim)

The same student underlines the perceived difficulty in breaking into established groups of Portuguese friends, noticing that "making local ties [can] be particularly difficult" (Sakurai et al., 2010: 182).

[…] in Portugal, with Portuguese [people], there are some problems. Because the younger Portuguese have a closed group. I'm not saying it's because I am Turkish, I already talked with

Italian friends, Spanish, and they also think the same. Entering a group of friends, of Portuguese, is difficult, they have some kind of barrier. (Naim)

In spite of the obstacles encountered by Naim in establishing meaningful relationships with local Portuguese people, he appears to be rather satisfied with his friendship network, which is composed mainly by locals and fellow Turkish co-nationals.

I have a good friendship network […]. There are some people that I met through the projects I have been involved in or that I had previously met. For instance, I had an Italian friend, he finished his Erasmus and left. The friends that still remain are rather Portuguese or Turkish, people who live here, like me. My [friendship] network is more like that. (Naim)

It is also important to notice that the development of interpersonal relationships is not linked solely to nationality issues but also to other factors. In Aiko's case, a female Japanese student, her interactions at university do not seem to be related with the dichotomy: foreigner/national; but with the factor of age:

At the university, the old ones join each other and we make a group, maybe an integration. (Aiko)

In Tânia's case, given her long-term sojourn in Portugal, which started as early as eleven years old, this student presents a diverse set of experiences regarding mono/multicultural contact. During the school years, she used to interact more with people from her own country or other Africans and, during the Bachelor's, she noticed a clear separation between local Portuguese students and Africans, which she explains through the perceived existence of racial prejudice in that group.

During my Bachelor's, I remember that I used to notice it [the racial prejudice] in those disciplines in which you need to do group work and you are never chosen for any of the groups. […] Some distance was always traceable if there was somebody dark skinned in the class and it didn't matter the nationality, whether it was Angolan or not. The tendency of the people was this one: always group with another white person or Portuguese. (Tânia)

In spite of experiencing these issues during her Bachelor's degree, Tânia reports rather positively on her experience overall.

[…] I was never fond of hanging out only with Africans, I was always comfortable in both groups. I was able to stick with one environment very well, and also with the other, I never had those kinds of problems. (Tânia)

Valéria, a female Brazilian student, compares her experience with the one of other Brazilian students and appears surprised by the complaints which she claims to frequently hear from fellow Brazilians regarding their difficulties in interacting with local Portuguese students:

> I am a person who creates friendships easily, I befriended also my Portuguese colleagues and all of them are very nice, I didn't have any problems. Some Brazilians arrive here and they complain. (Valéria)

This particular case raises an interesting question regarding students' attitudes towards mono/multicultural contact. For instance, Singh's (2012: 275) findings indicated that "international students have the desire to make contact with local students". This tendency was also traceable in most of the narratives, and some students even transformed multicultural contact into a specific goal, assuming that the contact with people from their own country would be prejudicial at several levels. For instance, Aiko believes that hanging out with fellow Japanese co-nationals would negatively affect the development of her Portuguese language skills.

> I have a friend who chose to study at the University of Lisbon but I did not want to [choose Lisbon also]. I didn't want to hang out with her because I would speak Japanese all the time, therefore I would not learn Portuguese. I distanced myself from her, I didn't want to move to the same city. (Aiko)

As visible in this excerpt, Aiko's conviction in regard to the negative aspects of interacting with people from her own country influenced her choice of a higher education institution. Contrary to the attitude of Aiko, Alfonso does not reject the possibility of interacting with fellow Spanish colleagues. However, his friendship network is formed solely by local Portuguese people, a fact that Alfonso regards as strongly positive, especially considering that, through contact with locals, cultural knowledge seems to be facilitated.

> Here, I only have Portuguese friends. The closest ones are all Portuguese and I get along very well with all of them, no problem at all, no stress. [...] Hanging out with people that are from here and they are sure that they will remain here, with Portuguese who are actually inserted into the local culture, gives a very clear notion about how Portuguese culture is and I like that a lot. (Alfonso)

Jaidev holds a similar attitude towards social interactions. Even though he does not reject the idea of interacting with fellow Indian co-nationals, this student actively seeks to increase his interactions with people from different countries. In his view, interacting with people from other countries, rather than one's own, can provide opportunities for learning about cultural specificities, an aspect of his international experience that he finds particularly interesting.

> Many of my Indian friends who are staying in the residence, they usually find it more comfortable to be within other Indians. I think differently, I lived for twenty five years in my country, I've been within Indians all my life, now it's time for me to jumble up things a bit. People come with a different kind of background, a different kind of history and that's very interesting to learn [...] (Jaidev)

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In his narrative, it is possible to note that Jaidev appears to be very satisfied with his friendship network and with the fact that he was able to achieve his goal of establishing links with people who come from different cultural backgrounds.

> I have lots of friends in the residence, there are like two hundred people staying there. Through my colleagues, I've met other people, they have also become my friends, so right now I have a big network. In that sense I have no issues with friendship and such. It's a very international network. (Jaidev)

As shown in the excerpts above, there is significant diversity in the way students position themselves towards the interaction with friends and colleagues. Whilst some students aim for a balance between the interaction with locals, co-nationals or other international migrants, other students proposedly reject interacting with people from their own countries. Brenda's reflection on this topic is particularly noteworthy.

> Both in Germany and here, in various countries, I met both people who really only stay with their own, with people from their own country, and also people who completely reject people from their own country and really get into the country where they are. […] They are both extremes and I like being in the middle because I want to get into the culture, to meet local people, but I also think that having the support system of other people who understand these certain aspects of your experience can be really valuable, also emotionally. (Brenda)

In this excerpt, Brenda identifies advantages both in the contact with locals, as in the contact with other international migrants, albeit rejecting the idea according to which interacting with co-nationals is a necessity.

> For instance, I don't need somebody from the US to understand what I'm going through here, just somebody who is not from here can also see the differences, in terms of this support system. […] I don't necessarily need to spend time with lots of Americans, but just people who are going through a similar experience and kind of get it. (Brenda)

In order to analyse this dimension, the quality and frequency of human relations that the students establish during their experience in Portugal was assessed. Aside from Amivi's case, who used to contact more with people from her own country, most migrant students appeared to live and interact in a rather multicultural environment. Therefore, regarding the level of contact between migrant and local Portuguese students, only few narratives are consistent with the results of previous research, which suggests that migrant students tend to live in isolation from the wider local community, in 'ethnic enclaves' (Antonio, 2001). Given that almost all students appear to interact and create friendships across nationality, both with other international students as with their local Portuguese peers, most of the narratives analysed in this paper contradict the widely spread idea of insufficient contact between students from different cultural backgrounds (Kimmel & Volet, 2012). As observed by Brenda:

> To have an enriching international experience means also to spend time with local people of course. But also with other expats because you learn more about the countries they come from. So, for me, it's all part of the experience. (Brenda)

The findings above suggest that interactions between migrant and local students cannot be regarded in a linear way. Even though all types of relationships bear both advantages and disadvantages, "for healthy social integration, students need monocultural, bicultural and multicultural friendship networks" (Spencer-Oatey & Xiong, 2006: 51). As indicated by Brenda, different types of relationships can bring different outcomes. On the one hand, interacting with locals can help students to get to know the culture of the host country and experience it in-depth. On the other hand, interacting with other foreigners can be more comfortable since both parts are engaged in a migratory experience, thus students can feel more understood, especially in regard to those aspects of their experience which are directly related to the challenges of being a foreigner.

> For me, personally, this middle way is the best because I want to get to know the culture, and I want to get to know different people and I want to have all the experiences of being in a place. At the same time, there are things you get frustrated about and I don't want to complain about them to Portuguese people. I feel bad when I complain to my boyfriend about things I'm frustrated with here because I don't want it to sound like: "You know, your country sucks and I hate it here". I love being here so it's nice to have other foreigners also so that I can say: "Oh, isn't this frustrating?" and they'll say: "Yes, it is". And then we're like: "Oh, but is so beautiful and [there are] these other things [which] are really nice". (Brenda)

Contrary to previous research, which identified several limits to the interaction between migrant and local students (Harrison & Peacock, 2009), the data presented above suggests that most migrant students do in fact interact with their local peers and some even establish meaningful relationships. Instead of solely approaching the local/international dichotomy, further research should focus on students' subjectivities in order to tackle this issue, bearing in mind that neither local nor international students belong to homogenous groups (Trahar, 2014).

## 3. Learning outcomes of migration

In spite of the singularities embedded in their migratory experiences, presented in Chapter 4, all students described their time abroad as a valuable experience, acknowledging the importance of day-to-day experiences of diversity, "the 'doing' of multiculturalism" (Butcher & Harris, 2010: 450). Even if opportunities for informal learning lie in social interactions (Webb, 2015), and the type of friendship networks that students establish is a crucial factor in evaluating the richness of their experience, this issue cannot be regarded in such a linear way. According to Vieira (1999: 151), during "intercultural contact, the communication is not between the national or local

cultural identities but between people that carry a dynamic cultural identity". Indeed, the learning that can be achieved during the international sojourn does not reside only in the contact between locals and foreigners. Regardless of the level of multicultural contact, discussed in the previous section, all students acknowledged the richness of their experience and identified learning as one of the most valuable outcomes of their sojourns. Both Amivi and Rita felt significant growth during their experiences as migrant students in Portugal:

> I think that living outside Timor brought me new things. It made me grow also, learn new stuff, meet new people [...] I really felt I grew. I grew compared with before, it's good stuff, the mind opens by knowing new things and possibilities. (Amivi)

> There is no doubt that having this evolution, it was all a valuable experience, I learned a lot on these levels, on the academic and on the personal one. Things like day-to-day situations and I feel that I grew a lot more that I could grow if I had remained in São Tomé [...] (Rita)

In most narratives, learning is explicitly mentioned by students, albeit its meaning tends to differ significantly across narratives. For instance, for some students, learning through the experience of migration is related to personal growth, whilst for others, learning is about acquiring new cultural capabilities and linguistic skills. Even when students did not explicitly referred to learning experiences, through the interpretation of their narratives, traits of learning were identified. Altogether, the data indicate that learning as an outcome of migration appears in diverse forms, and refers to very different aspects of students' lives. An interesting observation is that students rarely mention their academic trajectories when reflecting upon the learning that they experienced throughout the sojourn. Instead, they primarily focus on the informal learning, sometimes by attaching even more value to experiential forms of learning than to institutionalised learning, as in Rita's case:

> I learnt a lot from my colleagues, always listening and observing. I even learnt more from my colleagues than actually from my teachers. It's not about content, it's about life situations. I think that I learnt more out of home than at home and more outside the classroom than inside the classroom. (Rita)

This excerpt also emphasises the fact that "informal learning must be studied in its social context, specifically within the context of daily life" (English, 2002: 232). It is worth highlighting the clear way in which Rita gives value to her experience outside the university and acknowledges the learning that resulted from her day-to-day experience in a different country. Even when they mention their academic trajectories, students seem to give more value to other forms of learning rather than to the academic side of their experiences. For instance, Brenda seems to have more interest in the cultural learning and language skills, which she acquired through her Master's degree, rather than in the learning that she experienced in terms of academic content.

I've learned a lot during the Master's, I've learned a lot about Portuguese literature, which I didn't know, and a lot about Portuguese language African literature, which was interesting and it's what I'm doing my thesis on. It's been really interesting and I have learned a lot of Portuguese, including academic Portuguese. […] So in terms of knowing more about the culture of the place I'm in, I learnt a lot, it was really helpful. (Brenda)

Brenda's reduced interest for formal learning is also visible in her attitude towards academic success.

Since I'm not actually an academic, I'm not planning on going on to get my PhD or be a professor, I'm happy with acceptable grades, I don't need fantastic ones. (Brenda)

Similar to Brenda is the experience of Chang, who underlines not the academic content that he learnt but also the capability of being autonomous, that he seems to have acquired through the contact with a different academic culture.

I also consider that it was good to have to do more tasks and presentations during the Master's, comparing to the Bachelor's in China, where it used to be more memorisation. In the future, if I work in a company, it would be necessary to fulfil a lot of tasks by myself, and normally they are not memorisation tasks. (Chang)

Also regarding the learning outcomes which seem to arise from studying in a different country, Naim considers that his knowledge about his field of study was enhanced by the possibility to regard the same issues from different standpoints.

[…] By looking at the same topics, for instance labour market for the youth, to see it from the two sides: I learnt about it in Turkey, it's another culture, another discipline. The labour market is different in Turkey, in Portugal, and see it from the two sides is interesting. I acquired a broader vision of my field. (Naim)

Even when their academic learning was hindered by different types of obstacles, the students acknowledged other significant learning outcomes rooted in the actual experience of living abroad. For instance, Laina, a transgender student from Laos, was rather disappointed regarding her academic learning, mainly due to the barrier of language.

If I attend a seminar and somebody talks about their research or their paper in English, I can understand, at least learn something from them. But I learn nothing from nobody because every seminar and even PhD defence, they are all in Portuguese. [… So] I lost the input from other people, I like to meet new people, not just meeting them but I want to learn from them, that's what I was expecting and it didn't happen. (Laina)

In spite of the perceived reduced level of academic learning, Laina's narrative gives account of other significant learning experiences. For this transgender student who has been repeatedly discriminated against due to her gender identity, especially in her home country, learning

emerges not only from the experience of living and studying in a different country but also from her resilience towards a life trajectory marked by prejudice and discrimination.

> And besides all bad experience, like in the case of discrimination and so on […] I consider that everything is good in my life and I learnt no matter what, I learnt from it, and it makes me the person I am today. […] Without those experiences, without those obstacles, without those problems in my life, I wouldn't be the person that I am today: strong, educated and happy woman. […] So it's a great experience, in terms of education, culture, and everything is good, I learnt so many things, I learnt a lot. (Laina)

The same idea according to which hardship appears as a means to achieve learning is also present in Brenda's narrative. For this student, progress can be achieved by overcoming tough experiences and giving up the safety of comfort zones. Lilley et al. (2015) found out that students considered uncertainty and personal discomfort as means through which they were able to grow both personally and intellectually.

> So my experience in the Master's was tough but is a good thing to go through tough experiences sometimes, just to see how you do and what you gain from it. You have to be uncomfortable sometimes to make progress, generally, if you just do what you're comfortable with all the time, then you will never do anything else, there has to be a point when you are uncomfortable and just deal with the discomfort for a while until it becomes comfortable or at least less uncomfortable, and that's how you make progress. (Brenda)

Learning associated with personal growth is also a trace of Alfonso's narrative. This student considers that dealing with one's responsibilities is the first step towards becoming matured. Since the familiar and interpersonal support mechanisms are not easily available during an international sojourn, growing as a person appears to be related with the need to support oneself during difficult times.

> If I had remained in Spain, after 'n' years perhaps I could be the same as now. Notwithstanding, it would not be comparable, here I matured a lot, the fact of being alone and having to do everything by myself, having to be my own support. […] there were more complicated moments and I knew that I could not call home: "Look, I am not well, is not going well". […When you are abroad it is only] you, you need to support yourself and that also makes you grow. (Alfonso)

Similar to Alfonso's perspective, Rita considers that leaving home, and an overprotective father, was the main key to her learning experience. Also interesting to note is the fact that this student regards her departure from home as a liberation, as the moment in which the road to personal growth was in fact opened.

> With this experience, I learnt new things and I got a wider vision of the world. We [me and my twin sister] used to be a little narrow-minded because my father would not let us go out that much. […] Leaving home was, undoubtedly, a liberation. (Rita)

Rita sees her departure from home as a significant moment of change, a moment in which she was confronted with new life situations, which gave her an increased sense of agency. Learning seems to emerge from the abandonment of home and the need to embrace new and challenging environments. In fact, several students referred to their experiences as personal growth enhancers, which appears to be common in the case of migrant students (Ingraham & Peterson, 2004). Also Tânia, who was send to a military boarding school at a young age, acknowledged the learning that she acquired through her international experience, especially in terms of personal growth.

> Today, I look at that period of the boarding school and I see that it was interesting, it ended up giving me a different vision of life, of things. Today, I am a more organised person, due to the discipline I was subjected to, I am a person who gives a lot of value to family, friends, and I think most of it is because what I've been through. I give much value to things that other people don't care about that much. […] I learnt a lot of things, very early, not everything is able to knock me down, to put me down, to make me sad. (Tânia)

Also noteworthy in her narrative is the fact that Tânia regards the learning resulting from her migratory experience not as the result of an accident but as something influenced by some type of pre-determined destiny.

> Therefore, the learning I have been getting is very useful and I use to say that nothing happens by chance. If my trajectory was this one, it was because it was meant to be. For some reason ahead, I'll know why. And in all the phases of my life, nothing happened by chance. (Tânia)

A similar view over her harsh experience in Portugal is shared by Valéria, who considers that all the obstacles she was faced with were purposefully placed in her way by God, in order to enhance her maturing and personal growth.

> Perhaps God gave me this slap in the face in order to learn to lower my head. The difficulties I found here, everything I am going through, it's for a karma, I am paying off karmas. […] But I don't regret it. I think that I needed to go through this in order to mature, to grow. (Valéria)

A different approach to learning is brought by Aiko, who relates her international experience to the factor of age and to the fact that she came to Portugal as a result of her own wish. She appears to be rather satisfied with the learning outcomes of her experience, suggesting that her voluntary migration resulted in enhanced life progress, an especially meaningful aspect of her experience, given her age.

> In general, I don't have any problem with my life here because I like it a lot [here], I left Japan due to my own decision, therefore I like it here. With my age, I am learning many things. With my age women generally don't make progress, on the other hand I do. (Aiko)

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Without explicitly mentioning learning, Amivi brings a different perspective over the potential for personal growth provided by an experience abroad. This student regards her arrival in Portugal as the moment in which she first made contact with different ideas and perspectives that, until then, were not available to her.

> I came here and I got to know many new things, things that I did not know. Until the end of the high school, I didn't know anyone who would speak about other ideas, other thoughts. It made me grow also the fact that I got to know new things, new people […] (Amivi)

A rather wide-ranging notion of learning is provided by Jaidev given that, for this student, all experiences can be considered learning experiences.

> Here, even the adaptation process that I need to go through is an experience and every new experience is a learning experience or a good experience so, for me, bad experiences have been few and far apart. I can't even classify what is a bad experience as such. (Jaidev)

By examining these excerpts, different facets of their learning experiences appear in students' narratives. Different students make sense of their experiences abroad in particular ways and present diverse views of their learning trajectories. Besides these differences, all students appear to have experienced significant evolution and personal growth. In line with He's (1998: 17) findings, "the strangeness encountered in an exile landscape led to cultural, educational and language strangeness, resulting in an intellectual flux". Therefore, the encounter with a new and unknown social and academic environment seems to trigger significant learning opportunities, the results of which were acknowledged in the excerpts above.

All in all, learning appeared to be the common denominator of the twelve narratives, regardless of the type of interaction that students tended to be engaged in (mono/bi/multicultural). Thus, these accounts contradict the idea that the international experience could be described solely by addressing the level of contact between migrant and local students. As shown above, the learning outcomes of such an experience seem to be significant, regardless of the level of contact with the local population. Even though such contact is beneficial not only to migrant students but also to their local counterparts (Hyland, Trahar, Anderson, & Dickens, 2008), in these narratives, the contact between migrant and local students did not appear as a central element in migrant students' accounts about learning. In fact, Haigh (2009: 433) argues that most foreign students "are already advanced learners, while many 'stay-at-home' students remain novices". Working in diverse and unfamiliar environments is not an option for these students, it is simply embedded in their sojourn since usually they "cannot escape from the intercultural experience" (Otten, 2003: 20).

The data presented here suggests that studying abroad provides numerous opportunities to learn, confirming the idea that "cross-national migrants moving from one country to another, have to engage in learning to understand new culturally situated knowledge and practices and develop new skills to adapt to life in the new social space" (Webb, 2015: 63). Most of the learning was informal and appeared to be related to the experience of unfamiliar and sometimes harsh life situations. According to Morrice (2013: 260), there is an "enormous amount of informal and incidental learning that living in a new culture demands". Consistent with previous research (Montgomery, 2010), the narratives show that poor contact between international students and their local counterparts does not seem to nullify the learning outcomes of living and studying abroad. The learning experiences of international students appeared to be rather complex and highly dependent on students' diverse biographies. Learning through the international sojourn is, therefore, an intricate matter that requires a wider theoretical and methodological lens in order to be understood.

## 4. Institutional stances towards diversity

Even though all students identified learning as an outcome of their sojourn in Portugal, their perceptions regarding the institutional support they received throughout their higher education degrees are not as satisfactory. As argued above, migrant students experience many different struggles during their international experiences, requiring coherent and consistent institutional support mechanisms to aid them in their educational quests. According to Avery (2016: 2), "gaining the social and cultural capital needed to succeed in a new country with a new language and unfamiliar education system is a slow and complex process". However, across the participant set, students' perceptions over the support received from their universities reveal many failures in the institutional strategies for tackling (cultural) diversity. For instance, Brenda noticed a complete absence of orientation activities directed to Master's students.

> I just went to my first class and I thought it was strange that, as an international student, I never got anybody saying like: "Would you like to go to an orientation or learn more about the university or talk to other international students?". Nothing. So maybe they don't do that for Master's students or they don't do it at all. (Brenda)

Aiko shares a similar perception, underlining the lack of support specifically directed to migrant students. In the excerpt below, this student notices the existence of support mechanisms at the university, albeit none appear to be suitable to her own status.

> At the university, there is no support for foreign students. Perhaps directed to Erasmus students, yes, but those are activities [specifically directed] to them. To me, no. The Chinese

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have an institute which belongs to the university and I think that they support Chinese students. Other students I don't know what they have but, for me, there is nothing. (Aiko)

Interestingly, according to Aiko's testimonial, being a foreign student does not mandatorily guarantee access to institutional support mechanisms, given that most initiatives are directed to particular national groups or solely to students involved in exchange programmes. Not being an exchange student nor a Chinese student, Aiko felt excluded from those activities, and the resolution of those issues related to her integration remained in her own hands. A similar perspective is brought by Chang who considers that, even though migrant students' participation in student led activities is not explicitly prohibited, due to cultural peculiarities embedded in such practices, migrant students' participation is, in fact, restricted.

> In other universities, there is a culture in this sense, many activities that foreign students can do. Here, there are many 'praxes' [student-organised initiation rituals found in many Portuguese universities] but the foreigners are not able to participate in those activities. (Chang)

In the case of Laina, in an attempt to provide support in the initial phase of her sojourn in Portugal, the university invited her to an orientation activity destined to Erasmus students, even though Laina was not officially enrolled in an exchange programme.

> The next day, I contacted with the university because, in the programme, we had Erasmus students and we had the orientation. It was going to be already on the next day and I had to go to the office and inform them that I already arrived and they gave me some documents to prepare and apply for identification card, bank account and so on. (Laina)

Another student, Tânia, declares herself deeply unsatisfied with the university's welcoming strategy. In her narrative, she makes several recommendations to her university and stresses that students who come from different countries should receive extra attention.

> For instance, I know that the University of Évora has a class, I think it's Portuguese language support, destined for the students who come from abroad. It is a way to boost these students [academic] performance, to give them a different attention. It is not that we are different but, in fact, we came from a place with different characteristics, thus there should be a bigger attention, a different treatment. […] There should be, I don't know yet what and how, but there should be something: a plan, a discipline, something. That depends a lot on the policy of each faculty. (Tânia)

Similarly, Chang criticises the institutional strategy employed by his university in regard to migrant students, relating it to the decrease in the enrolment of local students.

> I think that the University of Coimbra is a good university but they do not have a good strategy to welcome foreign students. Given that nowadays there are lesser and lesser Portuguese

students, they need [to have] strategies for welcoming foreign students, especially for Chinese students since there are so many. (Chang)

Besides mentioning the lack of orientation and support mechanisms, and the apparent absence of a coherent institutional strategy to deal with diversity, the students assessed university support not only through the institutional services provided to them, but also through the behaviours of their teachers, regarding them as direct representatives of their universities. For instance, Tânia emphasised the coldness of her teachers and their failure to adequately welcome migrant students.

> […] The teachers also, they are very cold, they limit themselves to give the content they need to give, and they know they have foreign students in the class. I don't think that's right. There should be a greater attention [towards them...]. A greater solicitude especially from teachers towards students who come from overseas. […] On the other hand, they don't discriminate, they don't make that difference, they treat everybody in the same way. (Tânia)

Either Tânia's teachers 'suffer' from "cultural daltonism" (Stoer & Cortesão, 1999), being unable to identify the cultural diversity present in their classrooms, either the strategy they found in order to deal with that cultural diversity was to simply ignore its existence. Another student who does not appear to be satisfied with the relationship with her teachers is Aiko. According to this student, teachers were rather distant in relation to her, but not to other colleagues.

> Sometimes I get the feeling that teachers do not know how they can take care of me. […] They are not able to understand how I am. I felt some distance from them in comparison with other colleagues. Perhaps they see me as a strange person. (Aiko)

Indeed, previous research indicated that university staff does not always consider potential cultural difficulties experienced by migrant students, interpreting in a wrong way certain behaviours and therefore perpetuating students' problems (Lee & Rice, 2007). Another observation regarding teachers belongs to Valéria who considers that a diverse student body requires open-minded teachers, capable to see beyond the limits of their local reality.

> And I am not talking only about the university, I am talking also about the teachers: they need to have that sensibility. […] A teacher from a serious university as the University of Coimbra needs to be cosmopolitan, he/she cannot limit oneself to the walls of Coimbra. And what you notice here is that the majority of the teachers do limit themselves to the walls of Coimbra, they don't look ahead, they don't have a macro vision of the world, they live in their own universe. And they are educated people who, supposedly, should have a more open mind. But their mentality is still very limited to the confines of Coimbra. (Valéria)

Valéria appears to be quite discontent with teachers' behaviours towards migrant students, and concludes that teacher mentality is a key issue in improving the institutional strategy for welcoming (culturally) diverse students.

When you welcome these students without borders, you need to have a mentality without borders. (Valéria)

In spite of the negative perceptions regarding teachers, some students mentioned many positive experiences. For instance, Corina declares herself satisfied with the way teachers approached her struggles and reacted towards her learning needs.

From the teachers that are also coordinators of my degree, […] I received much comprehension, they were very kind indeed. […] teachers need to have, and [mine] do, this psychological part very well developed, understand the student, the barriers that each one has […] (Corina)

Similarly, another student, Rita, recalls the case of a teacher who used to treat her differently, with the intention to ease the potentially negative feelings associated with being a foreign student.

Regarding the teachers, I never felt any discrimination. I mean I felt some difference but in a positive way. They end up giving more attention, some of them, not all. […] In my first year, there was this teacher who was super mean with my colleagues. With me, she treated me super well, even said my name with affection. […] I suppose that she did so to make me feel better, […] so I could feel well in class. That was the reason indeed because the same teacher became a little bit mean even towards me, some years later. (Rita)

As showed in these excerpts, towards the challenges posed by their multicultural classrooms, teachers need to develop different strategies in order to aid students' adaptation. Certainly, "differential treatment is therefore sometimes needed to achieve equity" (Castles, 1997: 12). Laina brings another positive testimonial of a differential treatment, by mentioning the relationship with her supervisor, who seems to be aware of the specific struggles of this student, and gives her extra attention.

She [my supervisor] is wonderful, she is in fact worried a lot about my research paper because she knows my condition, that I don't speak Portuguese, and she completely understands that I might have to work harder compared to other students, so that's why she pays more attention to me in terms of my education. (Laina)

The same kind of experience of being the target of extra attention can be found in the narrative of Aiko. While discussing the topic of discrimination, this student referred not only to the moments in which she felt discriminated against during her sojourn in Portugal, but also to her necessity of receiving different treatment in class.

To discriminate means to differentiate? Sometimes I need different [treatment] in order to understand Portuguese. During the class, the teacher explains a little bit more to me, it is a discrimination, but I need it sometimes. (Aiko)

Similarly, Brenda's narrative suggests that her teachers were able to adapt to her academic needs and especially to her linguistic struggles. This student emphasises that supporting migrant students does not mandatorily imply simplifying academic content for them. In fact, previous research demonstrated that simplifying academic content for students who are not fluent in the language used in the classroom can have an inverse effect, negatively affecting their learning outcomes (Callahan, 2005).

> [...] There were also good situations, my advisors are some of my favourite professors from the programme, really nice and helpful, and they support me. They are confident regarding me being able to do the work necessary for the thesis and I felt support from most of the professors. Once they realised that I was there and wasn't a native speaker, most of them made an effort to, not simplify things for me, but to help me get a little closer to the level of the native speakers. (Brenda)

Another student, Alfonso, did not experience any struggles in regard to his academic adaption. Back when he was an Erasmus student, his academic integration seemed to occur somehow naturally, without much teacher intervention.

> My academic adaption was also very easy. [...] Teachers tried to ease [our adaptation] but it was not that complicated, they didn't need to make an extra effort in order to integrate us, it was easy. (Alfonso)

Even though some teachers seem to deal with their diverse student body in an appropriate manner, there are some examples of less successful practices. At the same time, the lack of institutional support mechanisms for migrant students is an important issue which, interestingly, was mentioned by several students, from different universities. The existence of inadequate institutional strategies to tackle diversity is therefore not specific to one institution but appears to be shared by all the four universities addressed in this research. Moreover, it is important to consider that support mechanisms such as orientation sessions or other types of institutionally-organised activities for migrant students do not constitute a panacea for their successful adaptation. As stated by Brenda, the struggles with academic content and the linguistic difficulties could hardly be eased by orientation alone. However, as this student notices, regardless of its limitations, orientation is indeed important for those students who live and study in a foreign context. According to Caruana and Ploner (2010: 14), "many universities provide orientation programmes for international students". Regrettably, that does not seem to be the case in the four universities addressed in this research, as shown in students' narratives.

> I think if I had some orientation for international students it wouldn't make a difference in terms of the actual classes and the language. But there were a lot of little things that added up and made me frustrated as well, so some kind of orientation could have helped. (Brenda)

From the excerpts above, it seems that institutional support mechanisms, along with teachers' attitudes towards migrant students, constitute two important factors of their academic integration. Besides the apparent lack of a coherent institutional response to diversity, visible in several of the excerpts quoted above, one student mentioned also the loose conditions of university admission as a factor capable of negatively influencing migrant students' academic experiences:

> In fact, I asked for an interview with some teacher in order to see if everything was fine, I wanted to know. When I applied [for this Master's], I went to the administration to hand over my CV, to pay the one-hundred euro registration fee and said: "I didn't have anything, no exam, no interview, how come?". They said: "It is not needed". I said: "No, I want to have an interview". (Naim)

Surprised by the easiness with which he was able to enrol in a Master's programme, Naim decided to ask for an interview with a teacher, in order to obtain more information about the programme and to make sure that he was indeed academically prepared for that degree.

> They called the director of the Department of Sociology and he was available [to talk with me], we talked for ten, fifteen minutes, I explained to him which were my motivations, what I wanted from this Master's and I asked what they were going to teach in the Master's programme. I didn't ask for this [interview] in order to be admitted in the programme, [I asked for it] because I wanted to explain my situation, I am Turkish, they will accept me in the programme and, if I don't speak Portuguese, if I don't have some experience in this field, they don't know either. […] They also need to know what will happen to me. Somebody applies for the programme, they accept that person but they don't know who it is, they accepted whom? This is a problem in Portugal, things are not very professional. You want to do something and they say: "Oh, that's fine, ok". Always ok, but in the end you don't manage to complete everything successfully, it is not enough. In principle, they always say "ok"; it's like the Portuguese attitude. (Naim)

In this excerpt, it is possible to note that Naim felt somehow disregarded by his university, even before actually starting to attend the Master's programme. Based on his perception according to which *things are not very professional* in Portugal, this student worried that the fast admission into the Master's programme could hereafter translate into academic failure. Indeed, allowing the enrolment of migrant students in programmes taught in Portuguese without testing student's linguistic abilities is a highly questionable policy which can lead to unpleasant situations, as in Chang's case.

> I also had a teacher who, due to my difficulty in understanding the words, said: "With this level of Portuguese you cannot study in the Master's programme". I got upset and I wanted to ask her: "I paid tuition, if you think that I don't have the capability to be in this programme, why the director accepted me?" (Chang)

In this case, there seems to be a gap between the university enrolment goals and teachers' views over the pedagogical struggles associated with teaching students whose first language is not Portuguese. This gap affects students negatively since most of them already have to struggle with the difficulties inherent to studying in a different language, and on top of that without receiving extra support from their teachers. Being informed by teachers that their language skills are not good enough for that programme might not be the best support strategy for migrant students. In fact, as indicated in their narratives, none of the twelve students was asked to make proof of their language skills in their university application forms. Considering that the vast majority of the programmes offered by Portuguese universities are taught in the local language, by allowing all migrant students to enrol in a tertiary degree, regardless of their level of Portuguese, higher education institutions are conveniently passing to students the responsibility for their potential academic failure. A highly inappropriate situation was narrated by Laina who was told, prior to her arrival, that all classes would be taught in English but, when she arrived in Portugal, the reality appeared to be quite different.

> [...] All the classes were also conducted in Portuguese and I was so sad. I did not expect anything like that. I can say I was quite disappointed with the school system because I was told in the application that all classes will be conducted in English but, when I arrived, we got into the classroom and every professor asked: "What language do we use in the class?"; and everybody said Portuguese. (Laina)

As visible in her narrative, this situation significantly affected the educational outcomes of Laina's experience in Portugal. In fact, her experience as a whole was marked by a profound dissatisfaction with the educational system, due to the language struggles she experienced in classroom settings.

> There was a moment that I hated myself that I could not learn Portuguese but then I said: "Oh, it's not an easy language". [...] I think it's gonna be difficult for everybody who will experience the same situation: you go to one country and you don't speak the language, you don't know anything about it and then you have to attend the class which is spoken in that language. How that's possible? (Laina)

When she arrived in Portugal, Laina seem to have found a university unprepared to welcome her and incapable of providing a coherent pedagogical response to her learning needs. In the excerpt above, it is possible to note that an inadequate institutional stance towards migrant students can raise unnecessary obstacles in their educational trajectories, impacting negatively on their global evaluations of the international experience. In Laina's opinion, the opportunity of studying abroad was, to some extent, undermined by the institutional failure in guarantying, as initially promised, English-taught classes:

Some professors they do not know how to speak English. I felt disappointed, I felt sad about it because I would love to have had the opportunity to understand what was being taught in the class, which is actually very important for my research. I lost so many things, on the one hand I got the opportunity to come here to the University of Minho to study and to learn about my project but, on the other hand, everything in the classes was taught in Portuguese and I could not understand, even the seminar lectures and everything was in Portuguese. I felt disappointed back then and I still say that I feel disappointed even now because, if I had understood what they were talking, my work would have been better. (Laina)

Another example of an inappropriate institutional stance towards migrant students is reported by Valéria. According to this student, the teachers from her PhD programme tended to discriminate against Brazilian students based on the assumption that the scientific production from their country was somehow inferior to European standards.

So when we arrived here for the PhD, we still encountered that barrier of them thinking that they worked better than the Brazilians. […] There was an academic shock: none of what was being done there [in Brazil] was valued here. […] But I think this is specific to this PhD in particular, it is not something [that happens] in the whole university. […] Therefore, here there is, inside academia, a certain resistance towards Brazilian students. For a very short time, I got to attend another PhD and there was this Nigerian who complaint precisely about that: he felt discriminated against due to his origins. (Valéria)

Although she considers that this resistance towards Brazilian students is not specific to the whole university but only to her particular PhD programme, she acknowledges that similar situations may occur in other faculties, recounting the story of a Nigerian student who also appeared to feel academically discriminated against on the grounds of his origins. Certainly, such behaviours that perpetuate the exclusion of different perspectives from the academic field should not exist within the teaching body of an internationalised university. In the excerpt below, Valéria reinforces the idea that she felt rather unwelcomed by her university. According to her perception, the university would not be interested in having her as a student, if not for a financial reason. At the same time, she provides some recommendation, which could translate in policies and practices directed towards the improvement of Portuguese universities' strategies for tackling diversity.

The university is opening itself for us to come for a financial reason, if there wasn't a financial reason they would not open themselves. Therefore, it is a university that opens itself for all the races, in which you can see students from all over the world, thus that university needs to have teachers capable of exiting their own world. The teachers need to know the reality of each country, they cannot remain solely inside of this world here. Ok, it is true that the University of Coimbra is seven hundred years old, but there are universities which are forty years old and they are thirty years more advanced than Coimbra. Therefore, I think that, when you open this range of options for receiving people from different countries, there needs to be a concern in knowing those countries. (Valéria)

Besides warning that being an old university will not suffice and will not provide, by itself, an adequate institutional welcoming strategy directed to migrant students, Valéria stresses the importance of having an open mind when dealing with a culturally diverse student body. At the same time, she reiterates Chang's and Naim's complaints of admitting students without confirming that their learning needs can be met in a particular programme. Valéria calls upon the guest-host metaphor in order to illustrate the inadequacy of the institutional strategy directed to migrant students perpetuated by her university:

> It is like you were to receive a guest in your house and you would not care about knowing absolutely nothing about that guest. You will make dinner, you don't care if the person is carnivorous, vegetarian, you simply make what you like to eat, if the person wants, then he/she can eat. So what is going to happen? The person will arrive, will look at your food and will not eat, will leave [your house] hungry. Therefore, I think that the host has the obligation to know the reality of his/her guest and I, when I come here, am a guest. It is not like the university went there to invite me but the university opened a door for me. Since it opened a door for me, it is inviting me to enter. Therefore, when it opens that door for me, it needs to know the reality of this people that will come. And it is not only the economic reality, [the university] needs to know the cultural reality. (Valéria)

This excerpt is particularly valuable for understanding the structural changes that universities need to implement in order to embrace diversity and become multicultural not only in its composition but also in its quotidian practices. According to Valéria, it is not enough to merely invite overseas students to come, universities and teachers need to be informed in regard to the reality of those students. Chang also appears to be unsatisfied with the way in which the University of Coimbra is developing its internationalisation strategy. The issue of language is, in his view, one of the main barriers that Portuguese universities need to overcome in order to become international.

> I think this is a very old university, it has a very good student culture and teachers also have good quality in the classes. [...] The majority of the students are Portuguese, therefore the language in the classes is Portuguese. It is not a good way to welcome foreign students. [...] When the foreign students do not speak Portuguese well, many activities will not go well either. [...] Also, this university does not do well in terms of doing advertising for foreigners. (Chang)

As shown above, the issue of language was mentioned by several students and, due to its ubiquity and the importance that it assumes throughout students' narratives, it will be analysed separately in a different section of this chapter. However, the language of teaching is an issue directly related to the institutional stance towards diversity. Contrary to Chang's opinion, I argue that each university should be able to decide in regard to the language of teaching used in its programmes. If universities opt for the local language, as in the case of the four universities

contemplated in this research, the process of admitting migrant students should be stricter, in order to avoid situations like the ones referred above, in which students were told, after being accepted in a particular programme, that their language skills were not sufficient for coping with the programme's demands. At the same time, universities should avoid the occurrence of situations as the one narrated by Laina, who was told that her PhD would be taught in English and, after arrival, was forced to assist classes in Portuguese, a language completely unknown to her.

Regarding teachers, the excerpts above revealed several examples of good practices. Many teachers seemed to be able to cope successfully with the diversity found in their classrooms, seeking to meet the specific learning needs of their migrant students. However, the narratives also contain testimonials of inadequate teaching practices, generally rooted in teachers' inability to think beyond the confines of their own reality, as exemplified by Valéria, or to even recognise the need for differentiated treatment when dealing with diverse students, as shown in Tânia's narrative. Proper teacher preparation in the multicultural field could preclude this kind of attitudes but, at the same time, universities need to be cautious in the way in which they approach teachers. Encouraging them to reflect upon their own classroom practices can be a rather challenging endeavour and even "profoundly disturbing, especially if teachers begin to question many years of their own practice" (Clifford & Montgomery, 2014: 42). From the excerpts presented above, the institutional strategies towards diversity employed by these four Portuguese universities do not appear to successfully answer to the particular needs of migrant students, given that many participants reported negatively on the institutional support systems. Interestingly, even in the absence of a coherent institutional strategy for welcoming diversity, migrant students attached, as shown in the previous section, significant learning outcomes to their international sojourns. Learning appears to be somehow embedded in their experience abroad and tends to occur even in the absence of a coherent institutional strategy of dealing with diversity. Yet, Vande Berg, Connor-Linton and Paige (2009) consider that higher education institutions need to intervene in order to improve the learning experience of their migrant students. Following students' recommendations, a university with a diverse student body should invest more in teacher training on multiculturalism and diversity issues, and in the development of activities and support mechanisms specifically directed to migrant students.

## 5. Social support

As shown in the previous section, Portuguese universities do not seem to have an institutional structure properly developed in order to successfully accommodate migrant students. However,

most of the students who participated in this study appeared to be rather satisfied with their learning experiences in Portugal. A possible interpretation for their successful adaptation, in spite of the unpreparedness that seems to characterise most higher education institutions, is the meaningful support they received from peers, other migrants or members of the local community. In other words, when the institutional answer to migrant students' needs is not satisfactory, a more adequate response is given by informal structures of support.

The research literature has shown that social support networks play a crucial role in the adaptation of migrant students (Yeh & Yu-Wei, 2000; Yeh & Inose, 2003; Baba & Hosoda, 2014; Thomas & Sumathi, 2016; Mao & Liu, 2016). According to Gill (2007: 175), "the importance of network relationships lies in the potential to facilitate participants' adaptation through interaction, friendship and cultural modelling and dialogue". Looking at the twelve narratives, one particular aspect becomes salient: excepting the case of Amivi, all students seem to successfully interact with local people. Considering that a crucial factor in the failure to adapt to the new context is the lack of support (Rania, Migliorini, Rebora, & Cardinali, 2014), besides being a marker of a successful integration, creating strong ties with local students can activate useful support mechanisms, as reported by Chang:

> My classmates and teachers always helped me, in the beginning and now also, they are very good friends. In order to be able to adapt, it is necessary to meet more Portuguese, make more friends, through them it is possible to know more. (Chang)

This case underlines the importance of a good relationship between migrant and local students (Hendrickson et al., 2011), and the positive effects that such relationships can have in the life of migrant students. In fact, most of the twelve students seem to have been supported by university peers in their academic tasks and other aspects of their sojourns. Amivi is the only student who felt that the necessary support from colleagues was missing, the same student who experienced many difficulties in interacting with local students.

> I don't know if they are racists or not but, many times, we need somebody to give us the lecture notes, to chat […]. I already asked for help, many times, because even though I am in Portugal for several years now, I need somebody to help me to study, Law is not an easy degree. I always asked for help and nobody helped me. (Amivi)

With the exception of Amivi, all the other students reported positively on their peer support experiences. For instance, Naim was able to find academic support in his only colleague who was fluent in English.

> My colleagues helped me a lot but only one of them knew how to speak English. The other ones only spoke Portuguese and, when the Master's began, my level of Portuguese was a lot

lower than now. We had a communication problem especially when we had to do group work. Since I had this colleague who spoke English, we shared some of the group work. During the Bachelor's he also studied in the same institution and knew everything: the teachers and how things were run. He knew a lot, thus he helped me a lot. (Naim)

Interestingly, in this excerpt Naim seems to acknowledge that having previously studied in a particular institution can provide students with privileged insights regarding the way *things are run*, therefore receiving support from an experienced student was paramount to his academic integration. Also supporting were Aiko's colleagues, who were:

very nice, all of them adults, therefore the class was normally very calm. […] I had many colleagues, all Portuguese, and they liked to help me. (Aiko)

Jaidev brings another example of the support received from university peers, especially regarding the linguistic aspect of his academic life.

The classes were in English and Portuguese, and there was someone to translate, friends, also colleagues, or it was the teacher who was, at the same time, saying the examples in English. […] they would translate […] or a friend of mine would translate for me. It's not a real methodology, it's just out of the moment. Still, it's consideration and that's really important. (Jaidev)

Valéria was also treated with consideration, especially by her Portuguese colleagues. Contrary to her expectations, this student received more support from her local peers than from fellow Brazilian students.

I noticed that the Portuguese were a lot more worried with the academic adaptation of the Brazilians than the Brazilians were worried with their fellow co-nationals, their colleagues that were also far from home, in the same difficulty, in the same situation. The Portuguese are even more solidary than foreigners are among themselves, because the foreigner only wants to take care of himself and leave. (Valéria)

A rather peculiar testimonial is brought by Brenda who felt that her colleagues were helpful and supportive because they perceived her as some kind of a rare bird, and thus as someone in need of extra attention.

As far as I could tell, I was the only American student in the entire faculty, apparently there weren't even any American professors at the time either. So I think I was a little bit of a novelty for some people. Also I wasn't just a tourist from the US but I was actually living here and wanting to be here, and studying here. They had some curiosity towards me, wondering how I ended up there. They are more used to European students in general but an American student in Portugal is kind of a fish out of water and might potentially have no idea of what's going on so that might have somewhat encouraged them to reach out and offer to help me. (Brenda)

Interestingly, the idea of being different from their colleagues and, to some extent, unique, is not visible only in Brenda's narrative. Chang also had the feeling of being somehow in the spotlight, especially due to the interest of his teachers and colleagues in knowing more about his home country.

> [...] since among the classmates there aren't many foreign persons, they [my teachers] are curious, they want to know more about the Chinese market, now the entire world, all the countries like to trade with China, so many colleagues are also curious about the Chinese market. (Chang)

In fact, both Chang and Laina felt rather unique among their classmates. Although other migrant students were enrolled in the same programme, they were the only non-native Portuguese speakers. Similar to Brenda's case, this peculiarity led to extra attention and support from their classroom peers.

> My colleagues also helped me a lot because, in my class, I was the only one who had difficulties with the language. The other colleagues are all Portuguese or Brazilians and they helped me with some things: when I didn't understand well they would explain to me; when we did homework they would help me to correct the language mistakes. Yes, they helped me a lot and they still do. Especially one of my Master's colleagues helped me a lot, at any moment in which I had difficulties, I would talk to him and he would help. (Chang)

> I think we are seventeen students and I am the only minority, there are Brazilians and there are Portuguese so they speak the same language and I am the only person from Asia who doesn't speak Portuguese. [...] In academic terms, they [my colleagues] were very helpful also, life and academic problems, they helped me a lot. (Laina)

A similar situation can be found in the narrative of Jaidev. Even though his class appears to be rather multicultural in its composition, he appeared to be the only student who didn't know how to speak Portuguese fluently.

> There are lots of other people also who are from different parts of the world in the programme, there is a girl from Turkey, one from Bosnia and one from Serbia, so the class is also quite multicultural in that sense, even though all the other people speak Portuguese except me, even the foreigners. They did come here before, maybe because they have boyfriends who are Portuguese. (Jaidev)

These several testimonials of being somehow the odd one out, the only non-native Portuguese speaker in a class, could be a reflection of the number of migrant students enrolled in Portuguese universities. As shown in the introductory chapter, most migrant students who study in Portugal come from Portuguese-speaking countries such as Brazil, Angola or Cape Verde. Interestingly, all these students who were somehow different from their colleagues, especially in regard to their Portuguese language skills, appeared to be very satisfied with the social

support they received. In the case of Laina, she felt supported not only in regard to her academic struggles but also in terms of her non-traditional gender identity.

> My friends, my colleagues, my classmates, they were wonderful, they were very nice and everybody accepted my [gender] changing, everybody understood and they supported me. [...] Everybody was just wonderful to me, even my professor, everybody very supportive and I feel so good to have them as my friends. In academic terms they were very helpful also, life and academic problems, they helped me a lot. (Laina)

Indeed, in most narratives students reinforced not only the academic support but also the help they received in terms of living in a new and frequently overwhelming environment.

> During this first year in Portugal I had a very good Chinese friend who was already living in Portugal for a long time and he helped me to organise my life, I met him in the course of Portuguese for foreigners. He helped me, for instance: if I needed something, he would bring it; if I was not able to speak Portuguese properly, he would help. Given that he was living here for a longer time, many places that I didn't know about, many things that I didn't know how to do, I could ask him. (Chang)

Receiving support from other migrant students who have more life experience than the newly arrived students can be very helpful in the case of migrant students, given that "previous knowledge and experience is passed between "old-timers" and "newcomers"" (Montgomery & McDowell, 2009: 463). Naim's adaptation also became easier due to the knowledge and experience that other Turkish people living in Portugal shared with him.

> After nine months in Portugal, I started to meet Turkish people here in Lisbon. That eased my adaptation because I learnt many things from them. Thanks to them, this adaptation stage was easier for me. You can go there and speak Turkish, you explain [yourself], you discuss and they give advice, therefore that stage it's easier. (Naim)

In the case of Chang, the process of adaptation was also eased by the support he received from a member of the Chinese community in Portugal.

> Back then, I also had another Chinese [friend], it was the owner of the Chinese shop located beneath my apartment. He helped me a lot: at the Citizen's office, to take care of the visa, he gave me rides to the supermarket, taught me how to shop for groceries, buy a phone, some necessary things. (Chang)

Another student, Alfonso, emphasised the importance of the support he received from his co-workers, especially in dealing with homesickness.

> Now right after Christmas, until the summer [when I will go to Spain again] there are still six months to go, obviously that the first week after returning from Spain it's always very tough. It's very tough because you have just been with your friends, your family, but the guys here help also because you start doing things right away: working, the Master's, dinners. (Alfonso)

Moreover, this student appears to be grateful towards his co-workers for including him in their group and for easing the negative feelings associated with a life abroad.

> After the first month, I was completely involved with them, going out for dinner or a drink, there were no problems, they don't make any distinction, everybody is there. I am very grateful to these people for all the help, the effort, it helps me not to feel that much that I am not at home, they are always worried: "It's everything all right, do you need anything?" (Alfonso)

The support that students received did not come only from their university peers or friends. For instance, Aiko was aided by the director of her Bachelor's programme in the process of obtaining her work permit from the immigration office.

> Regarding my work permit, I also went there [to the immigration office] with the director of my programme because I am afraid that they can be mean to me. She is very nice and likes to support the students, we are lucky. When I asked her [to come with me to the immigration office] she accepted right away. There, she explained [my situation] very well, better than I could do it, she lives here for a longer time than I do […] (Aiko)

Similarly, Corina was supported in the process of learning Portuguese by her own employers, back when she used to work as a housekeeper:

> With the ladies in whose houses I used to work I was more at ease, thus one of them offered to help me each time I misspelled a word [in Portuguese]. […] That helped me to overcome that moment, helped me with my integration, with the linguistic dimension. If not for these ladies I didn't use to talk Portuguese with anybody else. In terms of the linguistic dimension, that was indeed helpful for me. (Corina)

Similarly, Chang found the means to receive linguistic support through informal language exchanges, teaching Chinese while being taught Portuguese.

> During that year, I also did not know many Portuguese friends but I had two language partners […]. They were very good, they helped me a lot to learn this language. (Chang)

In the case of Valéria, the support received from friends appeared to be central throughout her sojourn in Portugal. According to Smith and Khawaja (2011: 703), students can feel "emotionally deprived in their host country without their support networks from their home country". Valéria missed the support networks she had in Brazil, especially the familial ones, which she was nevertheless able to replace with a new friendship support network that she established in Portugal. In the excerpt below, she underlines the important role that friends can play in supporting migrant students during their sojourns:

I have a colleague here who owns a store and many times [I left my son in her care and, when] I arrived, Victor was sleeping in the only fitting room she had. Her clients trying on clothes out of the fitting room. This means friendship, because that fitting room is the only one she has, the only one she can offer to her clients to dress but, nevertheless, she allowed my son to sleep there [until I would arrive]. […] These kinds of friendships are the ones that matter. She lives at my place? No. I live at her place? No. We go out to have lunch, dinner, to party? No. But I know that if I say: "Alexandra, can I leave Victor with you until I come back?". "You can". "Alexandra, you will give my son a snack?". "I will". This is what matters. Any person, friendship, any help is very welcomed [… because] it is not easy to be far from your family, from family support, your father and mother. It is not easy to give up everything, a whole set of joys that the familiar companionship offers […] (Valéria)

Even though most of the narratives give account of a very positive experience with peer and social support, certain cautions in the interpretive process need to be taken. For instance, the intention of some local students to support their migrant counterparts could not always be rooted in a genuine interest for helping their colleagues but in a certain curiosity for knowing more about those students who are regarded as different, sometimes even as exotic, as in Brenda's case. In this scenario, when the novelty factor fades out, and migrant students become 'less interesting' from the point of view of their local colleagues, the willingness to actively support them could also diminish. Furthermore, some local students could offer their support for a matter of etiquette and not because they are actually interested in establishing a meaningful connection with their migrant peers. This situation is visible in the excerpt below, which belongs to Brenda:

[My colleagues] gave me their phone number to call if I had any problem, so a lot of them were really nice. Definitely it felt good, it's always nice to have people offer to help you. […] At the same time they didn't try really hard to invite me to things either, it was just kind of: "Here is my phone number, if you ever need anything, call me"; and I never really needed anything that I felt the need to call them for and so that's just were it ended. (Brenda)

Moreover, it is important to consider that some of the examples given by students may not be representative of their experiences in Portugal. For instance, both in Aiko's and in Brenda's narrative, it is possible to note that some of the situations in which they received support from their colleagues were just isolated events rather than constant occurrences during their sojourns.

Sometimes I would ask for help to a student who […] is learning Japanese. He asked for my help also and we've been exchanging information, he taught me philosophy and I taught him Japanese. We used to meet at his place but we only did that one or two times. (Aiko)

[My colleagues] were helpful with academic related things, once or twice I copied notes from someone who had taken notes on the day, so a lot of the students were really nice. (Brenda)

Despite the overall positive effects of receiving support from colleagues, friends and other members of the local community, there are also some potentially negative aspects attached to this issue. According to Brenda, being constantly supported by others can lead to the impression of being a burden, reinforcing the feeling of being an outsider. In other words, the good intentions behind the social support directed to migrant students can have, in certain cases, the opposite effect: instead of aiding students in their adaptation, some support strategies could push them towards marginalisation and exclusion.

> […] Sometimes maybe you can feel like a burden, if you feel people have to explain things for you, to talk more slowly, or more simply. You don't always want people to single you out and make it clear that they are nice and helping […]. Like that, it's being made even more clear that you're kind of different […] (Brenda)

In spite of these potential drawbacks associated with social support, all students recognised, one way or another, that the development of their sojourn in Portugal was highly depended on the support they received from other people. The excerpts above suggested "that a significant benefit for the participants' process of adaptation was gained by their engagement in networks of relationships" (Gill, 2007: 174). Students indicated that peer and friend support were crucial in coping with language difficulties, day-to-day demands in the new context, or in easing potential feelings of homesickness. Similar to their perceptions on interpersonal relationships, discussed in section 2 of this chapter, students' evaluation of the support they received was marked by positivity. In their narratives, they use adjectives such as: wonderful, nice, solidary, understanding, supporting, helpful or considerate; in order to refer to the people who supported them during their sojourn in Portugal. In the previous section, participants' testimonials revealed that Portuguese universities do not tend to assume their responsibility for welcoming migrant students, failing to attend to their specific (learning) needs. As showed in the excerpts above, peers, friends or members of the local community ended up filling the void left behind by inadequate institutional strategies for dealing with migrant students.

## *6. Language*

As shown in the first chapter of this thesis, language assumes a crucial role in the life of migrant students. The issue of language has been shown to impact students' both at the educational level and the social one (Zhang & Brunton, 2007). In Brunton's and Jeffrey's (2014: 327) research, "language barriers were identified as the main source of challenge for international students", whilst Mori's (2000: 137) findings indicate that "the language barrier is probably the most significant, prevalent problem for most international students". Similarly, Rosulnik et al (2016:

36) stress that: "the knowledge of a foreign language, that of the new environment, is key for successful operation therein".

Attending to the central role played by language in the life of migrant students and cognisant of the challenges it can pose to them, the factor of language was considered in the process of selecting the participants of this study. As clarified in the methodological chapter, the participant selection process was guided by the intention to include both students who come from Portuguese-speaking countries and students who come from countries where Portuguese is not an official language. This methodological decision was taken based on the assumption that, on the one hand, students who come from Portuguese-speaking countries might not experience extra difficulties in dealing with the social and academic requirements of their sojourns, given that they are native Portuguese speakers. On the other hand, students who are not native in Portuguese would be expected to experience increased difficulties during their sojourns. However, this assumption was only partially sustained by the narratives. For instance, one of the students who comes from a Portuguese-speaking country did, in point of fact, struggle with language difficulties. In her narrative, Amivi mentions the political context of East Timor, where it was forbidden to speak Portuguese ever since she was born.

> In 1999, [during the East Timorese crisis], when the Indonesians left, Portuguese started to be part of the curriculum and it was then that we started to learn it. (Amivi)

Consequently, in spite of coming from a country in which Portuguese is now an official language, Amivi did not know how to speak this language during her childhood and most of her Portuguese skills were acquired when she was already living in Portugal.

> In fact, I learnt Portuguese in [the city of] Fátima, I learnt it with a religious sister who was our teacher, who supervised us during two years and, at the same time, gave us Portuguese language classes. (Amivi)

Similar to other students who are original from countries in which Portuguese is not an official language, Amivi experienced increased difficulties in dealing with her academic tasks. According to this student, law is a difficult subject even for a Portuguese person, let alone for the foreigners.

> My linguistic skills are not quite enough for this degree. […] Normally, I read and I do not understand what [the text] means, I actually need to check the meaning [of words] in the online dictionary. This certainly happens to the Portuguese also, I think it's common to all students. Although the development of the text it's really hard and I believe that for a Timorese or a foreign person, even though that person lives for many years in Portugal, the words to describe will always be lacking. A Portuguese can read the text and understand what it means and, with his/her own idea, the language will flow. I, since I am a foreigner, need to think hard before writing, if words are compatible or not and pay [extra] attention. (Amivi)

The excerpts above reveal that not all students who come from countries in which Portuguese is an official language do speak this language fluently and, for some of these students, language can actually constitute a barrier to their successful social and academic adaptation. At the same time, another narrative shows that the opposite situation can also occur. The case of Jaidev is somehow antagonistic to Amivi's, given that this student did not appear to experience many struggles related to language, even though his level of Portuguese appears to be elementary.

> I do the same things back home that I do here, it's the same thing, we talk in English, we think in English, so for me it's not as big of a shift. (Jaidev)

Interestingly, this student appears to successfully navigate the social and academic contexts in which he currently lives only through the use of the English language, considering Portuguese only as a *tiny difficulty* amid his sojourn.

> For me, coming from an Indian and Italian language background, it took a bit of time to get used but I love Portuguese, the language, is very sweet, it's very flowy. At the same time, I get confused about certain words, the language surprises me every now and then but that's the only, perhaps, tiny difficulty. (Jaidev)

Contrary to other students whose narratives are strongly marked by language struggles, especially in university contexts, the PhD programme in which Jaidev is enrolled is bilingual and the majority of the classes are taught in English.

> Maybe that happens also because of the fact that I'm in a niche sector and it is a doctoral which is bilingual: Portuguese and English. […] in the first year maybe 60-70% of the classes were in English. (Jaidev)

Besides the peculiar case of Jaidev, the other narratives belonging to students who come from countries in which Portuguese is not an official language reveal that language poses many challenges to those students. Similarly, besides Amivi, those students who were born Portuguese-speaking countries give little importance to the linguistic aspect of their experience. For instance, in the narrative of Tânia, who came to Portugal early in her childhood, language is not even mentioned. Rita does briefly refer to this topic, mentioning the existence of some differences between the way people speak in her country and the Portuguese spoken in Portugal. At the same time, she points out that language did not constitute an obstacle to her integration.

> I never gave up my accent, they notice the difference right away, it never bothered me, it is not like I had any problems or I was ashamed to speak with my accent. […] The Brazilians have some difficulties in understanding but I never felt that. It can be one word or another but I always understood clearly, the language was not an obstacle. (Rita)

In contrast, Valéria, also a native Portuguese speaker, experienced some difficulties in understanding European Portuguese. In spite of those small difficulties, she considers that her adaptation was a fast and easy process.

> In terms of language, there are always some difficulties but I adapted rather quickly. Even today, there are some persons that I have difficulties [in understanding], there are people who speak Portuguese in a way that makes it difficult for you to understand, you need to look at their mouth in order to see what they are saying. […] Therefore, there were some difficulties, yes, but we adapt to them, I was able to adapt easily, I did not have big adaptation crises. (Valéria)

Besides the cases of Jaidev and of the four students who come from Portuguese-speaking countries, the narratives of the other students are marked by several struggles related to language. For instance, Chang mentions the difficulty in expressing one's thoughts and recalls that his low level of Portuguese put him in some difficult situations in the past.

> 2011 was a difficult year because I did not speak Portuguese well, I was not able to communicate things. […] The language brought even more difficulties because I was not able to express my thoughts, my meaning. Because of the fact that I did not speak well, there were some difficult situations […]. (Chang)

A similar remark about the difficulty in expressing oneself was made by Brenda, who spoke about language in identity terms, focusing on the difficulty of bringing one's personality to life in a foreign language, and thus confirming that language is a significant factor in the development of students' self-identity (Gill, 2007).

> I feel like my personality just doesn't come out as much and I have a hard time, for instance, when it's like a dinner with a big group and there's lots of different conversations going on, it's hard for me to really hear any of the conversations. And my personality doesn't come through as much, I can't make jokes as much, so people might think that I'm boring or that I don't want to talk to them because I don't say much. I think my personality comes through a lot in German [even though is not my mother tongue]. In Portuguese, it comes more and more all the time but, when you're first making friends, it's hard if you can't say what you want to say and be as funny as you want to be, which is a totally common thing among immigrants. (Brenda)

Difficulties in expressing oneself was also an issue for Aiko. In the following excerpt, this student explains the failure of communication, which seems to have occurred many times between her and Portuguese people. According to her perception, language is responsible for structuring the thought of a particular nation. Therefore, communicating across nations becomes a difficult undertaking since the people involved in the communication process lack common ground:

> When I speak, the thought and the Japanese system are present and, with my level of Portuguese, it is difficult for people to understand. Firstly, there is no common ground.

> Secondly, you don't have a clue about how we, the Japanese, construct the thought. […] In the case of, for instance, a Spanish or a Polish, it is more accessible because they already know the history, they know more or less, you have the same basis, philosophical or ethical, but for us no. When I speak, it is frustrating because I know that people do not understand [me]. For instance, when I say something, it might seem immoral to you but not to me. […] Language creates the thought of the nation, therefore, the construction of the phrase, the explanation represents your thought and we, as we have another type of construction, are not able to communicate well. I am speaking Portuguese but I am communicating something else. […] During my interactions with Portuguese people, the conversation stopped many times because of that. It stopped and I felt bad, frustrated. (Aiko)

Aiko's observation is consistent with the findings of Peacock and Harrison (2009: 492), who noticed that: "although language was important in framing scope for interaction, students identified deeper cultural dissonances which formed barriers to meaningful discourse". In this excerpt, Aiko also gives account of the feelings of frustration that she repeatedly experienced when interacting with locals, especially in those moments in which they did not seem to understand her. Other students, as for instance Alfonso, did not make references to any language struggles, and regarded language acquisition as an educational goal in itself.

> I am a person who likes learning languages. One of my objectives for the Erasmus was very clear: try to learn the language. If I had gone to Italy, I had done the same: get involved in a team that would help me to learn Italian. I came to Porto, thus I wanted to learn Portuguese. Also learning the culture from here, live my life as if I were a local. (Alfonso)

Particularly noteworthy in this excerpt is Alfonso's desire to become deeply involved in the local culture, aiming to acquire not only linguistic knowledge but also cultural one. His efforts to learn Portuguese appear to have been acknowledged by the local peers, who offered him their support in terms of language acquisition.

> At the beginning, when I would make a mistake, first it would come the joke, but then, they would explain to me: "It's not like this, it's like that"; I thanked them for that. (Alfonso)

A similar experience belongs to Naim who regards language struggles not as difficulties but as motivations to improve his Portuguese, emphasising that, for him, living abroad constitutes an extra impulse for learning the local language.

> In Turkey, you will not pay below ten thousand Turkish liras for a language course and you will not learn it that well. Because you don't need it, you are able to speak Turkish and that's it. But here is mandatory [to be able to speak Portuguese], that is the difference. (Naim)

Moreover, the language obstacles that Naim found in university contexts did not discouraged this student from studying Portuguese, but motivated him to improve his linguistic skills.

> We also had a teacher who did not speak English. In the first semester, she allowed me to give presentations in English and, since we did not have an exam, we only did an essay, she allowed me to write it in English. Only in the second semester she said that she was not comfortable with English and that I needed to do it in Portuguese: "Talk with your colleagues and they can help you". But that is not possible, they also need to prepare for their own exam, they were busy. Thus that was a good motivation to learn, to improve my Portuguese, because there was no other option, I needed to do that. (Naim)

The request of Naim's teacher may not constitute the most adequate way to deal with a migrant student and his particular language needs. However, the result of this teacher's apparently inadequate request generated a positive response from Naim, who interpreted it as an extra impulse to improve his language skills. Another interesting aspect of this narrative is the fact that Naim was not initially interested in learning Portuguese. His interest for this language came as a consequence of his decision to extend his sojourn in Portugal.

> When I arrived here, my English was very bad. I spoke very little. In the beginning, I tried to improve my English, speak it better. Portuguese I never thought about learning because I was thinking about returning [to Turkey] after my volunteering [exchange programme]. After that, I started to talk more in Portuguese with Portuguese friends but that happened in the end of the [programme], when I decided to live here. (Naim)

Laina did not initially plan to learn Portuguese either, at least not beyond elementary level. However, she needed to change her plans due to an unexpected situation that occurred at the host university. Even though her scholarship provider informed her that classes would be taught in English, when Laina arrived in Portugal she found a rather different reality:

> [When teachers asked which language we would prefer] everybody said they wanted Portuguese in the class, they voted. [...] When I arrived, I didn't know any single word. [...] The university, they actually asked me before I came whether or not I wanted to study the language and then I said: "Yes, I would like that"; because I was thinking that I needed to know at least basic conversation. Expecting the classes to be in English, the language would be something extra, not the main thing that I would like to learn. (Laina)

Not being able to understand classes, Laina still had to attend them since her final marks were dependent on class attendance rates. This bizarre situation put this student in a difficult position, and isolated her from the remaining classmates.

> I went to the classes only because I had to attend, because of the participant list, they give the mark, the score according to the attendance. So I stayed there in the class like nothing, I would always be at the back and I was with my research, with something else. When they talked about something I searched on Google and I read about that particular something they were talking about. It was so difficult for me but that's what I did, that's how I learnt during my first year of the PhD. (Laina)

This episode shows the crucial importance that language assumes in academic contexts and confirms the assumption according to which "strangers with insufficient language skills are left outside, marginalised longer than others" (Murphy-Lejeune, 2003: 104). Laina's experiences in university contexts are marked by linguistic struggles and the excerpts above give account of the harshness of being forced to study in a completely unknown language. The unexpected use of Portuguese in university settings seems to have affected Laina's overall evaluation of her experience as a migrant student in Portugal.

> In terms of education, I am disappointed with this school system. […] If they would have spoken in English I would have understood better about what I should do in my research or I would have understood more about how doing research. […] If you ask me where I gained more in terms of education, I would say I gained more when I was in Japan, because of this language issue. In Japan we were speaking in English and I understood many things about my classes and here no. (Laina)

Another student who experienced language difficulties in university settings was Chang, who made use of two different languages in his academic tasks, both foreign to him.

> Some teachers make the exam in English but the classes are in Portuguese and I need to switch between two languages. I have some difficulties in switching between the two languages because, for me, they are both foreign languages. (Chang)

Naim also experienced some language difficulties in classroom settings but, interestingly, those difficulties were rooted in his concern towards the local peers who would not be able to understand presentations in English.

> The only problem was in the first semester when I used to make presentations in English and they [my Portuguese colleagues] would not understand. […] In the second semester, for the presentations, I would prepare the PowerPoint in Portuguese but saying everything in English: language mixture. I always prepared like this, otherwise I would be talking in English during half an hour and they would not understand a thing. It would be ridiculous. Therefore, in order to surmount this [obstacle] I worked with two languages. (Naim)

In two narratives, the issue of language surfaced more than in the others, holding a central place in students' sojourns in Portugal. Both for Corina and Brenda, language appears to be an important part of their migrations. One of the aspects that these two students have in common is the fact that both came to Portugal somehow unexpectedly, and had a limited amount of time available for studying language prior to arrival.

> I started to learn Portuguese […] from teach yourself books, so that, when I came here, I could have an idea of what was going around me […] (Brenda)

Before coming to Portugal for the first time, more or less fifteen days before, I picked up a textbook containing vocabulary and I started to learn words. I didn't have any idea about the Portuguese language, I only knew it was a Latin language. (Corina)

Besides the fact that they arrived in Portugal with limited language skills, most of the linguistic struggles experienced by these two students appear to be rooted in self-constructed demands and barriers. For instance, Corina's improvement in terms of language skills was delayed by her conviction that it was better not to speak at all than to speak bad Portuguese, which eventually led to her isolation from the local community.

In the first years, I would say that I went through a phase of isolation. […] There are people who speak, even if they know they do not speak well, they don't care about it, but I used to be very critical: if I don't know, it's better not to speak. (Corina)

Even after achieving a certain level of fluency, Corina was not comfortable in speaking Portuguese and preferred to listen more and talk less. A similar finding was reported by Brown (2008: 81), who noticed that "many interviewees were burdened by feelings of shame and inadequacy over their low" linguistic level.

[…] I was already able to understand everything and to say what I needed to say, to express an idea, yet I was conscious that that was very basic, very rudimentary. Therefore, I liked to keep listening and not talk that much. (Corina)

In the excerpt below, it is possible to note that Corina's fear of speaking Portuguese ended up affecting her social interactions, augmenting even more the feeling of isolation that she experienced during her first months in Portugal.

[…] I didn't use to speak that much because I do not speak if I am not sure if I speak well or not. Even the house that we used to rent back then had very nice neighbours, and I would only say: "How are you?". It was not that I did not want to speak, but it was the fear of not speaking well. I got along very well with the neighbours but I do not recall having many conversations. […] Always because of the language, thinking that perhaps the language level was not that good. (Corina)

As mentioned above, in these two narratives, language assumes a central role, albeit the causes of Corina's linguistic struggles are not the same as Brenda's. Instead of being fearful to speak Portuguese, Brenda actually insists on speaking it, even though most of the people with which she interacts are willing to speak in English, her mother tongue:

There are people, Erasmus people for instance, who come here and don't speak Portuguese, and make friends. The problem for me is that I insist on speaking Portuguese because I want to improve it and I also don't want to be one of those expats that only hang out with foreign people and, when they hang out with local people, it's still all in English. Maybe we would be better friends if we spoke English because then my personality would come out and also

they're probably better at expressing their personality in English than I am expressing mine in Portuguese. But if I never push [myself] to learn Portuguese to that extent then I never will and all of my friendships will be in English and I just don't want [that]. So it's a self-created barrier but I really wouldn't be happy having all of my relationships in English either. So I'm trying to push myself to improve my Portuguese by speaking it with everyone but then that's making it harder to really connect with people. (Brenda)

The excerpt above shows that Brenda's insistence in speaking Portuguese is a two-sided coin. On the one hand, speaking Portuguese on a daily basis would help her improve linguistic skills and provide her a feeling of satisfaction for not being *one of those expats that hang out with foreign people.* On the other hand, talking in Portuguese appears to block her personality from fully emerging, thus hindering the development of meaningful relationships with locals. The most challenging obstacles appear to arise in group settings when Brenda is:

> with several native speakers who are all talking fast and having several different conversations. I think of jokes or I think of things that I want to say and I kind of have to formulate them and then, by the time I'm ready to say something, they moved on to a different topic. (Brenda)

For this student, besides social contexts, the most significant language struggles appeared in classroom settings, due to the tiresome task of trying to understanding class discussions in a foreign language.

> Regarding life in general, I can handle it in Portuguese but academic language is always different. So, in lot of the classes, one of my problems was that I had to choose, because I only had enough brain power either to listen to everything people were saying in Portuguese and process it, or think about it. I understood everything what they were saying but still it takes brain power, so I had enough brain power to do either that: just deal with Portuguese; or think critically, and not really both at the same time. (Brenda)

One particular episode stands as proof of the centrality assumed by language in Brenda's narrative. Similar to the difficulty in engaging in group conversations in social contexts, this student struggled considerably in classroom contexts also, due to the required time to think and formulate sentences in Portuguese. According to Ampalagan, Sellupillai and Sze (2014: 32), even "though students may have the necessary skills to participate in the classroom activities, they will inevitably feel more nervous and anxious when they are not given ample time to formulate their responses or are to answer to the teacher". In the excerpt below, Brenda recounts a particularly tough moment when she became so nervous that she was unable to spontaneously think in Portuguese and answer to her teacher's request.

> I remember we had a class in which the professor wanted us to summarize [an article] but, at the same time, talk about it, give our opinion. So we had to do a little presentation and mine was too much of a summary for the teacher: "You summarized it, but now can you please

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expand, say what you thought about it?". And I was like: "No". Again, it was the lack of brain power, and I started crying then and I'm starting now too, because I couldn't think of what to say in Portuguese. I think if I did a discussion in English then I could have thought on my feet more, I could have thought more spontaneously, but in academic Portuguese I just couldn't quickly change and come up with something new. (Brenda)

Also noteworthy is the fact that Brenda has the feeling of not belonging in her Master's programme, worrying about the way she is being perceived by colleagues and teachers.

So I started crying, in the classroom. It was already later in the semester so I already had this kind of feeling, not really that I was stupid but that I was perhaps perceived as, or at least not smart enough for the programme. I felt that I wasn't contributing much to the class so, when I was not able to say something, I started to cry and I hate crying in front of people, especially in a classroom setting. So I felt really bad about that because it was also another example to them that I didn't belong in the programme. (Brenda)

Brenda's fears of not contributing to the class and being perceived as not *smart enough for the programme* appear to be shared by other migrant students, who are "concerned that peers and instructors might perceive them as lacking the knowledge and cognitive abilities to be legitimate contributors in the learning environment" (Halic, Greenberg, & Paulus, 2009: 91). Interestingly, in Corina's narrative feelings of not belonging or of not being quite up to the task are also present, along with a feeling that both teachers and colleagues might have doubts in regard to her academic success.

Now I talk more but, at that time, I was afraid of saying something wrong and I preferred to talk less. So, since I talked less, I think that my colleagues, even my teachers, thought: "Will she make it [through the Master's]?" (Corina)

The way Corina deals with those moments in which she experiences linguistic blockages in classroom settings is also negatively affected by her excessive concern with colleagues' and teachers' perceptions of her classroom performance.

During the first individual presentations, I would really freeze, I had everything ready and it was enough to not remember one word at the right moment and I would freeze. It was that psychological part talking, I was thinking: "What will my colleagues and my teachers think?". During those moments, I think that I was not able to think anymore, I was not able to reason in order to find the missing word. That is to say that, instead of concentrating on finding the right word, I would think about what they were going to think about me. (Corina)

Corina's experience is consistent with the findings of Rosulnik et al. (2016), in which the fear of embarrassing oneself in classroom settings appears to affect some migrant students. In spite of her struggles, Corina was able to successfully surpass the issue of language, and give the necessary 'language jump' (Murphy-Lejeune, 2003). She regards language as a key factor in her process of integration into the host country. Indeed, in the excerpt below, it is possible to note

how important the linguistic aspect was for this student, given that the moment in which Corina felt confident about her Portuguese skills coincided with the moment in which she started to feel more comfortable with her life in Portugal.

> Meanwhile, I started to speak Portuguese better, I was already managing to talk with other persons, I felt more at ease. […] I think that language is the key factor of integration. And it should be for this reason that I started to feel more at ease, to actually feel good and I started to ask myself if I really wanted to go back [to Moldavia] or not. (Corina)

The findings of this section show, in line with the research literature (Yang et al., 2006; Brunton & Jeffrey, 2014), that language is paramount in the life of a migrant student. Besides being crucial in the establishment of meaningful social relationships, language affects the way in which students regard their own selves and construct their identities. The idea that native Portuguese speakers would experience fewer difficulties during their lives in Portugal was, overall, confirmed by the narratives. Notwithstanding, the narrative of Amivi revealed that not all students who come from Portuguese-speaking countries are, in fact, native Portuguese speakers, and should also receive linguistic support from their host universities. At the same time, the narratives of those students who are not native Portuguese speakers revealed a colourful array of different experiences related to language, ranging from students who were able to study and live in Portugal only through the use of the English language, to students whose adaptation and academic trajectories were strongly marked by language struggles. Considering that language proficiency appears to have an impact on students' academic performance (Smith & Khawaja, 2011), some narratives also suggest that language difficulties seem to be exacerbated in university and classroom settings, threatening migrant students' academic success. Portuguese higher education institutions should, therefore, provide increased linguistic support to their migrant students. The way in which students positioned themselves towards the issue of language throughout their sojourns was also quite diverse. While some students regarded linguistic struggles as an extra motivation to improve their level of Portuguese, others succumbed to the weight of those struggles, which delayed their adaptation processes and even led to their isolation from the local community. As observed by Berry, Kim, Minde and Mok (1987: 493), "for some people, acculturative changes may all be in the form of stressors, while for others, they may be benign or even seen as opportunities". This diversity of experiences suggests that students' sojourns in Portugal do not depend solely on external factors but are also strongly influenced by the way in which students' react towards the diverse challenges which arise during their international sojourns.

## 7. The transformative potential of migration

In this section, the transformative learning outcomes of students' sojourns in Portugal will be addressed, in line with the guidelines of the theory of transformative learning (Mezirow, 1990). As shown in section 3, among the twelve narratives, students referred to their learning experiences in very different ways. Even though not all of them straightforwardly attached transformative outcomes to their international sojourns, through this thematic narrative interpretation, markers of transformative learning were detected, even when students did not openly referred to their experience in terms of personal transformations. For instance, in the narrative of Naim transformative learning became visible through his interaction with friends and family, back in Turkey, who noticed changes in the way this student now thinks and behaves:

> There are some shocks between me and people from Turkey. When I go there, my habits, my reflections, I think they are [different] now. [...] Sometimes my friends or my family criticise me: "You became very emotionless". [...] I'm here for five years now. I have a different life and, when I go there, they say I behave a bit differently, I think a bit differently from them. (Naim)

The experience of Alfonso is similar to Naim's, since he was able to acknowledge his personal transformation through the observations made by friends from Spain. In the excerpt below, it is possible to notice that Alfonso's migration shaped the way in which he reacts to life experiences, confirming that those students who undergo transformative learning processes "are different afterward, in ways both they and others can recognize" (Clark, 1993: 47).

> My way of being changed a lot and they already told me, my Spanish colleagues: "You are more calm, more quiet, you let things come and then you react". I think it was the way in which I was involved in things here that changed me in that way and I like it, I like it a lot, now I enjoy more the experiences. (Alfonso)

The same reaction from the people who live in her home country was noticed by Amivi. As a consequence of her experience in Portugal, this student states that she does not remain silent anymore when people express opinions that contradict her own, a shocking attitude from the point of view of most Timorese friends and relatives.

> Before, I was a person incapable of contradicting someone's thoughts. [...] After coming to Portugal, when I went to Timor I would not accept any more ideas that I consider wrong, now I contradict [people] a lot. [...] This mentality shocked very much people from Timor. [...] When I returned to Timor, my cousins even told me: "Sure, you went to Europe and returned different". (Amivi)

In other narratives, the transformative outcomes of migration are clearly acknowledged by students, especially through the comparison with the period in which they were still living in their home countries. For instance, Corina takes her brother as a point of comparison of her own

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transformation, emphasising that she would be a different person if she had remained in her home country. For this student, engaging in international migration had a transformative effect in terms of discovering and understanding diversity. As observed by Brown (2009: 517), the transformations occurred during an international sojourn can "result of exposure to diversity and of the geographical and emotional distance from the home environment".

> If I had never left my country, I would be different. […] understanding the other, so many different people, face such a diverse world, is a new experience […]. My brother is there and, during these holidays, I realised that he continues to be like he used to […] (Corina)

Another student, Tânia, acknowledges her transformation through the comparison with an imagined self who never lived abroad. She points out changes in her personality which seem to have occurred as a consequence of her international experience, along with the realisation that being away from familial protection contributed to her personal maturing, describing "change in terms of accelerated maturity" (Lilley et al., 2015: 236).

> […] if I had not left Angola, probably now I would have a son, a husband. […] I would be different if I had never left Angola even in terms of personality. Sometimes when we have a lot of family protection we end up not being that independent, autonomous, matured. (Tânia)

An equivalent view is expressed by Valéria who considers that the comfortable life she led in Brazil, surrounded by the protection of her family, prevented her from correctly assessing her priorities. Leaving Brazil and having to deal with hardship by herself, transformed this student into a more compassionate person, contributing to the rearrangement of her life priorities.

> Had I not left Brazil, perhaps I would not have this vision, perhaps I would be there still prioritising other things. Since I had my parents, my mother, my brothers, all my life there within my reach, perhaps I would not prioritise the things that really matter. […] When you are away from your family going through difficult moments in your life, that makes your human side flourish. (Valéria)

Even though the excerpts above contain several examples of students who appear to have experienced significant changes in their meaning perspectives, transformative learning is a far more complex process and cannot be adequately described by simply acknowledging its outcomes. Newman (2012) fairly criticises the field of transformative learning for its conceptual looseness, and especially for mistaking transformation for mobilisation. In order to demonstrate that the excerpts above do belong to students who were involved in transformative learning processes, a deeper interpretation of the narratives needs to be conducted. In line with the distinction between transformative learning as outcome and as process, proposed by Stevens-Long, Schapiro and McClintock (2012), the following pages will be focused not only on the

outcomes but on the whole process of transformative learning, addressed in the wider context of students' biographical trajectories.

Transformative learning, a dominant discourse in the field of adult education (Newman, 2014), is a theory that has been also increasingly used in other fields. Different scholars approach it in different ways, in accordance with the specificity of each discipline, enriching its theoretical development but also threatening its coherence and accuracy. As stated by Hoggan (2016: 60), "the lack of clarity around transformative learning theory decreases its value and usefulness". In order to avoid conceptual confusion, it is important to clarify the specificity of the interpretive process described in this section. Considering that the excerpts above were focused on the outcomes of transformative learning, and those alone were not sufficient to give account of the transformative potential of migration, transformative learning needs to be discussed as a process. In other words, "what the learner does, feels, and experiences" (Stevens-Long et al., 2012: 184). In most narratives, the process of transformative learning is clearly acknowledged by the students, as in Valeria's case, who moved to Portugal to do her PhD and brought her nine-year-old son with her. Valéria considers the obstacles that she had to deal with as the means through which she underwent a significant transformation, describing it using a Brazilian expression that she heard from her father:

> "You only need the sunrise in the morning to wake up a gazelle. The stone, on the other hand, will only wake up with dynamite". I needed a lot of dynamite in order to wake up. I came here, it was a tremendous dynamite blast in my life, living here is being [hit by] dynamite, every day that passes, every day when I wake up. It's a dynamite bomb because it's not easy. (Valéria)

The metaphor of the dynamite bomb illustrates the deepness of Valéria's learning, confirming the assumption according to which learning arises when familiar perceptions and behaviours are perturbed (Webb, 2015). In line with Mezirow (1990), this student's sojourn in Portugal contained many events that did not fit into her existing schemes, encouraging Valéria to create new ones capable of integrating the specificities of her new experience. In this example, the process of transformative learning appears to be profound enough to challenge her meaning schemes and to change not only attitudes but also behaviours, particularly regarding her previous materialistic lifestyle:

> I learnt so many things, you don't have a clue. […] What I learnt is that you don't need too much to be happy. I don't need a house with three bedrooms, each bedroom with its bathroom, a house with a pool where I would never enter […]. What I learnt is precisely this, that the material part is nothing. I lived for a long time aiming to have, have and have, my focus was to have. […] I learnt precisely that, here in Portugal, that you can be happy with little. […] Besides this experience of living out of my country, the most valuable thing this experience brought to me is that, today, I can consider myself a better person. (Valéria)

In line with this excerpt, previous research has related transformative learning with personal growth and development (Hoggan, 2016), a topic that also surfaced in other narratives. In Rita's case, personal growth emerged as a consequence of her migration, which constituted a form of liberation from an overprotective familial environment.

> Our father […] wanted so much to protect us that he ended up limiting us. The protection was excessive, exaggerated, and we ended up being unaware of many things. (Rita)

In this narrative, the process of transformative learning implied, at the beginning, exiting a protective environment and ceasing to be innocent. In a subsequent phase, growth as a human being emerged from the experience of dealing with a multiplicity of new and, until then, unknown realities. In Rita's case, leaving home and engaging in migration constituted an "eye opener", a means to "seeing the world and people differently" (Lilley et al., 2015: 236).

> I think that we were unaware of many truths, of what people are, of what they are capable of doing, we were a little bit innocent, ingenuous. We started to see many things after we left home and we grew a lot after we left home. (Rita)

At the same time, entering in contact with a different reality required from Rita not only a change in her meaning perspectives but also a transformation of her behaviour, without which she would not have been able to fit the new cultural context.

> By being brought up in a place, I have been shaping myself to that culture. Moving from there to here, my personality by no means could remain the same because I would be like a fish out of water. (Rita)

In this narrative, it is also possible to observe that transformation is actually a prerequisite for a successful adaptation to a new and different cultural context. According to Taylor (1994: 155), transformation "occurs out of a necessity for survival, out of a need to relieve stress and anxiety often experienced as the stranger struggles to meet basic needs". Rita's experience is also consistent with previous observations according to which "disjuncture or disharmony ultimately leads to greater cultural awareness, greater confidence, and competence in dealing with the new social context" (Morrice, 2013: 261). In another narrative, Corina relates her significant learning with the struggles she faced after coming to Portugal. Satisfied with her evolution, she still questions if learning could not have been achieved in an easier way:

> I learnt a lot […] but maybe I wouldn't need to go through so much in order to learn all of this. I don't know why but I blame myself in a way, why I needed to go through this in order to understand certain things? Why? Because there are people that learn with other's mistakes, they are cleverer. Meanwhile, I need to make mistakes myself in order to be able to understand. (Corina)

In this case, transformative learning emerged after a lengthy process and was closely related to Corina's delayed adaptation to her new socio-cultural environment, which was predominantly rooted in linguistic struggles. In an initial phase, Corina refused to interact with Portuguese people, believing that her linguistic skills were not sufficient for such an interaction to occur successfully. This attitude delayed even more the improvement of her Portuguese skills and even led to her isolation from the local population. As shown in her narrative, during several years, Corina's adaptation was hindered by the way in which she positioned herself towards the linguistic aspect of her sojourn. However, she eventually realised that such a stance was being prejudicial to her integration and adopted "a more inclusive, discriminating, permeable, and integrative perspective" (Mezirow, 1990: 14) of her own experience. Throughout the sojourn, Corina learnt to respect others and, through that, was able to also achieve self-respect and personal acceptance.

> […] For instance, I didn't use to speak Portuguese that much because I thought that […] my pronunciation left something to be desired. […] Today, I don't think like that anymore. […] Learning to respect the other has to do with this. Before, maybe because I had not learnt yet [to respect others], I was having a complex about my pronunciation. Now I'm starting to see things differently and to accept myself, this is who I am and that's it. (Corina)

Other narratives suggested that previous migratory experiences enhance even further the transformative learning potential of an international sojourn. Jaidev travelled repeatedly both internationally as in his home country and has a highly mobile lifestyle. Due to his vast experience in different cultural contexts, this student clearly identified a change in his meaning perspectives, a fundamental condition for the occurrence of transformative learning (Mezirow, 1990):

> These experiences lead us to changes in views and perspectives [… and I gained] a lot of international knowledge about different countries […]. Also people's viewpoints, perspectives, how different they are and there is usually a tendency to compare but I don't compare, I mean there is nothing to compare, it's all in parallel, it's all floating. I think what happens generally with travel, with living in different places is that you get a more holistic sense of life. (Jaidev)

Also noteworthy is the way in which Jaidev naturally integrates the international experience in his trajectory, without ascribing it much importance. Out of comfort zone experiences (Lilley et al., 2015) are not new to him, thus transformations of his meaning perspectives might have occurred repeatedly during his numerous experiences abroad:

> For me, it's not as greater deal the international aspect of it, for me it's just another city. […] I never thought about it in that sense, that I want to go abroad, or do something beautiful abroad. (Jaidev)

Perhaps due to his extensive international experience, transformative learning appears to be actually embedded in Jaidev's narrative. In the following excerpt, he regards with excitement the ability to embrace diverse frames of reference, pinpointing the importance of being open to new perspectives.

> Some people, they live in a shell or they build walls around them and [...] if they have an incident or encounter something which is very difficult, they automatically switch on their defences. Because it attacks their viewpoint. [...] So you have to be open to different perspectives, different dimensions of every phenomenon, of every aspect. For me it's fun, more fun than just sticking to my own ideas and to my own set of frames. (Jaidev)

Other students acknowledged the transformative value of the international sojourn not only through their own experience but also by looking at other people's experiences. Amivi, a student who has perceived racial discrimination on campus, considers that the international sojourn can diminish such behaviours by changing people's views and rendering them more tolerant:

> You can notice that some persons are open because they left their place, their nest, and went to another place. You can notice very well that there are people, among my teachers, some of them emigrated, they went to work or to study [abroad], and sincerely they are not that racist, they are not racist at all. [...] The people who left their countries gained other life experiences and have a much wider view than the ones who never left. (Amivi)

As shown above, all students attached learning outcomes to their international experience and appeared to have been involved in transformative learning processes. However, there is one student who did not acknowledge the transformative effects of migration and even rejected the idea of a significant change in her inner self. The only diverging narrative belongs to Aiko, a female Japanese Bachelor's student, who appears to reject the idea of transformation as such:

> I think the fact that I am in Portugal now doesn't add anything inside of me. I am having an experience as a Korean-Japanese. I think that my core, my centre doesn't change. For instance, I will not be Portuguese. What I do now is expressing myself as a Korean-Japanese in Portugal. These experiences are nice because every time I confirm the way I am, my being. (Aiko)

In spite of rejecting the idea of change in regard to her inner self, taking into account not only the ideas expressed in this excerpt but the whole narrative of this student, it is possible to observe that Aiko did experienced transformative learning during her sojourn in Portugal. Transformations can assume different shapes and influence several aspects of an adult learner's life, as shown in the typology of transformative outcomes proposed by Hoggan (2016). Even though she rejects the idea of change, Aiko's international sojourn provided her the means to improve self-understanding and explain her experience as a Korean-Japanese living in Portugal, which implies self-analysis, an indispensable aspect of transformative learning (Newman, 2014). At the same time, Aiko's narrative confirms Rosulnik's et al. (2016: 45) findings according to

which: "a new experience itself did not lead to a learning process. For learning, critical reflection was necessary, followed by a change (or sometimes an absence of change) on the basis of a decision". Indeed, through the experience of living in a foreign country, Aiko was encouraged to critically reflect upon her own sense of cultural identity, and to confirm the importance that her Korean-Japanese heritage assumes in her life. Considering that "transformation can also endow us with more power to explain our experience" (Stevens-Long et al., 2012: 184), the narrative of Aiko's reveals that this student is also engaged in a transformative learning process.

The narratives above show different nuances of transformative learning and suggest that the emergence of this particular form of learning is highly dependent on numerous and diverse (individual) factors. Not all students have the same international experience and certainly not all students relate to the learning opportunities provided by migration in the same way. However, a pattern did surface during the interpretation, the common denominator of the twelve narratives being the emergence of transformative learning during these students' international sojourns. This finding underlines the learning potential of migration and its ability to generate disorienting dilemmas which will eventually lead students to transform their meaning perspectives and achieve transformative learning. As stated by Valéria:

> [There are people who] do not have that kind of experience of going, traveling, seeing with their own eyes. People who never left their garden, who are very limited and conditioned by what is there, they think that what is there is life. […] I think that everybody should live alone, exit their comfort zones, spend some time abroad in order to be able to value more [certain] things. (Valéria)

Another student who clearly acknowledged the transformative potential of living abroad was Brenda. In her narrative, she emphasised the importance of experiencing different places as a means to see beyond one's 'bubble'.

> Sending students abroad it just opens them up to new contexts. A lot of people are really focused on just their own little world. Maybe intellectually they know that not everybody's life is like theirs, […] a lot of people intellectually know that, but I think it doesn't really sink in for a lot of people unless they go to a place and see what is like. […] it's important to put people in a different context just so they can see outside of their bubble. (Brenda)

Indeed, the twelve narratives suggest that the experience of migration encourages students to engage in transformative learning processes, and this finding is consistent with previous studies (Brown, 2009; Kumi-Yeboah, 2014). However, such a finding should be approached with caution. Even though the international sojourn can favour the occurrence of transformative learning, simply engaging in an international experience does not constitute a panacea for change (Lilley et al., 2015). At the same time, people do not mandatorily need to engage in international

migration or, to use Valérias words, do not always need *to leave their gardens* in order to be able to experience transformative learning.

## *Concluding remarks on the thematic narrative interpretation*

Even though this thesis seeks to give account of the experiences of migrant students in Portugal, in their singularity, through the thematic narrative interpretation that I present in this chapter, I also identify some regularities that hold across the twelve narratives. The main regularity that surfaced during the interpretive process provides an answer to one of my research questions, indicating that migration constitutes a learning enhancer. Albeit in diverse ways, all students ascribed learning outcomes to their migratory experiences, and seemed to have experienced some kind of transformation during their international sojourns.

Another pattern is related to students' perceptions of their higher education institutions. One way or another, all students expressed the feeling that their universities had failed them in their educational and migratory quests, being unable to provide a coherent answer to their specific struggles and (learning) needs. Another aspect that surfaces in students' narratives is related to the importance that social support networks assume in the life of migrant students. The void that the inappropriate institutional strategies directed to migrant students have created in their lives, seems to have been filled by informal networks of support. Classroom peers, friends, teachers, fellow migrant students, or other members of the local community; appear to provide invaluable support in the socio-academic endeavours of migrant students.

In line with previous research, this thematic interpretation across the twelve narratives confirms that the period adjacent to the arrival in a foreign country constitutes a particularly challenging moment in the lives of migrant students (Murphy-Lejeune, 2003; Gresham & Clayton, 2011). Unsurprisingly, language seems to constitute a key determinant of migrant students' adaptation, both in social and academic contexts, as reported previously (Zhang & Brunton, 2007; Brunton & Jeffrey, 2014; Rosulnik et al., 2016). However, along with these somewhat expected findings, some narratives suggest that arriving in a foreign country might not constitute, in all cases, an extremely difficult period marked by cultural shocks (Brown & Holloway, 2008), or even depression (Mori, 2000). Depending on each situation, some students might not experience neither, and have a rather mild entrance into the new country. Regarding the issue of language, the narratives also warn that, on the one hand, coming from a Portuguese-speaking country does not guarantee that those students will not experience language struggles. On the other hand, not being fluent in the local language does not necessarily mean that those students will not be able to successfully adapt to their new social and academic environments.

# Conclusion

Combining several interpretive approaches allowed me to reach an expanded understanding of students' migratory and learning experiences. Moreover, my methodological stance informed not only a wider view over the research results, but also over the research process. For this reason, I will make some concluding remarks not only in regard to the research findings, but also to narrative inquiry more generally, underlining the advantages of using narrative approaches for understanding migrant students' experiences. In order to provide clarity to these conclusions, I divide the text into several sections, seeking to clarify the contributions of this thesis for augmenting our understanding of the student migration phenomenon.

In the following lines, I will discuss the implications of this research for the field of migration studies, underlining the importance of distinguishing between mobility and migration. Moreover, I emphasise the importance of another distinction: between international and foreign students; clarifying the relevance of migratory profiles for understanding the experience of migrant students. Then, I reflect upon the relationship between migration and learning, which was paramount to my main research objectives. Afterwards, I share with the reader some of my thoughts on the methodology, underlining the relevance of using narrative inquiry in order to address migrant students' (learning) experiences. Furthermore, based on the main findings of this research and on students' perceptions, I make several recommendations to Portuguese higher education institutions, aiming to support them in the development of more inclusive policies and practices directed to migrant students. In the last paragraphs, I make some final remarks on the overall contributions of this thesis.

## *The inherent complexity of student migration*

The twelve narratives presented and interpreted in this thesis depict a colourful picture of migratory experiences of foreign students in Portugal. Throughout this research, I revealed and cherished the complexity of students' lives, and the "myriad of aspirations and experiences" (Ploner, 2015: 4) that moves them. One of the most important conclusions of this research is that the phenomenon of student migration cannot, and should not, be addressed in total disconnection from its protagonists. In other words, I argue for a theoretical and empirical 'humanisation' of the migration phenomenon, considering migrants' experiences as a whole, rather than reducing them to a set of pre-established variables. Confining migratory movements and their subsequent motivations to cause/effect dichotomies is not sufficient for providing

insights into what means, for actual people, to be engaged in migration, and which are the challenges and the wonders of being a migrant.

As shown in the twelve narratives and their interpretations, student migration is a highly complex phenomenon. By analysing the biographical interlacement of different factors, rather than focusing on single and isolated events, I was able to grasp many diverse nuances of student migration which, unfortunately, tend to be obscured from the (scarce) research literature specifically dedicated to the migratory experience of higher education students. This research also revealed that Carlson's (2013) proposal for analysing student migration as a process can constitute an adequate theoretical tool for approaching students' experiences in their complexity and diversity. Engaging in a processual interpretation of migration allowed me to interpret students' narratives without reducing the richness of their experiences and without erasing their inherent subjectivities. Through this approach, I was able to observe that migrant students are not a homogenous group like they are frequently depicted in the research literature (Bilecen, 2009). By focusing on the complexity and singularity of the stories they amicably shared with me, I was able to embrace the significant heterogeneity that describes this group of migrants. If researchers are to contribute to the knowledge production in this field, instead of over-simplifying the issue of migration, they need to give space to this significant diversity of student experiences, and embrace "the complexity and messiness of the real world" (Castles, 2010: 1569). Most research literature is focused on the 'typical' student (Tian & Lowe, 2014) whose migration story is frequently summoned, as if it could constitute a universally valid descriptor of other students' experiences. The findings of this research suggest that there is no such thing as a 'typical' student, if researchers choose to dive into students' lives and look through methodological lenses that treat diversity as a variable that needs to be enhanced, rather than minimised.

### *Surpassing the structure-agency impasse*

Besides its contributions for a more inclusive and complex view over the experience of migrant students, this thesis provides a way of surpassing the structure-agency impasse with which, according to Bakewell (2010), migration theory has been struggling. The findings indicate that students are not just subjected to structural factors that determine every single aspect of their lives, neither is their agency unlimited since contextual and institutional factors do influence their trajectories (Basford & Riemsdijk, 2015). Certainly, institutional and structural factors need to be addressed when discussing migration, but without completely losing sight of the actual protagonists of this phenomenon. The development of the process of migration goes way

beyond issues of structure and agency, and is shaped by students' 'explosive subjectivities' (Ferrarotti, 2003). Sometimes migration can also emerge or be redefined by circumstances of coincidence and serendipity (King & Raghuram, 2013), two factors frequently dismissed by researchers, perhaps for being considered 'too banal', and thus unworthy of scholarly attention. However, as the interpretation of the twelve migration narratives shows, many important events and turning points in students' lives occur within the development of their peculiar biographical trajectories, which are, at one point or another, also determined by instances of serendipity.

## *The experience of migrant students beyond 'push and pull' factors*

Even though the push-and-pull model, frequently used to explain migration, may be useful in some circumstances, it clearly fails to describe the process of migration in its complexity, and the 'diversity of intentions' that drive it (Findlay et al., 2005: 196). In this sense, the narratives contradict the relevance of conceptualising migrant students merely as neoliberal beings, as rational decision-making individuals (Collinson, 2009), who, supposedly, make a careful analysis of their situation prior to migration, objectively assessing the advantages and disadvantages of engaging in such an endeavour. As shown, for instance, in the narratives of Naim and Brenda, migration can emerge within a previous international experience, without having been initially planned, thus taking by surprise even its own protagonists. Valéria's words are also emblematic for the disorderly ways in which migration can occur, when she acknowledges that, in fact, she does not even know why she came to Portugal in the first place. When we address student migration exclusively through push-and-pull theories, we reduce the complexity of their experiences to a typical form of migration *a priori* defined, automatically assuming that all migrant students undertake some sort of a SWOT analysis of their own lives, before 'deciding' to migrate. In this way, we erase, right at the beginning, the subjective facets of their biographies and the idiosyncrasies embedded in their stories.

By acknowledging the need to embrace complexity in student migration research, rather than treat it as a bias that needs to be contained, this thesis encourages scholars working in this field to adopt methodologies that respect diversity and enhance its empirical exploration. As observed by Hollway and Jefferson (2000: 8), "when we aggregate people, treating diversity as error variable, in search of what is common to all, we often learn about what is true of no one in particular". In other words, further research on this topic should take into account the complexity of students' experiences, if they are to bring insights into the lives of those people who are actually located at the core of migration. However, by focusing on the singularity that

characterises each migration narrative, there is a risk of knowledge dissipation. If all stories are different and unique, how to draw general conclusions? Castles (2010: 1575) also acknowledges the risk of a "postmodern fragmentation of knowledge, based on the idea that everything is specific and that there are no broad social trends or institutional patterns". Perhaps researchers should not look for general conclusions at all and allow migration stories to "do the talking" (Clough, 2002: 14). Since processual approaches to student migration are rare, further research should consider these challenges, and use/propose new methodologies capable of producing valid and useful knowledge, while respecting the high level of complexity that characterises the student migration phenomenon.

## *Two related, yet distinct phenomena: mobility and migration*

As I have shown in the first chapter of this thesis, research on study abroad experiences can be weakened by the absence of a clear definition of the main research participants. Many researchers seem to combine different types of students and address their experiences as if they were all part of the same conceptual category. Certainly, all these students share one main characteristic, the fact of attending a higher education institution in a foreign country, albeit there are many nuances that distinguish them from one another. In this sense, it is important to take into account the existence of two distinct, yet related, phenomena: mobility and migration. These two concepts have been used rather loosely, as for instance in the European context, where some countries refer to the movement of people within the EU using the term 'mobility', and other countries consider those same movements as 'migrations' (van Ostaijen, 2016). Similarly, despite their differences, some researchers use these two concepts interchangeably (van der Velde & van Naerssen, 2011). According to Bell and Ward (2000: 88), "temporary mobility is perhaps most readily defined as the complement of permanent migration: that is, as any form of territorial movement which does not represent a permanent, or lasting, change of usual residence".

In the case of students, this distinction between a more permanent or a temporary form of international movement reflects the existence of two groups. On the one hand, there are students who engage in *mobility* and spend only a short period of time abroad. In most cases, these students are enrolled in higher education in their home countries, being considered as 'exchange' students in their host countries. On the other hand, there are students who engage in *migration* and generally spend several years abroad. These students are not enrolled in any university in their home countries, but pursue a full higher education degree in their host countries. However, research on student migration should go beyond assessing if the change in

students' usual residency is rather temporary or permanent. What matters most is to acknowledge that being engaged in *mobility* exposes students to different experiences than being involved in *migration*, as previous research has shown (Gargano, 2009; Carlson, 2011a). Even though the two groups may have similar experiences, especially in university contexts, the twelve narratives indicate that the experience of migrant students is more similar, especially outside university settings, to the experience of other (im)migrants. Moreover, it is important to consider that students are not exclusively confined to one of these phenomena, but they can switch, throughout their biographical journeys, from mobility to migration and vice versa.

### *Foreign/international students and the relevance of migratory profiles*

Besides acknowledging the difference between exchange and migrant students, I argue that research on student migration should attend to another conceptual clarification, rooted in students' migration rationales. On the one hand, some international organisations (UNESCO, 2009; OECD, 2013) suggest that those students who migrate with the specific goal of pursuing a higher education degree in a foreign country should be referred to as *international students.* On the other hand, if migration occurs without an educational objective, those students are then to be considered *foreign students* (Aksakal & Schmidt, 2015). This distinction is crucial for conducting research in the field of student migration, since the ways in which migrant students are conceptualised will unavoidably have an impact on the outcomes of the research (Anderson & Blinder, 2011). Moreover, distinguishing between international and foreign students is paramount for understanding the way in which students' diverse migration rationales influence their experiences. For instance, the twelve narratives presented in this thesis give account of many differences between those students who migrate with the specific goal of taking a higher education degree (international students), and the students who migrate for an array of different reasons, and only enrol in higher education at a later point in their migratory trajectories (foreign students). Interestingly, even though this distinction did not constitute a criterion in the participant selection process, from the twelve participants of this research, half fall into the category of international students and the other half into the category of foreign students. As shown in their narratives, the experiences of all these students are marked by a constant student-(im)migrant duality, albeit international students' experiences tend to be more related to their students status, whilst foreign students' experiences seem to be highly influenced by their migrant status.

As previously shown, most research literature dedicated to study abroad fails to consider students as migrants, thus the experience of foreign students is generally overlooked.

Frequently, the research focus lies mainly with those aspects that are specific to international students (as for instance the 'decision' to study abroad or the 'choice' of a higher education institution). Given that these issues do not even apply to the case of foreign students, the research literature tends to provide numerous insights into the experiences of international students, whilst the specific case of foreign students still requires additional research in order to be understood.

Furthermore, due to the fact that student migration tends to develop in most diverse ways, this distinction between international and foreign students may not be as linear as it may initially appear. In some cases, migrants leave their countries in search for better life opportunities and only enrol in higher education in the host country several years after their arrival. In other cases, even though they may enrol in a university degree right after their arrival, the main rationales for students' migration may not have been related with the aspiration to study abroad. Also, there are migrants who wish to remain in their host countries for longer periods of time and find, in the enrolment in higher education, a means to extent their visas. Similarly, migration can occur due to the desire to fulfill personal or professional objectives, as it can also occur in the absence of a clear intention or objective. A means to understand this complexity of migration rationales is provided by the migratory profiles that I created based on the main story line of each narrative.

The proposal of twelve migratory profiles reveals that the contributions of this research for the knowledge production in the field of student migration do not end in its capacity to tackle the subjective realm and the peculiarity of students' migratory trajectories. The twelve migration narratives gathered in this thesis are also able to expand our understanding of issues that go beyond the individual level, allowing us to glimpse upon wider social tendencies and defining traits of student migration. The twelve migratory profiles that I propose illustrate this passage from the particular to the general, by assuming that other migrant students' experiences may, at least in part, be consistent with the characteristics of one, or more, migratory profiles. For instance, the profile of the *determined* migrant, may constitute a suitable lens to understand the experience of those individuals who seek to improve their résumé, expecting future employers to value their international experiences. The profile of the *fighter* migrant may be used in order to explain the migratory process of those individuals who transform migration in an act of resistance, abandoning an oppressive environment, and surpassing those moments in which they are not able to reach their objectives. Similarly, all the remaining profiles can successfully describe the case of other migrant students, providing researchers an analytical tool capable of explaining migration as a process, transcending reductive and dichotomous views of this phenomenon. Further research on student migration can draw on these profiles and also

expand, if necessary, this list of twelve migratory profiles. Therefore, this thesis contributes to the ongoing discussion on student migration by providing a clear conceptual distinction between migration and mobility, between international and foreign students, and by proposing twelve migratory profiles which, together, can give account of the complexity that characterises students' diverse trajectories.

## *Migration: a (transformative) learning enhancer*

All narratives indicate that studying and living abroad provides numerous opportunities to learn. Most of the learning experiences of the twelve students are related to informal contexts and appear to emerge from the experience of unfamiliar and sometimes harsh life situations. Although all students had different experiences during their sojourn in Portugal, learning appeared to be a common denominator of the twelve narratives. Living and studying in a foreign country provided significant learning opportunities for each one of students. Thus, having an experience abroad appears to foster students' learning in ways that, perhaps, would not have been possible if they had remained in their home countries.

Even though previous research has identified several limits to the interaction between migrant and local students (Harrison & Peacock, 2009), most participants of this research appeared to successfully interact with their local peers and some even established meaningful relationships. Consistent with the findings of Montgomery (2010), the narratives also show that limited contact between migrant students and their local counterparts does not seem to simply erase the learning outcomes of living and studying in a foreign country. In order to tackle this issue, instead of solely approaching migrant students' interactions through a local/international dichotomy, further research should focus on students' learning experiences holistically, bearing in mind that neither local, nor migrant students, belong to homogenous groups (Trahar, 2014).

The interpretation of the twelve narratives revealed that learning is a complex matter, highly dependent on students' diverse biographies. Attending to its complexity, the task of understanding learning through migration requires a theoretical lens capable of providing an holistic perspective over migrant students' experiences. The theory of transformative learning proposed by Mezirow (1981, 1990) has provided such lens and proved to be a suitable analytical tool for understanding the different nuances of learning in international and multicultural contexts. This thesis therefore underlines the relevance of this theory for analysing migrant students' learning and calls for the realisation of further research in this field, especially considering the scarcity of research focused on the learning experiences of students who live and study in environments marked by cultural diversity. The narratives also call for caution in

the use of this theory for understanding the learning experiences of migrant students. To some extent, all migrant students may appear, at a first glance, to be involved in transformative learning processes, since their worldviews may be constantly questioned through the contact with different cultural realities and perspectives. In other words, Newman's (2012) critique about the conceptual looseness found in the transformative learning literature needs to be considered, since researchers are frequently tempted to consider change in people's behaviours or personalities as a valid indicator of the occurrence of transformative learning. At the same time, when subjects are unable to attach transformative outcomes to their experience, it does not necessarily mean that transformative learning simply failed to occur. As Mezirow (1990) pertinently pointed out, sometimes learners are unaware of the fact that they are engaged in a process of transformative learning. As shown in some of the narratives, traits of transformation can be identified even when they are not specifically acknowledged by the students.

## *The relevance of narrative inquiry for understanding student migration*

Besides the insights provided by this research into the experience of migrant students in Portugal, the continuous methodological reflections that I made throughout the research process can also provide some insights into the use of narrative inquiry and its relevance for understanding the lived experiences of migrant students. In this section, I will share with the reader some thoughts on the learning that I experienced during the development of this research, more specifically what I learnt about conducting narrative inquiry.

Even though it may seem rather obvious, England's (1994: 82) assertion according to which "research is a *process* not just a product", marked my overall experience of becoming a narrative inquirer. Through the work that I conducted in order to be able to write this thesis, the product of the research, I became aware of the importance of the process and even started to value it more than the product itself. In fact, writing the conclusions of this thesis brings me several recollections of the methodological journey I embarked upon, more than four years ago. Similarly to my research participants, I also engaged in migration during the development of this research, albeit in a different form of migration: a methodological one. As I explained above, the place in which I methodologically found myself, at the beginning of this research, was not able to provide me the necessary means for achieving my research objectives. Therefore, I had to leave, I had to search for better conditions elsewhere, in other ontological and epistemological realms. For this reason, I regard my decision to engage in narrative inquiry as an act of migration, in the sense in which migration can become a project against imposed circumstances (Trifanescu, 2015). When I opted for narrative inquiry, I rejected the idea of living within the epistemological

frontiers that social science imposed on me, and thus decided to cross that frontier, to migrate, opting for the biographical method which is projected, from the start, beyond such frontiers (Ferrarotti, 2003).

Along with this methodological migration, I also engaged in a conceptual and disciplinary migration when I decided to look at foreign students' experiences through theoretical perspectives rooted in migration studies, crossing the border between education and sociology. According to Romão (2007: 132), transdisciplinarity is described precisely by a need of "interaction between two or more disciplines since scientists of different fields of investigation "invade" necessarily foreign scientific territories". As in the case of my research participants, these migrations offered me numerous opportunities to learn.

Firstly, I learnt that, in narrative inquiry, researchers' personal narratives unavoidably assume a central role throughout the whole research process. In line with Etherington (2006: 77), I consider that "behind every piece of research, even research described as objective or positivist, there is a human being". Besides acknowledging this fact, researchers should straightforwardly assume it, and discuss their roles within the research, along with the way in which their own biographies may affect the research outcomes. Since "the academic community has traditionally discouraged the inclusion of our 'selves' in our writing" (Etherington, 2006: 85), narrative inquirers may end up feeling like foreigners in a different country, outsiders to a research community that does not accept their own methodological peculiarities. In my view, they should not give in to such pressures, nor to feel ashamed to reveal the "deep and abiding connection between one's own life history and one's research and writing" (Bochner & Ellis, 2003: 508). In fact, such a connection not only should be revealed, but also clearly described and discussed, as I sought to do throughout this thesis, in the attempt to provide readers a clear picture of the links that connect my own biography to my research practice. I argue that, in narrative inquiry, the acknowledgement of these links should be a guiding principle, as important for assessing the validity of the research as principles of statistics are in the case of quantitative inquiries. One way of doing this is to include the narrative of the researcher in the actual research report, giving to readers and the academic community the necessary means to evaluate the impact that the biographical connection between the researcher, the researched and the research, had in the final text. In line with Connolly (2007: 453), I consider that "layering the two narratives—that of narrator and that of listener or researcher—should perhaps become more of an ethical norm when reporting narrative inquiry". Clarifying researchers' biographies and the way in which they relate to the ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions which guided the research is also paramount for understanding and assessing the quality of the way in which the data was interpreted, which is "always personal, partial, and dynamic" (Lieblich et al., 1998: 10).

Secondly, I learnt that, through narrative, researchers can rebel against the 'epistemological yoke' (Stoer, 2008) that still subjugates many qualitative methods, and welcome diversity and subjectivity into the process of interpretation (Araújo, 1999). Narrative also proved to be able to "penetrate cultural barriers, give voice to human experience" (Larson, 1997: 455), which renders it a highly appropriate methodological approach for research conducted in multicultural contexts. Moreover, narrative appears to be a highly adequate methodological tool for addressing migration, since it provides a means for understanding "the great biographical alteration" (Trifanescu, 2015: 99) that migrants experience during their international sojourns.

Attending to these observations, and considering Ferrarotti's (2003) assertion according to which the biographical method does not fit into the epistemological boundaries of social science research, I argue that narrative inquiry, due to its peculiar research contributions, should not even be located alongside other qualitative research methods. In my view, narrative deserves an entirely distinct methodological place within social sciences, and should, perhaps, be "established as a new category of research method based on human experience" (Webster & Mertova, 2007: 114).

Regarding the issue of learning through migration, narrative proved to be an appropriate tool for unveiling the complexities embedded in students' (transformative) learning processes. "Learning is not always easily quantifiable" (Jacobson, Sleicher, & Maureen, 1999: 467), and perhaps its quantification should not even constitute researchers' main objective. Rather than quantifying it, learning should "be analysed while considering life contexts, their evolution and their impact on individuals' lives" (Trifanescu, 2015: 91). Narrative inquiry provides the means to consider all these aspects, while respecting the way in which participants give meaning to their experiences, and the extent to which they consider them, or not, learning experiences. All in all, narrative provided a more extensive understanding of the student migration phenomenon, and the learning outcomes associated with the engagement in an international sojourn.

### *Empirical-based recommendations for creating a multicultural university*

Unfortunately, according to students' perceptions, most narratives revealed significant weaknesses in the strategies employed by Portuguese universities in order to deal with their increasingly diverse student bodies. In fact, some situations narrated by the students raise doubts in regard to the actual existence of an institutional strategy focused on diversity issues, and especially on migrant students. For instance, some participants noticed:

- a lack of orientation and support activities directed to migrant students;

- an implicit exclusion of migrant students from informal activities led by local students;
- the existence of undifferentiated and inadequate pedagogical mechanisms in order to react to the specific learning needs of migrant students;
- a certain institutional easiness in admitting migrant students to a particular degree without providing a structure capable of further ensuring their academic success.

Throughout their narratives, students mostly referred to informal learning instances, and rarely approached the topic of academic learning. For this reason, I will not make any concluding remarks in regard to the effects that the inappropriate institutional support strategies reported by the students could have had on their formal learning experiences. Notwithstanding, in some narratives, the lack of support in university contexts resulted in negative feelings associated with the overall sojourn. For instance, Amivi experienced numerous struggles both in the social dimension of her experience, as in her academic tasks, due to the perceived high level of (racial) segregation in her classroom. The same student mentioned some episodes related to her teachers, which, according to her, revealed the existence of racial prejudices. Similarly, in Laina's narrative, the fact that all classes were conducted in Portuguese and not in English, as she had been previously informed, did not affect only her academic learning but led to her marginalisation in class. As a consequence, she made an overall negative evaluation of her academic learning experience, especially when comparing it with the period in which she was a migrant student in Japan.

In spite of the negativity that marked students' accounts on the way in which they were welcomed by their universities, some also mentioned several positive examples. Especially in regard to the attitudes and behaviours of their teachers, many students appeared to be rather satisfied, and some declared themselves grateful towards those teachers who were more solicitous and aware of their specific (learning) struggles and needs. These observations suggest that Portuguese universities should invest in the identification of pedagogical good practices that already exist inside institutions, encouraging teachers to reflect upon them, and eventually propose new ones, more adequate to their specific classroom realities. Besides encouraging the occurrence of meaningful multicultural interactions (Urban & Palmer, 2014), higher education institutions should seek to ensure that both students and teachers are "aware of the opportunities of a multicultural classroom environment" (Xerri, 2016: 29). In order to be able to continuously improve their pedagogical tools, teachers need specific moments in which they can reflect upon their own practices. Unfortunately, "there is often not time in lecturers' busy lives to step back and reassess the assumptions underpinning their practice" (Carroll & Ryan, 2007: 92). Considering that the development of a multicultural perspective "remains more on the margins rather than considered central in the field of teacher preparation" (Cushner, 2008: 8),

investing in teacher training and life-long learning activities directed to diversity issues can also constitute an appropriate institutional strategy.

Recently, the issue of internationalisation has become increasingly important for many Portuguese universities (Horta, 2010). Yet, the effects of internationalisation, especially in regard to the diversity brought by the increase in migrant students' enrolments, did not seem to constitute a main institutional concern. Students' perceptions over the multicultural institutional strategies of their universities indicate that "there is a tendency to see newcomers as an additional cost, rather than as a resource" (Avery, 2016: 3). Whilst the (economic) benefits of an increased body of migrant students are willingly embraced, the challenges raised by the presence of migrant students have been treated with "benign neglect" (Kymlicka, 1995). Through this stance, Portuguese higher education institutions are suggesting that the responsibility for their adaptation and academic success lies exclusively with the migrant students. In order to surpass this issue, Portuguese universities should acknowledge that migrant students constitute a rather peculiar group, which presents specific (learning) needs and requirements. Thus, it is not enough to guarantee them the same rights as local students, whilst their cultural specificities are ignored. Failing to adapt institutional structures to the increasing diversity found among the campus may encourage the "naturalisation of inequalities" (Casa-Nova, 2013: 146) and, eventually, jeopardise learning.

In line with previous research, I argue that Portuguese higher education institutions play a crucial role in the life of their migrant students. According to Baba and Hosoda (2014: 13), aiding migrant students in their process of adaptation to a new environment is so important that it "cannot be overemphasized". Similarly, Otten (2003) notices that diversity can constitute both a challenge and a learning opportunity, especially if institutional support is provided. In my view, in the absence of a coherent institutional answer, the diversity brought by migrant students may appear as a burden, especially for teachers and local students, and not as a valuable learning opportunity for the whole academic community. Considering that "reciprocal cultural learning is undoubtedly beneficial for both international and domestic students" (Urban & Palmer, 2014: 321), improving the way in which migrant students are welcomed and creating an environment that favours multicultural learning can have positive effects for all students, regardless of their origins.

At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that higher education institutions cannot, nor should they be expected to intervene in all the struggles that migrant students may face. There are cases in which the role of the university is to provide conditions for other agents to aid migrant students in their quests (Sawir et al., 2008), and local students can be crucial in

supporting their migrant peers. As shown in the twelve narratives, some local students easily engage in interactions with their foreign colleagues and provide them invaluable support, whilst in other cases students end up interacting solely in (culturally) segregated groups. For this reason, "the university should create more opportunities for social contact between international students and host students" (Baba & Hosoda, 2014: 13), encouraging local students to interact with their migrant peers, and underlining the mutual learning benefits of being engaged in multicultural interactions.

Besides acknowledging the importance of providing specific support to migrant students, the twelve narratives suggest that Portuguese universities should go beyond the implementation of measures meant to compensate migrant students for their supposed (learning) disadvantages. In other words, institutions should avoid reproducing the deficit view existent in the research literature on migrant students (Carroll & Ryan, 2007; Montgomery & McDowell, 2009), according to which these students require "extra attention, if not remediation, of supposed 'deficits'" (Asmar, 2005: 291). Such views end up reducing the experience of migrant students to the difficulties they generally encounter during the international sojourn. As showed by the interpretation of their narratives, students' sojourns tend to be made up, not only by difficulties, but by an extraordinary panoply of different experiences. Moreover, focusing exclusively on students' difficulties, regarding them as problems in need of solutions, fails to account for the fact that, frequently, many opportunities for learning and for personal growth lie precisely in the challenges of living and studying in a foreign environment.

Indeed, even though it is crucial for universities to recognise that culturally diversified students also have diverse (learning) needs and requirements, institutions should avoid approaching migrant students through a deficit lens. By doing that, they will end up engaging in paternalistic practices, looking at migrant students only through the difficulties that they experience, and reducing them to fragile entities who are in constant need of support. As observed by one of the students: *you don't always want people to single you out and make it clear that they are nice and helping*. Deficit views of migrant students are also problematic, due to their inherent assumption that the universities that welcome in an adequate way overseas students are being institutionally responsible, and thus somehow altruistic. In my view, providing migrant students with the best (learning) conditions should not be rooted in altruism, but must be regarded as an intrinsic responsibility of any higher education institution. According to another student, Valéria, once universities open their doors to students from all over the world, is their responsibility to know the different realities of those students.

Moreover, institutionally addressing migrant students through a deficit lens clearly places the root of the problem on their own (cultural) inadequacies, without even admitting the existence of potential problems within higher education institutions. In fact, if migrant students were to be welcomed in a truly multicultural university, perhaps they would not even experience additional struggles when compared to their local peers. By adopting a deficit view of migrant students, all institutional strategies directed to them will unavoidably be rooted in the assumption that migrant students are the ones who need to adapt to the university, excluding therefore the need for universities to also adapt to the specificity of these students. In other words, migrant students are the ones who need to change, whilst universities can remain exactly the same. Certainly, through this perspective, higher education institutions will not be able to adequately support migrant students in their migration and learning quests, let alone to create a multicultural learning environment for the whole academic community. In line with Singh (2012: 276), I consider that "rather than simply encouraging international students to be more resilient and to assimilate to the local culture and language, university staff and local students could be made more aware of the need to create a sustainable multicultural and multilingual environment".

As I have argued above, multiculturalism cannot end in the integration of diversity within an existing system, but needs to promote systemic change in order to be able to successfully accommodate diversity. According to Parekh (2002: 204), "'we' cannot integrate 'them' so long as 'we' remain 'we'; 'we' must be loosened up to create a new common space in which 'they' can be accommodated and become part of a newly reconstituted 'we'". This is precisely what Portuguese universities, and any university for that matter, should take into account when developing policies and practices focused on diversity issues. The interpretation of the twelve narratives reveals that Portuguese higher education institutions have been slow in acknowledging the increased diversity of their student bodies and still have a long journey ahead in terms of internationalisation strategies, diversity issues, and migrant student support. The recommendations I make in this section can provide them a useful empirical starting point for developing their multicultural policies and practices more efficiently.

## *Final remarks*

This research revealed and depicted an astonishing diversity of migration motivations and trajectories. The twelve students present a diverse set of migratory trajectories, switching between students to migrants, migrants to students; between mobility ad migration, in order to attend to their life objectives and to the needs felt in a particular moment. While some

integrated migration in their life projects, for others it happened somehow unexpectedly, as they ended up staying in Portugal long-term, in spite of their initial plans to stay only temporarily. In line with Findaly et al. (2005: 196), this research revealed that "student migration seems to be driven by a diversity of intentions rooted in past experiences and also linked to a colourful tapestry of imagined future benefits". Migration revealed to be a process in constant development, zigzagging through students' biographical trajectories, while being simultaneously influenced by visions of the past, present and future. Among the twelve participants, migration was generated by highly diverse reasons, where pursuing education appeared as a way to realise students' aspirations, rather than being always the objective itself.

Regarding their adaptation to the host country, students' narratives were also marked by diversity. While some experienced less to none difficulties in their lives abroad, other students struggled significantly before being able to 'fit in', while some even got to 'feel at home' in the new context. Adapting to a new country and culture is not a linear process, and tends to be highly dependent on each student's idiosyncratic trajectory.

Moreover, the twelve narratives and their subsequent interpretations revealed that learning, especially in informal contexts, tends to emerge as a consequence of students' experiences abroad. In most of the cases, learning was rooted in the challenges and struggles experienced during migration. In line with previous research, as for instance Montgomery and McDowell (2009), and Montgomery (2010), the narratives revealed that learning can constitute a substantial part of an international sojourn even if migrant and local students do not easily interact. Regardless of the type of interactions in which they were involved (mono/bicultural or multicultural), all students attached learning outcomes to their experiences in Portugal. Hence, learning appeared as a continuum, a cumulative enterprise, rather than as an isolated event. Living and studying in a foreign country appears to continuously enhance students' learning in new ways, teaching them not only about cultural peculiarities or differences, but also about themselves. In other words, there is "something very educational happening" in their lives, since they attend, every day, an "invisible school" (He, 1998: ix), stimulated by their international experiences.

Besides confirming the existence of a clear link between migration and learning, the data also suggest that students tend to experience transformations during their international sojourns. For most of the students, engaging in migration was an experience that changed their perspectives, worldviews, and the way in which they attach meaning to their own lives. For others, change might not have been so obvious, albeit the international experience provided them with the means to reach different understandings of themselves, their life trajectories,

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and their relationship with the world, which are crucial aspects of being engaged in transformative learning (Lange, 2015). In spite of the criticisms advanced by some scholars (Newman, 2012; Howie & Bagnall, 2013; Newman, 2014), the theory of transformative learning proved to be a highly adequate theoretical and analytical tool for understanding the learning experiences of migrant students in their singularity, complexity and diversity.

Overall, this research gives a different perspective over the experience of migrant students, revealing that they come in 'all shapes and sizes'. Their stories present tremendous diversity and require a methodological approach capable of doing justice to their unique migration trajectories. When addressing the migratory experiences of foreign students, researchers should not seek to achieve generally-valid truths or universal theories, but to bring students' lived experiences to the core of the process of knowledge production. As observed by Webster and Mertova (2007: 17), "educational research that embraces storytelling practices is unlikely to tell 'one true story'". At the same time, researchers should take into account the complexity that characterises the phenomenon of student migration, without dismissing the challenges posed by such complexity. According to Collinson (2009: 3), "migration pathways and motivations are highly varied and dynamic, and thus highly resistant to generalization", and "this diversity makes it impossible to talk of a single migrant experience" (Morrice, 2014: 150). Instead of assuming the existence of a single or typical migration experience, researchers should anchor their theories in the empirical ground provided by students' lived experiences, seeking to augment and enrich existent theories through the insights provided by their empirical data, rather than trying to make those data 'fit' the existent theoretical perspectives.

For some readers, the narratives of migration presented in this thesis may appear somewhat exotic. A former Timorese nun who enrols in higher education as a means to run away from a troubled relationship. A divorced Brazilian woman in her forties who moves to Portugal along with her son. An American girl eager to have a temporary international experience and ends up coming to Portugal *not really for a good reason*. A transgender woman from Laos who obtains a European scholarship to pursue a PhD degree. A Japanese woman in her forties who 'falls in love' with the Portuguese language and suddenly decides to leave her career behind, coming to Portugal in order to study Portuguese. Indeed, these stories are rather peculiar, and it was my narrative approach that provided me the means to uncover their peculiarities, giving me the opportunity to look at migrant students' lives in detail, and dive into their exciting adventures. I consider that, if I were to listen to the lives of thousands other migrant students, as I listened to these twelve, I would find that each one of their stories are peculiar and somehow unique, given that human beings are not simply individuals but 'singular universes' (Ferrarotti, 2003). For this reason, I make a plea to my readers to see these stories beyond their apparent exoticism. In

spite on their peculiarity, I cannot regard, and I refuse to regard these stories as exotic accounts belonging to some unusual or strange individuals. All human lives, if analysed and interpreted in-depth, will reveal a certain level of exoticism. Only when we will stop regarding the experience of migrant students as something exotic, unusual, and thus not applicable to the general population, we will be able to understand the complexity and diversity of the student migration phenomenon.

In a global context of increased xenophobia, discrimination, racism and terrible violations of human rights, frequently rooted in ethnic, racial, and religious diversity, the accounts of these twelve students may appear somehow idyllic and decontextualised from the harsh reality of our global contemporary society. In their narratives of migration, students highlight not only the fact that it is possible to live comfortably in multicultural environments, but also the innumerable positive learning outcomes provided by such a life. As noticed by Jaidev, *what happens generally with travel, with living in different places is that you get a more holistic sense of life*. Even though some may argue that it is not a panacea for change (Lilley et al., 2015), engaging in an international experience provides numerous opportunities to learn and to transform taken-for-granted assumptions. Confronted with alternative modes of seeing and understanding the world, the people who live in multicultural settings can start to question the very way in which they position themselves into that world. By showing us that their able to live cross-culturally, cross-nationally, cross-continentally, cross-linguistically, cross-ethnically; these twelve students leave, to all of us, a message of hope for a better future, for a world in which mutual understanding between diverse people is indeed possible.

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# Appendix

Model of the informed consent signed by the participants before the first biographical session (in Portuguese)

CONSENTIMENTO INFORMADO

Eu, _____, estudante da Universidade de _____, aceito participar no projeto de investigação desenvolvido por Cosmin Ionut Nadă, no âmbito da Faculdade de Psicologia e de Ciências da Educação da Universidade do Porto, com o apoio da Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia.

Tomei conhecimento de que a minha participação no estudo não implicará a revelação da minha identidade real, sendo o meu nome alterado, assim como determinados aspetos da minha narrativa, de forma a tentar garantir a minha anonimidade. Foi-me claramente explicada a temática deste estudo e a metodologia que será utilizada. Concordo com a gravação em suporte digital das sessões de trabalho e entendo que estou em pleno direito para me retirar da investigação, se assim o enteder. Tenho noção de que a minha contribuição é puramente voluntária, facto que me confere plena liberdade em decidir acerca da minha participação.

Local                                                                                          Assinatura

Data