

**Going Global: Representation and Sense-Making in the British International Branch Campuses of the  
United Arab Emirates**

By

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## Abstract

'Going global' is a prominent phrase used to describe transnational developments in British higher education, premised on the internationalization and export of UK universities. This dissertation interrogates one influential component of that agenda, the international branch campus (IBC), asking how British higher education is translocated and reimagined in the commercial education market of the United Arab Emirates (UAE). As a departure from existing research on IBCs, it examines the phenomenon vertically, tracing the globalizing logics of contemporary exportation to their sites of consumption, and transversally, situating global demand for UK higher education within logics informed by Britain's imperial past.

Applying Appadurai's (1986, 1996) concepts of the social imagination and regimes of value to transnational higher education, this study analyzes two interrelated processes: firstly, how universities represent themselves and the UK higher education brand through their offshore marketing practices, and secondly, how students and staff make sense of their IBC and imagine its role in fulfilling particular educational needs and desires. It applies an ensemble of interpretive techniques to the marketing images and texts of three large IBCs in the UAE to understand how particular qualities are signified and textured through a lens of Britishness. It then analyzes interviews with 52 undergraduates attending these IBCs, examining how expatriate and international students articulate value within the constrained parameters of 'choice' to maximize their future employment and mobility opportunities through an affordable, internationally valuable form of degree capital.

The study finds that students' IBC choices and the sense made of them are layered between proximal, practical calculations and deeply held desires to embody the qualities reflected in the British higher education brand, among them global recognition and belongingness. It also finds alignment between participants' enunciations of 'Britain' and the ways in which IBC marketing selectively mobilizes symbols and discourses to frame their relationship to the national higher education brand, making them knowable and valuable to audiences without making explicit how abstract qualities are translocated to educational experiences in the UAE. These findings affirm the powerful role of the social imagination in shaping higher education choices and meaning-making in transnational contexts.

Keywords: transnational higher education, UK universities, international branch campuses, marketing, United Arab Emirates

*In honor and loving memory of Ashley, my big sister and friend  
since day one. It is conceivable that I only took an interest in  
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## Acronyms & Abbreviations

AIP	academic infrastructure provider
ASU	Adam Smith University ( <i>pseudonym</i> )
CAA	Commission for Academic Accreditation (UAE)
C-BERT	Cross-Border Education Research Team
CBSE	Central Board of Secondary Education (India)
DAAD	German Academic Exchange Service (Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst)
DIAC	Dubai International Academic City
DKP	Dubai Knowledge Park
FBISE	Federal Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education (Pakistan)
GATS	General Agreement on Trade in Services (World Trade Organization)
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
GLU	Greater London University ( <i>pseudonym</i> )
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Agency (UK)
HM Gov	Her Majesty's Government (UK)
IBC	International Branch Campus
IIE	Institute of International Education (USA)
KHDA	Knowledge and Human Development Authority (Dubai)
MoHESR	Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (UAE)
OBHE	Observatory on Borderless Higher Education
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PMI	Prime Minister's Initiative (UK)
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency (UK)
RAK	Ras Al Khaimah (UAE)
TNHE	transnational higher education
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UG	undergraduate
UNE	University of Northern England ( <i>pseudonym</i> )

## Chapter 1: Introduction

*After several months exploring the higher education landscape in the United Arab Emirates, I thought I had seen it all. And yet, this event was something so remarkable and unrecognizable to me as an observer, despite having considerable familiarity with international higher education. It was not the cost and scale of each institution's display that surprised me, although these too were staggering; rather, it was the collective intensity of the spectacle: visitors buzzing from display to display, recruiters furiously gathering contact details, and prospective students (with their parents) completing on-the-spot enrollment offers. Despite this intensity, it was an oddly calm and orderly affair. But the broader panorama had the aesthetics of London's Ideal Home Show or the Chelsea Flower Show: grandiose displays from name-brand institutions, polished performances from their representatives, a floor map with which visitors could locate their desired universities, and even a main and side stage for TED-style presentations of both the informative and inspirational variety. Honored guests, VIPs and royals graced the event, wandering the aisles in their entourages and pausing for photographs with certain institutions. The ceremonial cutting of the red tape by one of these royals on the opening day was delayed due to Dubai traffic, creating a swell of students in the lobby eagerly waiting to surge the floor.*

*Some university displays were humble and restrained. This, however, was not the venue for restraint or frugality. Several had spared no expense (upwards of 1,000,000 dirhams<sup>1</sup> for Greater London University's stand, I am told), ensuring that their presence captivated as much as it did communicate. All of the UAE's 31 international branch campuses were present, as well as degree franchises, online providers and a few recruiters for universities outside of the UAE. Most had large TV displays, vivid backdrops, props, and giveaways, some with more gimmickry than others. Each display was purposed to catch attention and leave lasting impressions. Having visited so many displays in one day, I found it challenging to recall afterwards the distinct features of each university.*

*Bodies circulating the aisles and working the displays were another matter of curiosity. Students of traditional pre-university age had been bussed in from their schools and were identifiable by their uniforms. Parents, mostly mothers, turned up in equal numbers, sometimes accompanying their children, others browsing the marketplace and seeking out information on their own. The staff working at each university display were an unusual sight, as they were an unlikely assemblage of university senior management, marketers, academics, and student volunteers. The senior managers wore business attire, while marketing staff either did the same or wore semi-casual university-branded apparel in what I suspect made them appear more approachable. The academic staff were less consistent in their appearance. Some were lively and enthusiastic about their institution, while others appeared indifferent and perhaps dispirited to be in the role of marketing. Lastly, there were the student volunteers wearing university-branded polo shirts and keenly sharing with visitors their experiences as satisfied students. By the end of*

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<sup>1</sup> approximately \$275,000 USD

*the day as bodies on the event floor were thoroughly covered in branded apparel, stickers, and handbags, it got harder to discern the visitors from the student volunteers from the professionals.*

*From a marketing perspective, this scene was nothing extraordinary. It was a fairly tame event with the usual features of a commercial expo. One could imaginably substitute any consumer good into this scene – cars, appliances, timeshare condominiums – and find it unremarkable. But to see universities selling education in the same manner washed away any sentiment of higher learning as a noble pursuit. It instead appeared to be just another privately exchanged commodity epitomizing the Dubai market approach to social services. In this configuration, university experiences and degrees appeared to be commercial products, students were consumers and prospective customers, and academics and student volunteers were brand ambassadors. The marketization of higher education had indeed reached its zenith here in the UAE's international education marketplace. As it conflicted with my own normative position on the purpose of higher education, the implications of this spectacle weighed heavily on my heart and mind. As an anthropologically minded researcher of globalizing higher education, however, I found it absolutely fascinating.*

*(Excerpt from researcher's notebook, "GETEX Opening Day", April 15<sup>th</sup>, 2015)*

## **1.1 Study Overview**

As the above vignette relays, this monograph is on its surface a study on international branch campuses (IBCs), marketing and student choice-making. However, it is also a deeper exploration of the global export of academic institutions, accounting for the contemporary policies and historic, inter-subjective relationships between exporting 'home' and importing 'host' countries. It is interested in understanding one particularly active overseas market, the UAE, as a site for exporting and expanding the delivery of UK higher education. It seeks to understand the market phenomena described above as a contingent expression of a complex assemblage which brings together UK institutions, UAE free trade zones, and the diverse actors who constitute a branch campus.

This study draws upon interpretivist and qualitative methodologies to understand meaning in representations of UK higher education and meaning-making among its agents. Within the wider context of transnational flows of higher education, the study frames its analysis around three British

institutions, each with a home campus in the UK and a branch campus in the UAE. Each branch campus is comprised of staff and student actors, which the study views as imaginative agents and subjects in the collective enactment of a transplanted 'British' campus. With a focus on popular imaginations of British higher education, the study examines how meaning and value are formed between non-British students, international staff, and offshore British institutions. By analyzing visual and textual representations of each institution found in their marketing, the study traces the alignments and disjuncture between the performance of an offshore British university and the lived, embodied experiences thereof.

The presentation of this study is spread across eight chapters. It begins with an introductory establishment of the study context, the specific research area framed as a problem, research questions it seeks to address, and the parameters and rationales for the study (**chapter 1**). The next chapter provides an integrative review and critique of the relevant yet highly diffuse literature on international student mobility and choice, marketing and branding of higher education, and transnational higher education, which collectively inform the study's conceptual framework (**chapter 2**). This is followed by a detailed explication of the methods employed in the research and methodological grounds for their use (**chapter 3**). Chapters 4 and 5 establish the deeper context upon which the focal phenomena rest.

**Chapter 4** puts contemporary UK transnational activity and policy into historical context, examining the institutional footprint of British colonialism which created a global regime of value for its universities, and the contemporary policy rationales extending the global reach of UK higher education and reaping its economic potential through aggressive marketization and exportation. **Chapter 5** provides the context in which these phenomena play out, the United Arab Emirates, and the politico-economic settings that enable the construction of the UAE, Dubai especially, as a free market international education hub. Chapter 5 also introduces the three focal institutions examined in this study and draws on primary research data to analyze the continuities and distinctions of each university's globalizing agendas. The first major analysis chapter examines the practices, texts and visual displays employed in

focal institutions' marketing, identifying the key themes constituting representations of British higher education in the UAE (**chapter 6**). The second interrogates the imaginations of students and staff at these campuses, tracing statements on value and choice-making to the perceived potency of the British degree and national higher education brand (**chapter 7**). Finally, **Chapter 8** re-engages the research questions framing this study, summarizes the main findings, discusses contributions to the literature, and situates the implications of this study in the broader currents shaping the global consumption of British higher education.

This chapter begins with a brief presentation of this study's context, namely the key transformations in the UK higher education sector which gave rise to the transnational export of its institutions around the globe and in the Arabian Gulf region in particular (**section 1.2**). These activities prompt a host of questions around the social dimensions of institutional export – what overseas branches of UK institutions aim to be and how they represent themselves, how they are seen and imagined by those that purvey them and those that consume their services – framed as a problem worthy of research (**1.3**). The chapter then identifies the research questions (**1.4**), objectives and research design (**1.5**) and its rationale and significance (**1.6**). Before concluding, it provides a brief clarification on the key terminology used in this study, taking into account the confusing lexical differences between UK and US higher education (**1.7**).

## **1.2 Background and Context**

Cross-border activity in higher education is no longer the domain of mobile students and staff; institutions themselves are going global in a wave of activity to reach untapped markets of students offshore. Driven by international competition over growth and an internal need for new revenue streams to fuel their ambitions, universities are taking up innovative forms of extra-territorial delivery, mainly of their teaching functions, at an aggressive pace. Collectively referred to as transnational higher

education (TNHE), these activities extend the reach of the university by exporting its program delivery in the form of international branch campuses (IBCs), franchises, program validations, and various academic-business partnerships in overseas settings. The dominant players in this new arena are uncoincidentally those same countries that outperform in the global university rankings and are widely reputed for educational quality and research output. These countries, namely the US, UK and Australia, also have strongly marketized higher education sectors and relatively autonomous institutions (McBurnie & Ziguras, 2006). While these exporters dominate the global TNHE market, they are not exclusive actors however, as global competition remains fierce with new international actors entering the arena and the terrain rapidly transforming.

The UK is in close competition with the US and Australia as the leading higher education exporter, with soaring growth in its delivery overseas. Globally it has the highest number of partnerships with foreign providers leading to the award of a UK degree (i.e. program validation), the second highest number of IBCs after the US, and the greatest number of international students studying in its offshore institutions (HE Global, 2016; Healey & Bordogna, 2014; HESA, 2015). UK TNHE has achieved such a wide reach that is now possible to study for a UK degree in all but fifteen countries (HE Global, 2016). The scale is astonishing even within the national frame: more international students study on UK degree programs or in UK institutions *outside* of the UK than inside. 82% of UK universities offer some form of TNHE, and 23 universities now have more than 5,000 students enrolled on their overseas programs (*ibid.*). Most UK universities have assumed a global stance in their orientation and are driving their organizational growth agendas through international activities.

The logics driving these transformations in the UK are generally attributed to a decrease in public appropriation for higher education and the consequent shift towards steering university practices through market principles (Marginson, 2007; Williams, 1997). These market logics especially pervade

British universities' internationalization agendas (de Wit & Merckx, 2012; Knight, 2008), with nearly one-eighth the UK higher education sector's total income coming from international student fees (Universities UK, 2014). Most of this revenue comes from international students studying in the UK, but a steadily rising share stems from offshore students. The UK educational export sector as a whole, which includes on and offshore higher education delivery, is reportedly worth nearly £20 billion (\$25 billion USD) as of 2016 (HM Government, 2019), with enormous implications for national economic growth and strategic policymaking. Compared to its major competitors, the UK has a high degree of national policy coordination for growing and sustaining its education exports (S. L. Robertson, 2010b).

Despite comprising a relatively small proportion of total export revenue and of universities' student numbers, the IBC phenomenon has arguably garnered more attention than any other emergent form of educational export. Often described as the "gold rush" for new sources of revenue (Garrett, Kinser, Lane, & Merola, 2016; Lim, 2009; Miller-Idriss & Hanauer, 2011), the IBC surge has resulted in a concentration of overseas activity in regions of high demand, particularly East and Southeast Asia and the Arabian Gulf regions, where 80% of branch campus growth in the 1990s and 2000s took place in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Qatar, and Singapore (Redden, 2015). This concentration is led by these host countries' strategic policy initiatives to construct education 'hubs', designed to attract, train and retain global talent (Knight, 2011). While these hubs are host to a global consortium of international universities, consultancies, research and development incubators and axial educational services, they are dominated particularly by Anglophone Western education providers. According to the leading definition of a branch campus, Britain has the second highest number of IBCs worldwide and is one of the highest proportionate to its total number of universities inside the UK (Garrett et al., 2016).



In the UAE, there are approximately 31 IBCs<sup>2</sup> across three of the seven Emirates (QAA, 2017); each Emirate determines its own educational policies and priorities. While Abu Dhabi lavished state resources on high-profile replica IBCs like New York University and Paris-Sorbonne University, Dubai and Ras Al Khaimah (RAK) took the commercial market approach by establishing free zones in which international providers operate at their own expense with reduced regulatory hurdles and full repatriation of tuition revenue. These free zones, Dubai's especially, created a highly competitive educational marketplace where IBCs offer the most in-demand degree programs, compete for fee-paying students, and have a near-exclusive teaching function due to the high costs and low returns on research. Among these providers, British IBCs constitute one-third of the international institutions presently operating in the UAE, more than any other single exporting country. In terms of their market share of students, the ten British IBCs enroll over 8,600 students<sup>3</sup>, or over one quarter of the approximately 32,000 students in the Dubai and Ras Al Khaimah free zones<sup>4</sup>. The UAE student market is strongly bifurcated, however, with most Emirati citizens opting for national, often free universities, leaving the majority expatriate population with a wide range of private and international institutions to choose from. Those who attend IBCs in Dubai and Ras Al Khaimah are therefore, with rare exception, either fee-paying expatriates with impermanent residency in the UAE or international students who have relocated to the UAE expressly for the purpose of attending university. Unlike IBCs elsewhere, these providers are not tethered to national policy aims or strategic development agendas, and therefore operate with the sole aim of

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<sup>2</sup> This count strongly depends on the definition of an IBC being used. While many of the institutions based in Dubai and Ras Al Khaimah are technically either franchises (locally owned and managed) or study sites (offices without resident teaching staff), the KHDA, Dubai's educational regulatory authority, maintains the use of the term as its providers still fit into the "broadly recognised definition" used by the Observatory on Borderless Higher Education (Fox, 2015; Lawton & Katsomitros, 2012). Comparative IBC figures can be misleading as the definitions used between countries often differ, and the size and scope of the international provider may vary significantly between host countries.

<sup>3</sup> Based on 2017-18 KHDA Open Data (<https://www.khda.gov.ae/en/opendata>) for Dubai and estimates informed by primary research for Ras Al Khaimah-based IBCs.

<sup>4</sup> This figure is based on the approximately 30,000 students in Dubai as of 2017 (again using KHDA Open Data) and another 2,000 in Ras Al Khaimah (informed by Rensimer, 2015).

extending their international footprint and expanding their revenue streams through commercialized delivery.

### **1.3 Framing the Problem**

The rise in offshore education delivery and the global competition for overseas students are overwhelmingly understood through the prism of markets. Within this framework, institutions are cast as commercial providers of educational services, while students are reduced to rational, choice-making consumers responding to marketing and perceived returns on their investment (Sidhu & Dall’Alba, 2012). This is perhaps unsurprising given the transactional nature of the free-market IBC model. TNHE has extended the scope of academic research on market-driven internationalization, but to date has concentrated in organizational and business management literature (Healey, 2015a, 2016; McBurnie & Ziguras, 2006; Wilkins & Huisman, 2012) and descriptive reports “taking stock” of current activities (British Council, 2013; HE Global, 2016; Healey & Michael, 2014; Knight, 2016; V. Naidoo, 2009). This literature is highly attuned to the directional flows of students, programs and institutions, which it characterizes using trade terminology such as net exporting and importing countries.

What is widely absent from this discussion is the uneven terrain on which international providers operate, as are the nuances of the historical relationships between home (exporting) countries, host (importing) countries, and international students. Britain in particular has a protracted history of exporting its institutions and its academic templates, recruiting international students, and thereby making its universities recognizable and familiar to a global audience. Having its advantage as a ‘known’ or ‘knowable’ institutional form allows UK higher education to more easily capture student imaginations and desires by appealing to the collective reputation of its national brand. The potency of the British degree’s contemporary value and desirability internationally is in a sense predetermined, given Britain’s historical role in universalizing what quality and excellence in higher education look like and how they

are defined. An examination of the British higher education export industry is therefore about much more than contemporary market competition, as the industry itself is an exercise in post- and neo-coloniality. To fully examine this phenomenon, an analytical approach which is attentive to historical colonial subjectivities alongside the contemporary relationship between the UK export industry and its student consumers is thusly needed.

The problem area in this study is located at the nexus of commercial TNHE delivery, marketing, and student choice-making, where the role of the UK national educational brand is critically underexamined. This is especially the case with IBCs in concentrated education hubs, where student-consumers can choose from a range of different international institutions. Given the considerable contextual differences between British universities' home campuses and their branches, British IBCs must perform a collective ensemble of marketing practices to signal to prospective students a continuity of quality, reputation, or prestige with their mother universities in the UK. Some of these performances focus on the institution's global significance and reputation, while others fall back on the UK as a national brand that connotes desirable places, influential institutions, and educational quality, prestige and value. It is in these representations that UK education is qualified through a lens of 'Britishness' and reenacted for overseas consumer audiences.

This study concerns the marketing practices of British IBCs in the UAE and their students' sense-making thereof. It specifically examines how the UK and its brand of higher education are articulated through representations and marketing practices, and how non-British students at three IBCs consequently imagine their university and their relationship to it as students in British overseas universities. The study builds on scholarship on IBCs and international student choice-making by examining the implicit assumptions and overt national representations that are mobilized to levy students' desires and make cognitive associations between Britain, its global influence and educational excellence. It asks how the

UK and its universities, seen and experienced through representations in offshore campuses, are performed and imagined, drawing upon Appadurai's (1996) concept of 'imagination as a social practice' to conceptualize the relationship between these performances and the ways in which students interpret and act upon them. With a view to students as both consumers of educational 'products' and subjects of IBC marketing, it critically examines the ways in which IBC students imagine British higher education, how they experience its offshore campuses, and the ways in which they are asked to imagine and experience British higher education through its ensemble of marketing and branding practices.

#### 1.4 Research Questions

The research questions for this study take the form of one overarching question which will be answered through three constitutive sub-questions. Each sub-question will be answered in **chapters 5, 6 and 7** respectively. The primary research question is:

**Major question:** How is the 'UK university' – and by extension UK higher education as a national brand – represented and imagined through its international branch campuses?

The tripartite sub-questions each address a constitutive element of the research problem and major question.

**Sub-question 1:** What do university senior management imagine the purpose of their campuses in the UAE to be? How was the campus envisioned to fit into the university's strategic objectives?

Sub-question 1 (addressed in **chapter 5**) begins with the organizational purpose of each university's IBC by attending to the imaginations and visions of senior management and leadership at each institution. As a primarily descriptive question designed to frame and contextualize these particular IBCs, it aims to situate what is already known about each university's global portfolios in the language and emphases of senior staff who hold responsibility for steering the branch campus. This sub-question enables comparison between the three institutions by framing how each campus and its particular model fit into its parent organization's broader agenda and informs its strategies for global expansion.

**Sub-question 2** How do British IBC marketing practices articulate ideas and representations of the UK university and the national brand?

Sub-question 2 (addressed in **chapter 6**) asks how these campuses individually represent themselves and collectively represent British higher education through their marketing practices. The question is aimed at textual and visual representations in IBC marketing which speak to the positional value or superiority of British higher education as a national brand. It is phrased as a 'how' question to enable a broad and inclusive exploration of the marketing practices constituting performances of various organizational identities, such as that of the local branch, the university, and the national higher education brand. The question is also intended to illuminate how the UK, including its cultural symbols and iconography, is textually and visually deployed or encoded in marketing and how such representations operate in relation to its brand of higher education.

**Sub-question 3** How do students in British branch campuses imagine the UK university and British higher education, and (how) do they see their branch campus as an extension of these?

Sub-question 3 (addressed in **chapter 7**) examines how students perceive and experience their overseas campus, how they informed decisions to study there, and how they make sense of it as an extension of a British university in the UK. This question returns to the idea of imagination as a social practice, asking how students collectively form meaning and value around particular forms of higher education, and how they believe British higher education or their British IBC specifically addresses their aspirations and educational needs. It also enables an accounting of the contextual parameters of the UAE and its majority non-citizen population, where international mobility and symbolic capital are strategic essentials produced through higher education and are thusly entwined in the programming and marketing of IBCs. The question therefore aims to examine how British higher education in particular is seen by students as best providing these assets and how students are responding to various desires by choosing to enroll.

The findings of each sub-question are intended to complement each other and collectively inform the major research question, which draws together and is answered by each strand.

### **1.5 Research Objectives and Design**

The objectives of this study align with those of social research generally, that is, to explore, describe, explain and understand social phenomena (Blaikie, 2000). This study aims to accomplish these objectives through various components of the research design. It first aims to *explore* and *describe* the particular features of each of the focal institutions, the UAE higher education marketplace in which they operate, and how these settings contribute to each university's objectives in establishing a branch campus. Secondly, the study aims to *explain* how the UK and its educational institutions are articulated in IBC marketing representations and practices, broadly defined. It will draw out and analyze these representations to explain how they are mobilized in the promotion of British institutions in the UAE. Finally, the study aims to *understand* how these representations and practices inform and relate to the imaginations of student consumers, constituting a way of knowing and seeing the UK through the practices of its IBCs. These objectives are in keeping with the general aims of social research and the breadth of a US university doctoral research project.

It is difficult to physically locate a study purposed on transnational flows of policies and practices; such obviates the principles of globalization theories which privilege spaces of flows (of capital, information, technology, organizations, and symbols) as the dominant expression of contemporary societies (Appadurai, 1996; Castells, 2000). Nonetheless, the scope of the study is bound in finite physical and virtual spaces, and as a matter of practicality, limits these spaces to three types: the physical (in and around campuses, marketing events, educational free trade zones, and anywhere IBC marketing is present, all within the borders of the UAE), the textual (printed marketing literature such as brochures and advertisements, campus documents), and the virtual (the official websites and social media of each

branch campus). Each of these spaces are rife with observable phenomena which constitute data used in the study. Three British branch campuses were selected as research sites based on their relatively large campus size and undergraduate degree programs. In addition to these visual and textual data, the project engages student and staff participants of varying nationalities, gender and age to analyze and understand the nature of the relationship between imaginative agents and marketing. All data in the study are analyzed using strategies informed by phenomenological and hermeneutic approaches to interpret meaning and decode the processes of signification. These significations, put into dialogue with each other through a broad set of analytical codes and themes, form the basis for addressing the research questions.

### **1.6 Rationale and Significance**

The study is motivated by a need for richly empirical work in an emerging field of TNHE research. This need is partly a result of the rapid growth and changes in international higher education, and partly a result of the field's nascent, unestablished methodological traditions (Kehm & Teichler, 2007), with borrowing from fields strongly comprised of professional practitioners (Dolby & Rahman, 2008). There is a sizeable volume of work which focuses on the motivations, rationales, or logics behind IBCs generally (Edelstein & Douglass, 2012; Garrett et al., 2016; Girdzijauskaitė & Radzeviciene, 2014; Knight, 2008, 2012) and the Gulf region specifically (Khodr, 2011; Lane, 2010b). These studies approach IBC phenomena from above by defining, conceptualizing and rationalizing their varied forms and strategic *raison d'être*. Comparatively few studies engage with the lived, embodied accounts of TNHE. The methods that these studies draw upon provide rewardingly critical ways of looking at and understanding the experience of branch campuses and perspectives from the bottom up.

It is also motivated out of concern for UK higher education, given its strongly commercial tack, with practices in internationalization and overseas expansion being exceptionally market-driven, alarmingly

unreflexive, and at times, unquestionably neo-colonial. Some of the critical work in the international higher education literature challenges what British institutions claim to be doing for reasons of international diversity, improved learning outcomes and knowledge circulation (Madge, Raghuram, & Noxolo, 2009; M. Molesworth, Scullion, & Nixon, 2011; S. L. Robertson, 2010b; Turner & Robson, 2007). These works question the transformative potential of internationalization and overseas campuses, without leaning on traditional norms of what a university should do or be. Greater attention to students' nuanced experiences of IBCs allows research to speak back to dominant narratives of internationalization as a value-neutral practice and inherently beneficial activity. The findings from this study may inform the constitutive practices of student choice-making and university marketing in TNHE, but they aim to contribute to a more urgent examination of the political and organizational transformations in UK universities powerfully reshaping how we see, engage with and consume higher education.

Insofar as the personal objectives of the researcher are concerned, the project is both a professional and personal pursuit. International education has long been an academic interest to me as a frequent participant in foreign exchange and study abroad programs. As a former international student on a master's degree program in Manchester, England, my decision to study was informed by many of the same factors identified in student mobility research, namely cost, convenience (time to completion), prestige and university ranking; I was also drawn in by the appeal of a foreign location made familiar through popular narratives of Manchester as the heart of the Industrial Revolution and a contemporary cultural hotspot. It is not difficult to place myself in the research as a student captivated by an imagination of place I had hitherto only experienced through fairly banal (but no less attractive) representations. I retrospectively see myself as an unknowing marketing subject of the UK educational export industry. Consequently, I can identify with some of the student narratives presented in this study and can imagine myself responding similarly to the interview questions. While not intending this



research to be autoethnographic, I cannot ignore the personal experiences that shaped its underlying motivations, nor the ways in which they build on the interpretive lenses I use to relate to my study participants.

Further to this experience as an international student and consumer of UK higher education, I had also gained first-hand insight into higher education developments in the Arabian Gulf as a university instructor in the region. Taking notice of the ubiquitous foreign university programs and campuses emerging throughout the Gulf, I was particularly stricken by the free market approach to educational provision in Dubai, where it was evident that foreign education was being sold to consumers as a luxury good. It was not difficult to identify which international brands dominated that landscape, but the ever-important questions of why and how continued to intrigue the researcher in me. As with qualitative research generally, questions beget more questions, and the overarching topic linking the UK's history of HE exportation, its contemporary obsession with marketization, and the UAE as the ideal site for delivery and consumption, was borne.

### **1.7 Key Terminology Used in this Study**

While this study is attuned to British higher education, it is written primarily for a North American academic audience. There are a number of instances where academic terminology between the two national systems are homonymous (same word referring to different things or used in different manners, such as 'college' or 'course'), which potentially leads to confusion for readers. To maintain consistency and clarity moving forward, these terms are defined here as they will be used in this volume (**table 1.1**). Naturally, definitions are sites of contestation for academics, and to cursorily define entire practices and erase their historical significance with reductive definitions is appreciably an invitation for criticism. These definitions are not expansive and do not commit to a particular position. They are only proffered here to improve readability and clarity.

**Table 1.1 Key Terminology and Specific Uses**

<i>Campus</i>	Refers to the location-specific physical presence of a university, used synonymously with 'branch'. In this text, 'campus' refers to a university's physical presence in the UK or overseas; e.g. University X's campus in Dubai, or home campus in London.
<i>Course</i>	Refers to the British academic connotation, which means an entire degree program. Use of the British definition is necessary particularly in chapter 6 where the term is employed frequently in UK IBC marketing.
<i>Institution</i>	Used synonymously here with university, referring to the entire organization in all its locations worldwide.
<i>Marketing</i>	Speaks to the collective activities of recruiters, promoters, advertisement and brand designers, and any acts of university agents to promote enrollment and general interest in a university.
<i>Prospectus</i>	Refers to the official brochure or guide issued by either a university or an individual campus, detailing the courses and campus features offered.
<i>Staff</i>	Used to refer to all employees of a campus, including both academics and administrative employees (e.g. professionals in marketing, recruitment, admissions and management).
<i>University</i>	Refers to the entire academic organization in all of its locations.

## 1.8 Conclusion

This chapter sets out the structure for the chapters to come. It articulates the lived context in which the 'problem' to be researched plays out, and the academic debates which frame how the research intends to understand and engage with this problem. It advances a nested set of research questions and objectives which are qualitative in scope and thus demand a study design which draws on broad, interpretive methodologies and research strategies. The chapter proposes the guiding rationale and importance of such a study on internationalization research and practice, with the aim of offering uniquely ideographic and subjective accounts of TNHE. The chapter also serves to ringfence what it is concerned with, how it positions itself vis-à-vis other studies on the topic, and how it aims to distinguish itself. The next chapter will delve into the corpus of existing research to identify exactly where the study

is theoretically and conceptually situated and how this study contributes to a number of cross-cutting scholarly debates.

## Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

This study contributes to several, overlapping fields of social inquiry. It draws on interdisciplinary and emerging areas of research in international higher education, a field which is both enriched and made incohesive by its lack of a consistent disciplinary and methodological core (Dolby & Rahman, 2008; Kehm & Teichler, 2007). The theoretical framing of the study is based on foundational works in postcolonial and post-structural scholarship. Approaching the problem through these lenses offers novel and generative ways of examining the conduct of IBC practitioners, student imaginations and subjectivities of British education, and the power relations mediated through students' knowledge and encounters with British institutions. The empirical studies that structure this volume's conceptual framework and inform its research design subsequently fall under three thematic areas of scholarship: international student mobility and choice-making (**section 2.2**), the marketing and branding of higher education (**section 2.3**), and transnational or cross-border higher education as a form of internationalization (**section 2.4**). Each section critically assesses these studies' contributions to knowledge and identifies the research gaps that they present. The chapter then concludes with a visual conceptual map that locates this study within the cumulative contributions of these diverse research areas (**section 2.5**).

### 2.1 Theoretical Framings

This review of literature begins by establishing the theoretical lens used in this study. In distinction with the strong majority of scholarship on the topic, it situates the scope of inquiry in interpretive traditions, including critical sociology of policy, globalization, and philosophies of power. The study is concerned with the examination of discourses and practices of higher education, how they are articulated through marketing and how they are taken up by their audience, the student as consumer, in a transnational context. This type of examination demands the theoretical toolbox and language of post-structural and postcolonial thinkers, with specific attention to those that theorize relationships between knowledge

and subject formation, and the relationship between discourse, the social imagination and individual agency. As a diffuse body of theory, these works collectively offer a foundational set of analytical tools for understanding the social phenomena within this study. How these works form an epistemological lens shaping the research philosophy and methods of inquiry is explained in **chapter 3**.

### **2.1.1 The Social Imaginary in International Education**

One of the primary social agents this study centers on is the IBC student in the UAE, who in the process of choosing a university, negotiates their identities, desires, and sense-making in the global higher education marketplace. This negotiation transcends educational geographies and national borders, merging how they relate to their own nationality, that of their university, their sense of belonging as non-citizens in a third space, and belonging in a globalizing world. These identities are formed in relation to their imaginations of places, some of which are seen as distant and inaccessible to the typical IBC student.

The scholarly contributions of Appadurai (1986, 1994, 1996) offer a body of analytical language which usefully enables an understanding of these formations within the processes of globalization. His concept of social imaginaries offers an agency-focused approach to identity formation and sense-making mediated by transnational flows of mass media, ideas, technologies, finance and cultures. The negotiations between individual agency and “globally defined fields of possibility” are understood as a productive form of work, thus Appadurai’s framing of the imagination as a social practice and as a “staging ground for action” rather than a form of individual escapism (Appadurai, 1996, p. 7). His analytic is focused on the collective experiences of modernity that produce new forms of affiliation – the formation of diverse communities, nationalities, ethnicities, etc. which in turn engender an affective ensemble of senses, of belonging, understanding, possibility and action. In this regard it is trained on the micro interactions of globalization rather than its macro processes, with the analytical focus firmly on

“the everyday cultural practice through which the work of the imagination is transformed” (1996, p. 9).

As a fundamentally interpretive ontological position, it rejects prescriptive metanarratives or grand explanatory theory. This has particular relevance to international education given the tendency of scholarship in that field to draw upon essential modern binaries, particularly the center-periphery model of cultural diffusion, the global-local dichotomy, or a push-pull approach to migration. All of these framings are eschewed by Appadurai as simplifications unfit for understanding the “complex, overlapping, disjunctive order” of the “new global cultural economy” (1996, p. 32).

With a focus on the interaction between images, individuals and collective imaginations, Appadurai’s concept of the social imaginary shares the relational dynamics of subject formation used in post-structural scholarship, although he avoids the language of subjectivity owing to the constraints that the term places on the privileging of individual and collective agency. Social imaginaries are nonetheless attuned to power and possibility, with particular focus on the negotiations and contestations between and within groups of affiliation. In consonance with Foucauldian notions of power as embedded in knowledge and everyday practices, a social imaginary is comprised of the shared thinking, assumptions, norms and understandings “that make everyday practices possible, giving them sense and legitimacy” (Rizvi, 2006, p. 196 citing Taylor, 2004). These practices are channeled through images, texts, stories, mythologies, and most importantly for the global era, mass media. The representations encoded in image and text are thus a critical component of the dialogic relationship between an imagining subject and imagined object, particularly where ideas, norms and understandings are continually reified. The relationship between imagination and representations has been richly examined in the formation of social identities, notably the banal, everyday reproduction of national identity and nationalism (Anderson, 1983; Billig, 1995) or articulations of a distal, exotic ‘other’ and of difference (Said, 1978).

'Imagination as a social practice' also shares commonality with scholarship on imaginative geographies, in which understandings of the world and subsequent practices are shaped through engagement with representations of place, identities and difference (Driver, 2005). Imaginations can therefore be understood as ways of knowing and seeing the self relationally to other people and places. Where Appadurai's work emphasized the potency of transnational and international flows over that of the nation-state in the production of hybrid cultural formations, imaginative geographies is considerably more wedded to national or territorial identities, as its focus is on articulations of a distal 'other' in defined space and how actors interpret or make meaning from them (Frank, 2009). Those articulations may often be flattened representations, stereotypes or exotifications depending on actors' access to flows of information, making representation a rich source of examinable phenomena. With their focus trained on different phenomenological sites of inquiry, both disciplinary approaches nevertheless draw on the same epistemological assumptions that signification and meaning are made through engagement with discursive formations and social technologies.

These concepts of imaginations or imaginaries can also be understood as forms of embodied knowledge, laden not only with meaning and values, but with relations of power encoded within that knowledge and between subject and known object. For Foucault, social practices and representations are all derivative of texts replete with discourses, ways of knowing and talking about a referent which "systematically form the objects of which they speak" (Foucault, 1972, p. x). The imagination of distant places, things, and people is thus a product of discourses embedded in representations, images, texts and speech. These discourses shape the way a place is seen, understood, valued, and acted upon. For Said (1978), images and their attendant discourses which informed popular imaginations are instrumental in constructing and perpetuating asymmetries of power when projected onto geographical space. For him, power is concentrated not in ignorance or misperceptions of distant places but in knowledge itself, particularly as it links to institutions of authority and expertise (Driver, 2005, p. 153).

Both Foucault and Said offer important theoretical tools for delineating the functions of power/knowledge in objectified representations and enable an understanding of how systems of value are transmitted, and for Said, maintained in spite of global flows of institutions, ideas, people and commodities. Said's analysis of coloniality is not incidental here, as Appadurai too observed that globalization is as much an extension of "the earlier logics of empire, trade and political dominion" typified by "relations of disjuncture" (1999, pp. 229, 231). Globalization itself is thus an expression of history, grounded in power asymmetries which dictate relations of governing/governed, exchange and consumption patterns, and systems of value. This has important implications for consumption of goods and services exchanged on contemporary markets, notably educational services, given the unequal terrain and historically intricately shaped relations which shape which forms of education are not only desired, but seen as legitimate and having value. For higher education, this 'knowledge' is inscribed in state and institutional practices (e.g. which degree forms are promulgated and imbued with value), in bodies (who is and is not associated with expertise), and in the everyday practices of employers, degree-seekers, policymakers and others who exercise value judgments through their practices.

International education is implicated here in the cultivation of student imaginations (the mechanics of which are discussed further in **section 2.2** on student choice-making and **section 2.3** on marketing and nation branding) in the way representations of countries, institutions, histories, and cultures are mobilized to depict idealized study experiences that respond to students' desires (Collins, Sidhu, Lewis, & Yeoh, 2014; Sidhu, 2006). Just as orientalist scholarship was to Said a way of knowing and governing in the colonial project, present-day postcolonial institutions like the British Council operate promotional campaigns that facilitate knowing the UK and its universities through selected imagery signifying its proud imperial past and a globally relevant present (Madge et al., 2009; Sidhu, 2006). The social technologies employed in international education marketing are one component of a broad ensemble of both discourses and practices which inform student imaginations of desired study destinations. Students



are therefore simultaneously the subjects of educational marketing and the object which is formed through its representations. Research on the imaginations of international students implicates both the coordinated representations of education industries and the broader collective narratives that are socially reproduced among peers (Beech, 2014, 2015; Gargano, 2012; Rizvi, 2011; Sidhu & Dall'Alba, 2012), making students “the perfect candidates to explore their imaginative geographies” (Beech, 2014, p. 172).

### **2.1.2 Students as Imaginative Agents**

As imaginative agents tasked with navigating a now thoroughly global field of educational pathways, international students are theorized as complex, hybrid actors with multiple, transitory identities (Raghuram, 2013) while being simultaneously construed as choice-making consumers of education as a commodity (M. Molesworth et al., 2011). While domestic students across national higher education systems must also navigate a landscape of choices and technologies designed to govern those choices (e.g. market mechanisms of branding, institutional rankings, differential fees, etc.), it is migratory students where imaginations of place – both a destination country and its universities – are most germane. Granted there are historical, colonial elements to the shape and function of domestic higher education systems across much of the world (Altbach & Selveratnam, 1989; Samoff & Carrol, 2003), international students must cross geographical borders, physically or virtually, and therefore enact a form of agency, however circumscribed, informed by their imaginations of places<sup>5</sup> which are typically remote yet indirectly known through popular representations, entwined histories, and social networks. Their participation, unlike domestic students, has the added intersubjective elements of negotiating ‘receiving’ countries (mostly Western, former colonial powers), migration regimes, unfamiliar

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<sup>5</sup> This is not to say that domestic (non-international) students are not also guided by popular imaginations of institutions, their desires and range of choices; however with international students there is an analytical layer of inter-territoriality to the examination of the subject, object and intermediary representations which makes their enactments of choice more generative for inducing theory.

pedagogies, among other affective challenges experienced within the international dimension which powerfully shape their subjectivities (Madge et al., 2009; S. Robertson, 2015).

As higher education constitutes a non- or post-compulsory service sought in an increasingly global marketplace, international students' complexities are flattened by the dominance of market discourses framing students as consumers (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2006; M. Molesworth, Nixon, & Scullion, 2009). The collective practices of international student recruitment contribute to 'erasures' of students' complexities and agencies, negating their roles as anything beyond itinerant consumers of educational experiences (Madge et al., 2009, p. 41). Within this narrow framing, student agency is reduced to forms of 'choice', echoing Appadurai's sentiment that within global commodity flows, the "real seat of agency" lies with the producers, and that against the technologies of mass marketing, "the consumer is consistently helped to believe that he or she is an actor, where in fact he or she is at best a chooser" (1996, p. 42). Nonetheless, while remaining guarded against notions of 'free' agents, he counters that "where there is consumption there is pleasure, and where there is pleasure there is agency" (p. 7). Appadurai was not speaking with particular reference to students or international education, but it applies with equal measure here in suggesting that students' agential navigation of choice is a process of sense- and meaning-making, and one rich with negotiation between student agents and collective social imaginations shaping what is seen as possible or desirable. Even where students are reduced to 'choosers' (as much of the literature on student choice-making implies), there is much to engage with analytically and empirically in how choices are socially formed, circumscribed, and made contingent by time and place (where, for example, one's choice impacts another's by virtue of finite spaces, material limitations, social influence, etc.).

National higher education sectors and individual universities are also implicated in stimulating student flows, sculpting possibility through their policymaking, marketing and other governmental practices that

create and consolidate legitimacy, authority and value in higher education (Blanco Ramírez, 2016; Marginson, 2006; Sidhu, 2006). As sites of internationalization policymaking, universities forge new relationships with ‘sending countries’, international students, and with the academics charged with their teaching, in essence forming policy subjects governed by various initiatives internal to the institution (targeted recruitment, diversity agendas, cultural diplomacy aims) and external (educational export industry steerage, national student recruitment drives, visa and migration regimes). The technologies of policymaking in higher education through which subjects govern themselves and others – the practices of managing inter-institutional competition agendas, financialization, and market performativity – constitute a ‘regime of truth’ in Foucauldian terms, delimiting “the possibilities [actors] have for thinking ‘otherwise’” (Ball, 1993, p. 14). However research in policy anthropology and sociology reminds that every local enactment of policy (the inverse of what Appadurai refers to at the transnational level as ‘policyscapes’) is comprised of diffuse actors whose sense-making and contestations provide the spaces of possibility and resistance within a policy imaginary (Shore & Wright, 2011). As subjects of university internationalization agendas, international students and academics embody and negotiate the discourses and practices that collectively inform a university’s recruitment policy or an international branch campus, including its aims and targets, its marketing, its assertion of an institutional brand identity, among others (see Nielsen, 2011 for application of this critique to fee-paying students). Within this interpretivist approach, policy actors (in this case students, staff and external audiences) and their understandings of institutional directives are privileged over the policy text itself. This approach to policy illuminates the contingent and co-constitutive relationships between policy actors and their institutions, highlighting the need to examine both relationally in tandem with each other.

### **2.1.3 Regimes of Value and the Cultivation of Desire in Higher Education**

Further to the formation of identities or subjects under university policymaking, the practices of marketing (further explored in **section 2.3**) are also pivotal to the construction of market subjects and

the governance of 'value'. University marketing practices aim to modify and shape perceptions of an institution, usually through the deployment of various images and language that depict an institution as legitimate, influential, high quality or prestigious, among other positive and desirable descriptors (Haywood, Jenkins, & Molesworth, 2011; Sauntson & Morrish, 2011). The technologies of value construction in higher education – university rankings, mimetic traditions and branding, accreditations by authoritative bodies, employment outcomes, etc. – are mobilized to present a coherent positive image of value and resonate with collective imaginations of what is or is not desirable in an institution (Chapleo, 2011; Hazelkorn, 2014; Lowrie, 2008; Varman, Saha, & Skålén, 2011). These practices and common understandings partially constitute what Appadurai (1986) conceptually frames as a 'regime of value', wherein value is "socially constructed through cultural and economic processes, creating a logic of exchange and worth that can vary in its spatial extensiveness" (Crossley & Picard, 2014, p. 201). International higher education as a commodified form powerfully illustrates the ways in which a value regime transcends cultural and spatial boundaries, linking together diverse and geographically distant actors through participation in and consumption of a particular educational form. As with any governmental regime, value is always heterogeneous, as "the degree of value coherence may be highly variable from situation to situation" (Appadurai, 1986, p. 15). Universities themselves therefore play a large role in governing their value through their marketing, although such activities constitute only one part of the value system. They are also part of a wider regime which includes national elements such as promotional branding across the national education sector (a "higher education export industry" – Askehave, 2007, p. 739), nation branding, national cultural attributes, and global familiarity resulting from colonial legacies and post-colonial institutional ties (Lomer, Papatsiba, & Naidoo, 2016; Sidhu, 2002, 2006; Varman et al., 2011).

At the global and transnational level are other disciplinary components of value production, including the globally convergent practices of universities in defining and measuring quality (Marginson, 2006). An

obsessive focus on prestige and reputation among most universities has led to the adoption of systems of quantification and comparison (Power, Scheytt, Soin, & Sahlin, 2009), enabling international as well as intranational competition for indicators of quality under a shared set of metrics. The most well-known among these, the international rankings or league tables, take a set of quantifiable conditions to produce a highly reductive value indicator. No better example demonstrates the regime of truth in the way universities and academics re-prioritize their outputs to strategically speak to particular metrics which improve university standing vis-à-vis other institutions. Importantly, academics are compelled to participate through evaluative technologies governing their conduct (promotions and disciplinary criteria), and universities are virtually obligated to participate for fear of losing their positions and the resources that attend to them (Morrissey, 2015; Sauder & Espeland, 2009; Shore, 2008). As rankings have the effect of reflecting and distinguishing elite and non-elite institutions, there is the well-documented effect of emulation, where mass, non-elite universities mimic the practices and positioning of elite institutions. This is done by adapting a common lexicon ('world-class', 'global', 'top-ranking'), by streamlining governance and resources to prioritize research production, and through strategic reinvention to dislocate from a regional or local orientation to rebrand as one of a placeless global institution (Aula & Tienari, 2011; Marginson, 2010; Ng, 2014; Sauntson & Morrish, 2011). Rankings are converted into expressions of value when channeled to prospective students through marketing as indicators of academic rigor and prestige.

Studies on the relationships between elite institutions and elitism-seeking students trace the processes of conversion and uptake of value from institution to degree, typically using variations of Bourdieu's capitals framework to analyze universities as sites of production and consumption of symbolic and cultural capitals (Brooks & Waters, 2011; Lomer et al., 2016; Vavrus & Pekol, 2015). The material conversion of academic value into economic value – employability and access to elite jobs, matriculation to further studies at elite institutions, cultivation of pivotal social networks, and increased recognition by

migration regimes – is consecrated in the act of conferring a degree, which in essence confers upon the holder those same expressions of value (Ong, 1999). Importantly there are iterative elements to every value regime, reinforcing and reifying the ‘truths’ produced through the processes of value production (Appadurai, 1986). Funding bodies, for example, may take into consideration university rankings or the value of previous degrees in determining grant and scholarship recipients, and some rankings include in their formulae the number of graduates from a given university who go on to receive internationally prestigious awards such as the Nobel Prize.

As the brief exploration of value production above illustrates, regimes of value are loosely defined and expansive, scaling up from the micro-practices of individuals and institutions to the broader macro-processes of globalization (the various ‘scapes’ articulated in Appadurai, 1996). As a theoretical and conceptual device, its utility is enhanced by postcolonial scholarship which applies a governmentality analytic to the technologies and rationalities of international higher education (Sidhu, 2009; Sidhu & Dall’Alba, 2012) and links its mostly unidirectional flows of students in the present to the governing logics of a colonial past (J. Matthews & Sidhu, 2005; Rizvi, 2009, 2011). This approach challenges the self-evident and pre-determined nature of globalization, and aims to illuminate the processes of cultural domination that shape contemporary social, political, cultural and economic practices (Rizvi, 2009). These authors theorize international students’ contemporary perceptions of value as historically contingent, and their mobility pathways as circumscribed by situated imaginings of what is possible and desirable.

The position advanced by these scholars therefore argues that, rather than institutions having a universalist and self-evident value, it is that situated knowledge of international higher education subjectivities which is *productive* of a desire to become and “lead an ‘imagined’ life” (Koehne, 2006, p. 255). Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari (1987), Collins et al (2014) theorize this desire as not an

individual influence of choice but rather “a force that is socially generated” (p. 664) and not directly focused on an object or outcome, but what that object or outcome expresses. In the context of student mobility, they argue desire is not the international degree itself but rather “what it expresses in terms of the value of overseas education socially, culturally, educationally, and in terms of future trajectories” (p. 664). Furthermore, they argue that desire is inseparable from imagination in that the two work together to bring students towards international degrees and their expressions. In keeping with a productive understanding of power, their conceptualization of desire is attentive to its potential to transform, to enable one’s becoming, and “to escape natural, cultural, or governmental limitations on the body”, making it a force that engineers difference through its projections (Collins et al., 2014). These three elements of desire are critical to understanding not only how value regimes work and produce international students, but also how student ‘choice’ is constructed and constrained by the homogenizing effects of collective imaginations and their historical contingencies.

This section encapsulated the key epistemic positions and theoretical contributions guiding this study, looking at the productive working of the social imagination and power in students of international higher education. It framed the key issue of agency as a disciplinary difference between agent-centric theorizations such as Appadurai’s social imaginaries, analogous work on imaginative geographies and anthropologies of policy as a departure from the more deterministic post-structural work on discourse, subjectivity and governmentality. Both traditions nevertheless proffer a highly generative body of conceptual language for theorizing international students and globalizing universities. By drawing on postcolonial scholarship which privileges historical contingencies and relational, subjective accounts, this section has set the study in an interpretivist light, privileging approaches which speak to shared or collective experiences of the various global flows (of media, of technology, etc.). Embedded in these flows are the regimes of value which are both historically contingent and differently situated in time and space, in this case shaping the forms of education which are valuable and desirable. Now this chapter

pivots to the empirical literature starting with research on 'choice' and how choices are constructed individually and collectively.

## **2.2 International Students: Between Desiring Subjects and Strategic Agents**

While this study is not solely focused on student choice-making, the literature on this subset of international student research is useful for theorizing how students mobilize perceptions of value and desires. The literature on international student choice-making pairs closely with research on international student mobility, which examines the structural conditions and constraints on choice. There is also a close relationship between scholarship on choice-making and literature on university marketing practices, as the two operate in tandem. Studies from marketing and management disciplines isolate supply-side (i.e. university practices, discussed in **section 2.3**) and demand-side (i.e. students and consumers) research, typically focusing on only one of these aspects. Scholarship in critical social sciences are more likely to analyze the two co-constitutively, taking a relational approach to theorizing the formation of student subjectivities under a set of marketing practices. The debates and conceptual tools both bodies of literature proffer are useful for conceptualizing student choice-making at the individual level and patterns of collective mobility at the international level. The structures or discourses that govern mobility play out at various levels, and are therefore key to theorizing notions of choice as individual and social phenomena.

### **2.2.1 Choice and Choice-Making**

Unlike most secondary schooling, post-compulsory education is elective and therefore attends to a body of literature saturated with notions of choice. Tertiary education is highly heterogeneous in its breadth of institutional forms, qualifications, and modes of learning, with greater geographic distances also factoring into calculations. This framing is therefore inherently agent-centric with an onus on individual (students and parents) cognition and action within a structured range of known or knowable choices. As



the majority of student choice literature dating back to the 1980s demonstrates, such a framing lends itself to rational economic lenses where autonomous agency is assumed but framed as consumer agency within a market paradigm of university choice (Baldwin & James, 2000; Guilbault, 2016). These studies adopt managerial frameworks borrowed mainly from business and organizational studies for theorizing how students act upon preferences and access information in their process of selecting universities (e.g. Maringe, 2006; Soutar & Turner, 2002). Whilst they reflect and consolidate the dominant transactional view of students and higher education, these works rightly point to the decades of market-based policies which transformed the logics governing universities and the discourses changing how society sees and engages with higher education, which is particularly pronounced in UK and Australia.

In contrast to national or domestic higher education, the international education market is often characterized as resembling a 'normal' classical market as it faces fewer regulatory constraints (Foskett, 2011), and this distinction is reflected in the managerial literature on international student choice. The majority of these studies frame international students as savvy consumers of foreign educational services in a global market and as actors practicing economic agency through a knowable universal rationality (Collins et al., 2014). The conceptual language used inherently privileges the international student as an individual agent and higher education as a transactional service, which reduces their complexities and precludes a focus on the process and changes within the dynamic field of international education (Madge, Raghuram, & Noxolo, 2014).

Most studies on choice-making, especially in the early literature, are quantitative drawing on large student mobility data sets, and are therefore used in establishing descriptive models of choice-making parameters. As the literature evolved, empirical studies conceptualizing choice-making through explanatory models and marketing language increased, including international students' perceptions,

formation of images, motivations, or attitudes and norms (Binsardi & Ekwulugo, 2003; Chen & Zimitat, 2006; Maringe & Carter, 2007; Pimpa, 2005; Wilkins, Balakrishnan, & Huisman, 2011; Wilkins & Huisman, 2015). These models theorized difference within and between particular populations of students while also modelling the features and practices of 'destination' countries and their institutions (see Wilkins et al., 2011 for extensive list). The individual and structural context in which these choice preferences operate, framed as 'push-pull factors', were mainstreamed in large multi-country studies by McMahon (1992) and Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) which sought to conceptualize international student destination choice as a combination of economic and social factors. Studies using this framework importantly identify key factors in mobility, including cost, environment, familiarity of destination, geographic proximity, the role of parents, social networks, and access to information used to make determinations. Works that draw on this model take cultural norms and other factors as static, structural determinants of choice and are concerned with how they shape decisions rather than how such norms are formed. They also approach mobility at an aggregate level which obscures the hybridity and complexity of individual student agency. While they explain individual choices, they describe student flows without a deeper interrogation of the values and epistemic orientations underpinning them. The 'push-pull' framework nonetheless dominates management-based empirical scholarship on international student choice-making and its conceptual language, as it provides a straightforward and accessible framework for capturing the phenomenon, often in service of enhancing (rather than critiquing) university practices.

Despite an extensive body of research on international student experience, cultural adaptation and post-hoc perceptions of institutions, there appears to be considerably fewer studies that look ideographically at student decision-making processes and link their choices to specific institutions or practices. Maringe and Carter (2007) provide a five stage model of the international student decision-making process from assessing needs, iterative stages of information gathering and evaluation, and ultimately enrollment.

Their model, however, draws on generic models of consumer purchase behavior to examine African students' engagement with UK higher education. With respect to the information gathering stages in this model, several studies look at how students access, interpret and use information to shape their choices, including interpersonal (recommendations from friends and family, teachers, social media), marketer controlled (university websites, leaflets/brochures, guides/prospectuses, promotional events, campus visits, recruiters), and third-party (media coverage, independent websites, secondary school counsellors) sources (Abubakar, Shanka, & Muuka, 2010; Binsardi & Ekwulugo, 2003; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Shanka, Quintal, & Taylor, 2005; Wilkins & Huisman, 2015). While their models identify which sources were most utilized, they assume to a degree that marketing practices have homogenizing effects on individuals across contexts, minimizing individual complexities and sociocultural differences in how higher education is discursively formed and variously situated across time and geographic space.

Critical post-structural contributions to research on international students bypass some of the analytical trappings of mainstream choice-making research; however, as they draw on vastly different conceptual language and sites of analysis, they are seldomly brought into conversation with the studies discussed above. Rather than center on how individual agency is informed and rationally exercised in particular demographic groupings, post-structuralists theorize how norms, and thus the parameters of choice, are constitutively produced by students, institutions, and the state, among others actors, either through analytics of governmentality or globalizing social imaginaries governing what higher education is for, what kind is valuable or legitimate, and how educational destinations are made desirable, etc. (Rizvi, 2006). In this tradition, choice (although such authors seldom use this term) is less a rational calculation or matter of material possibility but rather a temporally and spatially contingent set of norms and practices reflecting the broader processes of globalization (Collins et al., 2014; Raghuram, 2013). For Foucauldians (e.g. Sidhu, 2006), the range of thinkable possibilities is situated within postcolonial and neoliberal subjectivities; for anthropological theorists of globalization, such choices or calculations "are

not, however, made in a void, but within an imaginary of global conditions and possibilities” (Rizvi, 2011, p. 698). Both shift the focus away from individualist consumer agency and towards market discourses and technologies of student recruitment which position the international student as “rational, choice-exercising consumers, preoccupied with a desire for positional goods and instrumental learning” (Sidhu & Dall’Alba, 2012, p. 415). With a focus on the broader configurations of institutions, discourses and actors that make student choices possible and thinkable, they critically trace how and where (spatially, temporally) value and desire in higher education is constructed. According to this approach, flows of international students must be understood relationally as simultaneously an enactment of individual choices and expressions of globalization.

Empirical contributions to theorizing international students using a post-structural analytic aid our understanding of the negotiations that take place at the interface between student agency and the social technologies of student subject formation. These studies, however, are few and unlike the methodological consistency found in student-centric choice-making research, are dispersed across disciplines. In contrast to choice-making studies which center on the student, Collins et al (2014) and Sidhu et al (2011) explored similar thematic phenomena – choice-making processes, experiences, relationships and aspirations – but with a spatial focus on Singapore’s Global Schoolhouse project as a policy assemblage which they argue governs how international students are positioned as strategic developmental assets in the reconfiguration of the city as a knowledge hub. Crucially, they look relationally at students’ varied contestations of subject positions, taking “into account disjunctures, dissonances, and contingencies” to illustrate how the governance of student choice or mobility is complex and always incomplete (Collins et al., 2014, p. 663). Similar to Collins et al, Raghuram (2013) examines how student mobility and desire to circulate are assembled constitutively through students’ relationships to educational institutions. Raghuram argues that the effect of this relationship is incomplete and finds that students subvert subjective positionings through communicative practices –

“sharing information, ideas of what student life should be like, what makes good educational institutions” (p. 149); to be effective, on the other hand, discourses rely upon students who embrace the strategic relevance of such subjectivity, such as identifying with their institutions’ power to elevate their positional status, employability, and thus mobility. The “good international student” has a limited range of expression which is valued by institutions, to which students may also subscribe out of a desire for belonging (Koehne, 2006, p. 247). What all of these studies find is agency in students’ contestation of subject positions, where contradictory desires to become and to resist or retain identities play out against institutional or state policy to frame the ideal student for an imagined purpose. They aid our understanding of ‘choice’ by situating choices within the limits and possibilities afforded by the regulatory power of discourse(s) governing student mobility, desire, value, and aspirations.

One key conceptual area looming large in the field of international student mobility is cosmopolitanism, which is characterized as having conflicting humanistic and instrumental conceptions (Caruana, 2014). The latter conception is particularly relevant where transnational identities are informed by the market logics driving international higher education. Studies examine the accumulation of economic, social, cultural and symbolic capitals by international students as a strategic purchase of flexible citizenship (Fong, 2011; Ong, 1999) or social advantage (Brooks & Waters, 2011). Identity capital is also seen as a strategic asset of international mobility, theorized as the validation of group belonging or membership afforded by the mobilization of resources acquired through cultural knowledge and exchange (Cote & Levine, 2002). In its transnational application, identity capital can be understood as competences to negotiate otherness or “a mode of cosmopolitan positioning to forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations, which can facilitate free movement among diverse groups and contexts” (T. Kim, 2010, pp. 583–584). These capitals are thusly pivotal to understanding student mobility and choice where international higher education is perceived by students to accord transferable skillsets and assets which travel with individuals across borders. As a symbolic marker of distinction, international study enables

students to differentiate themselves from peers without appealing to traditional hierarchies of elite and non-elite university status; instead, the location of study can substitute for institutional status where it is a renowned and desirable destination (King, Skeldon, Findlay, Smith, & Geddes, 2011). This is particularly useful for theorizing the success of non-elite universities in international higher education markets, and how students equally capitalize on such universities' associations with high status places, names, histories or national educational systems. This study views cosmopolitanism in this particular light as an instrumentality of student mobility enabled by international higher education. While Pieri (2014) argues that cosmopolitanism as a cultural phenomenon is itself a governmentality where transnational identities align with dominant neoliberal values, the everyday micro-practices of international student negotiation and sense-making are particularly important in illuminating how, where, or if such values are challenged.

Putting the wide disciplinary range of studies on choice-making in conversation, what the above literature suggests is a critical difference in emphasis from students as individualist, rational decision-makers operating within fixed cultural and economic structures, and social conceptualizations of students as temporally and spatially contingent agencies which navigate and contest the governing rationalities of their macro-circumstances. The latter provides a richer understanding of policy effects as they are constituted in student mobilities, as opposed to just being 'factors' that encourage or discourage mobility (a la push-pull frameworks). All of the common pull factors which managerial approaches usefully identify can nonetheless be inverted and understood through post-structural analytics, either as governmentalities or regimes of value which steer student choices. This is certainly true for historically complex factors like prestige-seeking, perceptions of degree value, familiarity with national education systems, and strategic capital accumulation. By circumscribing what constitutes choice and what opportunities are desirable or even imaginable, they compel students to exercise their

agency within the boundaries of their social imaginaries and enact mobilities broadly construed as choices.

### **2.2.2 Structure: (Im)mobility and (Barriers to) Access**

International student mobility (ISM) is broadly concerned with patterns and drivers of student movement or migration, privileging spatial analyses of flows and macro-policy orientations. The literature usefully identifies the structural conditions or factors promulgating movement, not dissimilar to push-pull choice frameworks but with an aggregate view to choice situated within models of global supply (receiving or 'host' countries) and demand (sending or 'home' countries). Where ISM de-centers the student as individual choice-maker, the majority of studies (1) consolidate homogenizing problematics of political borders, and (2) treat contemporary mobility patterns uncritically as "temporary, invisible and not worthy of theorization beyond building simple behavioural models" (Findlay, 2011, p. 165; S. L. Robertson et al., 2012). Problematizing structure within mobility is particularly important considering that student mobility contributes to reproductions of social (dis)advantage through the obtainment of scarce, valuable Western degree capital (Waters, 2012). Some of the structuration of student mobility patterns is located within the supply side, e.g. the role of the state, national export industries and institutions (explored in **sections 2.3** and **2.4**) in globalizing inequality (Findlay, 2011), and their role is often under-examined. But the demand end of ISM research is problematically narrow in its scope, mostly attuned to mobile and relatively privileged students who migrate for degree-level education (Waters, 2012). This particular framing of students erases their complexity and makes invisible labor and family migration which is increasingly intertwined with mobility and knowledge acquisition (Raghuram, 2013). This is critical given how knowledge acquisition (consumption) and skilled labor (production) are spatially linked in knowledge economy discourses and concentrated in knowledge hubs like Singapore or Dubai. Mainstream ISM models are unfit to theorize

the foreign resident (expatriate), mobile dependents, or mobile professionals studying part-time, all of whom may constitute international students alongside other mobile identities.

With the steady growth of student mobility and international higher education, it is apparent that global demand is not being met by traditional models of higher education delivery (van der Wende, 2003). The underlying structural consideration is thusly access, or inversely, barriers to access, which are concepts borrowed from domestic higher education debates and widely absent from ISM research (Rensimer, 2016). The concept is picked up by transnational or cross-border education research, with a view to cross-border delivery as enabling local access in light of domestic higher education incapacity (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Garrett et al., 2016; Lane, 2011b). Cross-border delivery is described in these studies as providing market-based alternatives which compete on cost, quality, flexibility, or other factors which might otherwise prevent enrollment in the existing provision landscape. Despite the similarity between cross-border access issues and those affecting international student mobility, no known study has examined access comparatively. With the focus most always on policy drivers and markets in the abstract sense, there is a need for student-centered empirical work which examines how access to higher education is increased through cross-border delivery, and how cross-border access is experienced differently from those seeking higher education abroad.

The assumption that cross-border delivery resolves a lack of access by increasing supply is frequently stated yet widely unsubstantiated, as immobility or barriers to access are under-theorized in the transnational and ISM literature. Immobility is, however, an analytical framing which usefully applies to the students of both, especially in transnational educational 'hotspots' where concentrated demand fuels increases in both outbound students and inbound institutions (HE Global, 2016; V. Naidoo, 2006). Given the preponderance of market analyses in cross-border studies, cost is most frequently cited in steering choice, but not in impeding it altogether. One survey on the impacts of TNHE in the top ten host



countries (British Council & DAAD, 2014) found that TNHE programs were widely seen as an affordable alternative to travelling abroad for a degree but relatively unaffordable when compared to local non-TNHE providers. While scholarships constitute an important enabler of access to TNHE, a minority of students are fully funded by either the host country or institution (*ibid.*). What this survey does not capture is the social nature of affordability and importance of physical distance in assessing financial cost. One often-cited draw of international branch campuses is their proximity to home, enabling full-time workers and students with family commitments, as well as reducing travel expenses and time costs. The role of financial and cultural obligation to family in transnational settings has been conceptualized in relation to choice-making (Wilkins et al., 2011) and immobility (Rensimer, 2016), where geographical proximity plays a considerable role in shaping education pathways.

Information sources and migratory (visa) regimes are two further areas examined extensively in choice-making and ISM research but are rarely seen through the prism of access or inopportunity. A lack of access to impartial, up-to-date information on international and transnational educational opportunities is potentially a bigger factor in limiting possibilities than is realized. A sizeable majority of students in the British Council / DAAD (2014) survey of TNHE host countries were found to be unaware of TNHE opportunities in their own country, implicating the role of access to comprehensive educational guidance or consumer information. While the TNHE and ISM literature often refers to the importance of access to information (via marketing or third-party information sources) to inform decisions (Binsardi & Ekwulugo, 2003; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002), there is a general lack of impartial sources guiding prospective students to would-be opportunities (such as the regional or market-specific ones recommended in Rensimer, 2015). There is also no known research on how such sources increase mobility opportunities or the scale of missed opportunities resulting from an absence of guidance elsewhere, but the profile of 'education deserts' where lower income families with minimal mobility

face a reduced visibility of options (Hillman, 2016) suggests that information or the lack thereof is an important structural constraint to choice.

The costs and complications of obtaining student visas are also characterized in ISM literature as determinants of choices, centering on (in)hospitable work and post-study residency policies in major student destination countries (Verbik & Lasanowski, 2007). Such attractors are also being explored in transnational hubs (Knight, 2011, 2014). However there does not appear to be discussion on the ways in which migration regimes curtail student mobility, as in the case of refugees, impermanent diaspora or nationals of countries barred from entry due to geopolitics. Some transnational studies touch upon the international politics impeding student participation in particular countries, but these geopolitical tensions are widely seen from an institutional or market perspective focusing on damage to revenue or lost opportunities (British Council, 2012; Walker, 2014). The centrality of nationality in informing immobility from a student perspective, and thus curtailment of educational choices, is widely absent from relevant literature.

The above structural impediments to mobility, and others not reviewed here, are consequential to higher education access and choice-making as they drive demand for alternative provision. The relationship between TNHE and international inopportunity is significant as it captures unmet demand where student migration is impossible, unaffordable, or impractical. For immobile groups, the analytical frameworks of push-pull do not apply with the same relevance as access and opportunity firstly, although internal market lenses do still apply thereafter with regards to how domestic choices are made. What the focus on structure and immobility offers is an inverse of the agent-centric academic discourse of choice-making and illuminates the structural background against which choices are often circumscribed.

Bringing the two research areas together in the examination of a global higher education space like the UAE highlights how they jointly operate to structure and govern educational possibilities and outcomes on the demand or consumption side. It also exposes key gaps which this study in part aims to address. Most importantly is the minimal attention given to the interface between students and institutions in TNHE contexts, specifically the ways in which prospective students in transnational education markets like the UAE perceive international degree providers as fulfilling strategic aspirations or imagined futures and how these students enact and make sense of choices. To date only studies by one research team (Wilkins, 2013b; Wilkins et al., 2011; Wilkins & Huisman, 2015) have looked at choice-making processes of prospective IBC students in the UAE. Utilizing mainly quantitative approaches stemming from the management and marketing traditions, these studies rework the push-pull framework to an offshore context to conceptualize choice-making through the lens of individualist consumer choice. They do not, however, interrogate the deeper desires and assumptions underlying students' choices which extend beyond rational consumer calculations, nor do they critically theorize how student agencies relate to the institutional or state practices and policies governing the TNHE marketplace in the UAE. A focus on how educational possibilities are constrained or circumscribed by either discursive or material conditions would be a novel approach to theorizing choice-making broadly and in transnational contexts specifically. Given the preponderance of literature privileging transnational institutions or markets through a wide-angle policy lens, there is a clear need for student-focused ideographic research which examines how students interpret, engage with, or even embody such institutions or imagine their relationships to their institution and its country of origin. Such work needs to be sensitive to context to account for how specific actors are bound by material limitations, commitments, or immobilities and how particular forms of TNHE are imagined to enable escape or transformation of such structural limitations. There is also warrant for critical sociological analyses (a la Waters 2012 and Findlay 2011) of

the consequences of transnational institutions in reproducing social advantage through the accumulation of foreign degree capital.

This review now pivots to the supply side, and the practices thereof, to frame the contours shaping students' social imaginaries of global higher education.

### **2.3 Marketing in Higher Education**

Higher education marketing can broadly be understood as a set of practices promoting universities for the purpose of student recruitment. As they are designed to engender impressions of institutional quality, value, prestige, and other attributes, they constitute social technologies for governing consumer imaginations and choice-making behaviors. Conceptually, marketing sits between educational *markets*, or spatially embedded assemblages of policy and institutions predicated on exchanging education as a commodity, and *marketization*, the “various processes by which organisations are disassembled, monetised, repurposed and recast as economic enterprises” (Lewis & Shore, 2019, p. 12; S. L. Robertson & Komljenovic, 2016). Where markets and marketization speak to the transformations taking place within policy spaces and organizations, marketing is effectively the productive work that is done by organizations or states in service to these ends.

Literature on marketing in higher education, in general, does not address its broader conceptual relationships, but rather examines any one of many marketing practices facilitating the commodification or consumption of higher education. The dynamics and contextuality of the relationship between these concepts is problematically transposed across geographies without accounting for the context-specificity of educational markets and the nature of education across economic and social spaces. Studies which examine branding or university websites, for example, often do so without situating these practices in a given market delimited by time and space and engaged by particular actors within particular assemblages. From an educational disciplinary perspective, studies on marketing in education are at risk

of what Dale (2005) calls ‘institutional parochialism’, by which practices are analyzed in isolation of their societally specific meanings or relationships to other structures or processes. Thus without dismissing the contributions of marketing research, its capacities for generating theory are more in service to enhancing understandings of business and the management thereof, rather than theorizing processes governing the conduct of education or its outcomes. However, this study acknowledges the opposite pitfall in educational research, which is the assumption that research on educational markets and processes of marketization are inherently *education* problems to be analyzed within education disciplines (S. L. Robertson et al., 2012).

This section looks at literature on marketing in higher education as both a set of abstract practices and as processes leading to outcomes or changes within educational markets. It does so firstly at the institutional level, broadly surveying the range of practices employed by contemporary universities in service of their commercial objectives, and then secondly at the national level, where state and para-statal organizations and policies promote the export of national higher education sectors through branding campaigns. Collectively these practices constitute the technical inputs of the value regime that this chapter builds towards theorizing (conceptually illustrated in **section 2.5**).

### **2.3.1 Institutional Marketing and Branding**

The institution-level practices constituting higher education marketing evolve in tandem with processes of marketization; as universities become more commercially oriented in light of growing domestic and international competition for students, they enact strategies employed in private organizations – market segmentation, product differentiation, image assessment and promotion, brand harmonization, among others – to maintain or increase their market positions (Binsardi & Ekwulugo, 2003; Ghosh, Javalgi, & Whipple, 2008; Rindfleish, 2003). A majority of the research on these practices is described as grounded in business sector models and lacking theorization that takes into account the distinct nature of higher

education services (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2006). These practices are, to borrow the language of management research, understood as 'solutions' to identified problems stemming from the marketization of higher education (*ibid.*). Research on marketing practices in higher education outside of marketing and business management disciplines are considerably fewer but where they draw on critical sociological theories or critical methodologies they can be rewardingly reflexive and situate particular practices within broader processes of control or seduction. This study favors these contributions for their broader theorizations of the productive power in marketing; however, given the shortage of this research, it also turns to studies borrowing from management traditions to establish the scope of research in each practice explored below.

University marketing research widely frames marketing practices as communicating key organizational values to prospective student audiences as a service sector business. While this view has broadened to understand marketing as a constructive engagement with wider stakeholder audiences, at the heart of services marketing is the fundamental notion that higher education is 'people-based' and hinges on relationships with students as service customers (Mazzarol, 1998). The communicative platforms by which this relationship is mediated are understood to differently impact student choice-making depending on the needs and preferences of audiences (B. J. Gray, Fam, & Llanes, 2003; Simões & Soares, 2010). Earlier studies look at the impact of print media such as course brochures or prospectuses with a focus on how prospective students search for information and inform decisions (Gatfield, Barker, & Graham, 1999; Hesketh & Knight, 1999; Klassen, 2001). More recent studies approach websites similarly, surveying the effects of university online content and design on relationship building between universities and student audiences (Chapleo, Carrillo Durán, & Castillo Díaz, 2011; B. J. Gray et al., 2003; Klassen, 2002). What these studies appear to collectively illustrate is the progressive cultivation of institutional image and reputation management and its strategic deployment in increasingly marketized universities. These media serve as critical spaces for universities to distinguish and (re)imagine

themselves through selective narratives and representations, but as studies on institutional image and perception remind, positive images are not always assured (Kazoleas, Kim, & Anne Moffitt, 2001; Wæraas & Solbakk, 2009).

A further subset of these studies examines contemporary practices of interpersonal marketing communications, including face to face recruitment through staff or third-party agents, teachers and guidance counselors as information sources, social media, and word of mouth. These practices constitute a public relations approach to marketing, which, in contrast to market communication as advertising, seek to create positive publicity through diffused and indirect impression management (George, 2000). Studies on social media and social networking consistently point to the increased interactivity between prospective students to universities (Constantinides & Zinck Stagno, 2011; Fagerstrøm & Ghinea, 2013); the degree of interactivity varies by social medium, however, with Twitter enabling more dialogue with universities and current students, while Facebook tends to facilitate more university-provided content (Bélanger, Bali, & Longden, 2014). Single-country studies have argued that the impact of interpersonal sources and social media in particular is less influential on student choice-making than traditional marketing practices stemming directly from universities (such as the print and online media above) (Constantinides & Zinck Stagno, 2011; Simões & Soares, 2010). However, this calculus is likely to contextually vary by audience, where for example social media participation is especially high among younger demographics whose social interactions are mainly technologically mediated, or by institution type, where social media is employed in different ways. One recent study, for example, finds a significant impact of social media validation (e.g. 'likes', 'followers', etc.) on recruitment particularly in higher ranking UK universities (i.e. the Russell Group) given the increased opportunities that validation gives them to interact with prospective students (Rutter, Roper, & Lettice, 2016). Students interacting with universities is fundamentally different from information seeking as it necessitates a form of social participation in the marketing process. With the exception of face to face

recruitment, these activities constitute a participatory self-governance of imagination where the relationship between universities and students is indirect, layered, and more embedded in socially shared estimations of value. Interpersonal sources may challenge a university's exclusive control over their representation or narrative, but in exchange they enable universities flexibility to micro-target different segments within student markets in ways that traditional marketing cannot.

Research on the content of university marketing is also pivotal to understanding how practices contribute to value production and choice-making in student recruitment. One influential and widely cited study in the management literature applied a popular business management framework, the '4Ps', or price, place, promotion and product, to analyze international marketing in UK higher education (Binsardi & Ekwulugo, 2003). It found that international students' needs, and therefore concerns for marketing, concentrated in the expressions of university products (e.g. international recognition, reputation, academic quality, and facilities and services) and price (e.g. fees, potential for scholarships, and perceptions of value), with these concerns ranking higher than those of place (i.e. location in the UK). This hierarchy of marketable features corresponds with the broader literature on marketing content and, uncoincidentally, accurately describes the major emphases of contemporary university website and prospectus content. International recognition, reputation and quality are commonly signaled to audiences by foregrounding accreditation (Altbach & Knight, 2007), rankings or league tables (Jones-Devitt & Samiei, 2011), and to a lesser degree, mission statements (Sauntson & Morrish, 2011).

The textual elements in marketing are arranged and coded in particular ways to optimize their impact with international student audiences. What critical studies of higher education marketing illuminate is the shared lexical templates and visual grammars employed in marketing across national contexts, implicating a solidity of market logics governing these practices internationally. A comparative analysis of international prospectuses finds a consistent 'genre' of textual and visual conventions imitating the



rhetoric of advertising and tourism industries; these conventions consistently service discourses of students as discerning choosers and universities as customer-driven providers of “interesting and challenging university ‘experience[s]’” (Askehave, 2007, p. 739). Critical to the effectiveness of textual elements is their multimodal interplay with selective imagery which often draw on familiar tropes in higher education: the university clocktower or library as an aesthetic of heritage and erudition; the inquisitive student in white lab coat ‘doing knowledge’; the satisfied graduate in cap and gown signifying their success and bright future; or the authoritative professor as knowledgeable yet caring mentor or life coach (Blanco Ramírez, 2016; Bulotaite, 2003). Such tropes symbolically communicate the generic qualities which consumer audiences expect to find in or embody through ‘good’ universities generally. Crucially, however, they simultaneously “serve as ideological systems of representation” (Vavrus & Pekol, 2015, p. 9). Marketing representations are often raced and gendered to appeal to popular imaginations of higher education, with bodies of professors most always White and male, and students typically non-White and female (Blanco Ramírez, 2016; Papadimitriou & Blanco Ramírez, 2015). Such playing into stereotypes and imaginations is widely understood as a strategy for building or maintaining institutional legitimacy in the social judgments of constituent audiences (Bitektine, 2011). According to Blanco Ramirez (2016, p. 194), these mimetic practices result from the highly normative environment in higher education wherein “legitimacy demands remaining within the boundaries of what is considered acceptable.” The dominant representations thusly appeal to audiences’ sense of ‘normality’ in the social imagination of higher education; students may not see themselves exactly represented but the discursive logic employed in idealized representations sufficiently conform to their expectations and understandings of how higher education or successful students should look.

University brands and branding practices are also understood to contribute to the production of value, with universities spending considerable sums to engage prospective students cognitively and affectively. The marketing literature is rife with studies examining the process of ‘student-university identification’,

by which branding contributes to students' attraction to and identification with a university, resulting in shared identities and values between students and institutions (Balaji, Roy, & Sadeque, 2016; Hemsley-Brown, Melewar, Nguyen, & Wilson, 2016; Sung & Yang, 2008; Wilkins, 2013b). These studies again draw on business models and social psychology to conceptualize how students form loyalties to institutional brands in the process of choosing a university (Bennett & Ali-Choudhury, 2009; B. Nguyen, Yu, Melewar, & Hemsley-Brown, 2016) or after completing their studies (Dennis, Papagiannidis, Alamanos, & Bourlakis, 2016; N. Nguyen & LeBlanc, 2001). Another subset explores brand meaning and the spaces of slippage where universities' brand values are interpreted differently by stakeholders across space and time (Dennis et al., 2016; Wilson & Elliot, 2016). These works conceptualize the interface between students and universities as a process of cognitive and affective encounters which lead to evaluation, and ultimately, action (i.e. university selection). Despite talking about polysemy in relation to brand interpretation, however, they do not examine particular acts of branding by way of theorizing the polysemic work that practices or texts do.

There is, of course, the possibility that the complexity of universities cannot be communicated in a single reductive brand (Wæraas & Solbakk, 2009), or worse, they could just be "smoke and mirrors" (Chapleo, 2011, p. 101). Despite the oft-stated claim that branding functions to communicate to consumer audiences an organization's unique strengths and features (Balaji et al., 2016), studies across disciplinary divides point to convergent practices in the shape and substance of university branding. The ubiquity of common brand terminology, such as 'world-class' or 'top-ranked', is evidenced across institutions regardless of whether they truly meet these labels (Aula & Tienari, 2011; Ng, 2014). Underneath the superlatives are similar corporatist strategies to communicate a university's 'covenant', or implied promises with students, which commonly signal degree status, graduate employability, and academic quality (Bennett & Ali-Choudhury, 2009). Visual conformity in the development of university emblems or logos is also documented across and within higher education sectors internationally (Delmestri, Oberg,

& Drori, 2015). What these perspectives suggest is potentially a set of performative practices that do not substantively communicate information to students. This is not the same as governing student imaginations, as discursive and visual brand technologies can certainly captivate and resonate even where they are similar to those of other universities (or more likely, they captivate *because* they are similar). Analysis of university branding is therefore still relevant to the production of value and desire, just not perhaps, in light of the above, in a richly informative manner; rather, branding may be more productive of or responding to broadly held desires by students to become or fulfill an imagined future self through higher education.

While many of the studies touched upon above address marketing to international students, there is a sustained gap on analogous inquiry in transnational contexts. In contrast to marketing to individually mobile international students, the transnational arena is constituted on an entirely distinct market and educational environment from the providing institution. This introduces a separate analytical layer whereby student perceptions of institutions may be wholly different or institutional or national brands may be less recognized due to fewer previous interactions between students and universities (Wilkins, 2013b). Understanding how transnational institutions deploy their marketing and the processes by which students make sense of them – or indeed of foreign higher education – is critical. Only a small handful of marketing or branding studies engage with TNHE. Examining the “forward spillover effect of the parent brand identity” in international branch campuses, they identify contradictory pressures between, on the one hand, brand congruence (i.e. perceived identical programs, standards and organizational heritage), and on the other, local relevance and integration to establish legitimacy (Farrugia & Lane, 2012; Yuan, Liu, Luo, & Yen, 2016, p. 3074). Crucially, this process of extending reputation and establishing legitimacy is received differently by students depending on whether the university originates from the Global North or South (Chee, Butt, Wilkins, & Ong, 2016). These studies do not interrogate the branding practices themselves, however. Juusola and Rensimer (2018) examine the

discursive and symbolic legitimacy-building strategies of transnational MBA franchises, looking at how legitimacy is simultaneously extended from the home campus and locally embedded by conforming to local needs and ideals. Their study narrows in on the adaptive strategies of marketing while also prompting critical questions of how representations of elite or quality higher education travel. In line with Chee et al, it also implicates the asymmetric flows by which institutions originating from the Global North are attended by essentialized notions of superior quality and assumed legitimacy. Examining traveling market technologies and their impact in transnational education spaces is thus a timely and productive direction for cross-disciplinary work in higher education marketing research.

### **2.3.2 National Higher Education Branding**

Operating on a larger scale is the work of nation-states and national higher education industries in collectively marketing and recruiting international students. This work is driven widely by diffuse organizations representing national higher education sectors and public relations campaigns, especially in export-dominant countries like the UK and Australia, where such campaigns are also backed by national policy and ambitious growth targets for the sector. In light of the varying coherency of these policy efforts, there are two interrelated processes contributing to the governance of student imaginations: national higher education branding and nation branding. One is attuned to the collective quality and prestige of its institutions and degree values; the other to the qualities and character of the place where those collective institutions originate. Both draw heavily on imaginative geographies and are thusly mutually intertwined and inseparable from their shared spatial referents.

Nation branding as a set of practices or social technologies intended to create positive reputations or steer public imaginations of countries is a relatively new phenomenon typically employed by national governments or subsidiary agencies to enhance international political (soft power) or economic (tourism, trade, and foreign investment) agendas (Dinnie, 2015). These practices fabricate a strategic

national identity to address a perceived need or end (a la Anderson, 1983) by mobilizing a highly selective toolkit of visual representations and symbols, cultural practices, national histories or mythologies, and prominent institutions to commodify and convert symbolic resources into economic capital (Pamment, 2015). It can be used to challenge negative stereotypes, histories and discourses by reauthoring narratives, establishing official representations and making others illegitimate. This is particularly useful in illiberal states which deliver on national economic agendas by drawing on global knowledge economy discourses articulating an open and outward international orientation (Koch, 2014). Dubai is an enduring example of the use of impression management in conjunction with economic growth and global investment to engender an identity as a global city and destination for individuals wishing themselves to be and become global citizens (Haines, 2011). Singapore's 'Global Schoolhouse' project, a re-branding campaign to open its borders to transnational education investment, similarly cultivates associations of the city-state as business-friendly, innovative, and thus suitable as a place for world-leading institutions to establish international partnerships (Olds, 2007). Successful branding campaigns thus convert places into metaphors for particular (positive) qualities which lead to beneficial economic consequences. The revisioning of places like Dubai or Singapore as desirable destinations for investment, for students, or knowledge circulation also constitute instrumental political agendas for authoritarian or illiberal governments seeking to attract foreign investment without fundamentally ceding authority or territorial sovereignty.

The utility of nation branding for increasing higher education exports is evident in the close relationship between the symbolic resources of nation-states and those of its universities. As examined earlier, universities frequently draw on romanticized historical origins, aesthetics, or values as embedded in particular national systems which reflects those identities. Given the lucrative contributions of international students to national economies, there is growing academic and policy attention to the role of nation branding and increased higher education exports in either traditional educational destinations

in the Anglophone West (Lewis, 2011; Sidhu, 2006; Sidhu & Dall’Alba, 2012; Waters, 2006) or through the construction of ‘smart states’ or knowledge hubs in emerging economies (Collins et al., 2014; Knight, 2011; Olds, 2007; Stephens Balakrishnan, 2008). Lomer, Papatsiba and Naidoo (2016) broke new ground on this topic looking at the inter-dependent relationship between nation brand and national higher education brand. Their study examined how the national symbols, heritage, cultural icons and products of the UK inform the reputation of its collective higher education sector, which they find to be reductively represented by the UK’s leading elite institutions, Oxford and Cambridge. Because these institutions hold international recognition and symbolic value as ‘touchstones’ of quality, their value is transferred to the rest of the sector by association. Importantly, they find that these ascriptions of elite and high-quality education convert into economic advantage in the international labor market, thus feeding back into the reputation of the brand as reputable for employment. Their work exemplifies how nation brands constitute regimes of value which commodify (an invented or reimagined) national identity in the service of a particular end, in this case the promotion of its higher education export industry. Similar to the reauthoring of Dubai or Singapore as global spaces, there is a looping effect or virtuous circle by which international student participation strengthens the conveyed brand image as a desirable destination, which in turn begets further participation.

The organizations purposed on nation-branding, such as the British Council (explored in depth in **chapter 4**), are not necessarily new, although the social technologies and campaigns they employ in support of national educational exports are a more recent development. Sidhu’s (2002, 2006) extensive work in this area demonstrates how leading educational export industries cultivate national educational brand identities that present countries as desirable and welcoming to international students and signal their association with academic quality and tradition. These ‘micropractices’ of branding, advanced by ‘educational brokers’ and their campaigns, variously draw upon aesthetics, symbols and experiences, collectively the ‘technologies of imagineering’ (Löfgren, 2003, p. 244), to govern the imaginations and

desires of prospective international students. Similarly, postcolonial geographers interrogate the imagination-shaping technologies of nation-branding organizations like the British Council, examining how it showcases the postcolonial universality of the English language “and the value of the UK as the home of that language” to attract students to UK degree programs (Madge et al., 2009, pp. 40–41). The authors frame the British Council as an “arm of British academic imperialism which precisely locates itself in myriad countries in order to, among other things, recruit students”, although they caution against over-determining colonialism’s influence in light of a shifting global higher education landscape. Nevertheless this theoretical link between imperialism and contemporary imaginering is furthered by Beech (2014), who finds that particular students’ imaginations of the UK are powerfully shaped by colonial legacies as reflected in British Council materials and programming. She writes,

This conception of the UK as providing a superior education is in part built through current marketing campaigns and strategy, but is likewise a remnant of the UK as a powerful and colonising nation that has infused the social imaginary, influencing international and overseas students. Thus the British Council’s marketing strategies – and those of UK universities more broadly – while positioning the UK in a postcolonial context, subtly draw on a persistent imaginative geography of British imperial power. (p. 173)

These works are useful in understanding how discursive power is infused in imaginaries of place and can be used to shape international student perceptions and choices. They also show how this power is multi-scalar and articulates from the level of student embodiment, to institutions, national organizations and policy through various discourses governing desirable destinations and educational forms (Collins et al., 2014). Despite this growing area of scholarship, no known work looks at how nation branding and national education brands operate in service to transnational education in overseas markets. Such a focus would add an analytical layer of ‘home’ and ‘host’ nation brands, which presumably work in tandem to command imaginations and attract (or retain) mobile students. There is great potential for research examining how and where spatially overlapping nation brands or popular imaginations of place align or contradict each other in transnational projects like IBCs.

This section has set out a diffuse range of literature speaking to the richly-semiotic 'imagineering' work of marketing in higher education at institutional and national levels. The studies highlighted in this section each examine particular student markets or institutional practices and we cannot assume their generalizability or transferability across contexts. Collectively, however, they form a body of scholarship which contributes to critically understanding the productive power of educational marketing as a social technology. Moreover, they point to an agenda for further research on such practices in transnational contexts, as there are strikingly few studies which examine the marketing of universities or national brands in their offshore forms. The existing gap is considerable given the explicitly commercial orientations of TNHE, which often operates in competitive market environments and caters to numerous market segmentations (in terms of student nationality). This mobilization of national and institutional brand identities to govern imaginations and recruit students prompts critical questions of the marketization of universities and the changing purpose of higher education, particularly in light of globalization, to which this chapter now turns.

## **2.4 Global(izing) Higher Education**

This section sets out the big picture: the logics and policies shaping globalizing practices in higher education. Having examined the interface between institutional practices and agents above, this section grounds those practices in the dominant rationales governing and transforming higher education systems into export industries and institutions into global actors. It focuses on market-driven expansionist practices which broadly fall under the aegis of internationalization, looking at TNHE and IBCs as a subset thereof. These domains are revisited in **chapter 4** with regards to internationalization of British higher education specifically; in the following section, they are approached more broadly to situate this study within the debates on internationalization, a field saddled by its history and turned upside down in the era of TNHE.



### 2.4.1 Internationalization

The international branch campus can be considered many things – TNHE, educational export, a cross-border engagement, among others – but above all else it is a form of internationalization and an expression of globalization. These two terms, their relationship to each other, and relationship to IBCs are contested in the literature. As concepts they are useful, however, for theorizing how IBCs fit into university agendas, the purpose they are imagined to fulfill, and how they are situated in broader histories of globalizing educational forms. Where globalization is more conceptually diffuse, internationalization of higher education popularly refers to a change process by which institutions or national policies take up international dimensions in their purpose, function, or delivery of higher education (Knight, 2004). As a process defined by crossing of borders in some fashion, this definition normalizes the starting position of the internationalizing university as embedded in a national framework and constituted on borders (Scott, 1998). It is contrasted with globalization, which is generally characterized as the circumvention of national boundaries and the dissolution of territorialized space by non-state entities, bodies, knowledge, etc. (S. L. Robertson, Bonal, & Dale, 2002; Teichler, 2004). According to these framings, they are opposing processes set within a dialectical relationship: one operates through a national framework and affirms the centrality of the nation-state, while the other operates across scale to undermine it. These terms are thusly distinguished as a degree of control or evitability. Put together, they tend to frame internationalization as a strategic and deliberate response to globalization, the latter being structural or “unalterable”, and the former defined by “many choices” (Altbach & Knight, 2007, p. 291; Altbach, Reisberg, & Rumbley, 2009).

This definition of internationalization is not entirely instructive, however, for understanding grand transnational endeavors like IBCs and the global impulses that guide them. For one, it belies the dynamics of global competition informing university growth strategies. As Marginson (2006, p. 18) writes, the gap between rhetoric and reality of internationalization obfuscates the “uni-directional

student flows and asymmetrical cultural transformations” resulting from the nature of higher education as a positional good in a globally competitive market. He points out that most countries are primarily net exporters or importers of students or higher education provision, with few countries striking a balance of in- and outbound circulations. With a focus on international student circulations, Brooks and Waters (2011, p. 114) similarly assert that “internationalization is a notoriously uneven process, representing a plural landscape of opportunity for some (individuals, institutions and countries) and disadvantage for others.” Given the extent of asymmetry between net exporters like the UK or Australia and net importing countries, as well as the overtly commercial orientation of such internationalization practices, the conventional view to internationalization as a process to “cope with globalization and to reap its benefits” (Altbach & Knight, 2007, p. 291) fails to capture the existing unevenness in global student flows or the competitive dynamics shaping and distorting the terrain. Further, a view to internationalization (at the institutional or national level) as responding to globalization grossly overlooks the role of institutions and higher education systems in stimulating global flows. Internationalization agendas are thusly imbricated in the flows that they produce and are not distinct or passive beneficiaries of them.

Another critical consideration is the historical and discursive embeddedness of power in the asymmetries of contemporary global higher education. Seen through the lens of globalization as an extension of past logics of empire and global trade, the practices of internationalization necessitate ways of seeing the world as markets, opportunities, and mutually beneficial exchanges which are not distributed equally across geographic space. Rather, such practices capitalize on existing inequalities (in student mobilities, in spaces of former political dominion, or even in representations of students and places in university marketing) to fuel positional advantage and fulfill institutional aims informed by market logics. Drawing on a postcolonial analysis of internationalization, Sidhu (2006) questions the utility of a focus on superficial activities that fail to challenge these dominant international flows (of

bodies, institutions or knowledge). She argues that primarily market-driven flows critically constitute expressions of neo-imperialism in internationalization agendas, pointing to the political and historically-contingent nature of markets in earlier colonial regimes. Her analysis illuminates how internationalization is neither a benign nor apolitical process, and is strongly tied to historical and contemporary relations of power grounded in institutions and dominant representations of higher education. Vavrus and Pekol invoke a tenet of critical theory in their critique of internationalization, which similarly finds that

social practice, including the practice of internationalization of higher education, is ‘interested.’ This does not mean it is intentionally malicious or nefarious; it does mean that social practice often serves the interests of states, institutions, and actors who benefit from the status quo. (2015, p. 16)

Both of these works compel an understanding of internationalization grounded in a view to power as historically contingent and discursively embedded in practices at various scales and sites of global exchange. Both also speak to the importance of Appadurai’s notion of global flows, in which materialities, discourses and bodies in motion are in “relations of disjuncture” (1999, p. 231), traveling unequally across space through pathways which are contingent but not necessarily pre-determined. Through this lens, seeing internationalization as a diffused set of practices and technologies better enables theorizations of how, where and why universities pursue particular international agendas.

There is a wide array of literature which posit the diffuse rationales of internationalization. Many identify the overlap or contradiction between rationales, or tensions in the cooperative and competitive logics driving them; most, however, uncritically describe and taxonomize existing practices and the multi-dimensional benefits accrued across institutional and national levels. Edelstein and Douglass (2012) identify nine logics which inform seven categories of international engagement. A majority of the logics they find are comprised of market or zero-sum strategies, among them: inter-institutional competition, market access & regional integration, institutional growth and development, network

building, and demand for resources. Others similarly find that market logics drive the majority of internationalization agendas, especially where they concern delivery abroad (Turner & Robson, 2007; van der Wende, 2003). A number of these studies find that despite the driving imperative for institutional gains and growth, the realities of overcoming obstacles and upholding commitments to foreign endeavors often prove to be more costly and burdensome for universities than initially envisaged, with short-term gains in visibility outweighed by long-term marginal costs (Garrett et al., 2016; Hawawini, 2011; Wilkins & Huisman, 2012). Hawawini refers to this as the 'internationalization paradox' (p. 12), which suggests that university internationalization is so highly normed that institutions go to any expense to pursue it whether or not it can be sustained. Theorizing internationalization as a norm or impulse is potentially instructive as it takes the emphasis away from notions of institutions as strictly pursuing rational, purposive strategies designed to deliver planned outcomes. It also potentially shines light on the role of individual agency (e.g. institutional leadership) in responding to particular impulses, and where there may be disagreement between actors in justifying the particular forms pursued in an institution's international agenda (such as New York University's 'imperial presidency' under John Sexton)<sup>6</sup>.

In contrast to critical theory referenced earlier, these studies all tend to privilege the institution (in contemporary perspective) with a view to understanding 'institutional behavior' in organizational theory or to track the rapid developments observed in internationalization practices worldwide. They do not aid an understanding of where the ideas or impulses for pursuing change come from, or why specific forms of internationalization dominate in particular spaces or among particular universities, alluding to the unevenness of the global higher education terrain in historical perspective. They do not appear to address where exactly institutional logics (a la Edelstein & Douglass, 2012) are situated among key

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<sup>6</sup> Aviv, R. (September 9<sup>th</sup>, 2013). The Imperial Presidency. *The New Yorker*. Retrieved from <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2013/09/09/the-imperial-presidency>

decisionmakers or engage with how internationalization agendas, particularly those with grand projects such as IBCs, are imbued with meaning and are imagined by university leadership to fulfill a particular function or strategy and speak to a particularly dominant logic. What is missing in this literature is an examination of how internationalization is pursued out of a perceived need by university leaders to compete for resources or prestige, and where and what forms are perceived to deliver these objectives. Such a focus would aid a deeper understanding of how market or competition discourses are diffused and deployed across institutions and articulate across scales from policies to individuals.

#### **2.4.2 Transnational (Higher) Education**

Understanding how the broader literature on internationalization frames transnational higher education is important as it situates TNHE practices in the more theoretical debates that that literature offers. This contrasts with the incipient literature on TNHE, which is widely seen as under-researched and thus under-theorized, and beset by conflicting terminology<sup>7</sup> and definitions (Knight, 2016; Kosmützky & Putty, 2016). Unlike other forms of internationalization, TNHE is overwhelmingly characterized as commercial ‘opportunities’ or revenue-seeking practices for sending institutions, and as an educational capacity-building strategy and human capital magnet for host national economies (British Council, 2013; Healey & Michael, 2014; V. Naidoo, 2010; Vincent-Lancrin, 2007). The strongly commercial tack of TNHE discourse is evidenced in the ways its impact is consistently measured in financial terms. Studies generally cite the net value of the global education market and the share of this figure which constitutes overseas educational services as a national commercial export (see HE Global, 2016; or V. Naidoo, 2009, for example). The rapid growth of TNHE is attributed to the increasing presence of a trade rationale in

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<sup>7</sup> Among them, transnational, cross-border, borderless, offshore, and ‘internationalization abroad’ feature most prominently in the literature. While they originated with different conceptual emphases and were championed by different organizations, they are coalescing around transnational education or TNHE as the umbrella term for a range of activities which concern “the mobility of an education program or higher education institution (HEI)/provider between countries” (Knight, 2016, p. 36). Their differences do not appear to hold any bearing on the conceptualization of TNHE practices in this study.

international higher education leading to the emergence of a global education industry (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002); it is also frequently described as a necessary pursuit in light of a general decline in state funding for higher education across major exporting countries (Altbach & Knight, 2007). Studies focused on the scale and nature of the global TNHE trade often draw on the World Trade Organization's General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) to conceptualize the differing modes of delivery (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Healey & Bordogna, 2014; Healey & Michael, 2014; V. Naidoo, 2009), although the majority of TNHE falls into Mode 3 (Commercial presence) within that framework (e.g. IBCs, franchises, and other partnerships). The implication of GATS as the impetus for TNHE strongly suggests the primacy of commercial interest, or at the very least, a common understanding of the phenomenon through a lens of marketization and competition. Writing for UNESCO, Tilak critiques the normalization of trade discourse in TNHE practice and research, finding that

Many current developments could and will take place both within and outside the strict framework of the GATS, but the spirit of the GATS – trade in education – seems to be all-pervasive, with only a few exceptions. ... The GATS adds to the problems [inherent in commercial internationalization], as it changes the very perspective on and approach to the development of higher education, and formalizes and legalizes this new perspective in which education is treated as a commodity and traded internationally. (2011, p. 17)

As TNHE research keenly points out, TNHE encompasses a range of activities which are continuously diversifying and growing in sheer scale (Healey & Michael, 2014; V. Naidoo, 2009). TNHE ranges from, on one hand, Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), online and distance learning from traditional higher education providers, to multinational education corporations like Pearson Education and the Apollo Education Group. There are also collaborative partnerships or overseas extensions which do not neatly conform to existing TNHE typologies, like new universities comprised of international partners (e.g. British University in Dubai) or federated institutions without one definitive home campus (e.g. Iran's Islamic Azad University) (Knight, 2016; Wilkins & Rumbley, 2018). As Naidoo (2009) demonstrates, the elusive definitions and typologies is only part of the problem of capturing the full scope of global TNHE. The bigger hurdle is the lack of comprehensive data on transnational activities worldwide, including

new, non-traditional and non-degree providers. While these forms of provision are outside the scope of most studies, they are relevant to traditional universities insofar as they serve as competition in a global education market.

The majority of TNHE provision, and for now the majority of research on TNHE, attends to the four forms recognized as distinct and significant by national regulatory bodies and literature: distance learning, franchising, program validation, and IBCs (Bennell & Pearce, 2003; Knight, 2007). Their differences are conceptualized by Healey (2015b) by the degree of risk that they pose to the sending institution, mainly in terms of reputational damage or financial loss in the event of market failure. Finding that the four dominant forms of TNHE do not conform to discrete risk profiles, he argues that risk in TNHE is multi-dimensional and varies by the structure, scope and goals of each partnership. On one hand this challenges the popular understanding of IBCs as the riskiest form of TNHE owing to their high profile and cost. At the same time it casts institutions with large or ambitious TNHE portfolios as particularly prone to and comfortable with risk, which Wilkins and Huisman (2012) argue typifies universities facing loss situations in their home country environment (such as declining state appropriation).

The major TNHE exporting countries are often identified as the US, UK, and Australia, as they dominate global market share in student numbers, partnerships, and revenues. What is less clear (in part because of the changing landscape of TNHE) is which types of institutions are most TNHE-active. With several of the key drivers for institutions being access to new sources of revenue and increased international profile (Healey, 2013; McBurnie & Ziguras, 2001), TNHE conceivably appeals to institutions with expansionist ambitions in domestic policy environments where access to new growth opportunities is limited. Marginson (2006) devises a global typology of market segmentation in higher education, characterizing institutions into five segments varying by their profile, prestige, function and student

constituency in the global market. Segment 1 describes typical ‘world-class’ universities driven by prestige, underpinned by reputation for research and degree value. He finds that Segment 1 institutions are more likely to see internationalization (either at home or abroad) as foreign aid or cultural exchange than a revenue opportunity. As their primary business is national position competition and exclusivity, foreign students are selected on an academic and social basis. On the other hand, national research universities in dominant exporting countries (Segment 2) and lesser status teaching-focused universities from those same countries (Segment 3) are more prone to commercializing delivery of their teaching functions in the global market. As they are driven by revenue over status (excepting for Segment 2 institutions which command prestige in the domestic market), the global profile of their brand is subsumed by the reputation of the national system to which they are part. In other words, and returning to the choice-making research here, their less-known name on the global stage does not limit or impact their overseas success as they do not trade on their institutional reputation<sup>8</sup>. Despite the commercial interest undergirding most of these institutions’ TNHE agendas, Wilkins and Huisman (2012) remind that there is also a normative dimension which partly explains which countries and institutions participate in TNHE. Mindful of the optics of an explicit market orientation, some institutions may approach a partnership under a premise of capacity-building or be discouraged from partnering altogether. Such norms, however, are insufficient in shaping broader TNHE patterns and pale in comparison to the effect of entrepreneurial norms in governing institutional leadership (or for that matter, norms in favor of internationalization, as per Hawawini, 2011, discussed earlier).

The other piece of the equation in TNHE is the demand side, or perceived ‘opportunities’ for TNHE providers. Some of the empirical attempts at capturing the broader scale of TNHE (HE Global, 2016 for UK; Naidoo, 2009 for global) suggest that virtually every country, including dominant exporters,

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<sup>8</sup> Although this differs in TNHE hubs where institutions from the same national brand are put in competition with each other.



consume foreign higher education in some form; however, for the most part, demand is concentrated in regions with relative disparity between rising demand for tertiary education and limited delivery capacity. These regions typically include East, South and Southeast Asia, and the Arabian Gulf, as well as other single-country 'markets'. TNHE, particularly in smaller partnerships and from less reputable degree providers, is often characterized as 'demand-absorbing' (Altbach et al., 2009); partnerships offering more reputable and diverse qualifications are meanwhile characterized as contributing to the retention of human capital and stemming the outbound flows of skilled labor (McBurnie & Ziguras, 2001; Vincent-Lancrin, 2011). Where TNHE is concentrated in skilled migration or knowledge hubs, IBCs in particular are seen as strategic magnets for attracting students, thus creating demand while also absorbing existing demand (Knight, 2014; Lane, 2011b). For the purpose of this study, one conceptual point regarding student demand follows. Frequently asked of TNHE but rarely directly addressed is the question of whether TNHE activities cannibalize international student markets by recruiting students to study offshore rather than travel abroad. Earlier literature appears to speculate without substantiation that rapid TNHE growth does exactly this (V. Naidoo, 2009; OBHE, 2005); however, this position has been rebutted by more recent studies finding that TNHE caters to different markets of students, many of whom are immobile and unable to afford traveling for international study (British Council & DAAD, 2014; Levatino, 2017; Wilkins et al., 2011). Larger IBCs designed to attract high fee-paying and academically advantaged students may attract those who would otherwise study abroad (Healey, 2016), but in most cases the diversity of TNHE is intended to capture existing demand and is seen by institutions as a non-zero-sum practice for expanding market access. This is all dependent, of course, on sustained demand for foreign degrees, which varies over time, across contexts, and with the shifting dynamics of new providers and forms of provision.

### 2.4.3 International Branch Campuses

International branch campuses sit within the above debates as a subset of TNHE and derivative of internationalization abroad. They are governed by the same logics of revenue-seeking and competition, but as high-profile, high-investment, and high-risk projects, they also attract more fascination and scrutiny from policymakers and higher education practitioners. There is slightly more research dedicated to this form of TNHE, although much of it concentrates in the practice-based 'grey literature'. The lack of substantive academic research on IBCs is owed to their newness as a phenomenon, the tendency for IBCs to adhere to commercial secrecy, their remote locations and local hiring practices (Healey, 2016). The majority of academic work on IBCs to date has focused on their rationales and policy drivers (Khodr, 2011; Knight, 2012; Lane, 2010b), models of campuses (Hawawini, 2011; Lane & Kinser, 2013), compatibility with local systems (Farrugia, 2012; Lane & Kinser, 2011; Miller-Idriss & Hanauer, 2011), and staffing and management issues (Clarke, 2015; Healey, 2016; Kinser & Lane, 2014). Such studies are helpful in contextualizing the emergence of IBCs, their process of embedding in overseas settings, and the tensions that play out between disparate actors, institutions and the home and host country policies. The two strands of IBC research relevant to this study are those that illuminate the competitive commercialization dimension of IBC expansion and the limited empirical work that examines embodied experiences within them.

The precise definition of an IBC is hotly debated in IBC literature. With slight variations in the definitions proffered by relevant research bodies, the number of IBCs worldwide varies, although the IBC landscape is arguably changing as quickly as do attempts to conceptualize them. Early definitions were leaner, with references to "some physical presence" and "award[ing] at least one degree" allowing for a degree of ambiguity between IBCs, single-degree franchises and distance/tutoring hybrid models. A 2016 major collaboration between the OBHE and C-BERT refined earlier definitions by outlining four essential criteria; accordingly, all IBCs must have some degree of investment from the sending institution or home

campus, acknowledgment of its relationship with the home campus through a shared name or explicit representation, a complete onsite program of study, and resulting in a degree issued from the home campus institution (Garrett et al., 2016). Despite their comprehensive report, support for a more maximal definition appears to be building, with Wilkins and Rumbley (2018, p. 14) adding that “the branch has basic infrastructure such as a library, an open access computer lab and dining facilities, and, overall, students at the branch have a similar student experience to students at the home campus.” The authors acknowledge the challenge of capturing IBC diversity in a single definition; however, their stringent addition of specific facilities and a ‘similar student experience’ element raises serious questions of its applicability to the reality of most IBCs, which are usually a fraction of their home campus in size and range of facilities. In Dubai, for example, IBCs typically share most of their non-teaching facilities with other IBCs until student enrollment numbers reach a sustainable figure, allowing institutions to gradually phase in their investment. Given the established relationship between the quality of campus environment and student experience in ‘traditional’ universities (Hendershott, Wright, & Henderson, 1992; Price, Matzdorf, Smith, & Agahi, 2003), this element will likely lead to challenges from IBC researchers and practitioners alike.

Looking beyond definitions, however, is productive for theorizing what IBCs actually are or do. Studies critically demonstrate how public universities are private entities in their IBC form and behave as de-facto private institutions in their ‘host’ context (E. H. Kim & Zhu, 2010; Lane & Kinser, 2006). In some setups they may contribute to public policy goals of the host state (Lane & Kinser, 2011), but more often their commercial orientations sit in tension with state objectives as commercial IBCs supplement supply rather than build local capacity (Kinser & Lane, 2013; Owens & Lane, 2014; Wilkins, 2011). With a minority of notable exceptions (e.g. the state-funded flagship IBCs in Abu Dhabi or Qatar), variations of the commercial subsidiary model constitute the majority of IBCs worldwide (Garrett et al., 2016). As it requires a business model responsive to local market demand and a viable strategy to remain financially

solvent, these IBCs are mainly teaching institutions and offer only degree programs with sufficient local demand. This plays into home campus critiques of internationalization agendas which, despite claims to enabling reciprocal and rich global learning opportunities for students at both the home and branch campuses, seem opportunistic and of limited ambition. Hawawini (2011) argues that almost all IBCs fall into 'missionary' models which aim to "teach the world what it knows" (p. 25). As these IBCs allow students and staff to experience the world without compromising institutional identity, he contends that their claims to being 'global' institutions are merely exercises in institutional branding.

IBCs are often deeply embedded in circuits of capital and private enterprise, closely resembling the offshore operations of multinational companies. The use of private investment is commonplace, particularly in the provision of the physical infrastructure (Lane & Kinser, 2013), operations (Ziguras & McBurnie, 2011) and co-located research parks (Knight, 2011). The host state facilitates the flow of capital by housing IBCs in educational 'free zones' which enable the skirting of local educational and financial regulations (Looser, 2012). These zones are known to create overlapping and sometimes contradictory quality assurance mechanisms, often stretching accountability across multiple regulatory agencies (Farrugia, 2012; Lane, 2010a; Rawazik & Carroll, 2009). With many IBCs beholden to local licensure and regulations, accountable to diverse investors and stakeholders, legally incorporated as limited companies, and subject to local hiring and management practices, the home university is effectively a "minority shareholder in a private offshore company" (Healey, 2014, p. 22). This role of IBCs (or internationalization broadly) in circulating capital is often under-emphasized in higher education literature and presents opportunities for researching institutional practices or actor-network analyses at the nexus of local policymaking, private investment and university offshoring.

With much of the IBC corpus addressing the drivers or consequences of policy or organizational models, there is a critical dearth of scholarship attending to the subjective experiences of IBCs, particularly those

of students and with a view to learning and employment outcomes<sup>9</sup> or future opportunities (Kosmützky & Putty, 2016). Several recent contributions in management studies examine the experiences and difficulties faced by IBC managers (Healey, 2016) and academic staff (Clarke, 2015). Both attend to the negotiations which play out at the interface of sending country institutional norms and host country regulations, and where differences in objectives and institutional cultures create tensions understood through the 'principal-agent problem'. There are also a limited but invaluable number of ethnographic contributions which locate and examine disjunctures between IBC models and students' lived experiences of them. Vora (2014) explores the accounts of students inside Qatar's Education City project, locating the spaces where local and national identities meet American and 'global university' educational practices to produce new forms of citizenship and belonging. She argues these cultural forms allow branch campuses to speak back to the Western academy, challenging dominant narratives of one-way flows of benefits and the denial of agency in neoliberal subject construction. Similar work by Kane (2011) examines how an American medical degree program is "transplanted" and manipulated to become legible in its Qatari national context, and Lim (2009, pp. 36, 42) draws on her experience teaching at NYU's Tisch Asia (a now defunct IBC in Singapore) to argue the global university is performed through multicultural aesthetics and "the educative language of scholarship" but in its practice delivers a thinned-out curriculum attentive to professionalization, "corporate-style knowledge production", and commodified multiculturalism. These bottom-up accounts of IBCs challenge the organizational literature by looking at how IBCs are actually practiced and embodied, and by calling attention to the performative, imaginative nature of its actors which conflict with the ways IBCs and their home universities present themselves. In line with critical sociology of policy (Ball, 1997; Canaan & Shumar, 2008; Shore & Wright, 2011), they also call attention to the ways in which IBC and host country policies

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<sup>9</sup> Empirical outcomes such as degrees awarded or post-degree employment are difficult to access where they are even documented as they are collected by individual host governments or sending institutions.

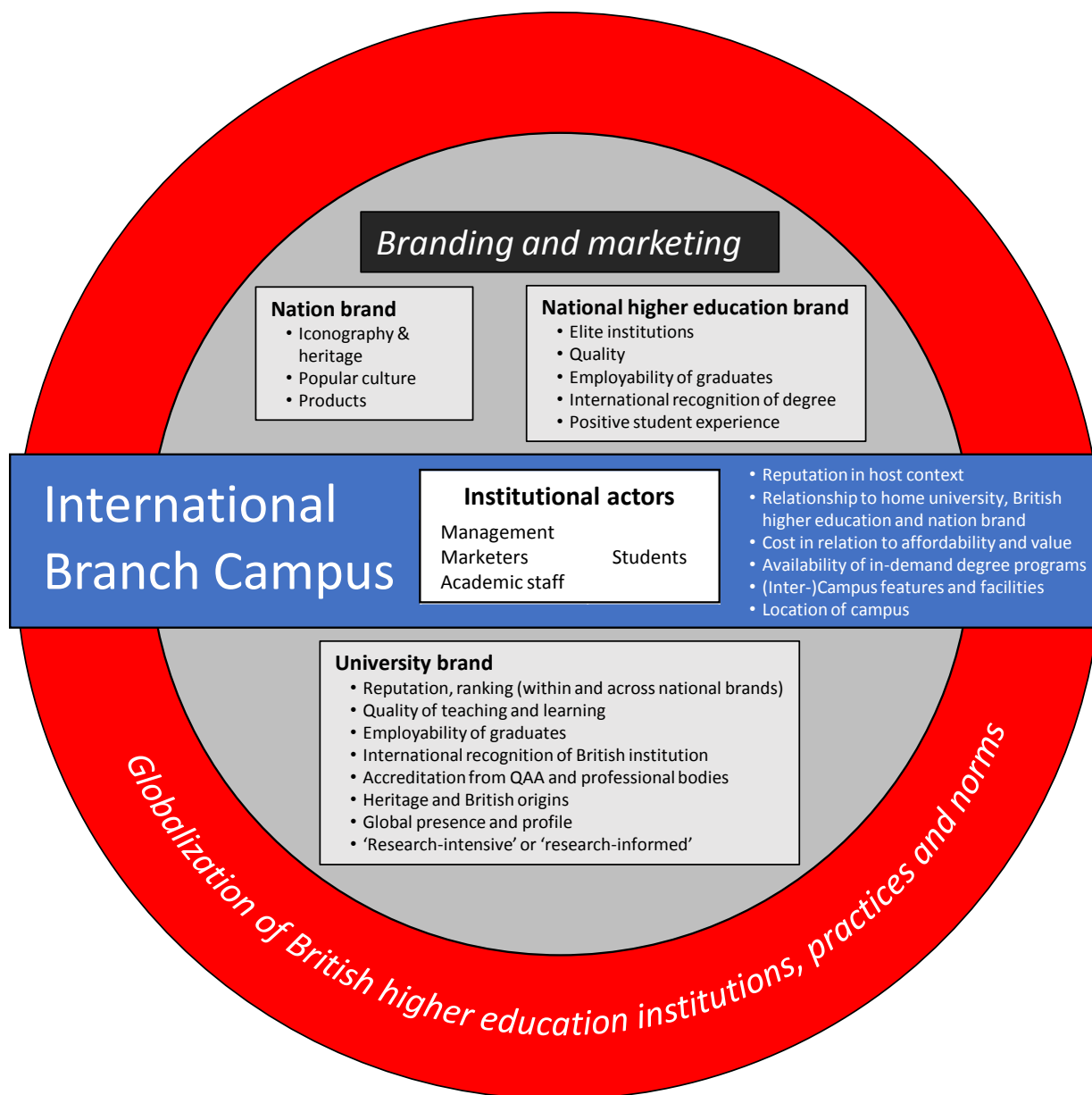
can be understood as sites of contestation and reinterpretation, thus illuminating power dynamics and the indeterminacy of their governing technologies. More research in this area is needed, particularly in commercialized IBCs where complex student identities negotiate consumerist and demand-driven education, marketing and the performance of foreign universities in familiar local settings.

This section sets IBCs as a phenomenon of globalizing higher education within the literature on internationalization and TNHE. Doing so, I argue, provides a theoretically richer body of scholarship with which to locate and interrogate the logics providing the basis for IBCs, including the market drivers of contemporary global higher education and the power of particular forms grounded in historical asymmetries of globalization. As explored above, research on IBCs concentrates in macro-descriptive and a-theoretical contributions located in managerial, organizational, and quasi-academic grey literature, reflecting the interests of practitioners and stakeholders. Non-vested accounts of IBCs are considerably rarer and are further hindered by commercial secrecy and private ownership limiting organizational exchanges of information between host and home campuses. This need for focusing on students and lived experiences sets out not only a crucial research area but a normative agenda for the inclusion of their voices and sense-making, given the stake they hold in their universities and the impact of IBCs on their futures.

## **2.5 Conceptual Framework**

This chapter has brought together a broad selection of theoretical and empirical scholarship and put them into conversation to frame the boundaries of this study and identify knowledge gaps. The relationships between the concepts that these studies explore can be visually arranged in a conceptual framework which focuses the key concepts in relation to this study's research aims. The conceptual diagram below (**figure 2.1**) illustrates these relationships.

Figure 2.1 Conceptual Framework



This study concerns the production and imaginations of value in UK TNHE, drawing on Appadurai's contributions to cultural theorizations of globalization. His notion of regimes of value theorizes how the social value of a commodity is produced and sustained across cultural and economic systems of exchange while accounting for variation in value coherence "from situation to situation" (1986, p. 15). Like theorizations of control within governmentality, value production within regimes is always

incomplete. This flexibility enables a broad application of the concept in social theory, from to the practices and knowledges informed by conditions of globalization (Sidhu, 2009) to work on nation branding and tourism studies (Crossley & Picard, 2014). These applications enable understandings of how value is socially constructed within regimes but flow and transform across cultural and spatial boundaries. As they are not fixed in time or space, regimes are not exclusive and can operate in tandem in processes of production and consumption (*ibid.*).

The diagram thusly illustrates the construction of value in UK higher education as two overlapping and co-operative regimes of value. The larger red sphere represents the globalization of British higher education, both historically and contemporarily. It includes the colonial export of educational institutions and the imposition of academic practices and norms which inform the cultural and institutional template for higher education systems around much of the post-colonial world. This regime broadly encompasses the asymmetric flows in contemporary globalization, which whilst have taken on new pathways and expressions, are inseparable from historical expressions thereof. Situated within this broader regime is the targeted work of branding and marketing as a set of strategic social technologies, policies and practices to produce value. In this regime, UK higher education is imbued with value and made desirable through practices of branding the UK as the originating place of its universities, the collective higher education sector, and individual institutions. While comprising distinct practices, these technologies function cooperatively by drawing on shared discourses and representations of excellence in British higher education and Britain as a cultural system producing superior higher education. The promises of UK universities (or their 'covenant', as per Binsardi and Ekwulugo, 2003) are typically their reputation for future employability, academic quality, and name recognition. In some cases, their prestige, heritage or global profile are also points of value. These features collectively inform the national higher education brand, which bestows graduates with variously interchangeable capitals, and



works in tandem with the UK nation brand as a set of symbols, cultural forms and products (Lomer et al., 2016).

The IBC is situated in this diagram as a phenomenon resulting from the globalization of British higher education and driven by both regimes of value. As **section 2.4** argued, TNHE is driven by commercial logics but nested within widely shared notions of value in dominant exporting brands like the UK. British IBCs therefore are products and beneficiaries of asymmetric globalization, backed by historical precedent and contemporary metrics of academic value. In their branch campus form, they reflect much of these same value ascriptions by wielding the institutional and national higher education brand in their name. At the same time, they build their legitimacy locally by offering in-demand programs at affordable costs and facilitating pathways to employment or international mobility. IBCs are by their transnational nature set within other regimes of value which inform higher education value in the host context. In some cases, IBCs draw on the host nation brand to contextualize and build positive associations or pit UK higher education against local brands.

The institutional actors – students, marketers, management and academics – are situated within concentric value regimes and are thusly at the center of value production as both subject and agent. Appadurai's concept of imagination as a social practice is invoked here as students imagine, evaluate and make sense of foreign higher education within social systems of meaning. These systems, shaped by global flows of media, finance, and technology set within relations of disjuncture, inform imaginaries of higher education – what is possible, familiar, and desirable. Social imaginations work through regimes of value and are thusly informed by them, albeit only ever partially and heterogeneously. If desire can be understood as wanting to circulate among the expressions of particular objects (as per Collins et al., 2014 drawing on Deleuze and Guattari), IBC students wish to associate with or embody the expressions of British higher education through their campus or degree, including its positional prestige, recognition

and perceived global significance. The desire to embody a perceived cosmopolitanism is particularly germane to variously (im)mobile students in transnational hubs like the UAE, where degrees can be leveraged as forms of flexible cultural capital and inform layered notions of belongingness in the world (T. Kim, 2010; Ong, 1999). Social imaginaries inform how IBC students make sense of their university, how they interpret and ascribe value to its British representations, and ultimately how students project themselves as a member of it. Students' IBC choices are thusly shaped by social imaginations and can be understood as expressions of desire and possibility, accounting for the ways in which choices are circumscribed by structural barriers and shaped by competing notions of value.

## 2.6 Conclusion

This chapter has drawn together a vast range of scholarship focused on or speaking to international higher education and experiences thereof. In doing so, it identified a number of research gaps and their importance to scholarly understandings of the research problem laid out in **chapter 1**. The study's theoretical framings were explored in **section 2.1**, which pulled together seminal contributions to social theories of globalization, namely Appadurai's work on social imaginations and regimes of value, as well as related contributions in social sciences which privilege interpretive and phenomenological experiences of institutions and policies. These theoretical works were then brought into the context of this study by examining and applying the empirical literature of three intersecting areas of inquiry: international student choice-making and mobility (**section 2.2**), marketing and branding in higher education (**section 2.3**), and the globalization of higher education and market-driven models of internationalization (**section 2.4**). This chapter has identified gaps in each of these areas pertaining to TNHE, with a need for an epistemological privileging of student sense-making or critical examination of the imaginative governing work that marketing does in transnational educational spaces. These works collectively inform the conceptual framework employed in this study (**section 2.5**), which visually threads together the relationships between these conceptual domains.

The study now turns to the methods employed in this study, guided by the scholarship explored above and its key methodological orientations underpinned by the theory this study situates itself within.

## Chapter 3: Methodology

Having established the research problem, objectives, and theoretical warrant for this study, this chapter sets out its philosophical and practical parameters for carrying out the research. Just as the research topic spans multiple theoretical domains, this study's methodological orientation is also multi-dimensional. As the research philosophy in **section 3.1** and the analytical framework in **3.2** explain, the concepts that this study operationalize are used in different disciplinary traditions, affecting which research paradigm they contribute to and how findings are interpreted. As the research strategy in **section 3.3** also addresses, this study draws on two different methodological approaches, multiple methods of analysis, and numerous sources of data. How these data were collected and analyzed is explained in detail in **section 3.4** and **3.5** respectively. Before concluding the chapter, there is a brief discussion of the study's ethical considerations in **3.6** and the limitations of its research design in **3.7**.

### 3.1 Research Philosophy

The purpose of this study is to understand how British higher education is translocated and reimagined in its offshore form by university students and staff. Consequently, the questions that the study asks lend themselves to a qualitative research design, centering on methods that enable an interpretivist approach to understanding reality and allow the researcher to "get inside the world of those generating it" (Rosen, 1991, p. 8). It adopts a relativist ontology and subjectivist epistemology; thus the goals of the study are to understand rather than explain reality in any causal sense. These positions hinge upon several key assumptions about what can be known from inquiry generally and this study in particular. Its relativist ontology assumes that structures cannot exist or be known outside of the social contexts that constitute them, and thus these structures are positional or relational to those interacting with them. It also assumes plural realities that are embodied and bound to individual experience; these realities can be understood through qualitative investigation of social interactions or texts. By this account

knowledge is also treated as having a positional validity, where participant responses need to be evaluated in the social and temporal context in which they were voiced, placing value on the relationships between the subject, social context, and object being discussed (Blaikie, 2000).

As the previous chapter illustrated, critical research on international students, and to a lesser degree nation branding, mainly embraces two research paradigms – interpretivism and post-structuralism. The fundamental difference between them is their approach to problematization (Bacchi, 2015). Despite both identifying students as subjects, their ontological difference stems from the former assuming an element of agency in the subject which is sovereign to and outside of the inter-subjective reality of individuals or their encounters with social constructions; the latter, on the other hand, sees subjects as fundamentally inalienable from and constituted in socially produced forms of knowledge, or discourses, as per the Foucauldian tradition. Their disagreement with regards to problematization is where thought, and therefore reality, emerge from: individuals or practices (*ibid.*).

This study is attuned to both the meaning-making processes of students and the value-governing practices of British IBC marketing. It is sympathetic to the critical aims of post-structural scholarship and is enriched by research which approaches international students using post-structural lenses and concepts. With regards to ontology, however, this study aligns itself with the interpretivist research paradigm as its core concern is with meaning, specifically value, in terms of how a marketing regime aids in the production of meaning and how students interpret or ‘make sense’ of it. These key differences in conceptual language are evident in the research questions, which privilege interpretation and agency over subjectivity and governance. This is not to dismiss the latter; on the contrary, the post-structural position informed the original scope of this project which problematized the IBC as a body of policies and the British TNHE industry as a set of governing practices. As the project developed and took an interest in the relationships between IBCs and students’ realities, the questions it sought to answer as

well as the methodologies such questions required were no longer befitting a Foucauldian approach. Geertz apparently predicted a “blurring of genres” within postmodern paradigms (Geertz, 1988, 1993, cited in Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011, p. 97), which is constructive as an exercise in thinking through research philosophy. Nevertheless, the aims of this study square with a theoretical tradition which focuses its research gaze on subjects as producers of knowledge and reality, rather than subjects as produced (via a text or practice).

What this “blurring of genres” also points to is the interdisciplinarity of this research. It is often observed that higher education research is highly interdisciplinary and lacks a core research philosophy (Tight, 2004); this is similar for international and TNHE research (Dolby & Rahman, 2008; Kehm & Teichler, 2007). Within the context of interdisciplinarity, however, ontology in higher education research is seldomly made explicit but generally aligns itself with the primary discipline informing the research approach (e.g. a post-positivist paradigm in business and management research; constructivist, interpretivist and various postmodern paradigms in sociological disciplines). Their differences are not highlighted here to delegitimize any one paradigm, but to illustrate firstly the paradigmatic breadth of the field, and secondly, reject “the claim that different research paradigms produce ‘incommensurable’ kinds of knowledge” (Morgan, 2007, pp. 61–62). The contours of this study are informed by research across paradigmatic divides. It is the questions that it asks, however, which demand an interpretivist approach as its underlying research paradigm.

On the question of epistemological stance, or what is knowable and how it can be known, this research subscribes to a close alignment between ontology, epistemology, and methodology, given their tightly overlapping assumptions about the philosophy of knowledge in the interpretivist paradigm (Crotty, 1998; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). A subjectivist epistemology takes a view that knowledge is inseparable from the knower, and is therefore situated, multiple and relative. In this view, the researcher and the

social world are mutually constituted in the production of knowledge such that understandings are co-created in the process of research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Analytical findings are thusly created through the researcher's interactions with research objects (Guba, 1990). The researcher is therefore as integral to the research process as the researched, as findings are shaped through social interactions and the researcher's interpretations (informed by values, perspectives). The inalienability between research subject and knowledge applies to the researcher as well and critically informs how responses are interpreted and the objects of inquiry are understood.

This epistemological position spells two related consequences: firstly, the notion of power in relational knowledge, and secondly, how that power is situated in the researcher and informs the study. Returning to the definition of epistemology above, power is constituted in knowledge by what is known (i.e. truths) and how it can be known (the production thereof, at the levels of the individual and society). Mignolo's scholarship on the geopolitics of knowledge (2011) illustrates how the origins of all knowledge systems are socially and historically contingent and situated within relations of power that legitimize some and delegitimize others. He would argue that relations or hierarchies of power are reproduced through what knowledges are privileged, and crucially, how they can be known – that is, through Eurocentric epistememes. Shahjahan and Morgan link Mignolo's thesis to the coloniality of higher education, arguing that,

the geopolitics of knowledge privileges knowledge systems that are considered universal, delocalized, and applied without question in all contexts. ... [O]nly certain local knowledge systems, always already derivatives of particular historical-material conditions (and even backed by military power), have the social privilege to shape global thinking. (2015, p. 95)

For them, this global thinking is a privileged way of knowing and understanding the world which is emblematic of the (Western model of the) academic enterprise writ large. A subjectivist and grounded epistemological stance is thusly also an ethical practice in decentering knowledge, its production and circulation. This study is sensitive to history and the continuation of certain historical knowledge

systems (i.e. British higher education) globally dominating the epistemic landscape, recognizing the extended impact of coloniality and post-coloniality on the valuation of knowledge, ways of knowing, and their institutional progenitors (i.e. universities). **Chapter 4** in particular efforts to link the contemporary rationales of British TNHE to those of the colonial past by illustrating their continuities which simultaneously sustain global participation in Eurocentric epistemes while normalizing the colonial project that institutionalized them.

As an individual engaged in such scholarship, I, the researcher, critically reflect on my role in such research and my privileged position as a scholar engaging in institutionalized knowledge production. Further to the ethics of representation (discussed in in **section 3.6** below), my epistemological stance inserts me into the research process at every stage, from the articulation of the research questions and motivation for study, to the social interactions held with participants, up through the analysis and final interpretation of the data. My identity and my collective experiences are therefore brought to bear in the production of knowledge (Bettez, 2015). As a White, North American, cisgender, middle-class and highly educated doctoral student, I make no claim to research from below or from a particular historically marginalized position. At the same time, I make every effort to countenance and ‘think through’ the contributions of marginalized knowledge(s) and am conscious that the personal absence of such positions (in terms of my identities) does not equal the absence of positionality. To the contrary, my White North American upbringing shapes the assumptions I make about my research participants (who are not North American and mostly non-White) despite all efforts to sustain a conscious awareness of such during the research process. These components of my identity are unalterable, indivisible and unconcealable, and without a doubt impact on the depth of access I was given in my research and the quality of the engagements therein. The UAE has a notoriously semi-official racialized labor hierarchy that encodes in every aspect of daily life who belongs where and whose bodies and knowledges are most valued (Mahdavi, 2013; Malit Jr. & Al Youha, 2013). I recognize and reflect on how the access I



enjoyed during my data collection was enhanced by, if not predicated on, my visibility as a White, North American male wielding his credentials as a visiting scholar from a reputed US university. This is not to single out and 'other' the UAE as an illiberal space, however; my access to senior leadership at universities in the UK was invariably enhanced to similar effect. In reflecting on such privilege, I acknowledge that these components of myself fundamentally shaped the type of study I was able to produce, and that researchers with different identities would come away with different data and different findings.

With regards to knowledge and positionality, I approached every analytical stage in this study with principles of critical reflexivity in mind, which compel the researcher to "interrogate each of our selves regarding the ways in which research efforts are shaped and staged around the binaries, contradictions and paradoxes that form our own lives" (Lincoln et al., 2011, p. 124). This interrogation process is conceptualized by Daley (2010) as two distinct but related analytical approaches which critically identify relations of social power in the process of knowledge production. By being reflexively engaged, such relations are analytically foregrounded during the social interaction (such as the interview process); critical reflection, on the other hand, applies such analytic to past interactions for the purpose of interpretation and future engagements. For others, the difference is characterized as one of self-engagement (thinking through how the researcher's experiences and social positions impact the research process) versus relational engagement (positioning the researcher's subjectivities in relation to participants') (Pillow, 2010, cited in Bettez, 2015). Both of these processes critically account for micropractices of power in social relationships and in social research, and constitute reflexive research ethics. I reflexively accounted for my presence in interviews by anticipating how I might be perceived and how these perceptions might shape the responses. I stressed to participants a simultaneous reciprocity (showing an interest in their lives, not just their data) and transparency (talking about the research process and showing participants the value in casually structured conversations). During the

analysis, I similarly reflected on how responses were situated within the complexities of the social interaction between myself and participants and the different social worlds we occupy. While these asymmetries could be fragmentedly anticipated, identified or 'factored' in the process, they can only ever be partially mitigated. The purpose, of course, is not to account for social difference in order to mitigate it, but to recognize its inevitable and inextricable constitution in the research process and frame the findings accordingly.

### **3.2 Analytical Framework**

The conceptual framework developed in **chapter 2** showed the theoretical relationships between the central concepts in this study; specifically, how an IBC is situated within concentric regimes of value. The framework was devised by putting into conversation the divergent bodies of theoretical and empirical literature which collectively inform the study's topic. This section revisits the conceptual framework in order to operationalize it into a framework for analysis. It is followed by the research strategy, which maps out the specific analytical approaches used to answer each of the research questions.

The conceptual framework devised for this study positions international students within regimes of value as agential consumers of British higher education. The idea of a value regime has been adapted and theorized variously, with many using the term "more as a source of inspiration and as a starting point for conceptualizing value differently than as a set theory to be strictly adhered to" (Crossley & Picard, 2014, p. 202). Appadurai invoked the term as a concept to describe a spatially expansive and historically contingent assemblage of cultural and economic processes governing logics of exchange (1986). His aim in developing the term was to capture how value production transcends cultural boundaries within a political or cultural arena or between them. Born in a disciplinary context of anthropology, the term sustained dialogue within the discipline to theorize value production in the exchange and consumption of material objects (e.g. commodities) (Appadurai, 1994; Myers, 2004). Its

use in this tradition, however, concentrates on material culture within indigenous or non-capitalist societies (e.g. Appadurai's theorization of the Trobriand Islands Kula exchange made famous by Malinowski), making it an unlikely fit for theorizing the global consumption of immaterial commodities like transnational higher education.

The term was picked up by tourism studies and further developed to theorize contemporary commodities at the center of the tourism industry, such as heritage sites (French, 2010), traditional holiday homes (Abram, 2014), natural resources (Kaaristo, 2014; Schlosser, 2013), or performances of indigeneity (Picard, Pocock, & Trigger, 2014). Their use of this term is not dissimilar to Appadurai's, in that they aim to understand how an object can have differing economic values or social functions among different constituencies in a single cultural arena. Each constituency subscribes to different or multiple regimes of valuation, requiring a translation of value between regimes. In keeping with the anthropological conception, they stress that value or meaning is never fixed and is not constituted in the object itself, but continually reestablished in each arena in the process of its exchange (Abram, 2014; Kaaristo, 2014). Their use of the concept to understand abstract, immaterial, and globally consumed commodities is a closer fit with British higher education, which, like tourism studies, draws on selective reimaginings of national icons, assets and nation brands. As a consumable and exchangeable commodity, British TNHE is heterogeneously imbued with value across differing arenas (host countries), constituencies (student consumer groups), and in relation to other commodities (e.g. other higher education brands). Its value or significance is not intrinsic but continuously produced and confirmed through its consumption, which would include the marketing and recruitment experience, the experience of being a student, and upon completion, being bestowed with its symbolic capital. Just as Appadurai theorized how holding a Kula confers its symbolic value to its owner (Abram, 2014), the value of a British degree is embodied by its holder.

These contributions from tourism studies broadly employ interpretive and post-structural research paradigms, examining processes of value construction and interaction in richly semiotic assemblages. They focus on the deconstruction of representations and discursive analysis of practices that construct and sustain value regimes. Schlosser (2013), for example, examines the marketing of ‘ethical’ consumption in the diamond trade by tracing the discourses of the ethical consumer in Canadian cultural politics. He identifies ethical consumption as a regime of value which is historically situated in imagined moral geographies of “white Canada” and “dark Africa” (p. 165), drawing on Baudrillard’s (1998, 2002) theories of the relationship between consumption and social signification (i.e. identity and meaning). Semiotics, both textual and visual, are thusly at the center of Schlosser’s analysis. Applying Baudrillard, he argues that signification is achieved “when the signifier of ‘diamond’ ceases to denote the material diamond, and begins, instead, to connote ‘diamondness’ and its discursively attendant properties” (p. 165). A semiotic analysis of higher education marketing can similarly be approached by attending to significations of the British brand constituted in material and discursive form – i.e. visual and textual representations. As critical marketing studies illustrate (Blanco Ramírez, 2016; Oswald, 2012; Papadimitriou & Blanco Ramírez, 2015), advertisements and websites become rich sites of representation and discourse which can be systematically analyzed to extract and interpret meanings (explained in further detail in **section 3.3**). The elements of the British nation brand and higher education brand, identified in **chapter 2**, are encoded through representations which communicate and signify their various qualities. These qualities can thusly be inductively identified and applied to an understanding of how British higher education is projected or reconstituted in offshore spaces.

The social imagination and imaginaries are conceptually related to the processes of value production, in that identities are formed and sense is made through interactions and engagement with representations. In contrast to regimes of value, the concept of imagination as a practice has an extended history in the social sciences; however, Appadurai (1996), Taylor (2004) and contemporaries

modified it as a collective or social practice concerned less with aesthetics (the traditional realm of the imagination) and more the micro-practices and interactions of daily life. According to Rizvi (2006), their ontology is twofold and mutually constitutive. On one hand, imagination is derivative of representation: images, myths, stories and mass media. On the other, imagination is the 'structuring matrix' against which individuals form identities and make sense of their worlds (p. 196). These orientations respectively lend themselves to interpretative methodologies informed by hermeneutics and phenomenology, although the concept is also loosely invoked in post-structural scholarship as an agent-centric analytic of subjectivity. With a focus on student sensemaking, this study employs the concept to theorize how students 'imagine' British higher education in the phenomenological sense: how different groups of students accord it value in relation to their lives, how students differently arrive at understandings of value through their hermeneutic encounters with marketing, media, and myth, and how their imaginations challenge qualities or measures of value prescribed in representations. The term is thusly grounded here in an interpretive tradition as an analytical lens for understanding students' engagements with and consumption of British higher education in the transnational context.

### **3.3 Overview of Research Strategy**

Having established the research philosophy and guiding analytical framework that this study situates itself within, this chapter now lays out its specific research strategies for addressing the research questions. The research methods were chosen in keeping with the interpretivist research paradigm and its assumptions about the nature of knowledge and how it is known. They are also derived from the analytical framework and methodologies used in previous studies which informed this study's conceptual framework. As the research follows an inductive approach, it proffers no hypotheses; it does not induce grounded theory either, however, as it is structured by particular theoretical orientations (D. E. Gray, 2013). This section first revisits the research questions and grounds the argument for applying

particular strategies in relevant methodological and higher education literature. The specific procedures applied for collection and analysis of data follow in **sections 3.4** and **3.5**.

As **chapter 1** explained, the structure of the research questions is cumulative so that the overarching question is informed by the tripartite sub-questions. That question, *How is the 'UK university' – and by extension UK higher education as a national brand – represented and imagined through its international branch campuses?*, brings together the two dialogic components of the study: representation and imagination. The methodological tools required are respectively, a composite hermeneutic strategy to examine the encoded representations which structure meaning, and a strategy informed by phenomenology to understand the process of meaning-making among IBC students (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Heracleous, 2004). Hermeneutics is broadly concerned with the interpretation of texts. While it is itself a research method committed to textual interpretation through longitudinal immersion in texts' social and organizational context (Heracleous, 2004, p. 181), it is also the umbrella methodological term for interpretive strategies including semiotics, discourse analysis, and content analysis (Oswald, 2012). I refer here to the latter to describe this study's bespoke layered approach which draws on the three aforementioned techniques to distil, supplement and complement each of their analyses.

Phenomenology is concerned with the understanding of lived experiences through description of what and how something is experienced (Moustakas, 1994). Within its focus on experiences, it is fundamentally centered upon meaning from an 'inside perspective', in the sense that unique meanings are made through experiences which cannot be divorced from the maker (Karlsson, 1993, p. 17). The goal is thus to understand how phenomena are experienced and interpreted from the point of view of the research subject. With sensitivity to post-structural critiques of classical phenomenology as preoccupied with 'pre-discursive' or 'authentic' experience, this study leans towards a post-structuralist reading of phenomenology (S. Ahmed, 2004, 2006) which recognizes both the affective and bodily dimensions of lived experiences and the discursive manner in which subjects, and thus their

experiences, are “positioned by various intersecting and conflicting cultural norms” (Berggren, 2014, p. 244; Stoller, 2009). Finding that meaning is always situated, these critiques enable an interpretive approach which reconciles two seemingly contrastive philosophies of how meanings are made, diffused, and embodied. Hermeneutic and phenomenological research strategies have divergent analytical aims, procedures, and data sources (traditionally texts and interviews, respectively), but can be complementary techniques as they are both preoccupied with understanding the production of meaning through interpretive analysis of language.

This research design investigates phenomena playing out at different levels of scale and human activity: individual students and staff, IBCs, the UAE higher education market, UK universities and the globalized British higher education brand. While it draws data from different geographical sites and spaces, it is ultimately an examination of British TNHE in the UAE, looking at how international branch campuses enact and perform the British brand and how students make sense of this. It takes a view of the data as speaking to these collective phenomena rather than specifically aiming to identify variations between sites (such as home vs. branch campus, UK vs. UAE higher education market, or between the three IBCs). Although the research is multi-sited, it eschews use of the term ‘case’ to refer to the three institutions this study focuses on<sup>10</sup>. Firstly, the three UK IBCs were at the time of data collection the only UK IBCs in the UAE with a full array of undergraduate programs, a multi-building campus, and student enrollments of 500 or more (explained further in **chapter 5**). In this regard they would therefore not be a sampling of cases selected by discriminatory criteria but rather the full population of institutions matching the study’s focal area (IBCs servicing undergraduates). Furthermore, the study does not employ a traditional case study design which seeks to explicitly identify differences and comparisons between bounded cases to induce theory (as per Yin, 2014). Differences between institutions are indeed identified in the

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<sup>10</sup> For the sake of clarity and consistency, the three universities are framed here as ‘focal institutions’.

analyses (**chapters 5-7**) and these variations provide insightful analytical entry points for relational areas (e.g. different types of students); however, these differences are not consequential to the overarching design nor the concluding argument.

The project rather takes British TNHE as its single case or focal phenomenon; within this complex assemblage, the study design enables analysis across three axes: horizontally, where the inquiry moves across space (transnationally and between IBCs), vertically across scale (from institutional strategy at the home campus down to the sensemaking of the individual student at the branch campus), and transversally, across time (from historical inceptions of the globalizing British university to the logics governing contemporary practices) (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017). It does not locate the focus of the study in a particular policy as a policy anthropology approach would (e.g. Shore & Wright, 2011), but its vertical focus enables the researcher to trace ideas as they travel through a process (in this study, transnational export) and are variously interpreted, enacted or embodied. Research on processes of globalization demands a 'trans' orientation which take a view to processes "moving through space or across lines, as well as changing the nature of something" (Ong, 1999, p. 4). Verticality in research thus escapes the trappings of horizontal binaries (e.g. 'the global' and 'the local') and enables focus on the logics which transcend scale. This research concentrates its gaze on an historical object (British higher education) as it translates across national boundaries and filters down through policy spaces (free trade zones), embeds itself in contextual practices (a commercialized higher education market) and is variously embodied by staff and students. For practical reasons the research context is located in finite spaces, but it ultimately concerns a phenomenon which is immeasurably dispersed across and between scales. The research questions and their respective analysis chapters concentrate their discussions in spatially contained referents (the UAE, the UK), but their connectedness and verticality are brought back together and discussed in the conclusion chapter as part of the implications of this research.



### 3.3.1 Sub-Question 1

*What do university senior management imagine the purpose of their campuses in the UAE to be? How was the campus envisioned to fit into the university's strategic objectives?*

This question is included in the study in order to frame UK IBCs within the broader policy decisions and processes of internationalization and marketization at the UK home campuses. As the core research focus is on phenomena *within* IBCs and the UAE market, this sub-question explores where such practices stem from and how they were conceived. This question assumes that British universities' transnational strategy and their decision to establish IBCs derives from decisions made by different actors, driven by differing visions and approaches to why and how to deliver overseas educational experiences. In order to place the models and practices of British IBCs in the UAE into the broader picture of globalizing British higher education, this question examines how key decision-makers envision the role of British higher education globally, and how they see their institution in advancing such roles through their IBC activities.

The objective is to capture internal accounts of the strategy making and policy making processes at each of the three universities. This is achieved through single, semi-structured interviews with relevant senior staff who hold leadership or management responsibility for their university's transnational portfolio or IBCs (as conducted in British Council, 2013; Healey, 2016; Lane, 2011b; Sidhu & Christie, 2014). This style of interview, which uses an interview protocol to cover and order the key questions and topics, was selected as it balances flexibility and control over the direction of the conversation. It is considered an optimal interview style for "dealing with high-level bureaucrats ... who are accustomed to efficient use of their time" given that there was only one opportunity to interview each participating senior staff member (Bernard, 2002, p. 205). The focus of the interview questions varied depending on the location of the staff member (UK or UAE), their specific role (senior leadership, IBC management, or director of

marketing and recruitment), and their organization (one of the three universities)<sup>11</sup>. The focal concerns for each role holder are summarized in **table 3.1**.

**Table 3.1 Sub-Question 1 Staff Interview Strategy**

<i>Role</i>	<i>Focus of questions</i>
<i>Senior leadership (with responsibility for IBC or university-wide strategy)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The primary function of the UAE campus and what role it plays in the university's mission or vision;</li> <li>• Why the UAE, and what was important about UAE over other regional locations;</li> <li>• If and how the university saw itself filling a niche in the UAE;</li> <li>• How the university sees its relationship with its UAE campus;</li> <li>• How particular decisions around the location and model of their UAE campus were made, and the external factors that made IBC possible and desirable.</li> </ul>
<i>Staff responsible for student marketing, recruitment, and admissions</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What kinds of students does the university aim to recruit with its UAE campus;</li> <li>• How IBC students are different from (1) UK students and (2) international students at the home campus;</li> <li>• How students are connected to the university and seen by the home campus;</li> <li>• How students at the branch campus are recruited, and how it differs from the ways students are recruited in and to the UK;</li> <li>• Whether the recruitment strategy is in coordination or alignment with the home campus; where recruitment decisions are made;</li> <li>• Whether the marketing strategy is in coordination or alignment with the home campus; where marketing decisions are made;</li> <li>• Alignment with national higher education campaigns or strategies for marketing UK higher education;</li> <li>• If and how the reputation of one campus affects the other; How reputation of the home campus is used to promote the branch campus;</li> <li>• How the reputation of UK higher education in general is used to promote the branch campus.</li> </ul>
<i>Academic partnership managers, senior lecturers involved in programming</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What role they play, if any, in marketing the IBC;</li> <li>• Specific features of IBC and university that speak to UAE student needs or desires;</li> <li>• How the IBC represents British education and the specific ways that students experience it;</li> </ul>

<sup>11</sup> Five interviews were also conducted with management staff at peripheral organizations supporting British transnational higher education in the UAE: UK Trade & Investment, the British Council, and Dubai's Knowledge and Human Development Authority.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How the UAE market context shapes the implementation and practice of branch campuses (e.g. what can and cannot be offered, etc.);</li> <li>• How and whether the UAE campus serves students in similar ways to the home campus; key differences between campuses.</li> </ul>
<i>External agencies (British Council, UK Trade &amp; Investment)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The broader practices, aims and strategy of the UK educational export industry (including national branding campaigns);</li> <li>• Why and where particular forms of UK TNHE are established;</li> <li>• What factors lend themselves to the market model of UKHE export;</li> <li>• How they see the industry's role in the UAE market, its desirability, its comparative advantages among competitors;</li> <li>• How national branding campaigns are coordinated with individual institutions and what impact they have on student recruitment.</li> </ul>

Sub-question 1 lends itself to a descriptive analytical approach to understand how senior leaders at each university imagine their university's purpose in the UAE. Their responses are integrated with data taken from each university's international or strategic plan, a public document which articulates an institution's internationalization strategy, objectives, portfolio, etc. Profiles of each of the three focal institutions' international agendas, supplemented with commentary from senior leaders at each institution, are presented in **chapter 5** after exploring the UAE policy context. These profiles lay the foundation for an examination in the subsequent chapters of how their IBCs represent their parent organizations and how institutions ask students to imagine them.

### 3.3.2 Sub-Question 2

*How do British IBC marketing practices articulate ideas and representations of the UK university and the national brand?*

The strategy for this question departs from the experiential focus of sub-questions 1 and 3, as it concentrates on how universities are represented. At its core, representation is the systematic production of meaning through encoding of concepts into signs. Meaning is constructed and signified within language and subsequently decoded through interpretation; meanings are thusly mediated by

the structures of language (Hall, 1980). In the semiotic tradition, cultural practices can be 'read' as signs and function like language to communicate richly encoded meanings and ideas (Barthes, 1972; Hall, 2013). Marketing functions to communicate ideas through the strategic mobilization of signs, making complex values communicable to consumers through sign systems, e.g. brands (Oswald, 2012). The British higher education brand is encoded and communicated to prospective students through ensembles of signs – text, visual representations, symbolic icons, and social practices – to signify or perform the values and qualities of its higher education, both in its general and applied contexts. In this sub-question, hermeneutic strategies are thusly applied to British TNHE marketing in the UAE to unpack its meanings and the ideological structures embedded in representations.

The data informing the question are broad. The primary data are textual materials which have a function in university marketing, including IBC websites, social media, prospectuses (official university brochures for prospective students), billboards and print advertisements. These materials are rich with text and imagery that represent IBCs and British higher education in idealized ways designed to resonate with consumer audiences and communicate particular values. Facebook and Instagram were chosen as analytically appropriate social media firstly due to their strongly visual and university-provided content (in contrast to Twitter, as per Bélanger et al., 2014), and their popularity as social media platforms with younger audiences in the UAE. As the previous chapter identified, these various forms of marketing have differing functions, audiences and representational strategies depending on the author (university) and context. A comprehensive approach to these materials, rather than concentrating on one form of marketing, minimizes the analytical impact of differences between them and enables findings which can be applied more broadly. The strategy for collecting and analyzing these materials is discussed in the subsequent sections.

In complement with marketing materials, the sub-question is addressed through selective observations conducted in and around spaces where UK higher education is marketed to prospective students. These events include campus tours and open house events, self-led explorations of campuses (noting particularly the aesthetics and displays) and a large higher education expo held annually in Dubai where prospective students are recruited. Observation of these specific events are structured by focal questions and a concentration on specific practices (outlined in **table 3.2**). The purpose of the observations is to contextualize marketing processes and capture immaterial marketing practices such as student recruitment and face-to-face marketing (Bryman, 1988, cited in Silverman, 2001). Observations in this study combined participatory and non-participatory approaches. On some visits to IBC campuses, passive observations were conducted in busy spaces (e.g. front lobbies, courtyards, hallways) to document both the aesthetics of those spaces and how students engage with or interacted in those spaces. Other visits were more participatory, including spending leisure time with students, or in the case of open house events, participating as a prospective student. Marketing events were open to the public and thus as a participant I was better able to experience situations and interact with others as an interested student (the ethics of which are discussed in **section 3.6**). Observations and experiences were meticulously documented afterwards in a field notes journal to facilitate an iterative process of description, analysis, and reflection (Bernard, 2002).

As a further complementary source of data, interviews with select staff and students engaged in marketing are drawn upon in order to enrich observations of marketing practices. Questions in these interviews focused on participants' understanding of their roles in marketing, how they conduct their work, and how they see their institution's purpose in the UAE. These interviews were open-ended and loosely structured to maximize conversational flexibility to explore areas of personal importance or experience.

**Table 3.2 Observable Marketing Events**

<b>Event</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Focus of observations</b>	<b>Specific observations</b>
<b>GETEX Dubai 2015</b>	Three day-long student recruitment expo for higher education providers in the UAE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How IBCs represent themselves (1) as local organizations; (2) as extensions of British universities;</li> <li>• How institutions use and associate themselves with UK imagery;</li> <li>• How recruitment staff interact with prospective students.</li> </ul>	Aesthetics and layout of displays; recruitment activities and engagement with students; conversations with recruiters and student volunteers (participatory and non-participatory).
<b>Campus open house events</b>	Guided promotional tours of campuses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Which features are foregrounded, which are not;</li> <li>• What visuals are used to promote or distinguish the institution;</li> <li>• How campus guides talk about their institution and what associations do they make with the home campus or the UK.</li> </ul>	Presentations of campus; features highlighted; use of campus spaces; information displays; engagement of tour guides and marketing staff with visitors.
<b>Campus visits</b>	Self-led explorations of campuses (non-participatory)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What campus spaces look like; How they are arranged and textured;</li> <li>• University and UK branding;</li> <li>• How and which actors use different campus spaces.</li> </ul>	Aesthetics of campus (exterior and interior); displays and decorations; use of campus spaces; presences and absences.
	Time spent in campus spaces with participants (participatory)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What students do on campus; where they spend their time;</li> <li>• How and which participants interact with others.</li> </ul>	Student interactions; use of spaces.

### 3.3.3 Sub-Question 3

*How do students in British branch campuses imagine the UK university and British higher education, and (how) do they see their branch campus as an extension of these?*

Sub-question 3 returns to a phenomenological approach, focusing on understanding how students make sense of, experience and thusly imagine their IBC and British higher education. In contrast to the previous two questions which concentrate the research gaze at institutional strategies and practices,

this question visits the opposite side of the relationship – the student as subject of British TNHE, as subject of its marketing practices, and subject of the UAE commercialized higher education environment. All of these identities are formed around experiences and interpretations thereof, which a phenomenological approach is best suited to capture (Kruger, 1988). The research tool chosen to best answer the question is semi-structured interviews as it allows students to articulate in their own words the sense they make of their place in British higher education, how they informed their choices, and how they see their university or degree shaping their futures. A target of around 15 undergraduate students per each of the three institutions was set (discussed further in **section 3.4.2**) in order to sufficiently capture the range of differences between students produced through their nationality, race/ethnicity, gender identity, family income, previous schooling, and time spent in the UAE. One further distinction among students is their relationship to the UAE as expatriates residing with family or as strictly international students. This distinction, explored further in **chapter 7**, was found to result in slightly differing articulations of university choice-making processes, experiences, and consequently, imaginations of British higher education.

Students were interviewed either individually or in pairs averaging one hour per participant. Paired interviews allowed two students, always friends or close classmates, opportunities to expound on each other's responses. Each student was still asked the same core questions and given opportunities to respond, but the small group dynamic facilitated a more fluid, relaxed style of conversation which often encouraged participants to go into further detail, and in some circumstances, affirm or challenge each other's responses (Lohm & Kirpitchenko, 2014). The semi-structured interview approach for individuals or pairs allowed for flexibility while also ensuring that key topics were covered. The core topics focused on how students identified themselves, how they informed their university choice, how they experienced their institution, how they saw themselves in relation to their institution as an extension of

a UK university, and ultimately how they imagine British higher education and their relationship to it (outlined in **table 3.3**).

**Table 3.3 Sub-Question 3 Student Interview Strategy**

<i>Core topics</i>	<i>Focus of questions</i>
<i>Student background</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student background and identity;</li> <li>• Previous education;</li> <li>• International travel and residence.</li> </ul>
<i>Decision to study at institution</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sources and access to university information;</li> <li>• Decision-making process (key factors and considerations, experiences of choice, counterfactuals);</li> <li>• Financial considerations;</li> <li>• Future plans (employment, further study, emigration) and if/how they are enhanced by their university and degree choice.</li> </ul>
<i>Placing the student at the institution</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• First impressions of IBC vs. current sentiment;</li> <li>• Participant's descriptions of IBC;</li> <li>• Participant's descriptions of self within IBC (how they see themselves in relation to other students).</li> </ul>
<i>Experiences</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perceptions and experiences of 'Britishness' (i.e. which different elements of the IBC <i>feel</i> British according to participants);</li> <li>• Meaning and importance of being a British university student;</li> <li>• Experiences of marketing as a prospective and current student.</li> </ul>
<i>Imaginations</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participant's sense of connection or relationship to the UK, and belongingness in any imagined community of British university students;</li> <li>• Imaginations of institution's home campus;</li> <li>• Imaginations of UK higher education (in isolation and in relation to other international brands).</li> </ul>

Due to time constraints and the challenges in setting up each interview, it was only possible to interview each student once. There were opportunities to follow up with participants by email, however, when it was necessary to seek clarification on particular responses. Furthermore, as I visited each campus with frequency during the UAE research visits, I often encountered interview participants on campus and was able to have productive follow-up conversations. In some cases, these opportunities presented



themselves during observed events, enabling immediate opportunities to probe for students' interpretations of jointly experienced phenomena.

### **3.4 Data Collection**

This section explains the specific procedures for collecting the wide range of data forms described in the previous section. These data fall into three categories: documents, observations and interviews. Within each of them there is considerable variation in form, particularly with documents, as this is a container for a broad ensemble of physical and electronic marketing materials. The following subsections thusly outline what specific artifacts constituted data, how their collection was strategized, and how their collection was conducted.

#### **3.4.1 Documents**

In order to broadly survey the practices of representation in IBC marketing, a wide range of documents were collected physically in the UAE or online (summarized in **table 3.4**). The bulk of these data were collected in digital format, which aided their subsequent analysis. The strategy for collecting digital content was more structured or systematic than the strategy for print materials owing to their abundance and ease of access. Prospectuses were produced by campuses on an intermittent basis; owing to their length, one digital prospectus per institution was collected. IBC webpages were collected using a web browser extension which converted entire pages into PDF files. These dynamic screenshots preserved the textual elements of each page to enable their analysis. A comprehensive exploration of each IBC's website garnered between 40 and 60 webpages per institution.

Collecting social media images required a more complex strategy as some of the IBCs used these platforms extensively. To keep the data sample to a manageable size, an arbitrary collection target was first set at 125 images per medium per institution, or effectively 250 in total per IBC. The collection process was semi-randomized to prevent the sample from concentrating on any particular images. This

was done by dividing the collection target (125) by the time period being sampled (the number of months each platform was in use), and selecting that many images from each month. For example, where an institution had used Facebook for its marketing between May 2011 and July 2016 (62 months), two images from each month were selected. Images within each month were chosen at random, except where an item documented an event already captured or repeated an advertisement. Where an event (such as an open campus or graduation ceremony) was documented on both Facebook and Instagram, default went to the latter as IBCs' use of Instagram appeared to be more judicious than that of Facebook (where content was often published in great excess). This selective strategy aimed to longitudinally capture IBC marketing and representations in their social media by producing a semi-randomized slice of the larger social media image pool. Images were captured by screenshot and given a filename identifying their IBC, medium and date of publication.

Material documents such as flyers, program brochures, and branded paraphernalia (tote bags, sunglasses) were collected at student recruitment events including open campus days and at GETEX, the annual higher education expo held at a convention center in Dubai. Advertisements displayed on billboards or public spaces were photographed as they were encountered. These material documents were not guided by a predetermined strategy and were collected on an ad hoc basis. The campuses themselves were rife with representations, often found decorating the interior walls, front lobbies or campus grounds. Many of these were explicitly brand identity markers (e.g. Greater London University's use of London imagery, or University of Northern England's Union Jack-themed Mini Cooper car parked outside the main entrance, seen in **figure 6.2**). Photographs of each campus were taken on researcher visits to document both specific identity markers and the overall campus appearance and facilities.

**Table 3.4 Content Analysis Data Sources and Collection Strategy**

<i>Document type</i>	<i>Collection strategy</i>	<i>Date of data/collection</i>
<i>Prospectuses</i>	One digital copy per institution, retrieved from IBC websites or requested from institution	Adam Smith University (2017), Greater London University (2015), University of Northern England (2012) <sup>12</sup>
<i>Websites (text and imagery)</i>	Screenshots of IBC website and all subsidiary webpages; screenshots converted to PDF to preserve textual elements	October 2016
<i>Facebook &amp; Instagram</i>	Screenshots of social media images and text captions; semi-randomized collection strategy to reduce data volume and capture broad time period	Facebook: 2011-2016; Instagram: 2014-2016
<i>Print advertisements (promotional flyers, billboards)</i>	Print materials collected at student recruitment events such as open campus days and GETEX higher education expo; photographs taken of billboards and advertisements in public spaces	Between February 2015 and June 2015
<i>Edifices, interior designs and motifs</i>	Researcher's photographs of campuses focusing on overall appearance and specific identity markers	Between February 2015 and June 2015

### 3.4.2 Interviews

As explained in the research strategy, semi-structured interviews were selected as the research tool to capture the lived experiences that this study aims to understand. The question of exactly whose experiences is a methodological and strategic matter. Different strategies were employed to recruit

<sup>12</sup> New prospectuses did not appear to be issued every year, making it impossible to select three prospectuses from the same year. In contrast to the other two IBCs, University of Northern England's prospectus was university-wide (rather than speaking for the IBC only), and thus the 2012 version was chosen over more recent editions as it contained a sub-section focusing exclusively on the RAK campus.

different participant groups for interviews, as sub-question 1 targets specific leadership roles whereas sub-questions 2 and 3 concern the broader population of staff and students. The strategies and rationales for recruitment of staff and students are thusly explained here.

### ***Staff***

University senior management and leadership positions are limited to very particular roles and could not be recruited using selective sampling techniques. Rather, specific individuals were selected for recruitment following an investigation of the organizational structure of each university (as roles and title tend to vary). Participants were contacted either by email or LinkedIn, and subsequently through introduction or referral once relationships at each institution had been established. Some individuals were stationed at the UAE campus while others were based at the UK home campus. As these participants were senior personnel within each organization, recruitment for participation had a lower success rate, particularly with unacquainted home campus staff. This necessitated a flexible approach to the interview timetable and a degree of perseverance to wait until contacts developed and rapport was established at each university.

Participants were selected on their involvement in the establishment, steering, coordinating, marketing, or maintenance of their university's overseas campuses or their UAE campus specifically. These roles broadly fell under three categories: senior leadership, partnership management, and senior marketing staff. Examples of role titles and recruitment targets for each category are shown in **table 3.5**.

Leadership interviews were conducted in a one-to-one format either in person or by telephone. With participants' consent, interviews were recorded and transcribed, with transcriptions subsequently shared with participants if requested. Due to the exclusivity of each role, titles have been generically classified as directors, managers, or marketers to maintain the confidentiality of participants.

**Table 3.5 Leadership Staff Participant Recruitment Strategy**

<i>Staff category</i>	<i>Example role titles</i>	<i>Recruitment target</i>
<i>Senior leadership responsible for international campus</i>	Provost, Director (or Associate Director) of International Partnerships, Director (or Associate Director) for International Development, Deputy Vice-Chancellor International, Campus Director, Head of Campus	3 per university
<i>Academic partnership managers involved in IBC programming</i>	Academic Partnership Manager, International Relations Officer, Partnership Services Officer	1 per university
<i>Senior marketing staff responsible for student recruitment and strategy</i>	Director (or Associate Director) of Marketing, Director (or Associate Director) of International Recruitment, Director (or Associate Director) of Marketing Communications, Chief Marketing Officer, Marketing Manager	2 per university

Interviews were also conducted with UAE-based IBC staff at each institution to serve as secondary data sources for sub-questions 2 and 3. These interviews focused on marketing practices and objectives at each institution. In some cases, IBC staff held explicit marketing and student recruitment functions. In others, as **chapter 6** explores further, boundaries between roles were often blurred, such that teaching faculty were heavily involved in campus marketing and students were also hired, either as volunteers or paid interns, to carry out marketing tasks. This made a purposive participant recruitment strategy difficult to design or adhere to. At the same time, the blurring of staff roles opened up new avenues, enabling marketing-focused interviews with teaching faculty and program heads. Similarly, interviews with students often revealed their roles in marketing their institution, leading to opportunities to discuss these roles in further depth. In all, the selection criteria for IBC staff were indeterminate to allow findings like these to organically emerge. Teaching staff interviews were primarily set up with the assistance of campus directors, while others were contacted directly by email.

Several additional interviews were also conducted with external agencies servicing British IBCs in the UAE to broaden an understanding of TNHE marketing strategies and objectives. These agencies include the British Council (office in Dubai), the UK Trade & Investment office (situated within the British embassy in Dubai), and Dubai's Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA). The British Council and UK Trade & Investment support and advance international trade in British educational services, while the KHDA is responsible for licensure and regulation of Dubai's international providers. Interviews with these personnel were exploratory, and as complementary data, did not follow a structured interview protocol or participation target.

**Appendix B** provides details on the 28 UAE and UK staff interviews conducted during the course of this study.

### ***Students***

Interviews with students follow a more purposive recruitment strategy, with a sampling target of around 17 students per institution. In light of conducting only one interview per student, a robust target was chosen to capture a sufficiently broad sampling of students. The extent of student commentary to each question varied depending on the comfort or articulateness of students (being conducted entirely in English), and thus having a large sample of participants helped to mitigate differing depth of responses to each question. However, the recruitment strategy was not prejudiced against 'outlying responses' and welcomed diverse, occasionally provocative responses, as long as participants met the essential participation criteria.

The participation criteria minimally required that participants are students at one of the focal institutions, of non-British citizenship, and 18 or older in age. Previous studies on student perceptions of IBC marketing draws on secondary school students prior to university enrollment (Wilkins, 2013a; Wilkins & Balakrishnan, 2013); this study, however, is designed to examine the process of sense-making

through students' continuous experiences, allowing participants the space after their enrollment to begin making sense of their institution and reflect upon their decision. Graduate students were excluded as they are generally older and have differing priorities guiding their choice-making processes (Mowjee, 2013; Pimpa, 2005). Participation further required that participants come from non-British backgrounds in order to capture both their imagination of the UK and the attendant desire to participate in its institutions as a non-British national.

A secondary set of preferred selection criteria prioritized recruitment of students who were enrolled on full-time programs, had not previously attended a British international secondary school, and had never visited the UK. The secondary school criterion was aimed at minimizing the rollover of students directly from British secondary schools to British IBCs and maximizing participation from students who were more likely to consider different international university options. Some of these preferred criteria were complicated by the fact that British IBCs in the UAE were heavily attended by nationals of countries formerly colonized by Britain, making the influence of British educational institutions widely unavoidable in the participant sample. These selection criteria are summarized in **table 3.6**.

**Table 3.6 Participant Selection Criteria for Student Interviews**

<i>Required criteria</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student from one of three focal institutions</li> <li>• Non-British nationality</li> <li>• Has not spent significant time in the UK</li> <li>• Age 18 or older (for IRB/ethical considerations)</li> <li>• Attending undergraduate degree program</li> </ul>
<i>Preferred criteria</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Currently attending full-time (graduates considered if recent)</li> <li>• Has not visited the UK and is somewhat unfamiliar with its traditions, educational institutions (i.e. did not attend a British international secondary school)</li> <li>• Wide dispersion of nationalities and backgrounds</li> </ul>

One distinction among participants which was unique to the transnational environment was their residency status within the UAE as expatriates (with visa sponsorship from parents or other family who themselves are sponsored by a UAE-based employer) or international student who came to the UAE on a student visa to attend a university. These student groups had distinct senses of belonging in the UAE, different experiences of the higher education marketing and recruitment process, and often divergent post-university aspirations. As **chapter 7** explores further, these groups were often comprised of students of particular nationalities, owing to the expatriate demographics of the UAE population and the overseas 'hotspots' for international student recruitment, both of which produced patterns within visa designations. At the same time, the differences between some participants on either visa was negligible, rendering their designation for the purpose of study participation irrelevant. Rather than narrow the student focus to one group or the other, the recruitment strategy did not discriminate between them, and instead attempted to analyze their distinctiveness with regards to sub-question 3.

Student participants were recruited through a combination of referrals and snowball sampling. In the case of referrals, staff at two of the institutions each referred several students whom they thought reflected a diverse sample, met the selection criteria, and would be willing to participate. These student participants then referred some of their classmates or friends in a snowball or chain sampling strategy (Miles & Huberman, 1994) either by introduction from participants or by emailing them directly. Student participants were occasionally recruited at campus events in the process of participatory observations (i.e. 'hanging out' with students). Of the 52 total student interview participants, 44 were interviewed in campus spaces such as the cafeterias, recreational rooms, or unoccupied classrooms; four were held in cafes off-campus and four were conducted over Skype (following missed in-person appointments).

A detailed table of the 52 IBC students interviewed for this study is provided in **Appendix A**.



### 3.4.3 Data Collection Schedule

The collection of data in the UAE took place over three visits between late 2014 and early 2016, each with distinct research objectives.

**Visit I (September to December 2014):** the objective of this visit was to become acquainted with the geography of the field, build contacts, and conduct exploratory research (interviews, observations and document analysis) on TNHE in UAE. This phase was also framed as a pilot study looking at the commercialization and regulation of international non- and for-profit higher education in the Emirate of Ras Al Khaimah; the findings in this phase were shared through various academic presentations and publications (Juusola & Rensimer, 2018; Rensimer, 2015, 2016).

**Visit II (February to June 2015):** the objective of this visit was to collect primary data on British IBCs in Dubai and Ras Al Khaimah, particularly their marketing and recruiting practices on and off campus (including sector-wide events like the GETEX higher education expo). On this visit, the researcher observed and documented events, collected visual materials, and interviewed staff and students. Collected artifacts were converted into data and analyzed following this visit, with the aim of informing further interviews in the subsequent field visit.

**Visit III (April to May 2016):** in this third and final visit, the bulk of students at each institution were interviewed individually or in pairs. The researcher also observed students in campus spaces and participated in social activities with interviewees in order to broaden an understanding of their social worlds and university experiences.

Further to these three visits to the UAE, interviews with UK-based senior leaders and marketing managers at university home campuses were conducted by phone from January to August 2017.

### **3.5 Data Analysis and Synthesis**

The data analysis strategy for this study is a layered approach, drawing on a series of methods grounded in the interpretive research paradigm. These methods were selected as they were best suited for interpreting and understanding how meaning is produced and communicated through social interaction. On their own, each method is commonly used as a qualitative research technique; in this study, they are employed complementarily to approach the data in different ways and produce conjoined findings. In this regard the study design is innovative, particularly in higher education research. This section makes explicit the analysis techniques applied to the marketing, interview, and observation data, followed by their synthesis in the production of theory. All analysis was assisted by NVivo 12, although analysis was a continuous process which took place during data collection, through memoing, and constant reflection on the research process (Morse, 1994).

#### **3.5.1 Analysis of Representations**

The voluminous marketing data were approached using three different interpretive methods in a sequence designed to distill and iteratively reexamine findings. Data produced from website screenshots, social media screenshots, prospectuses, and photographs were imported in NVivo; printed materials were scanned and imported, while other material items were either photographed or described in order to analyze them. The first method applied to the data was an empirical form of content analysis which enabled a broad overview of the data and an early formation of analytical codes (Bell, 2011). Word frequency searches were applied to the textual data (websites, prospectuses, social media captions) to draw out frequently used words and phrases. These items were then aggregated into thematic clusters based on their proximity in use or meaning to related words (such as 'accredited' and 'recognized' in relation to 'degree'). While simplistic in their early development, these clusters informed one set of analytical codes pertaining to the key identities that IBCs communicated in their marketing. They also interrupted certain assumptions I had about which self-descriptors British IBCs used most

(such as 'global', which this method revealed was used infrequently as an explicit label but was later found in abundance visually and semiotically).

The visual content was also enumerated by devising a coding frame which defines the categories with which each image is classified (Hannam & Knox, 2005). Some classifications were descriptive and analytical, while others were exclusive denominations which enabled a frequency tabulation similar to the content analysis of text (labelled using a hashtag, such as #stock to label a stock image). I adapted a coding frame developed by Bell (2011) to analyze images according to a series of categories as illustrated in **table 3.7**.

**Table 3.7 Visual Content Analysis Coding Frame**

<i>Category</i>	<i>Descriptor</i>	<i>Type</i>
<i>Make</i>	Actual photograph, stock image, or informative graphic	Exclusive
<i>Manifest content</i>	Concise description of all visible items	Descriptive
<i>Setting</i>	IBC interior, IBC exterior, generic educational setting, UAE, UK, etc.	Exclusive
<i>Functional purpose</i>	Advertising event, document past event, documenting achievement, advertising campus feature, advertising academic program, communicating with current students, etc.	Hierarchical
<i>Intended audience</i>	Internal (current students), external (prospective students, general public), etc.	Hierarchical
<i>Angle of viewer and gaze of subject</i>	Upward, level, downward; Centered, oblique	Exclusive
<i>Mood</i>	Description of feeling, tone, warmth, etc.	Descriptive
<i>Multi-modality</i>	Relationship between image and text (where appropriate)	Descriptive
<i>Relation to IBC, UK higher education or UK</i>	Relationship between denotative content and study phenomena	Descriptive

After the coding frame was applied to all visual data, it was possible to run a series of tabulations to identify key trends in image purpose, audience, content and style by institution and collectively. As the coding frames were applied through NVivo, the descriptive categories could also be coded using some of the analytical codes developed in the initial textual analysis. This broadened the iterative development of themes. The process also identified sets of key representations which would then be approached using the next analysis method.

This second method, semiotic visual analysis, approaches image content as signifiers embedded with meaning and ideology. Roland Barthes' (1967, 1972) work in this field posited that signs produce denotations and connotations; the former refers to the manifest content signified through visual language, while the latter refers to abstract concepts encoded in cultural semantics and linked to broader, diffuse fields of meaning and knowledge. Descriptions produced in the first stage of analysis using the coding frame were used to analyze the visual grammar of images, which semioticians argue has a syntagmatic and paradigmatic structuring as textual language does (Nöth, 1990). Syntagmatic structure concerns the combination or ordering of elements to produce particular meanings, while paradigmatic refers to the particular choice of an image or word out of infinite possibilities. These analytical axes provided another way of looking relationally at the visual data to establish trends and identify visual tropes (for example, smiling 'students' in graduation caps and gowns clutching diplomas, staring intently at the viewer). At the denotative level, there is relatively little semiotic slippage between signifier and signified. This example would collectively denote a celebratory moment at the completion of a higher education degree program. At the connotative level, there is greater room for interpretation (a common criticism of Barthes' methodology). However, connotative analysis can be grounded to concentrate interpretations of ideological and cultural signification into purposive frames, sometimes referred to as an ideological or cultural framework (Echtner, 1999). In this case, it was assumed that representations had a purpose in marketing British higher education, and thus connotative elements

would be anchored to positive, idealizations of higher education and Britain as its originating source. In the example, the underlying connotative meaning, linked to the promotion of higher education, might be interpreted as 'achievement' or 'promising future' which the viewer is invited or urged to participate in by undertaking the same pathway and fulfilling one's self. As the images across a source (i.e. a prospectus or social media platform) were analyzed at the connotative level, their relationship as a structured text could be read to deduce deeper meanings or ideological patterning (for example, repeatedly drawing on international icons of tourism, symbols of mobility, and depictions of the globe in relation to the IBC might be read as that institution's global reach, connectedness or influence). This practice of mobilizing particular encodings into patterned rules or statements in order to construct objects of knowledge constitutes a discursive event in the Foucauldian sense (of which its repetition across texts and practices would inform a discursive formation) (Hall, 2013). I consequently approached these connotative patterns as ways of knowing the subject in images (e.g. how British IBCs, IBC students, IBC staff, etc. are constructed through representations), and iteratively mapped them in analytical memos and charts to develop key themes.

To further analyze the textual data, select items identified in the content analysis stage were thirdly analyzed using an approach inspired by Fairclough's (2001) analytical framework for interactional analysis, which approaches all forms of semiotic activity as a conversational interaction between an author and audience. This method is principally concerned with the semiotic work that "people are doing on specific occasions", looking at how texts are "used and worked" to achieve signification (p. 240). Interactional analysis examines texts with regards to their representations, relationships, identities, and values. Similar to the visual semiotic analysis method, these dimensions can be analyzed paradigmatically by their linguistic choices and syntagmatically by the way texts are structured to produce meanings. This was done initially at the word and clause level to generate and refine codes corresponding to the four analytical dimensions. These analyses were subsequently put into

conversation to produce a meta-textual analysis which fed into the themes developed previously. An example of this process is provided in **table 3.8**. In this example, one text datum has been extracted from Adam Smith University's 2011 international strategy publication. This document was not used as data in the study and is only included here to illustrate the analytical process.

**Table 3.8 Example of Interactional (Discourse) Analysis Process**

"Adam Smith University provides a much sought after and high quality British education in Dubai as well as at home and around the world."		
<i>Code</i>	<i>Paradigmatic</i>	<i>Syntagmatic</i>
<b>Representations</b>		
<i>UK as a type of higher education</i>		"high quality British education" – British is used as a signifier of a type of educational system. Linked here to high quality.
<i>UK as home</i>	"home" – <i>Whose</i> home? suggests the UK without explicitly saying so.	"home" – may assume the reader shares the notion of UK as home, or may be seen as inviting the reader to share in this identity of 'home'.
<b>Relationships</b>		
<i>Spatial</i>		"in Dubai as well as at home and around the world" -  Dubai is the only place that is named here. It is through this place one accesses the home and the world. Dubai as a place becomes a means to access 'home' and 'the world' [Adam Smith University is the conduit that links spatialities].
<b>Identities</b>		
<i>Institutional self-projection</i>		"Adam Smith University provides a much sought after and high quality British education" – Adam Smith University sees and projects itself as a provider of an exclusive product that people (other than the reader) want. [syntagmatic link: quality and demand].
<b>Values</b>		
<i>Market value</i>	"sought after" – speaks to notion of market demand; it suggests it is a seller's market.	

### 3.5.2 Analysis of Interview Data

The analytical approach applied to the interview data was relatively less complicated, as the mode of communication, or 'text', was singular (an interactive conversation) and the basic parameters of that conversation such as its function and audience were self-evident. Nevertheless, a structured analytical technique informed by phenomenological methods was applied to the data using pre-existing and bespoke analytical codes. The data were produced through the sets of questions outlined in the interview protocols. As interviews were semi-structured, responses fell into focal stages which reflected the shared experiences of phenomena, such as the choice-making process or students' experiences of their institution since the moment of enrollment. These phenomena made for discrete narrative units which could be analyzed across the interview data.

Analysis of interviews proceeded through five-stage processes adapted from Hyener (1999, cited in Groenewald, 2004, p. 17) and Vagle (2010): re-orientation and familiarization (referred to as bracketing or bridling), identification of meaningful statements, coding, summarization of interviews, and aggregation into themes. The first stage is a preparatory process of familiarizing the researcher to the data in order to set conditions for seeing the participant's world or subjectivity without the interference of concepts or presuppositions from the researcher. This was done by revisiting all of the interview data, firstly through laborious transcription from audio recordings to text, and secondly by re-reading student interviews consecutively and holistically to cognitively situate myself in the context in which they were produced. The post-structural adaptation of this method recognizes that all analysis is in part autobiographical, and adheres to a sustained practice of active reflection – through memoing and journaling – to 'bridle' or examine assumptions informing the interactions with participants and interpretations thereof (Vagle, 2010). Analytical memos were produced throughout the process to enable continuous reflection and locate myself within the analysis. In the second and third stages, I identified and coded utterances or statements which spoke to the particular phenomena of interest to

the research questions. Codes were partially informed by analysis of marketing data, looking at statements speaking to students' value of, identities in, and relationship to their institution (corresponding to values coding as per Saldaña, 2009). A further set of codes were devised to classify patterns in students' experiences, comparative statements, and descriptions of places (corresponding to initial coding). The latter set of codes was particularly useful in identifying phenomena and factors outside the research framework, such as student accounts of racism, gender discrimination, or pedagogical unfamiliarity, which informed or textured their experiences and value derived from them. Reflections on the coding process and early thematic findings were recorded in the same research log used during the data collection stage. Entries were dated, titled and labelled with keywords to facilitate search and retrieval given the extended length of the document.

The fourth and fifth stages comprised a second round of analytical coding, starting by revisiting each transcript and summarizing key narratives and experiences in analytical memos. The sequence of this process followed students' institution and residency (expatriate or international student) in order to identify patterns within these sub-groupings. According to Hyener's method, participants should be invited to provide feedback on the summaries of their interviews to determine whether accounts were accurately 'captured' (1999, p. 154, cited in Groenewald, 2004). Follow-up conversations were held with participants wherever possible; however, feedback was not often substantive or critical in a useful way. Drawing on emerging themes across the interview data, transcripts were re-coded into 'meta' codes which captured deeper social processes reflected in previously coded states. These meta codes were used to produce themes in the final stage of the analysis. I was mindful in this stage not to force idiosyncratic or contradictory accounts into themes where their differences were meaningful, as themes were developed to accommodate differences rather than erase them. These differences are explored in each of the thematic clusters in **chapter 7**.



Interviews with staff followed a different analytical process with fewer iterative stages. For interviews with senior leaders (addressing sub-question 1), transcripts were coded using a combination of descriptive and initial coding approaches to categorize and cluster responses by their commonalities. As the research sub-question concerns the different approaches of each institution in their transnational strategy, there was no need to aggregate codes into cross-cutting themes. Coded data were incorporated into the focal institution profiles developed and presented in **chapter 5** and their key similarities and differences were summarized in the conclusion of that chapter. For interviews with marketing staff, transcripts were coded through initial and values coding approaches to capture accounts of marketing processes and the affective dimensions of their experiences. These interviews were intended as secondary data to address sub-question 2, and were therefore used mainly to help me as the researcher contextualize and appreciate how particular events or practices were conducted. Key statements were extracted from transcripts and applied in complement to the analysis of marketing data in **chapter 6**.

### **3.5.3 Analysis of Observations**

Observations were used to contextualize marketing processes and either visualize or experience live marketing practices. As noted in the research strategy above, observed events were structured by focal questions and documented in a field journal in order to record, reflect upon, and analyze each experience. These observations therefore helped to broaden my understanding of phenomena and contextualize them in the UAE higher education market – which was somewhat alien to me prior to conducting the research. Participant observations in particular helped to close the distance between myself and student participants, which proved to be instrumental in the bracketing stage of analyzing their interviews as I felt that I could visualize their accounts with greater depth and clarity.

Field memos on observed events were coded where they corresponded with meaningful interview excerpts using previously generated codes. These coded data were used to enrich the process of developing themes and served as a tool for reflection where memos observed dissonance between my own emotional and cognitive experiences and those I sought to identify and understand in participants' accounts (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This reflective process was extended to other analytical memos recorded during the data collection stages to retrace how my perspective, affective experience, and theory-building had developed over the course of the research.

#### **3.5.4 Synthesis of Data**

Analysis is often characterized as the splitting apart of data into pieces which can be examined in a systematic manner; in contrast, synthesis is the process of bringing the examined pieces back together to present an intelligible (coherent) picture. According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2012), synthesis extends beyond the development of themes within each data analysis strategy; rather, it cuts across the data and across strategies, putting the findings in conversation with each other, the research questions, the literature, and the researcher's assumptions before and after conducting the study. The synthesis of findings in this study therefore follows an inductive approach, where the key themes developed in each of the analysis chapters are combined to create a compelling and substantive answer, and in effect, produce theory.

The synthesis of findings takes place in the conclusion (**chapter 8**), where the research questions are revisited and addressed using findings from each of the analysis chapters grounded in foundational literature and concepts. Reflection is woven into the process by retracing analytical development from early field memos to the writing up stage, in order to see where and what caused arguments to shift, expand, narrow, or ultimately solidify. If analysis is indeed "a journey with no defined end point"

(Gibson & Brown, 2009, p. 203), the subtext of the conclusion chapter is a discussion of how and why the research arrived at its end among many possible endings.

### **3.6 Ethical Considerations**

Scholarly research in the North American and European academic enterprise has a well-established and troubled history of unethical research practices underpinned by or advancing socially unjust aims. Such practices extend beyond the immediate ethical considerations surrounding researching on/with human subjects, as at the heart of the matter is the exercise of social power: for the purpose of representing others, for collecting (and unequally benefitting from) others' knowledges, and ultimately for the purpose of advancing careers and contributing to institutionalized gains through research metrics and the consolidation of Western/Northern-centric epistemes. Although doctoral research is now closely regulated through risk assessments and ethical compliance procedures (e.g. an institutional review or research ethics board), there is no equivalent ethical-ization of representation (through writing and publication) or the asymmetric benefits of the research process (despite overtures to the gains of 'public knowledge', which is only beneficial to those who can meaningfully access it and utilize it for other purposes). With their historical baggage as institutions constructing the world through the gaze of Western/Northern-centric epistemic lenses (Willinsky, 1998), universities have a responsibility to think beyond risks and benefits of IRB compliance, looking instead to the epistemic projects their scholarship knowingly or unknowingly contribute to. For the purpose of this study, this section is concerned with the ethical considerations of conducting social research involving human subjects and of representation as an outsider to a community I attempt to speak on behalf of. Both of these concern power, particularly asymmetric relations which I as the researcher held responsibility to anticipate and negotiate throughout this project, from my social interactions with participants (and non-participants) to my representations of them in this writing.

The first and most immediate ethical consideration is the obvious need for ensuring participants' confidentiality. Social research in the UAE is not necessarily more restricted despite being an absolute monarchy; it is relatively open in this regard. Interpersonal or inter-institutional criticism, however, is not well tolerated, and the UAE maintains strong penal codes against speech acts which can be construed as defamation or libel (both criminal offenses). The possible consequences for a disclosure of sensitive commentary about individuals or organizations are serious. To ensure participants' employment, residency and personal security, full confidentiality and data protection were practiced throughout the course of this research. All participants' identifying information were removed from the data (transcripts and notes) and kept in an encrypted key file stored on a University of Wisconsin-Madison server. Culturally responsive pseudonyms were given to all student participants, while generic roles (e.g. director, marketer) were given to staff. Participants were rehearsed in the purpose of the study and the risks in participating before commencing with an interview. Consent was obtained orally to avoid producing a material form of identification through traditional (signed) consent forms. Participants were also given the right to decline the use of an audio recorder, discontinue the interview, and subsequently withdraw their comments at any time.

Focal institutions were also given appropriate pseudonyms containing analogous features of their names, such as geographical references or namesakes. The use of institutional pseudonyms in this study cannot prevent their identification by any reader familiar with the IBC landscape in the UAE, but serves to further enhance the overall anonymity of participants when used in tandem with individual participant pseudonyms. Institutional pseudonyms were also the preference of gatekeepers at one of the three IBCs out of commercial concern for the potential impact of research on the reputation of their campus. This convention was written into the University of Wisconsin-Madison IRB application and applied to the other two institutions on the grounds that a partial application of institutional pseudonyms would undermine the anonymity of the one institution requesting it. Even with these

assurances in place, the level of access and resources provided at each branch institution varied. No parallel IRB/ethical reviews were required in the UAE or UK. To maintain the anonymity of the focal institutions examined in this dissertation, some numerical figures and dates which would easily identify an institution have been marginally changed or generalized; the tradeoff in this decision is not seen to impede the study's empirical or analytical potential in any significant way.

The second ethical consideration in this project is in the act of representing myself to others in the process of conducting the research. As the earlier discussion of my positionality argued, my numerous, visible, historically privileged identities were brought to bear throughout the research, strongly impacting the access I had to particular spaces and participants. Much as I believe the researcher should embrace an ethical code of authentic self-representation at all times, being a consistent version of myself would not have opened doors equally across the very different participant groups I sought to access (senior leaders, staff, and students). It was at times difficult to find the balance between a desire to be taken seriously and the need to be approachable, relatable and trustworthy to different kinds of participants. This was complicated by being in the UAE, a place I could not claim to know deeply, and one in which expertise, professional attire and elitism intersect at the upper strata of higher education in ways that vectored uncomfortably with university identities and spaces I embrace. I initially played along by dressing smartly, particularly as I represented the research foundation sponsoring my visit, though this carried an air of authority that made me deeply uncomfortable, even if it was the kind of research that participants could most easily recognize. Fortunately, mid-way through my visit, I was encouraged by a trusted colleague to 'dress down' in order to put participants at ease and increase access by avoiding any pretense of 'inspection' as a professional investigator<sup>13</sup>. I was happy to oblige,

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<sup>13</sup> To illustrate the severity of race/ethnicity on access to social spaces in the UAE, however, another research colleague, from the US and of exceptional academic pedigree, felt he had to dress up in fully formal attire to be taken seriously due to his South Asian name and appearance.

not only for the sake of my own comfort and feeling of authenticity, but for my participants as well, as it enabled the type of casual interactions and unrehearsed commentary I preferred to capture in the research.

There were opportunities while participating in campus events where it would have been possible to 'blend in' as an IBC student. Much as that persona might have enabled a more routine series of interactions between staff and students in the room, I felt it was ethically incumbent upon me to identify myself as a visiting researcher and make explicit the phenomena I was observing. Doing so likely altered the course of interactions, but also prompted new conversations from staff and students interested in my research, leading to helpful suggestions and occasionally new participants. The only occasion in which I felt it would not be irresponsible to present myself as something other than a researcher was at the GETEX higher education marketing expo. At the time of this event I already knew some of the staff and volunteers at the three British IBCs so I remained as myself when visiting their expo stands. As I walked around and took in the many non-focal institutions at the event, however, it was an interesting opportunity to just participate as a casual visitor and ask about each university as a prospective student to graduate degree programs. This gave me an appreciation for the breadth of marketing phenomena, and to a small degree, from the perspective of a visitor shopping for the right program.

The final ethical consideration lies in the act of representing others in writing and choosing the right descriptive language. The term 'subjectivity' is richly layered with analytical uses in linking (the limits of) human thought and activity to broader structural processes and discourses. We are all 'subjects' of discourse and subject to the infinite processes that govern us (albeit in different ways). Nevertheless, the term 'subject' carries an unsettling connotation of one who is relatively unempowered, illusioned, or worse, beguiled by others. The term subjectivity is comfortably applied when theorizing from a distance,

but feels less appropriate up close when the research subjects become three dimensional, complex, and relatable – thus no longer being ‘others’. I take care to acknowledge that if there is a subjectivity relating to British higher education, I too was subjugated as an international student in the UK and to an extent remain so as that experience has shaped my thinking and perspective on both international study and the UK.

It is partly for this reason that Appadurai’s contribution to social imagination is so welcoming here. Imagination shifts the focus from what is being done to someone limiting what they can think or say, to focusing on the agent who is collectively empowered by social imaginations of what is possible or thinkable. This language feels less egocentric (particularly as my gaze as the researcher spans differences of culture, class and ethnicity/race) and shifts the production of assumptions slightly more towards the participant. It is particularly well suited for international students, as this study on choice-making is interested in how they formulate value and meaning in educational choices and consumption, not how they are hoodwinked or coerced into consuming one brand over another in some crude commercial sense. Nevertheless, justly representing my participants and their wider social groups is indeed an ethical challenge which I acknowledge and try to maintain awareness of throughout the writing process. With all the scholarly fascination with the spectacle of branch campuses, I believe the act of centering student voices (sublimely championed by Gargano, 2012; Koehne, 2006) is itself an act of social restitution against a powerful educational export industry that capitalizes on the necessity and desire for flexible cultural (degree) capital. I hope that the analysis I conducted is sufficiently rigorous to understand and accurately portray the complex realities of my participants.

### **3.7 Limitations of the Study**

The research design employed in this study is an amalgamation of methodological and analytical traditions which were seen as best suited for these particular areas of inquiry. The research itself is

original in that its design does not follow one established tradition or design template in its entirety to investigate the performances and interpretations of TNHE forms. As later chapters demonstrate, the study design was effective in producing the analyses they were employed to produce while minimizing design flaws as best as possible. At the same time, the design is not without its shortcomings, and the study could have been conducted differently if time or financial resources were not limited to the extent that they were. These issues are acknowledged here as limitations of the research design. Dovetailing with these, an agenda for future research in light of this study's findings is discussed in **chapter 8.4**.

The study is concentrated on British TNHE in the UAE, understanding the way it is commercialized and marketized as a problem within higher education. This problem takes extreme forms in the UAE as it is an international higher education hub with a strongly market-led mode of access, making it a marriage of two marketizing processes (British TNHE and UAE free zoning) that operate in tandem. The previous chapters have argued that this presents a worthy problem for research; however, this design does present a limitation in terms of its overall scope of inquiry. The scope could have been broadened to incorporate a comparative frame such as an examination of British IBCs in a comparable market setting like Malaysia. This would broaden the focus of the inquiry to British TNHE at the global or cross-national level. A second approach might have compared British IBCs with another national higher education brand popular in the UAE, such as the Indian or American IBCs. This would have changed the research problem entirely but enabled a deeper comparative analysis of different TNHE brands in the UAE higher marketplace. A third comparative approach would be at the institutional level, with visits to the three focal institutions' campuses in the UK and their other international locations. However, this would have relocated the focus of the study to concentrate on institutional and transnational strategy, which addresses a different problem and set of questions. While an explicitly comparative design would offer various analytical advantages, it would change the scope of the inquiry away from the identified



research problem, and in the context of finite resources, investigating multiple geographical sites or competing national brands might stretch thin its empirical and analytical capacity.

A limitation of the participant selection strategy was its narrow focus on undergraduate students who were attending or had attended one of the three British IBCs in Dubai or RAK. The research question of how these students make sense of transnational British higher education and indeed why they made the choice to attend one of the institutions is best answered by this particular population of students.

However, this does locate the data supporting the existence of a regime of value within those who volunteer to participate or 'buy in' to its value constructions, when presumably a regime of value impacts a wide audience to differing degrees. Students were not unequivocal in the way they valued their British IBC over other choices, and sometimes their choices were simply a matter of cost or something equally circumstantial. The analysis may therefore have benefitted by including the counterfactual – that is, students who chose not to attend a British IBC but had otherwise similar encounters with British IBC marketing (such as the performances at the GETEX higher education expo).

One practical accommodation might have involved seeking out students who had transferred away from a British IBC to understand how they saw things differently. On the issue of choice-making, it was realized late in the data collection process that parents had a strong if not commanding influence on students' choices of their undergraduate studies, either by imposing geographic, financial, or degree program restrictions, or doing much of the market navigation and choice-making themselves.

Interviewing parents, particularly among student participants who claimed to have had little choice in their institution, would have certainly broadened the findings and scope of the analysis. This particular critique could be said of much of the international student decision-making literature, which tends to concentrate a rationalizing gaze on the individual when, as argued in **chapter 2.2**, choices are made in social contexts (e.g. families, friendship circles, and other social units).

A final limitation of this study, which again arises from its finite time and financial resources, is the extent to which the relationship between marketing and student imaginations was able to be examined. As I was an outsider to the UAE with a limited social circle operating in the IBCs, recruiting student participants was at times difficult. Most of those who volunteered in advance to participate were eager to share their views and experiences, and perhaps to talk to a foreign researcher and learn a little about doctoral research. Their time was not infinite, however, and creating sufficient time and locating an appropriate setting for a full interview often proved challenging and in itself time-consuming. With greater access to IBC students, perhaps if the study were conducted by an insider (e.g. as an academic staff member or doctoral student at one of the same IBCs), there might have been more opportunity to conduct follow-up interviews or arrange focus groups bringing different types of students into conversation. Focus groups especially would have allowed for deeper investigation of particular marketing practices and their effect on students' choices and sense of value. Students were asked about their encounters with marketing and about particular marketing practices in the one-off interviews in this study, but further space to probe the relationship and in an explicitly dialogic setup might have yielded richer findings which could speak to the strength of marketing or students' critical resistance to it. As the analyses in this study hopefully convinces readers, the limitations of depth to particular individuals is countered by its overall volume and breadth of participants. As a tradeoff for a more narrative-focused presentation of the data, it presents a wide dispersion of voices, and this adds empirical solidity to the findings in **chapter 7**.

### **3.8 Conclusion**

This chapter covered a range of topics speaking to the manner in which the study was conceived, framed, and conducted. To a greater degree than the subsequent chapters, this chapter followed a systematic structure to cover every aspect of the research process in observance of the academic principles of transparency, rigor and ethical conduct. It began with the intellectual considerations

shaping the core assumptions that the study rests upon (what is knowable, how it can be known) and how the specific strategies employed in this study are informed by these assumptions and traditions. It then pivoted to the practical considerations of conducting the research, based on specific methods and techniques employed in similar previous research and adapting and combining them to suit the phenomena in this study. Throughout the chapter there was also continuous reflection on the inextricable presence of the researcher in the research and how I am constituted in the study's design and execution, illustrating one of many ways in which the study is unique to its author.

## Introduction to Chapters 4 & 5: Policy and Site Contexts

The next two chapters place British universities and their border-crossing practices in their historical and contemporary policy framings. By looking at how the UK higher education policy environment changed between the nineteenth to the twenty-first century, it is possible to understand how the idea of the 'global' British university was formed through Britain's imperial reshaping of the world, creating a context for the exportation of British institutions. The institutional imprint and image that this left, which provided the foundation for global demand, would be filled by a commercial export model enabled by market reform policies in the UK which have slowly disentangled the state from university governance. Despite the substantive transition from politico-imperial to free market logics fueling the outward flows of institutions and inward flows of students, what remains constant throughout is the global reach of British institutions. These chapters connect those pivotal developments by tracing the origins and gradual dominance of the market rationale, looking at policies in the UK (**chapter 4**) and their consequences in one particular international education market: the United Arab Emirates (**chapter 5**).

While the thrust of these chapters focuses on the politico-economic continuities underpinning the transnational movement of UK universities generally and IBC developments more specifically, it also establishes the scalar dimensions to which this study speaks. The act of tracing institutions and policy developments necessitates a multi-scalar approach as the analytical frame moves from meta-policy (such as colonial domination or the contemporary educational export industry) and global frame to particular institutions in particular regions governed by particular policies. These chapters frame the vertical and transversal axes within which contemporary British IBCs in the UAE can be understood and analyzed as the products of historical policy developments. This approach is further essential to visualizing the connections between institutions and students, and how upward imaginations and

downward representations are governed by shared ideas and historical experiences of British universities.

The historical framing of Britain's globalizing higher education is explored in **chapter 4** to argue that UK transnational education, and particularly IBCs, must be understood not only through the lenses of present-day British and global trade in education, but also in the context of past colonial trajectories and in relationship to the British world-making project. It argues that while the transnational phenomena constituting institutions 'going global' is not new to British higher education, the overarching rationale and scope in its contemporary formations is. This new rationale is essential to understanding contemporary university cross-border engagements (although importantly the discourses framing UK TNHE shift by scale and audience). **Chapter 5** will then illustrate the scope of Britain's educational export industry in the UAE, where a large expatriate population and highly commercialized educational service sector enable cross-border trade in UK educational services within a vast consortium of international providers of varying sizes and purposes.

The objective of these chapters is to critically examine the development of the IBC as a practice in internationalization and its perception as an ahistorical global phenomenon. On the consumption end, it aims to unsettle commonplace assumptions around 'demand' for British higher education in non-British spaces by highlighting the ways in which British universities have historically been made known to the world through their global export and their relationship to the British imperial state. On the institutional end, it places universities' cross-border engagements in the context of policies old and new, in the UK and UAE that create socio-political spaces, both imaginative and material, for an extreme form of internationalization – one which in some ways crudely resembles an ignoble yet normalized colonial past.

## **Chapter 4: The (Re)Globalization of British Higher Education (Policy Context)**

This chapter establishes the policy origins and historical context of British IBCs, including an overview of the political impulses and social technologies driving the globalization of British higher education. It also looks at the structural transformations in UK higher education that increased institutional autonomy and shaped institutions' actorhood around the interests of markets. It begins with an historical examination of higher education exportation and the rationales underpinning it. It follows with a brief identification of the key policies that frame the need for 'internationalization' in general, as it is understood in contemporary practices, and the elaborate development of IBCs in particular.

The historical arc of British universities' outward gaze is similar to that of other European higher education trajectories over the same periods. Its development moves from a medieval pre-nation-state model that networked across European institutions to a modern institution that carried out political functions with the support of the state in imperial and post-war Britain, to a third and current stage of global competition to capture resources, elevate institutional profile, grow and consolidate in the wake of attenuating state funding. Institutional autonomy, and conversely the role of the state in higher education, fluctuated through these periods, in a dialectical relationship between the state and universities that saw the political functions of universities recede and their economic agency or 'responsibilization' rise (Marginson, 2009). Despite the wane in overt state control in the late modern stage and present day, the state maintains its arms-length reach over universities through evaluative regimentation (Neave, 2012) and a series of policy incentives to steer and strengthen the collective ensemble that has become the UK's educational export industry, a sizable part of the UK service economy (S. L. Robertson, 2010b). In other words, to understand the logics driving the outward expansion of UK universities, the economic cannot be seen as distinct from the political nor does it necessarily replace it; it is in many ways a transformed continuation of it, in the same way that under

neoliberal policymaking generally the state is retooled as an indirect hand in the (re)regulation of public institutions.

This chapter argues that the global expansion of the UK higher education sector as seen in the present day is not unprecedented. Rather, the high global demand for British education today can arguably be attributed in part to the world-making imperial project that preceded it. This position is controversial among scholars of internationalization who argue that the attenuation of the state or the shift from political to economic rationales in university internationalization constitute a clean break from the “academic colonialism” of the early modern epoch (de Wit & Merckx, 2012; Scott, 1998). Their works do posit a number of important ways in which universities and their place in the world have fundamentally changed. This chapter, in keeping with the epistemological orientations outlined in **chapters 2 and 3** however, takes the position of critical and postcolonial scholars in geography and social theory that the global policy imaginary and the limits of its discourse – effectively every form and direction that British institutions take and the ways in which they are known by global audiences – are governed by historical antecedents. Global flows of higher education cannot be understood in isolation of their historically situated pathways and the constellations of power that shaped them (Marginson & Sawir, 2005). After all, the markets that UK universities occupy and the assumptions guiding universities into them are not *ex nihilo* or ‘given’ objects but rather historical contingencies and must not be divorced from them in their analysis. It is with this regard that the historical arc of British universities will be examined, tracing the key policy formations of the past that allow us to see British higher education and its global status in a certain ‘natural’ light today.

## 4.1 Imperial Modernity – The National Institution in the Global Empire

### 4.1.1 The Imperial British University

The rise of the nation-state in the early modern ages, and with it a consolidation of national identities, led to a national territorialization that subsequently transformed the academic circulations of pre-modern Europe. Within Britain, the domestic expansion of higher education lagged behind all other imperial powers at the time, with Oxford, Cambridge and several Scottish institutions remaining the only sites of university-level instruction until nearly the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Ashby, 1966). During this period, those universities had been thoroughly parochialized by national policy developments to become sites of elite formation for British gentry and later, in-bound colonial subjects. The federated colleges of the University of London also emerged in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, but these were exclusively purposed for examination and certification until the early 1900s.

As European imperial projects expanded, the pathways of student mobility shifted from an inter-European network to a strongly siloed web of flows between imperial centers and colonial peripheries (Altbach, 1998; de Wit & Merckx, 2012; Pietsch, 2016). These flows were overwhelmingly unidirectional, with students moving towards the center for their professional training, and increasingly, institutions and faculty towards colonies as higher education expanded. Despite its limited number of universities, Britain embraced this paradigm for interfacing with its overseas empire. The outward flow of British higher education to colonial peripheries, and thus the diffusion of the Anglo-Saxon university model, is thought to have its origins in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, with the general purpose of consolidating Britain's ideological control over its empire<sup>14</sup>. Notable examples of British higher education exports towards these ends include: the founding of a Royal Chartered university in Ireland to deflect the influence of Jacobin republicanism emanating from France; the founding of universities in India to train elites for

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<sup>14</sup> de Wit and Merckx (2012, p.45) describe this as a stage of “academic colonialism” or “academic imperialism”



administrative roles in the colonial government; and the development of universities in Australia and New Zealand to educate gentry in exile while consolidating the relationship between Crown and clergy (Ashby, 1966; Marginson, 2002). On the particularly isomorphic nature of these universities, Ashby (1966, p. 41) notes that such institutions especially in India and Africa were “greatly influenced, if not determined, by advice from the metropolitan government in London”, and importantly, maintained strong administrative, financial and curricular ties with the Crown and patron universities in the imperial center<sup>15</sup>. These exports had clear political functions with their trajectories linking the colonial implants directly to their UK ‘mother’ institutions, mediated by the commanding authority of the imperial state.

The export of British educational institutions functioned within the imperial governing project by shifting away from a detached curiosity with Oriental knowledge towards an aggressive cultural politics that needed to posit British ideals above those of its subjects in order to manage dissent (Darwin, 2011; Willinsky, 1998). To this effect, university instruction was conducted in English in order to expand access to the British literary canon, disseminate European knowledge, and train cadres of administrators who not only served in the colonial apparatus but embodied the moral codes (ethos) undergirding the imperial project. As a governing technology, the diffusion of British education to its dependencies therefore served not only the indirect control of the colonies (i.e. “steering from a distance”), but also fulfilled the moral and psychological needs of Britons to “rehabilitate the British empire in the national psyche ... to one with moral and ethical underpinnings” (Sidhu, 2002, p. 127). Bound to a shared vision of the world, Britons and colonial elites championed educational institutions as sites of progress,

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<sup>15</sup> This experience, however, strongly contrasts with university developments in the U.S. prior to its independence. While structured on the Anglo-Saxon model, its universities were never governed from abroad, and also began innovating with land-grant utilitarianism around the same time Britain started exporting its models to the other colonies.

development and universalist knowledge – the aegis of the Enlightenment – with the effect of shifting the governance of its dominions from a material to discursive relationship of asymmetrical power.

Into the twentieth century, universities expanded across Britain while continuing to grow institutional pipelines to the colonial periphery. While the rationale for higher education remained elitist in both contexts, universities in the colonial periphery floundered due to overexpansion and poor quality generally. As knowledge was concentrated in the imperial center, the asymmetric flow of ideas and legitimation perpetuated the hegemony of Eurocentric epistemes in academic curricula and research, and thoroughly entrenched the British academic model (Altbach, 1989, 1998). As nations emerged from colonial control, many former colonial universities in Africa and India remained tethered to their mother institutions (typically the University of London) in governance, budget support, and the production and assessment of examinations. Despite the structural realities constraining the shape and form of colonial universities, demand for British higher education over indigenous variants continued in part due to its symbolic value and as it complemented the wider British schooling model that had been much longer diffused across the colonies.

Even during the pivotal stages of colonial independence movements, Britain continued to support and fund its indirect governance model via educational institutions. Sensing a change in relations with the colonies, the Sadler Commission report argued that Britain needed to leave its intellectual imprint on education broadly and universities specifically in its dependencies and vastly expand educational opportunities so that universities would remain as valuable entry-points for injecting British ideas into newly independent states (Altbach, 1989; Ashby, 1966). As anti-colonial ferment built, the impact of such imprint could still be seen in nationalist movements, which Darwin (2011) argues articulated a form of “Britishness” that Britain could rationalize and subsequently respond to.

#### 4.1.2 The Post-Colonial Tie that Binds: the British Council

The interwar period gave rise to internationalist forums for dialogue including the League of Nations, and national education and culture became tools of public diplomacy, international engagement and intercultural exchange. Following the establishment of the Institute of International Education in the U.S. (IIE) in 1919 and German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) in 1925, the British Council was founded in 1934, then tellingly titled the “British Committee for Relations with Other Countries”<sup>16</sup>. While it emerged in the same period and is often cast as analogous to its US and German counterparts (de Wit & Merckx, 2012), it has a rather different origin. As direct offshoots of interwar internationalism, the IIE and DAAD were aimed to resolve international tensions through cultural dialogue. The British Council, emerging at a time of rising tumult and nationalisms in Europe, was designed to counter Axis as well as French political propaganda in Europe and contested territory in the Middle East (Byrne, 2013). As an explicit agent of ‘cultural propaganda’<sup>17</sup>, the British Council aimed to “promote good will and an appreciation of British culture and way of life among ‘those foreigners who were in a position to influence large numbers of their own people’” (Hampton, 2012, p. 693), by projecting values that reflected British interests and cultivating strategic relationships overseas.

Similar to the IIE and DAAD, the British Council was funded through the national government despite operating independently. But in addition to its later origin, it appears to have differed in several important ways. First, the British Council was not concerned as much with international understanding or humanistic area studies as it was with strategic cooperation, particularly bilateral relationships with

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<sup>16</sup> Which King George V is said to have declared was created ‘to show the world what it owes to Great Britain’ (Fisher, 2009, p. 1)

<sup>17</sup> There appears to be disagreeing accounts of the connotative use of this term. The British Council’s own telling of its history (Fisher, 2009) suggests the term had not yet taken on a negative connotation during this period. However, Byrne (2013) argues that the British Council was met with much hostility in the U.S. and was banned until 1973 for the very fact that it was a propaganda organization sponsored by the British government and thus viewed with strong suspicion.

actual or potential allies (see Fisher, 2009). Secondly, in line with Darwin's (2011) thesis of an ongoing world-system 'project', its aims specifically concerned "'maintaining and strengthening the bonds of the British cultural tradition throughout the self-governing Dominions' and ensuring 'continuity of British education in the Crown Colonies and Dependencies'" (Donaldson, 1984, p. 2). Finally, as a cultural propaganda organization it was not a facilitator of academic exchanges as were the IIE and DAAD. As an extension of British interests, it promoted British higher education from an early stage, even publishing a handbook on courses and costs for prospective students from the former colonies. This feature in particular would become a prescient foreshadowing of its later role as the central organ for facilitating international trade in higher education and highlights the simultaneous functions of its propaganda as a political and economic tool.

The pattern of global student mobility changed following Western Europe's emergence from the Second World War. Due to a decreased capacity for higher education provision broadly, European students flowed in great numbers to the U.S., while the elites of former colonies continued to flow towards Europe. European universities during this "laissez-faire" period of internationalization played a passive role in receiving foreign students and did little to recruit them (de Wit, 2002, p. 44). The dominant discourses for student circulation centered mainly on development cooperation for inter-European exchanges, and human capital and skill-building rationales for the emergent colonies of the Global South (de Wit & Merx, 2012, p. 53).

In the former colonies themselves, the development of degree-granting institutions was not only molded in the image of British institutions and academic practices but was entrenched further in a dependency-style assistance which paired academic institutions of the former colonies with British universities. The 1945 Commission on Higher Education in the Colonies, popular known as the Asquith Commission, was tasked with identifying British institutions to be affiliated with colonial colleges to

enhance teaching and research capacities in preparation for self-rule of the colonies. Its report recommended “the establishment of an intimate relationship” of most colonial institutions with the University of London due to its leading role as an ‘Empire University’ in establishing the colonial university template (A. Ahmed, 1989; Hussey, 1945, p. 166). The report identified scores of institutions across the colonial theater which were to be upgraded to University of London satellites, including the University Colleges of the West Indies, Gold Coast, Ibadan, East Africa (Makerere College), with the understanding that they would eventually become fully fledged universities. The report also identified a set of already established universities across the Empire, including Universities of Ceylon, Hong Kong, Malta, and Jerusalem, which were to be targeted for enhanced assistance to bring them closer to the uniform structure of the University of London<sup>18</sup> (Colonial Office, 1945; Davies & Bjarnason, 2013). Healey (2014) argues that these institutions, like the plethora of IBCs in the present day, can be understood as an earlier form of branch campus of the University of London, a point which underscores the degree of replication and transplantation of academic practices in the image of the British university.

## **4.2 Market Transformation**

### **4.2.1 Key Policy Developments Leading to Creation of the Higher Education Market**

The late 20<sup>th</sup> century saw a raft of educational reforms that would precipitate the creation of higher education markets and transform the logics of British universities’ international engagements. These developments were in many regards without precedent across Europe, making the UK a pioneer of the market model, a trend which has continued to the present day. While such policy developments were

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<sup>18</sup> The centrality of the University of London in setting the institutional template and administering the examination and awarding of degrees across the Empire cannot be easily overstated. As Davies and Bjarnason (2013) illustrate, its External Degree concept established an early distance learning-style model combining decentralized education (via satellite colleges) and coordinated examinations which was adopted by both British universities prior to gaining their own Royal Charters to award degrees and by institutions across the Empire. Maintaining close alignment with Britain’s largest degree-granting institution was seen by Asquith and contemporaries as essential to aligning and maintaining quality standards after independence.

mainly crafted with a focus on the higher education sector within the borders of the UK, they would inevitably come to impact the growing numbers of international students who were increasingly seen as units of an economic rather than political exchange.

***Reductions in state appropriations and full fees for international students (1979)***

While the British higher education sector in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century would become an early laboratory of neoliberal policymaking, its economic transformation began as a result of fiscal conservatism and state interventionism in the wake of the Thatcher government. Cuts to university appropriations came in waves starting in 1980, with a 15% cut to the entire UK higher education budget and again to a lesser degree in 1988. The first cut was broadly understood as a hold on public expenditure, with the latter a disciplinary exercise to "bring higher education institutions closer to the world of business" (1988 Education Reform Act, cited in Jenkins, 1995). Despite a resulting reduction in student places at each university, attendance would still remain free to UK and EU nationals until two decades hence.

The first subject of tuition fees was instead international students, where in 1979, the government discontinued its subsidies for students from outside the European Community in an effort to cut public spending on non-residents. With this move, the logic underpinning Britain's cross-border academic engagements took an economic turn, introducing universities to an unexplored stream of revenue. As Britain became the first and only member of the European Union to impose costly fees to foreign students, numbers initially dropped sharply, only to recover and surpass pre-fee enrollment rates eight years later (Moore, 1989). Despite the enhanced revenue contributed by their fees, the policy was broadly opposed by the universities at the time with seemingly little interest in reaping their commercial potential (Williams, 1997). It did, however, play into the wider process of making universities accountable for their own expenditure, and in doing so it shifted the locus of international student recruitment downward from a national-level political engagement to an institutional strategy to

supplement budgets and circumvent the constraints of domestic student enrollment caps. This development of private 'quasi-markets' in UK higher education, alongside the repeat funding cuts, transformed the university-state relationship and set in motion further iterative processes of rationalization and privatization of UK institutions (Moore, 1989; Williams, 1997, p. 277).

***Massification of higher education (1980s); Polytechnics become universities (1992)***

The cuts in university appropriations during the 1980s had the unanticipated effect of promoting mass higher education in the UK. Up until this time, there existed a two-tiered funding model which distinguished degree-granting universities (only 60 as of mid-1980s) and 'polytechnics' or further education colleges, which were teaching-intensive and vocationally oriented. In response to decreased funding, the autonomous centralized funding body for universities lowered its overall number of student admissions, collectively preserving the enrollment status quo between universities. Colleges and polytechnics, on the other hand, had a competitive funding pool system that offered more revenue for more students, and so their recruiting efforts went into overdrive to compete for students excluded from universities owing to funding cuts (Williams, 1997). Their collective enrollment numbers increased dramatically during this period, resulting in an unintended massification of the UK tertiary sector (*ibid.*).

Further to the rise in student numbers, the overall number of UK universities, distinguished by the legal authority to grant higher degrees, increased as a result of the Further and Higher Education Act in 1992. In addition to restructuring the funding mechanisms for higher education, the act enabled 35 polytechnics to become universities, thereby doubling the overall number of degree-granting institutions<sup>19</sup>. The aim of the act, passed under a Conservative government, was to introduce competition between institutions and openly encourage their competition for students (McCaig, 2011).

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<sup>19</sup> This number continued to grow with further education and university colleges upgrading to degree-granting university status. There are currently 165 degree-granting higher education institutions across the UK.

The upgrade and change in funding structure also allowed former polytechnics, or 'new universities', to tap into international student fees, which they previously were obligated to remit to their local authorities or private owners (Williams, 1997).

### ***Implementation of fees for 'home' students***

Domestic student participation rates in higher education changed from five percent in the 1960s to thirty percent in the 1990s, with the steepest increase following the conversion of polytechnics into universities. Funding, had not kept up with student numbers over this time however, putting a critical strain on university budgets (Barr & Crawford, 1998). Tasked with addressing the fiscal crisis, the Dearing Report in 1997 proposed the implementation of tuition fees, which would be loaned from a public scheme and made income-contingent. The fees were set at £1,100 per year irrespective of university or degree course, which was intended to relieve budgets more than introduce market choice (Palfreyman & Tapper, 2014). Once fees had been introduced, however, they continued to increase with each subsequent national funding review, with fee limits in England and Wales rising to £3,000 in 2004 and £9,000 in 2012<sup>20</sup>. The principle behind variable fees was a market mechanism to introduce differentiation and enhance choice (Foskett, 2011), although nearly every university opted for the maximum fee, thus undermining the principle. While paradoxically having increased the number of low-income and first-generation university students, the fees also injected a consumer ethos into students, to which the universities were then made accountable and responded (Maringe, 2011). The introduction of fees, therefore, drastically transformed the relationship between universities, students and the state, and imbued a competitive logic between universities for a continuously growing source of income (S. L. Robertson, 2010a).

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<sup>20</sup> Scotland maintains tuition fee-free access for Scottish residents due to its separate funding body, although it charges between £1,800 and £3,400 for mature (over 25) students. Northern Ireland separately introduced and capped fees at £3,805 per year.



#### 4.2.2 Rise in University Actorhood

In response to competitive market and policy mechanisms that pressured institutions to reform, British universities are seen as having broken from their past with a new degree of institutional agency and self-awareness as organizational actors (Krücken & Meier, 2006; S. L. Robertson, 2010a). As chartered institutions with charity status, British universities had historically enjoyed more autonomy than their European counterparts (Moore, 1989). However, policy developments in the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century which transformed this relationship between universities and the state (such as the implementation of fees and expansion of the sector to create markets) led to universities becoming more rationalized and agential organizations with stronger, hierarchical forms of steering and internal governance (Krücken & Meier, 2006). The dominant model that defined this period was the ascendant 'entrepreneurial university', which is characterized as having a strengthened steering core and institutional culture of entrepreneurialism integrated into all of its activities (Clark, 1998; Shattock, 2010). These activities were guided by the need to diversify the university's funding base in light of the attenuating and decreasingly predictable relationship to the state, as well as the increase in competition between universities for resources and students. Such activities naturally heralded a shift in stakeholders and away from serving a public function, having become self-serving organizations divorced from their primary obligations to service their local communities (Hazelkorn, 2014).

As the relationship between universities and the state changed, discourses of economic competitiveness, market ethic, and consumer rights emerged, ushering in a heightened climate of accountability. A major consequence of these discourses was the 'juridification' of British universities, which brought higher education under the purview of the state in a common legal framework, and the concurrent introduction of evaluative regimes, which relocated legal control to indirect steering mechanisms like indicators, criteria and targets (Neave, 1988, p. 13, 2012). One form these indicators took was the introduction of the Research Assessment Exercise (now the Research Excellence

Framework) to evaluate research quality and output, thus subjecting academic research to measurement and comparison (Deem, 1998). Another key metric was the development of rankings or 'League Tables', most influential among them the National Student Survey. While the international rankings overwhelmingly compared universities by their research and influence, the National Student Survey heavily attended to student satisfaction – often at odds with the judgments of international rankings tables (Jones-Devitt & Samiei, 2011; Locke, Verbik, Richardson, & King, 2008). A third form of evaluation having emerged in response to demand for accountability was the expanded role and increased visibility of quality assurance bodies, particularly the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA), which conducts institutional quality assessments across the sector to safeguard standards and promote best practices. This ensemble of accountability and evaluation tools is said to have paradoxically precipitated an acute loss of public trust in British higher education, to which the solution was even more oversight (Amaral & Rosa, 2010; Trow, 1996).

While universities were being disciplined externally and restructured internally, the drive towards competition for resources provoked the rise of marketing apparatuses within institutions. Universities appointed executive level leadership for marketing and external relations, leading entire teams of staff dedicated to marketing and branding (Foskett, 2011). Research on UK institutions note a rise in the strategic importance of university brand development (Rolfe, 2003) and brand harmonization between universities and their departments, which tend to manage their own degree programs, admissions and budgets (Hemsley-Brown & Goonawardana, 2007). Such brands frequently draw upon and commercialize university heritage and tradition (Bulotaite, 2003) and positions in university rankings to build brand reputation and signify 'high quality' (Chapleo, 2011; Locke, 2011, p. 80), spending "vast sums of money ... on promoting whatever it is that universities are, do, and how they do it, without publicly available research on the efficiency or the outcomes of these investments" (Jevons, 2006, p. 467). Such efforts at impression management complement strategies for targeted recruitment of

students by appearing simultaneously elite to high-achieving students and accessible to local stakeholders (McCaig & Adnett, 2009). At the center of all of these marketing activities is the pursuit of revenue from student fees, which in the cases of England and Wales, constituted over half of universities' income in 2015/16 – three times greater than income from either public appropriations or research grants (HESA, 2017a).

As these transformations between the state and university and *within* universities demonstrate, the marketization of British higher education had come of age, partially by circumstance (funding cuts and the impact of massification on university resources), but mostly by design (the litany of subsequent policies under Conservative and Labour Governments to rationalize and discipline institutions). These policies fostered elements of choice to stimulate competition, raise standards, reduce inefficiencies and costs, and vastly widen participation, thus creating a “quasi-market’... in which the hand of government provides significant guidance and influence on how the market operates” (Foskett, 2011, p. 30). Over the past four decades, British universities went from minimal public relations to strategic outreach and identity management; from autonomous but disinterested institutions to fully aware organizations; and from a small number of independent ‘charities’ for elites to nearly two-hundred streamlined and highly competitive marketized actors. The sector had metamorphosed and was poised to expand outside national boundaries once again.

### **4.3 Global Once More**

The market transformations gripping British higher education from the 1980s onward had an analogous yet far greater impact on its international activities. Unlike the ‘quasi-market’ in which universities operated domestically, services intended for non-EU students or delivered outside of UK territorial space were much more quickly deregulated and commercialized, as these fell outside universities’ partial remit to serve the British public. With fewer constraints on the scope of international

engagements or number of students recruited, growth in universities' activities in international markets grew rapidly from the dip following the introduction of international fees in 1979 to record levels at present (with approximately 460,000 studying in the UK in 2017/18, and over half of all of UK's graduate students being from outside the UK) (HESA, 2017b; HM Government, 2019). While international market activities diversified beyond the recruitment of international students, resource-hungry universities reorganized their budgets around fee incomes, thus making their contributions a significant part of university income at 13% of total revenue. These sums are so considerable to university budgets that a drop in recruitment would have deleterious effects on their operational capacity (Viña, 2015).

At the institutional level, multiple logics of international student recruitment developed under the aegis of 'internationalization'. Some studies contend that rationales have broadly shifted away from political, cultural and academic ones and towards predominantly competitive economic logics (Knight, 2010; van der Wende, 2001) as universities scramble for financial resources; others have illustrated how these drivers coexist, overlapping and intersecting between actors, faculties and institutions, often in tension with each other (Edelstein & Douglass, 2012; Turner & Robson, 2007). Whether for money, cultural diversification and talent recruitment, pedagogical improvement, or other outcomes, British universities have taken internationalization as a core objective, incorporating its principles into mission statements and institutional identities (de Wit & Merckx, 2012). Some of these are more earnest efforts than others, as appearing globally integrated can be as much about branding as it is about substance.

#### **4.3.1 Educational Export Industry and Policy Coordination**

In contrast to the idiosyncratic approaches to internationalization at the institutional level, national higher education policy and international trade policy in the UK evolved over several decades to

produce a tightly coordinated export industry that capitalizes and markets British higher education<sup>21</sup>. These policies are most often explicitly framed as economic strategies for securing and building on what has become a major industry putatively worth £19.9bn as of 2016 and the country's fifth largest service export<sup>22</sup> (HM Government, 2013, 2019). Such framings were not limited to the benefits of financial security for British universities, but the benefits that befell the wider economy, including the recruitment and circulation of talent ('brain gain'), the enhancement of research and its contributions to innovative industries (the knowledge economy), and the stimulation of axial educational services (recruitment, consultancies, English language training, etc.) (Knight, 2008). These priorities were channeled through an emergent trade rationale, in which the notions of international study broadened from an elitist scholarship-enabled pursuit to a mass consumption activity (V. Naidoo, 2009). The 'aid' rationale continued to coexist through Commonwealth Scholarships and Fellowships, but with fewer resources or policy attention (Merrick, 2013), and in many ways this too had been subsumed in discourses of economic cooperation, with scholarships sustained by an interest in strengthening international trade (S. L. Robertson, 2010b).

The development of the UK's educational export industry does not have any one definitive start date. While UK universities began capitalizing on international student fees from the 1980s onward, the vision of a broader educational export industry did not kick off until two decades hence, when under the New Labour government starting in 1997, a series of reports and initiatives began identifying strategic growth areas and coordinating closely with universities. The discourse woven through these policies "rehearsed the importance and value of 'international education' to the UK economy in the face of a threat of a declining share of this market", and framed global engagement in overwhelmingly instrumental and

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<sup>21</sup> In contrast to devolved policies discussed previously, much of the discussion that follows applies to the entirety of the UK (although with differential impact), as they pertain to policies enacted at the national or international level.

<sup>22</sup> with 75% of the industry's net revenue stemming from UK-bound international students

competitive terms (S. L. Robertson, 2010b, p. 22). One such policy was the Prime Minister's Initiative for International Education (PMI1 and PMI2), launched in 1999 with the aim of increasing international student enrollments in British universities and colleges by 75,000. Having exceeded this target, it was relaunched in 2006 to recruit 100,000 new non-EU students by 2011, although the second iteration "was formed, in part, in reaction to the perceived threat of creeping competition from other countries adopting the UK's own strategies and a general weakening of the UK's established top-rank position" (Geddie, 2010, p. 42). These initiatives were mobilized through a coordinated ensemble of government agencies, led by the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills, UK Trade & Investment, and the British Council, which collectively orchestrated the "Education UK" campaign to strategically market the national brand, increase international student intake, and strengthen overseas exports. In the competitive race to maintain its position as the second largest destination for students after the US, the UK had transformed its higher education sector into an internationally tradable commodity like any other service export, backed by the rationale that universities are the driving engine of the knowledge-based economy and are therefore of high strategic value to the national economy (S. L. Robertson & Keeling, 2008).

The marketization and commercialization of the UK higher education sector of course was not contained to the national policy space; rather, it complemented broader regional and global policy frameworks designed to facilitate international trade in educational services. At the regional level, the European Union had enacted the Bologna (1999) and Lisbon Treaties (2000) aimed at integrating national higher education systems into a cohesive framework to stimulate regional circulation and strengthen economic competitiveness (Mora & Felix, 2009). The knowledge economy discourse fueled an escalation of intra-regional frameworks to keep students circulating and knowledge flowing, but unique among members of the European higher education community, UK universities garnered a secondary benefit of profiting from the tuition fees that followed students. Despite the relatively high fees for European nationals, the

collective reputation and dominant position of UK higher education within Europe led European student enrollment rates at British universities to steadily climb alongside fee increases, until the fallout resulting from the 2016 European Union membership referendum, after which numbers appear to have stagnated (ICEF Monitor, 2019).

At the global policy level, the same discourses of competitiveness and knowledge economies became the orthodoxy of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the World Trade Organization (WTO) and World Bank during this period (S. L. Robertson, 2009). Importantly for higher education exporters like the UK, the WTO introduced the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) in 1994 which designated educational exports as a tradable service, codified by four modes: cross-border supply, consumption abroad, commercial presence and presence of natural persons (WTO, 2004). This trade liberalization mechanism “conceives a worldwide market in which not only the education of transnational students would be deregulated but foreign producer firms or institutions could enter different national markets. As each national market became deregulated education would start to look more like a set of global product markets” (Marginson, 2009, p. 4). With these trade rules, UK higher education would become further integrated into a global education market, with foreign providers also having access to British territorial spaces (such as Kaplan International or Syracuse University London). While some have pointed out that national education systems have remained widely national, protected, and publicly subsidized following the GATS negotiations (*ibid.*), the effect has mostly benefitted developed exporting countries (USA, UK and Australia), private and for-profit education providers, and educational disciplines with greater commercial potential including professional and vocational training (Tilak, 2011). These disproportional gains to dominant education exporters stem from their enormous advantage as highly sought study destinations (which are closely linked to post-study career and migration opportunities), the scale of their burgeoning for-profit

education and training industries, and their influence over the mechanisms and terms of policy architecture governing trade in education (Verger, 2009).

#### **4.3.2 Transformation of the British Council and the UK as Global Brand**

As the higher education sector became marketized and international students a lucrative mainstay of the industry, the British Council also evolved to continue its mission to support and promote British culture and education to overseas audiences. The neoliberal shift towards market logics in state-university governance seems to also have had a profound impact on the operational logic and work of the British Council, with the once political interest in influencing and steering through its public diplomacy transformed into a parastatal agency for promoting UK education markets to overseas consumers. As a publicly-owned organization funded by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, however, the British Council continues the work of the state in facilitating markets, thus illuminating the fixity of underlying interests of the UK in maintaining its dominance and influence in a post-sovereign world system.

The British Council began its Educational Counseling Services (ECS) in the mid-1980s, representing in overseas offices a consortium of British educational institutions. ECS functioned as a marketing and promotional service, most often to attract overseas prospects to study in the UK, but also to promote British educational services in each country of operation, including English language training and professional qualifications (Bennell & Pearce, 2003). Today the British Council continues to facilitate inbound migratory flows of students (GATS Mode 2), while UK Trade & Investment offices coordinate opportunities for British institutions seeking to deliver courses and training outside of the UK (GATS Modes 1 & 3).

Going beyond representing individual providers, the British Council has also become a central conduit in a series of nation branding campaigns designed to frame the UK and its institutions as a world-class



destination for aspiring students to invest in their futures. The “Education UK” campaign began in 1999 as a “well-considered branding exercise” which consulted influential advertising and public relations agencies to construct a national brand identity that would hold global appeal in the face of declining market position vis-à-vis the UK’s competitors (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2012, p. 729). Importantly, the campaign focused not only on institutions but the qualities that they espoused and the character of the nation which they represented. This meant devising a “highly selective image of ‘the British university’” which cast institutions as dynamic yet traditional, world class, and future-enabling, while positioning the UK as a place of “culture, tradition, safety, and diversity” (Sidhu, 2006, p. 129). Sidhu goes on to identify the curious discursive and iconographic linkages with the UK’s imperial past, particularly the invitation to become an elite economic subject who holds a credential with global currency, yet a passive subject of Western/British tutelage. By engineering consumer perceptions of Britain and its educational institutions, the campaign successfully generated further demand worldwide and aided the PMI1 & 2 in meeting their recruitment targets. An analogous campaign was launched in 2012 as the ‘Great Britain Campaign’, a broader public relations exercise designed to “showcase[s] the best of what our whole nation has to offer to inspire the world and encourage people to visit, do business, invest and study in the UK” (“Great Britain Campaign,” n.d.). While appealing to multiple export sectors, the intent was the same: of ‘packaging culture’ (Hannerz, 1996, p. 19) or ‘imagineering’ (Löfgren, 2003, p. 239) the national aesthetic as a consumable commodity by converting a selection of symbols and collective narratives into a desirable brand among nation brands. This strategic manipulation of perceptions and desires illuminates a key function of the British Council specifically and the state-backed export industry in general: the mobilization of social technologies to enable and sustain economic opportunities in overseas markets. This speaks to a blurring of the boundaries between the state and market, with the subject being invited to participate in ‘Britishness’ (a political formation) through the consumption of a market-traded commodity.

### 4.3.3 Transnational Provision and Branch Campuses

In addition to the inbound flow of international students to the UK – the more historically familiar form of internationalization – there has also been significant growth in transnational or cross-border provision of British higher education, ranging from online and single degree courses taught in partnership with local institutions to global franchises and international branch campuses. Starting in the early 2000s, UK institutions intensified and diversified their delivery of cross-border engagements, with the most active concentrations or ‘markets’ being in southeast Asia, China and the Arabian Gulf. UK TNHE has since grown so profusely that more international students currently study for UK degrees outside of the UK (701,000) than inside (460,000). 82% of UK universities deliver content through some form of TNHE, and collectively have a presence in all but fifteen countries globally (HE Global, 2016; HM Government, 2019). The robust pace of activity has sparked fears that TNHE is potentially cannibalizing the traditional UK international student market (Mode 2) by keeping would-be migrants to UK in their countries of residence (OBHE 2005a, cited in Naidoo, 2009). Nevertheless, a 2013 HM Government international education strategy report illustrated in great detail the indirect strategic value of UK TNHE. While TNHE income amounts to only one-tenth of that of on-shore international student fee income (only a proportion of fees is repatriated and all additional expenditure occurs overseas), the report highlights the secondary impact transnational education has as a promotional tool for the British educational brand and British culture more generally. It posits that UK transnational education at any level promotes the UK as a study destination, creates “a pipeline of prospective students who will study in the UK” in the future, and “strengthen overseas business, research, social and cultural links” with its graduates (HM Government, 2013, pp. 23–24). These indirect effects on recruitment and national higher education brand image are referred to in subsequent government reports as ‘the halo effect’ (Mellors-Bourne, 2017; Mellors-Bourne, Fielden, Kemp, Middlehurst, & Woodfield, 2014).

In line with Australia and USA, the UK's two closest competitors also exporting TNHE, the figures suggest an overwhelming unidirectionality to their relationships with recipient (importing) countries. The UK imports very little foreign higher education while being the largest exporter (see V. Naidoo, 2009, p. 327). This trade position illustrates Tilak's UNESCO report on GATS (2011), which argued that the biggest beneficiaries of the education trade are the three major exporters as flows are unidirectional: students come to the UK, institutions go abroad particularly to developing countries, and money moves from those countries to the UK. This unidirectionality is reflected institutionally as well. As Hawawini (2011) argues, most TNHE activities are one-dimensional as they are required to be equivalent to the home campus by policy or by popular demand. With little space for variation especially in commercialized models, an exporting institution aims to "teach the world what it knows" thus minimizing institutional learning and reciprocal opportunities (2011, p. 25). Despite the inclusive, global branding, the unidirectionality suggests that the UK export position is strongly one in which students come to British universities exclusively to learn from them, *not* to exchange knowledge.

The locations of UK TNHE, without coincidence, draw heavily on markets Britain once had a role in creating, including former colonies, protectorates, and overseas territories. Among the ten countries identified in a 2014/15 university survey as having the most number of overseas UK TNHE students, only two – China and Greece – had no formal historical ties to the British Empire (HE Global, 2016). The rest were mostly Anglophone middle- and high-income countries with close past and present relationships with the UK. It is again the case that the twenty countries with the most UK TNHE programs are historically linked to an Anglophone empire, excluding China and the European market (*ibid.*). Whether the English language has become the lingua franca by colonial imprint or by its relevance to the modern world economy is a heated debate (see Phillipson, 2011), but the link between such language policies and the interests of the UK export industry is undeniable, as the lists of top importers evidences. In spite of the varied experiences of English as a colonial language policy, the "English-dominant world system"

allowed for the construction of transnational education spaces where English-medium educational services are not only highly sought after but often seen as more globally valuable and legitimate (*ibid.*, p. 451). It is in this context that 'demand' for certain transnational forms of higher education over others has deep historical antecedents that govern contemporary consumer affinities and 'choices'.

Within the UK educational export strategy, IBCs feature as a highly visible component, although they comprise relatively few of the students studying British programs overseas and little of the net revenues remitted to their patron universities in the UK in comparison with online and partnership TNHE activities (HE Global, 2016). They are also a moderately risky form of internationalization due to their upfront investment costs and are often subject to fierce competition from other international providers in the countries in which they operate (Healey, 2015b). What has made them so attractive as a transnational form are the indirect effects to UK universities noted above. IBCs allow universities to enter new regions in target markets, extend their reputation and brand with a visible presence, enhance links with businesses and industries in host countries, and use the campus as a feeder to recruit for the home campus, either within the same degree program (transfer) or a subsequent one (matriculation) (Mellors-Bourne, 2017). They also diversify the pipelines by which universities can recruit international students given the fractious politics of immigration in the UK and the power of the UK Border Agency over universities' sponsorship authority (McGettigan, 2013). IBCs feature strongly in universities' brand identities as global, cutting edge, industry-responsive institutions, and are thus a feature for attracting fee-paying UK students as well.

As discussed in **Chapter 2.4**, what constitutes an IBC varies, making comparative statements on global numbers problematic. The variable of greatest consequence for surveying numbers is the partnership and ownership model employed with local entities (whether it takes on a different name, whether it is a locally owned degree franchise); secondly, the breadth of program delivery matters, as the distinction

between a single MBA program IBC and a program franchise can be minimal. What is known is historically the US has led in IBCs, broadly defined, but not for the same reasons as UK IBC development, as many US universities adopted IBCs in the past as a form of internationalization to enhance study abroad opportunities for their own students and would often feature in less typical markets, like Latin America and Japan (Verbik & Merkley, 2006). Where US institutions do establish IBCs in high demand markets like China and the Arabian Gulf, they tend to be prestigious and well-known (Becker, 2009). UK IBCs on the other hand, and Australian IBCs to a lesser extent, target local student markets either where demand is highest or a niche degree offering has relative market advantage. In both cases, the model is highly commercialized for maximal recruitment, intake, and growth, and in most cases is a less prestigious former polytechnic (*ibid.*). According to 2016 data, the US has an overall majority of the 251 IBCs (using the OBHE's definition); however, when factoring in the proportion of IBCs to total number of sending country higher education institutions, the UK has a much higher ratio of universities with IBCs (Merola, 2016). Among those UK universities with IBCs, many have more than one, and those with only one IBC have extensive non-IBC TNHE activities elsewhere. What this suggests is a more developed TNHE strategy among British universities and export coordination in the UK government.

#### **4.4 Conclusion**

This overview of the global pathways of British higher education has aimed to trace the continuities between what are often seen as two distinct phases: academic colonialism and contemporary internationalization. The continuities it identifies illuminate the underlying logics driving both stages, one as a state maintaining sovereign power over its dominion, and the other as a fiscal necessity for institutions and a strategic economic agenda for the state-vested educational export sector. In both there are regulatory formations designed to advance the interests of universities and the state, the former by facilitating global flows and connections with extraterritorial educational spaces either in colonies or markets, and the latter by securing a significant share of these global educational spaces for

injecting British institutional templates and knowledge into the imaginations of the consumer-subjects past and present. In both the colonial past and the market present, the work of universities crossing borders and drawing students into the British academic system, either at home or at a remote outpost, continues the latent work of the world-making project by captivating minds and governing bodies from a distance.

The work achieved by these reformulations of past flows is a preservation of Britain's grip on both the academic world and the broad global networks of graduates and positional elites. As a tool of such work, higher education functions to preserve a status quo in the relational power dynamics between the UK and the world. By drawing on the global recognition and esteem of its universities, the UK converted its advantages gained from its colonial past to capitalize upon them in a new modality of exchange and consumption, allowing the UK to reconsolidate its edge over would-be competitors. This outcome interestingly parallels the work of multilateral institutions coming of age in the era of the 'global knowledge economy', as Robertson (2009) argues when the World Bank repositioned itself as a higher education advocate after decades of supporting policies which aided the construction of knowledge gaps between the Global North and South. By transforming itself into an essential knowledge broker backing trade in education, the World Bank not only preserved its legitimacy but was able to seize upon the very crises it had a hand in forging, the result being the maintenance of global knowledge asymmetries. This is equally echoed in the OECD experience, where the rationales it endorsed for international higher education (mutual understanding; skilled migration; revenue generation; and capacity building) established a global gospel of knowledge circulation which inevitably serviced the talent recruitment needs of developed countries at the expense of the developing world (Rizvi & Lingard, 2006). Like the pivot by the British export industry, the asymmetries of the past are preserved by converting them, changing logics to suit the contemporary global discourses of knowledge capital, skilled migration, and the role of higher education in economic competition (Bolsmann & Miller, 2008).

The next chapter will examine how these discourses are realized through the mass delivery of higher education through private markets in the UAE, and how British higher education seizes upon these impulses with its commercialized export model.

## Chapter 5: British IBCs in the UAE (Site Context)

This chapter sets the location of the research, or the contextual parameters within which the work of UK TNHE is understood. It complements the previous chapter by providing the social and political space in which UK TNHE, among many competing forms of education, operates, simultaneously drawing on existing demand while aiding in the construction of new markets. It takes the transnational formations examined in **chapter 4** and looks at how the UAE became one global site among many wherein IBCs have become a normalized part of the educational landscape, and where the UK plays a role as provider through a private commercial modality. This pivot from a public or semi-public institution in the home country to a fully private one in the host (Lane & Kinser, 2006, 2011) results not only from the resource-seeking institutional behaviors and marketization examined in the previous chapter, but also due to the UAE's intensely commercial approach to social service provision. It is therefore not a basic situation of supply (UK TNHE looking for markets) and demand (a large pool of working and middle class expatriates seeking degree qualifications), but also the role of the Emirati state in constructing market spaces, and the confluence of these spaces with competing international brands and student 'consumers' in the construction of new markets – one in which the UAE in general and Dubai in particular reimagine themselves as 'hubs' or global destinations for higher education.

As an examination of British transnational education formations in the UAE, this study is focused on particular manifest phenomena in the UAE; it is, however, less concerned with the UAE as an educational policy space and the specific aims driving the construction of an educational hub. The first part of this chapter nonetheless will briefly explore the UAE's key educational policy drivers in order to frame the 'host' policy environment fostering TNHE activity. The scope of this first section is limited to those policy and historical formations that pertain to the operation of UK TNHE, its competitors, and its principle constituents: the student-consumer. In setting out the key spaces, institutions and TNHE actors, it is by necessity mainly descriptive. The second half, however, focuses on the British universities



with IBCs in the UAE, drawing links between the favorable operational environment in the UAE and the strategic interests of those universities in establishing an IBC. It draws on primary data collected in both the UAE and UK through interviews with senior management at those universities and peripheral actors steering the regulatory and commercial environment in the UAE. These data contribute to the chapter's aim of framing the relationship between the UAE and British TNHE, examining the objectives or visions which prompted the creation of the particular IBC formations taken up by the three focal institutions in this study.

**Section 5.1** begins with the Gulf region in historical and modern contexts and the constituents who comprise their populations. **5.2** then examines the key UAE policies that construct educational markets and market spaces such as the zoning of commercial TNHE and the regulatory agencies that shape possibilities within those spaces. **5.3** reviews the transnational landscape in the UAE, with emphasis on British institutions. The final section, **5.4**, provides the institutional background, global footprint, and key IBC characteristics of the three UK universities examined in this study. It further incorporates statements from university management highlighting links between institutional aims and opportunities in the UAE. Before concluding, the key features of each of the three universities are presented individually and comparatively.

## **5.1 Internationalization of Higher Education in the UAE**

### **5.1.1 The Arabian Gulf & the UAE**

The Arabian Gulf region had, in comparison with virtually all its regional neighbors in every direction, relatively minimal involvement in the British Empire. While the Trucial Sheikdoms were signatories to various treaties with the British from 1820 as protectorates, and the Aden region of Yemen held an important role as a British East India Company trading port, protectorate and eventual colony, the Gulf polities were widely autonomous or loosely under the umbrellas of Ottoman or Iranian governance until

the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Even after the discovery of vast oil reserves and increasing British interventions in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman, Bahrain, Qatar and the Trucial States (UAE), Britain's relationship with the peninsula was distal with only the military and economic interests of securing its hegemony over the wider region and its trade routes with Crown Colonies. There was minimal physical presence of British military installations, of British institutions, and consequently British cultural influence.

While the history of British influence in the region is limited, the Gulf polities have a deep and extended history of policy borrowing and institution importing. The region was widely rural and tribal, thereby limiting the development of formal schooling up until the early to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. Prior to this, formal schooling was decentralized and heavily focused on religious education. Following the exploitation of oil wealth, accretion of national boundaries and identities, and growth of urban populations, modern schooling systems developed yet drew heavily on foreign models and provision in the absence of national curricula and qualified instructors. The greatest influences stemmed from neighboring Arab states, with Egypt especially being the source of textbooks, instructors, pedagogy and models of examination and matriculation (Davidson, 2008). While nationalization campaigns in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century sought to consolidate national identity and shape national educational agendas, state schools continued to be staffed by Arabs from the wider region, partly resulting from highly gendered local norms around teaching and partly stemming from an acute absence of educated, qualified instructors from the Gulf (Ridge, 2014). More recently, however, school systems in the region have frequently adopted English as the medium of instruction, following on from the vast 'Anglicisation of daily life' in which increased circulations of non-Arabic speakers, imported consumer goods and foreign media demand a daily encounter with, if not immersion in, the English language (Solloway, 2017, p. 178).

Higher education in the Gulf region emerged in the 1960s, with the establishment of a small number of national universities modelled mainly on the American four-year institution, typically taught in English,

and again instructed by foreign staff. In spite of their many non-local characteristics, Gulf national universities were formed with citizens in mind, either through exclusive access by Gulf nationals or a two-tier system where the costs of attendance for nationals are wholly subsidized, and tuition fees are charged to all others (Shaw, 1997). As these universities inflected much of Western and international academic traditions in their structure and operation, their relevance to the needs of Gulf residents has often been scrutinized. Their institutional ties to Western educational systems pits Gulf countries as consumers of "knowledge technologies, and learning packages produced elsewhere, with only limited relevance for local society and economic growth" (Mazawi, 2008, p. 65). Donn & Al-Manthri (2010) argue that a 'magistracy' of the OECD, World Bank and other multilaterals have so influenced the higher education agendas of the Gulf region that their foreign importation of educational products has become inescapable and alternative policy agendas unthinkable.

Among the six-member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), the UAE and Qatar lead on the importation of international educational products and policies. Notably, Qatar commissioned a study by the RAND Corporation which restructured the school system into charter schools based on core standards, and also established 'Education City', an assemblage of eight Western universities to collectively deliver an array of foreign degrees (Bashshur, 2010). The UAE has even more aggressively pursued the transplantation of foreign providers, by establishing multiple free zones where TNHE activities can flourish, as well as several high-profile flagship IBCs in Abu Dhabi including the bespoke campuses of New York University and Paris Sorbonne. However, their strategies and therefore their approaches differ, with the two holding divergent visions of the knowledge economies they purport to build. Qatar is concentrating its economic diversification targets on research and development for high-end innovative industries, while the UAE has less proactively invested in research and knowledge-intensive industries, aiming instead to carve out its place in the global service economy. Both have high-profile research and development projects and showy flagship institutions to craft the public image of a

'smart state', but their divergent approaches to increasing higher education capacity positions Qatar as a 'knowledge/innovation hub' and the UAE a 'skilled workforce hub' (Knight, 2011). This distinction is important for understanding how IBCs are courted, which degree programs are most prevalent, and how IBCs deliver and market their programs. Unlike Qatar, private international provision in the UAE appears to be steered by the labor market – the business and service sector especially – rather than by strategic policymaking on the part of the state (Ismail, 2010, cited in Donn & Al-Manthri, 2010, p. 36).

### **5.1.2 Two-Tiered Society: Emiratis and Expatriates**

The UAE is one of four GCC countries which is demographically comprised of a majority of foreign residents; among these countries the UAE has the largest percentage of foreign residents at around 88% of a total population of 9.6 million (The World Bank, 2018) out of need for foreign labor, both skilled and unskilled, to maintain its economic growth. The largest demographic groups by nationality are Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, and Filipino nationals (Vinod, 2019). These widely-Anglophone national groups, alongside the British as the largest European nationality in the UAE, solidify the dominance of the English language as the lingua franca of the UAE for all non-government communication (Solloway, 2017). Discursive classifications of non-citizens in the UAE are frequently ascribed along lines of race, national origin and social class, using disparate terms such as expatriates, immigrants, foreign residents, and 'migrant laborers' or 'guest workers' as codes for particular nationalities and their social roles (Koutonin, 2015). Despite the exclusionary biopolitics of citizenship and the complex regimentation of residency in the UAE, it has become a semi-permanent home to multiple generations of foreign nationals, many of whom have limited familiarity or experience of their country of citizenship (Vora, 2008). This discursive divide between citizen and foreign resident allows the Emirati state to view the majority of its residents as transient, and therefore not entitled to public investment.

As with other Gulf states, the UAE is often characterized as a two-tiered society, where Emirati nationals are protected by a wide range of social entitlements, subsidies and preferential hiring policies, while non-nationals receive tax-free salaries and access to social service provision through private markets (in healthcare and education particularly). A vast infrastructure of fee-charging private schools across the UAE exists to accommodate its diverse expatriate population, offering instruction by language and national curriculum and having the effect of stratifying access and quality along socioeconomic lines (Ridge, Kippels, Shami, & Farah, 2015). As a result of two-tiered provision and the use of private schools, expatriate children are socialized separately from Emiratis, and if their national group is sizable enough to have an international school offering its national curriculum, they are educated separately from other national groups as well. With the mass arrival of IBCs in the UAE, these cloistered socialization pathways continue through tertiary education, with a wide range of differentially priced universities, including IBCs from nearly a dozen different nationalities. While free to Emirati citizens, the UAE national universities are either inaccessible to non-Emiratis (such as the federated Higher Colleges of Technology) or charge tuition fees to attend (such as UAE University and Zayed University). There are, however, a number of emirate-level and private universities where Emiratis and non-Emirati students intersect, including the University of Sharjah or the American Universities of Dubai, Ras Al Khaimah and Sharjah<sup>23</sup>.

Due to the two-tier system and the complex architecture of federal accreditation which governs access to jobs in the public sector, an overwhelming majority of the students attending IBCs in the UAE are non-Emirati. Further to this, a majority of these non-Emirati students are expatriates residing in the UAE for purposes other than their education (typically as dependents of family members sponsored by employers), thus distinguishing them from a minority of 'international students' who enter the UAE on student visas. The effect of this is that most IBC students, especially at the undergraduate level, hold

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<sup>23</sup> These are not IBCs as they are locally established, and while they hold accreditation from American regional accrediting bodies, they have no home institution in the US.

similar experiences of the UAE, share a degree of familiarity with its political and social institutions, and engage differently with their IBC than an international student given their locally grown social networks (Rensimer, 2016). For these reasons, international students are distinguishable from expatriate students by their motivations, expectations, local mobility, needs, as well as their national origins. Precise figures on UAE foreign residents by visa sub-category are not published by the UAE National Bureau of Statistics, but the KHDA separately published data for Dubai-based IBCs in a 2015 report which indicates exactly one-third of Dubai IBC students are non-resident 'international students', among whom the dominant countries of origin are India (30%), Egypt (8%), Pakistan (6%) and Nigeria (6%) (KHDA, 2016).

## **5.2 Policymaking in the UAE: Free Zones and the Construction of Markets**

The function of higher education in UAE is firmly socio-economic, with an emphasis on skilling and credentialization for the local labor market. An empirical study of the UAE's national and private (non-IBC) universities found the degree programs offered and the corresponding enrollment levels to be highly vocationally oriented, with particularly strong numbers in business management, engineering and information technology (Randall, 2011)<sup>24</sup>. As IBCs are dependent on sufficient market demand and compete with private local providers for students, their program offerings are equally vocational in orientation to correspond with the perceived needs of the labor market. A number of reports on the UAE's IBC programs evidence this (Garrett et al., 2016; KHDA, 2013, 2016). This purpose aligns with the national strategy outlined in *Vision 2021*, the UAE's strategic roadmap towards its vision of modernity and the construction of a diversified economy, which states that "Universities will listen closely to the needs of Emiratis and of their future employers, and will balance their teaching to the demands of the workplace" (Government of the United Arab Emirates, 2014, p. 16).

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<sup>24</sup> IBC figures were excluded due to their lack of federal accreditation which would require reporting of institutional data.

There is, however, another function of its massification of higher education, which is to construct the UAE, and Dubai especially, as an education hub and destination for foreign students and human capital. The strategic outcomes are twofold: it firstly increases the supply of skilled labor for the UAE's knowledge- and service-based economy (Knight, 2011); secondly, higher education is itself a profitable commercial enterprise. As the UAE's non-fossil fuel economy leans heavily on the service sector, private higher education and IBCs present vast commercial opportunities through lucrative partnerships with international and commercial education providers, axial educational services including examinations, language training, publishing, and 'study abroad' consultancies, and peripheral services including marketing, events production, student accommodation, leisure industries, travel agencies and consumables. As a supply-side approach to private higher education, the development of an 'education hub' extends collective economic benefits to the UAE and churns further demand by positioning the country as a popular study destination and global site of educational opportunity (Kinser & Lane, 2010). Each emirate has distinct educational and economic aims, with policies to reflect their aims. The models adopted in Dubai and Ras Al Khaimah in particular are commercial market models and reflect a commitment to the construction of higher education markets for domestic students and as destinations for international study.

### **5.2.1 Free Zones and Commercialized Educational Provision**

The key policy instrument in the UAE's construction of higher education markets is its establishment of educational free zones, which like free trade zones in general, are spaces of exception from cumbersome national regulations on business ownership and capital flows. Such spaces of derogation are typical of the Gulf region, often branded as 'cities': Qatar's Education City, Saudi Healthcare City, Dubai's Media City, to name a few (see Khodr, 2012 for full list). These policy innovations concentrate foreign investment and partnerships in target sectors, while attracting investors with relaxed ownership rules, null taxes, and subsidized ground rents. Thus with TNHE in the UAE, providers can set up

operations within such dedicated educational zones without having to enter shared ownership with Emirati partners, and revenues can be repatriated to the home country organization without constraints. Another key element of these zones is the shelter they provide from national education regulations. Foreign providers inside free zones are shielded from having to acquire operating licensure from the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (MoHESR) as well as federal accreditation from the Commission for Academic Accreditation (CAA), which can be an onerous disincentive for prospective foreign providers. A limited number of free zone IBCs do still acquire CAA accreditation as it enables its graduates to work in the UAE public sector and Emirati students to receive financial aid, both of which advantage IBCs in recruiting students. A large majority of IBCs in UAE's free zones, however, only hold accreditation from their home countries<sup>25</sup>.

Where foreign providers were in the past casually licensed under economic free zones of various emirates, only Dubai and Ras Al Khaimah continue to do so and have now both constructed specialized zones dedicated to higher education. Dubai has established two dedicated zones, Dubai Knowledge Park (DKP, previously Dubai Knowledge Village) and Dubai International Academic City (DIAC), the latter being developed later and larger after DKP exceeded its physical capacity. Built on the southern edge of the city, DKP was planned entirely off blueprints from TECOM, the Dubai Government Authority's property investment arm, providing one-size-fits-all infrastructure and shared facilities for foreign academic institutions to set up within. Its younger analogue, DIAC, is closer to the northern end, 10km east of the city in a barren sandy plot. The site hosts one office tower for fledgling IBCs to start up while growing their student numbers, but the site's vast undeveloped space is reserved for IBCs to establish their bespoke campuses. As of 2019, DIAC is still widely unoccupied and dotted with only a few flagship campuses. Dubai also hosts a handful of IBCs in non-academic free zones such as Dubai International

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<sup>25</sup> This creates the unusual and contradictory situation whereby IBC degrees are internationally recognized as equivalent to degrees from their home institution but not within the UAE, the country where they were earned.



Finance City, where providers of executive MBA programs are particularly prevalent. The northern and less urban emirate of Ras Al Khaimah, meanwhile, has heretofore hosted a number of foreign education providers scattered across its territory, all sanctioned by licensure from one of its two free trade zones. A dedicated academic free zone is currently in development on the southern edge of the emirate outside of any inhabited areas, into which some of the current international providers will purportedly relocate once it is completed.

As policy instruments of market-based provision, educational free zones are regulated by parallel governing bodies which simultaneously create spaces of exception and reregulate them with rules adapted for non-local institutions. Dubai's foreign and private providers are licensed by an emirate-level regulatory agency, the Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA), which assesses the viability and suitability of providers entering its zones, ensuring that an equivalency with the standards of each provider's home country accreditation can be delivered. The concept of 'equivalency' is thus a popular discourse among local policymakers, IBC marketers, and even students, as it is the backbone upon which IBC degrees hold value and authenticity in the UAE labor market. The KHDA is also responsible for protecting consumers by regulating advertising and publishing key data on each institution. Through this exercise in transparency it builds consumer trust while also promoting the visibility of its IBCs. In this sense the KHDA is simultaneously the regulator and conduit for connecting students with providers. In Ras Al Khaimah, the general free trade zones hosting IBCs (prior to the completion of its dedicated academic zone) require providers to maintain equivalent standards of home country accreditation; however, this has been minimally enforced in practice, thus making the emirate attractive in part to lesser known degree providers (Rensimer, 2015). With the gradual development of the dedicated academic zone, the free zone authorities have begun enforcing regulations designed to combat misleading marketing practices and improve the public image of the emirate's higher education sector (Swan, 2017).

Another key element of IBCs in free zones essential for contextualizing their integration into local markets is the academic infrastructure provider (AIP). The AIP, and its derivative academic service provider, is the privately-owned partner organization which builds, owns and manages the physical sites in which IBCs deliver their degree programs. These companies may be locally owned or held by foreign firms with operations across multiple countries, as free zones enable them to operate without Emirati co-ownership. The role of AIPs varies by IBC and zone, with some providing only physical infrastructure, while others hire and manage the non-academic staff to enable international university partners to easily slot themselves in. In Dubai, AIPs are typically silent partners, whereas in Ras Al Khaimah, AIPs have enjoyed relatively high visibility as franchisors of international degree programs, having full oversight and responsibility for academic staff hiring, marketing and operations. In exchange for sharing in the IBC's business revenue, the AIP enables international universities looking to establish a campus in the UAE by providing the local licensing, legal knowhow and the high up-front cost of constructing a campus. By minimizing the financial risk to foreign universities, AIPs provide flexibility and lubricate flows of transnational education and capital. Foreign universities typically identify AIPs prior to entering the UAE market, and with AIPs taking responsibility for the physical campus, IBCs can establish operations with a small number of degree programs and incrementally expand as student numbers and demand increase.

### **5.3 TNHE and IBCs in the UAE**

#### **5.3.1 The UAE TNHE Landscape**

Accounting for the total TNHE activity in the UAE can be a serious challenge; the definitions of TNHE are slippery, making tallies elusive or inconsistent. Even if only taking into account GATS Mode 3 transnational education (commercial presence of educational services), the issue of ownership presents analytical challenges, as for-profit corporations with offshore training centers fall under transnational education in equal measure as joint ventures with local institutions or businesses where the foreign

entity holds a secondary role (V. Naidoo, 2009). The latter category of institutions highlights the temporal dimension of TNHE, as such partnerships are often temporary and designed to phase out foreign involvement with the aim of establishing fully independent local institutions (Verbik & Merkle, 2006). These activities, as well as the numerous local franchises of foreign degree programs scattered physically and virtually across the UAE, have not been tallied to date and are the subject of relatively little research despite their ubiquity (Juusola & Rensimer, 2018). Overall student enrollments for degree franchises and niche programs, however, are relatively small. The UK, for example, had TNHE students in the UAE registered across 72 British institutions, although 70% of these programs have fewer than 20 students, according to 2014 data (QAA, 2014). Other international providers such as the low-quality TNHE franchises across the northern emirates tend to have very limited lifespans due to their low numbers and high student attrition rates (Rensimer, 2015).

The TNHE form in the UAE with greater student proportions is the IBC and large local institutions with transnational elements. Combining institutional typologies from Miller-Idriss and Hanauer (2011, p. 183) and the QAA (2014), these forms can be categorized into six distinct models, as detailed in **Table 5.1**. 'Turnkey' or 'foreign-style' institutions are not considered IBCs because they have no home institution, but they do have foreign partners and institutions which contribute to program development, accreditation, or research collaboration. Some also operate out of free zones and behave similar to IBCs with regards to marketing and recruitment.

The three IBC models – 'replica', 'branch' and 'administrative' campuses – are all acknowledged in literature and licensed in the UAE as IBCs. Totalling 31 in all as of 2016, the UAE was second only to China (with 32) as host to the largest number of IBCs (Garrett et al., 2016, p. 51). While replica campuses are few and operate exclusively in Abu Dhabi under special arrangements with their host emirate, the UAE's branch and administrative campuses all operate inside free zones in Dubai and RAK, giving them a

distinctly commercial orientation. The size of these operations range from single-floor offices with limited facilities and fly-in faculty to large bespoke campuses with full accommodations and resident teaching staff. The provider countries with the greatest number of IBCs in the UAE are the UK (10), India (5), and USA (5).

**Table 5.1 TNHE Models in the UAE**

<i>Model</i>	<i>Characteristics</i>	<i>Notable examples</i>
<b>Distance learning with localized support</b>	Single degree programs delivered mainly online with some local tutoring through private commercial education providers	University of London (UK); Arizona State University (USA)
<b>Degree franchises</b>	Single degree programs delivered through private commercial education providers by local tutors	University of Chichester (UK); Swiss Business School (Switzerland)
<b>'Turnkey'/'Foreign-style' independent institutions</b>	Locally owned universities having an affiliation or partnership with a foreign institution	Canadian University Dubai; British University in Dubai; American University of Ras Al Khaimah
<b>'Replica' campus</b>	Full-scale research universities with complete colleges, research facilities and student services	New York University (USA); Paris Sorbonne (France)
<b>'Branch' campus</b>	Derivatives of home university with selected features and some facilities; usually for both undergraduate and graduate students	Wollongong University (Australia); Amity University Dubai (India)
<b>'Administrative' campus</b>	Administrative offices only with limited teaching facilities; academic staff typically flown in for intensive teaching sessions	University of Manchester (UK); University of Bradford (UK)

### 5.3.2 UK TNHE and IBCs in UAE

The UAE is a strategically important market for UK TNHE, as host to over 15,000 students enrolled in British universities through some form of transnational provision (QAA, 2014). As the UAE is de facto an

Anglophone country, demand for English-medium education is high, presenting an advantage for UK providers. The TNHE market is segmented into three distinct qualification levels. Some UK providers offer exclusively graduate (or in British parlance, postgraduate) degree programs, popular among adult expatriates looking to advance their careers or retrain through part-time specialized master's programs in vocational fields. There is also a booming undergraduate market, appealing primarily to the children of longer-term expatriates, offered by one-third of the UK IBCs. The third market segmentation is the pre-undergraduate or bridge programs, either as 'foundation year' lead-ins to an undergraduate degree program or as a standalone training courses which can be 'topped up' to a bachelor's degree at a later date. These programs are especially popular in the UAE as they fill an academic gap left by many of the private secondary schools and they fast-track entry into undergraduate degree programs.

The size, shape and purpose of each UK TNHE activity varies, from single program distance learning and degree franchises of only one dozen students to full university campuses with several thousand enrolled undergraduate and graduate students. As noted above, most are small in number and hold a low-profile in terms of marketing inside the UAE. A small handful of UK TNHE programs have a distance learning model with in-person tutoring support through a local private education business (e.g. University of Liverpool via Laureate Online Education, University of Northampton via Stafford Associates, University of London via Western International College). Further to these, the online Oxford Brookes Applied Accounting bachelor's degree, the largest single-program UK TNHE globally, enrolls over 3,000 students in the UAE seeking a chartered accountancy qualification. Many of these programs have instructors flown in for short intensive sessions, with impermanent teaching venues rented on a temporary basis (such as hotel ballrooms or conference centers).

Of the approximately one dozen British universities with a consistent physical location (not distance learning or temporary meeting site), there are currently ten which meet the OBHE definition and are

licensed by the UAE as IBCs (see **Table 5.2**). Notably, only four of these are large branch campuses with multiple degree programs for both undergraduate and graduate students. Heriot-Watt and Middlesex University are the largest British IBCs in the UAE both in terms of student numbers and degree programs offered and are among the largest fifteen IBCs worldwide (Garrett et al., 2016). The University of Bolton, one of two British IBCs in Ras Al Khaimah, started as a branch campus steered by the home campus but ceded its management to a locally owned AIP which also manages other transnational education partners including Pearson's Edexcel<sup>26</sup> pre-bachelor's qualifications (QAA, 2014).

A majority of these institutions are 'administrative campuses', offering only a small number of similar programs, usually professional graduate degree programs, especially in business and finance (e.g. University of Manchester, London Business School, City University London). All cater to broad market demand for MBAs or niche specializations like MSc International Health Management or EdD TESOL. These programs are typically delivered part-time, in intensive teaching blocks, and allow students to complete non-sequential program components in whichever country locations the courses are offered.

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<sup>26</sup> Pearson Edexcel is the UK's only private, for-profit exam board, operated in tandem with a range of Pearson qualifications which correspond to those in the UK national qualifications frameworks. The Edexcel program at the Ras Al Khaimah site offers National Diplomas (1 year) and Higher National Diplomas (2 years) as accelerated vocational entry pathways into a University of Bolton undergraduate program.

Table 5.2 British Universities with IBCs in the UAE<sup>27</sup>

<i>Institution</i>	<i>TNHE Model</i>	<i>Location in UAE</i>	<i>Established in UAE</i>	<i>Approximate student size (2018)</i> <sup>28</sup>	<i>Approximate number of degree programs</i>
<b>Heriot-Watt University</b>	Branch	DIAC	2005	3836	24 UG; 58 Grad; Foundation Year
<b>Middlesex University</b>	Branch	DKP	2005	3473	40 UG; 44 Grad; Foundation Year
<b>University of Birmingham</b>	Branch	DIAC	2018	98	7 UG, 5 Grad
<b>University of Bolton</b>	Franchise/ Branch <sup>29</sup>	Ras Al Khaimah	2008	600 (approx.)	9 UG; 3 Grad; 7 UK Diploma and Higher National Diploma
<b>University of West London</b>	Franchise/ Branch	Ras Al Khaimah Academic Zone	2018	50 (approx.)	3 UG; 1 Grad (MBA)
<b>University of Manchester</b>	Administrative	DKP	2006	561	8 Grad (5 MBA)
<b>City University London</b>	Administrative	Dubai International Financial Centre	2007	237	6 Grad
<b>University of Bradford</b>	Administrative	DKP	2009	133	2 Grad
<b>London Business School</b>	Administrative	Dubai International Financial Centre	2006	206	1 Grad (Executive MBA)
<b>University of Exeter</b>	Administrative	DKP	2006	44	1 Grad (EdD)

<sup>27</sup> Several further UK providers identified by the QAA or OBHE have been excluded from this list owing to various technicalities: University of Strathclyde Business School in Dubai and Abu Dhabi (a single MBA program which uses the UAE's Higher Colleges of Technology for its facilities), and Bath Spa University in Ras Al Khaimah (a franchise with two undergraduate and one MBA programs, sharing AIP facilities with Abasyn University from Pakistan).

<sup>28</sup> Data on Dubai-based institutions are made available through the KHDA's website. Data on Ras Al Khaimah-based institutions are estimates based on primary research.

<sup>29</sup> Most international providers in RAK closely resemble degree franchises in all but name. Providers took on characteristics of IBCs (such as having websites independent of their AIP) following regulatory changes in 2016; however most still appear to be offered alongside degree programs from other universities, which is a key feature of degree franchises (see Rensimer, 2015).

The cause for popular demand for these British IBCs is manifold. One important feature of all of the campuses is their links to local and international industries, which allows for the provision of on-site training, internships, and post-graduation career placements. This demand is accentuated in the UAE context, where the most sought-after educational qualifications are vocationally oriented, and education in general is framed as an instrument of career development. Many of these IBCs integrate employability and professional skills into the curriculum, require personal development plans, and incorporate industrial site visits into their programs (QAA, 2014). The effect of this focus on careerism is the frequent framing of each university's quality in both student-consumer discourse and marketing around the employment outcomes of its graduates. The value of the degree is consequently understood by what it is perceived to do (or not do) for its recipient in the labor market.

The second common feature, captured in the 2014 QAA report, is their global brand identities.

In many cases, the word global appears in their mission statements or the strap-lines on their websites. Heriot-Watt's is the most concise expression: the phrase 'Distinctly Global' appears above the University's website address on the cover of the latest strategic plan, which is entitled 'Global thinking, worldwide influence'. ... Bradford has a Global Business Strategy and a Global Campus Department; Manchester has a Global MBA Programme; London Business School (LBS) prominently promises 'Global perspectives' on its website, and has an EMBA-Global programme. The global aims of the others are less explicit but clearly related: Middlesex wishes to 'produce a global community of staff, students and partners'; Coventry calls itself a 'Business facing university in a globalised world'; and Cass commits itself to 'recruit and support the most able students from around the world' and to provide 'international mobility opportunities'. However similar their vocabularies, different universities implement their intentions in different and more or less comprehensive ways. (QAA, 2014, pp. 15–16)

What this means for each IBC varies. For some, it speaks to their multiple campus locations to which students can transfer, the networking opportunities each program enables, or the curricular focus of each program. In the case of Heriot-Watt, it speaks to the nature of their offshore student numbers, which exceed its total students at the home campus, and also their de-centered organizational structure in which each campus head is a member of the university executive (QAA, 2014). What the QAA report does not point out is the use of these global identities as key elements of university marketing. By



foregrounding the global alongside the British institutional brand identity, it communicates to student-consumers an orientation as something beyond local reproach and signifies quality as members of an imagined body of elite institutions (Sidhu, 2006). As **chapters 6 and 7** will illustrate, these expressions are instrumental brand positions in each IBC's marketing practices and draws strongly upon them in forging the link between UK higher education, the UK as global metaphor, and the student-consumer subject responding to a desire to 'go global'.

#### **5.4 Focal Institutions in this Study**

The three focal institutions examined in this study were selected on the basis of their branch campuses in the UAE as opposed to the features of their home campuses, although as the following section demonstrates, those characteristics too have analytical importance. At the time of this study's inception in 2014, only three British institutions in the UAE operated campus-based TNHE serving undergraduates with enrollments exceeding 400 students. Unlike the other British IBCs, these three offered broad portfolios of degree programs, employed staff in residence, and broadly catered to the expatriate and international student market (as opposed to niche or specialized professions). All three operated physical campuses with purposive infrastructure (dedicated study spaces, computer and engineering laboratories, dining and athletic facilities, libraries) which thusly featured in their marketing as components of each university's student experience. All of these features stem from and speak to their internationalization models, which vary in scope but generally constitute similar attempts to tap into the vast international degree-seeking undergraduate market in the region. The distinguishing features of each focal institution are not intended as central 'variables' to the study but are necessary to understanding and contextualizing the resulting analysis.

The following sub-sections present a descriptive profile of the three focal institutions examined in this study. Each begins with the historical origins of the university in the UK and its development to the

present, followed by the global footprint of their TNHE activity. As each profile demonstrates, their forays into the UAE market may be their largest TNHE projects but are not their first, as each has a wide global dispersion of partnerships, franchises, recruitment offices and offshore study sites, on top of explicit agendas to internationalize the home campuses and increase international student numbers. Their global profiles are then followed by the key characteristics of their IBCs in the UAE which stem from their rationales and origins. These profiles are then summarized in a final sub-section which integrates key components and strategies in comparison with each other and with the wider UK university sector.

#### **5.4.1 The University of Northern England**

The University of Northern England (UNE) has origins as a mechanical training institute, dating back to the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century. It remained a site of vocational training for the town and nearby communities in the northwest, despite several name changes, divisions and expansions, until it merged with a nearby education college in the 1980s. As a polytechnic, its mandate was in vocational training in technical fields and had a strong emphasis on teaching. The institute was awarded degree-granting status with the Further and Higher Education Act in 1992, but was not officially recognized as a British university for another decade thereafter. While offering advanced research degrees, its present-day profile remains as an industry-linked teaching institution for vocational training with a focus on Widening Participation<sup>30</sup> and relatively low UK league table ranking due to its limited and nascent research output.

Around the same time it became a university, UNE rapidly grew its home campus facilities, established a business school, and developed a wide portfolio of overseas partnerships, validated courses and degree franchises. These partnerships were established to deliver select UNE degree programs at locally owned

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<sup>30</sup> An access and inclusion policy agenda stemming from the 1997 Labour government's manifesto to increase the overall number of young people in higher education and in particular, those from under-represented groups

institutions in Europe (5), South and East Asia (4), and Sub-Saharan Africa (3). These programs often consist of small student cohorts, are taught by either local or fly-in academic staff, are managed locally and are monitored remotely for quality and consistency. UNE created a partnerships office for managing its offshore portfolio in 2010, with the aim of providing a major source of income for the university while enhancing both its global reputation and the educational opportunities it provides domestically and internationally (UNE Strategic Plan 2015-2020). While the home campus has a relatively diverse student body due to UNE's focus on Widening Participation, its international student numbers are comparatively lower than other UK universities at around 2-4% of the undergraduate student body (The Complete University Guide, 2017). As UNE leadership understood internationalization to be essential to its teaching mission in a globalizing economy, the difficulty attracting international students to the UNE home campus drove the university to expand its TNHE activity in lieu (Director 2, UNE). As that strategy developed, however, the TNHE business model prioritized fewer but larger international partnerships over numerous smaller ones to bring down costs and concentrate resources in target markets (Marketer 1, UNE).

The 2008 offshore partnership in the UAE was the university's most ambitious transnational engagement and has become by far its largest. Other proposed international locations faced onerous legal barriers (e.g. India) or minimal rates of return on investment (e.g. sub-Saharan Africa), making the Gulf region the optimal combination of market accessibility, stability and revenue (Director 1, UNE). Seeing an opportunity in the UAE to capitalize on the South Asian diaspora market as well as the country's growing potential as a study destination for students from UNE's other target markets,

the University decided at that juncture that we need to do something different, so they felt that maybe one way of branding ourselves, because we're a small university, would be to punch above our weight and set up an international campus. (Director 1, UNE)

Despite the primary driver being revenue, senior leaders felt that the UAE also maximized an international opportunity to fulfill UNE's Widening Participation agenda by "making higher education

available perhaps to people who wouldn't ordinarily come into it or ordinarily wouldn't be able to afford to come into it" (Director 2, UNE). This different type of student was initially imagined as those who could not afford to study in the UK or were immobile due to social and cultural obligations; however, after UNE was unsuccessful in securing KHDA licensure to operate in Dubai and instead sought partners in Ras Al Khaimah, leaders also framed the campus as a more affordable and accessible alternative to the numerous IBC competitors in Dubai. With lower fees and considerable geographic distance from the Dubai market, the UNE campus saw itself as serving primarily the Northern Emirates, offering British vocational qualifications to a different market of students, many of whom placed priority on affordability and practicality over a traditional university experience. Although the campus does attract small numbers of students from the larger Emirates and competes with IBCs in Dubai, competition is mainly in the context of Ras Al Khaimah, which includes the several Indian and Pakistani degree franchises, one American-style local university and one high-profile American IBC which closed the year after UNE arrived.

UNE's entry into RAK was similar to that of most IBC startups in the UAE, as it partnered with an investor who understood the local market, provided the physical infrastructure, and assumed most of the financial risk. The campus teaching portfolio similarly consisted of various in-demand vocational fields at the undergraduate and master's level in engineering, business, and IT. In contrast to competitors, UNE leadership made the decision in 2012 to downgrade the RAK campus from an IBC to a 'strategic partnership' (i.e. degree franchise) with its AIP in order to reduce its reputational risk and direct involvement. The arrangement reframed the campus as an 'academic centre' from which the AIP would assume responsibility for all staff hiring and management, and enable it to partner with other international franchises to deliver multiple programs at the site. At the time of data collection these partners were all British providers, including a distance master's degree program from a reputable London university and pre-undergraduate vocational qualifications for facilitating the entry of less

academically-prepared students into UNE degree programs. At the point of data collection, the AIP managed its own website, under which UNE was one major component, and promoted its own branding as a 'college' alongside UNE in its advertisements<sup>31</sup>. In spite of its re-designation as an 'academic centre', UNE is still classified as an IBC according to the OBHE and C-BERT, although not by Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) or the QAA. The partnership is still academically supported and quality assured by UNE home campus staff, and the university still views the partnership as an important asset for internationalizing the organization through staff collaborations.

#### **5.4.2 Greater London University**

Greater London University (GLU) began as an agglomeration of training colleges in the West and North London areas dating back to the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century. As independently operating institutes, they included a women's teacher training college, two colleges of art, and a technical institute, brought together under one umbrella as a polytechnic institute in the 1970s, with its main location in the northwest periphery of London. It was upgraded to a degree-granting university in 1992 at the same time as most polytechnics across England, making it a 'New University' with an emphasis on teaching over research. The University continued to accrete further teaching colleges in the area, including schools of health and dance, until the early 2000s when a restructuring campaign began consolidating by closing campuses and streamlining operations with the selling off of academic departments deemed less financially viable at home and overseas (McGettigan, 2013).

Shortly after becoming a university, GLU began expanding internationally with overseas recruitment and marketing offices in Malaysia and across Europe. Its TNHE activity also developed rapidly, led by a Vice-Chancellor who over two decades sought to transform the university into a global institution. In tandem

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<sup>31</sup> These arrangements may have changed since the period of data collection due to RAK Academic Zone's strengthening regulations on AIP advertising and multiple degree franchising.

with the transformations and consolidation drive at the home campus, GLU established a plethora of degree franchises and validated programs delivered through local providers in 15 European countries, in addition to India, Sri Lanka, China, Vietnam, Malaysia, Hong Kong and Egypt. It further launched three consecutive branch campuses: Dubai (2005), Mauritius (2009), and Malta (2013)<sup>32</sup>, making it the UK university with the highest number of IBCs. GLU's transnational activities have become a core element of the university's branding, identifying as a leading 'international university' based in London and holding a reputation for leadership and innovation in transnational education (GLU University Strategic Plan 2012-17). This transformation was described by senior leaders as an untested strategy in a then-early TNHE environment where GLU leadership saw an opportunity to distinguish itself from other Post-1992 universities and "accelerate their international footprint" (Director 2, GLU). The alignment between international opportunity, backed by strategic ambition, and financial need in light of ongoing restructuring in the UK was key to the expansion agenda. While its identity in the UK was informed by its polytechnic roots as a vocationally-driven institution serving mainly British, first-generation students, the expansive portfolio of international sites enabled GLU access to vast increases in students and an opportunity to "repackage itself as a big international player" (Director 1, GLU). The broader effect of the organizational transformation has been that the home campus has begun to reimagine itself thusly as "a research institution.. a serious university... moving up who we benchmark ourselves with and... becoming one of the better universities in London" (*ibid*). This change in reputation precipitated a subsequent increase in international student interest in the home campus (Director 2, GLU).

The campus in Dubai was the first of GLU's IBCs and one of the earlier IBC startups in Dubai when it opened in early 2005. It was also the first British university offering a broad range of courses to both undergraduates and graduates, although it emerged at nearly the exact same time as its primary British

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<sup>32</sup> The Malta campus was decided after a third campus planned for New Delhi was cancelled only two months prior to opening in 2011.

competitor, Adam Smith University. Offering degree programs in business management, marketing, IT, education, media, psychology, law, tourism management and international politics, its enrollments have risen to over 3,000, making it the third most subscribed IBC in the UAE behind Adam Smith and Wollongong University (Australia); like most IBCs operating inside Dubai's free zones, it does not have UAE federal accreditation and is thusly unpopular with Emirati students. The choice of UAE was a strategic calculation, seen to be a stable and transparent operating environment which aligned with GLU's "conservative" protectiveness of its academic quality (Marketer 1, GLU). The UAE student market was also seen as an ideal match for GLU's vocational orientation, suiting local demand better than higher-ranking research-intensive universities:

[GLU's IBC] was seen as something that could be very positive because it was very vocational focused, very much focused on securing employment at the end of your study. It's not that other institutions aren't, but that was 100% their focus. (Director 2, GLU)

With a flagship campus located at the intersection of several target student markets, the strategy enabled GLU to capture local students that it would not otherwise reach with its home campus. Having a minimal degree of student circulation between its campuses, each location in the GLU intercampus model effectively caters to different students in different markets.

Based in DKP in facilities rented from TECOM Investments<sup>33</sup>, the university occupies several buildings and shares facilities with other IBCs hosted inside DKP. Its distinctive branding which emphasizes its London origins and draws on popular London icons shrouds the windows of the front entrance and the interior hallways, thereby personalizing the otherwise uniform office blocks of DKP. The ownership of the campus is opaque; in addition to the infrastructure being rented from TECOM, the university itself is incorporated through a shell company with separate management chain from the home campus. Thus while it is recognized by all research and regulatory bodies (OBHE, C-BERT, HEFCE and QAA) as an IBC, it

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<sup>33</sup> An Emirati real estate and investment corporation and subsidiary of the Dubai government

is technically a large franchise operation given its local ownership, management, staff hiring, marketing and branding<sup>34</sup>. Despite the aligned appearance of its website and university logo with the wider university organization, the Dubai campus has its own marketing and student recruitment strategy with its own network of international agents and campus partnerships; this is apparently unique among the GLU campuses and stems from the licensing and ownership model of the UAE (Marketer 1, GLU).

### **5.4.3 Adam Smith University**

Adam Smith University (ASU) is distinguished from the other two universities with regards to its origins and history. As a Scottish institution, it began in the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century as a school of arts, which was established in Edinburgh to teach mechanics and practical industrial fields to working class men. Over the next half century, it widened its curriculum, shifted its attention to middle class students, and opened its doors to female students twenty years before legislation demanded the same of all Scottish universities. From the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the then-college issued awards to its graduates equivalent to university degrees and began doing the same for advanced research in the 1950s, and was therefore recommended to be upgraded to a full university in the 1963 Robbins Report<sup>35</sup>. The university was granted an estate outside of Edinburgh where it gradually transferred its facilities and expanded its overall capacity to become a full residential university with six disciplinary schools concentrated on producing research with economic and social value (ASU Strategic Plan 2013-2018). Due to its attention to applied research, it ranks relatively highly among UK universities (in the top tercile of 127 institutions according to the Complete University Guide methodology) and international metrics.

ASU is also distinguished in terms of the scope and depth of its internationalization agenda, as a key element of the university's growth strategy and at the core of the Adam Smith brand (ASU International

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<sup>34</sup> This is not popularly known, however, so its effect on students' perceptions of legitimacy are likely minimal

<sup>35</sup> This pivotal legislation sparked a wave of new UK universities, many of which were designated formerly as Colleges of Advanced Technology, including Universities of Bath, Loughborough, Brunel, Salford and Bradford.



Strategy 2011). The University has accumulated over fifty international delivery partnerships with local providers, with several of these exceeding 1,500 students each, such as the programs delivered in Hong Kong and Trinidad and Tobago. These delivery partnerships are managed and run separately from the University's international research partnerships, its global distance learning program, its regional marketing offices in China and India, and global network of recruitment agents in over 225 cities (*ibid.*). Its largest investments in its international portfolio are its two IBCs, in Dubai (2005) and in Malaysia (2014). These IBCs, in alignment with the home campus, constitute a networked model of fully serviced campuses which encourage inter-circulation of students and faculty, teaching and research collaborations, and joint student activities. The university collectively has embodied all of these features in its branding, labelling itself the international university for Scotland and foregrounding its 'global' identity in its straplines. Of its overall 32,000 students, only 11,000 are based in Scotland, and among the latter figure, one-third are international students. The limited number of UK-domiciled students is in part an underlying factor in ASU's dramatic transformation. As one director explained, there was a perceived need for growth which could not be achieved within the UK:

In some ways we had a strategic position to make about 15 years ago.. we had up until that point, with the exception of the business school, a fairly traditional university, you know, on the outskirts of Edinburgh doing science, technology, engineering, maths, business management, fashion... and there was limited scope for expansion. In the Scottish context, we were capped numbers for certainly undergraduate funded places to grow<sup>36</sup>. And the portfolio that we have is particularly well-suited to most international markets... and so the mapping of demand to Adam Smith was quite a close one to a lot of what the Asian and Middle Eastern markets are looking for. (Director 3, ASU)

This sentiment was echoed by other senior leaders who framed all UK universities as rational surplus-seeking organizations with an urgent need to exploit opportunities to grow, adding that "Over the past

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<sup>36</sup> This participant further explained that all Scottish universities have caps on the number of Scottish students they can admit due to Scotland's fully government-subsidized higher education model. As such, they are barred from admitting fee-paying Scottish or EU students at the undergraduate level. Students from England and Wales pay tuition fees, but only as a reciprocal measure. On the international student front, he further added that the then Westminster government, which collectively regulates UK international student numbers, posed a bottleneck for growth in student numbers at home.

few decades... it was very clear that if British universities want to expand their operations they need to go global, they need to go overseas” (Director 2, ASU). While there were also normative elements in their explanations pointing to desire for a decentralized, ‘global’ delivery model of teaching and research, the primary drivers were consistently described as a combination of perceived need for resources, international opportunities, and having an institutional “culture that was more risk-taking and entrepreneurial” than other universities (Director 3, ASU). ASU’s internationalization strategy, which seeks a broad and deep portfolio of TNHE activities, has enabled the university to convert risky ventures into assets which collectively sustain the organization by diversifying its presence across global student markets. Where, for example, regulatory changes or economic shifts make one market less productive, ventures in other markets capture those changes and maintain the university’s flow of revenue. The strategy was also explained as a ‘critical mass’, by which the increased international presence drove profile and brand recognition, increasing flows of international students to the home campus.

Commencing in September 2005, the Dubai campus offers a broad spectrum of applied and professional degree programs in popular demand in the UAE, including business management, engineering, physical sciences, computing and fashion design. Its petroleum engineering and Global MBA programs are especially popular, and PhD-level studies are being gradually introduced. It currently enrolls over 3,700 students across the campus’s undergraduate, master’s and PhD programs, with nearly 15% of the students recruited from outside the UAE as international students (ASU Annual Review 2014), making it less dependent on the domestic UAE market than many of its competitors and attracting a wider range of nationalities. Like many IBCs in the UAE, the campus was conceived by the AIP, who in looking for a delivery partner, approached ASU senior leadership. With a less fully-formed strategy than ASU employs in its present TNHE portfolio, the university saw the offer as a timely opportunity to enter one of the two TNHE ‘hotspots’ of the time (the other being Southeast Asia, where it later set up its second IBC).

The UAE student market was seen as particularly hospitable to ASU's applied approach to knowledge in a globalizing labor market.

So the fact that we're an international university, we're leading to a sort of international career, we're specialist – again leading in engineering, business, science and real world issues. Experts, again, specialist creative experts. Applied. ... There's no law, there's no humanities, there's no philosophy. It's really STEM plus business and fashion and textiles... The courses are all tailored to specific jobs. ... And even languages, we teach interpreting and translating. You know, trying to all the time tie our students into specific professional careers, so a lot of that is a big part of the message – you're creating graduates that are in demand. So, the global, applied, technical, specialist, connected, industry-linked, those kinds of things which obviously go down well in the Gulf. (Marketer 3, ASU)

While fulfilling the university's own interest in building a global campus model which students could circulate between, ASU's brand seized on both the international makeup of the UAE student market and its strongly vocational higher education focus. Despite being a Scottish university with subtle distinctions, it leads strongly in the UAE market with its identity as a British university, leaning closely to the recognizability and reputation of the UK brand<sup>37</sup>. Asked why the UK focus in its branding, one senior leader put it simply: "This is what our customers want" (Director 1, ASU).

The university branch occupied various temporary spaces in both DKP and DIAC before relocating to its purpose-built campus in 2012, which includes a four-floor main building, a detached auditorium, and two dormitory towers. The bespoke campus has its own food court, convenience store, sports grounds, gym, library and numerous design labs for teaching and learning. The campus infrastructure is owned by the university's AIP, which holds a 50% revenue-sharing contract with ASU in exchange for its investment and management of the campus, as well as its staffing of the campus's recruitment and admissions operations. Unlike the relationships between GLU or UNE and their AIPs, ASU maintains broad managerial authority over the campus, its academic programs, staffing, and marketing, including design of the prospectuses and websites. This arrangement was described by senior leaders as essential

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<sup>37</sup> According to one Dubai campus marketer, the campus started off with a more visible Scottish affiliation but later discouraged its recruiters from raising its Scottish origination with prospective students and parents.

to maintaining strategic oversight of the brand, complex procedures and decision-making while benefitting from the offset financial risk and logistical challenges in a then-unfamiliar market. The AIP has no visibility on the campus, yet its recruitment and operations staff work discreetly alongside ASU staff. The campus is universally recognized as an IBC by C-BERT, OBHE, HEFCE and QAA.

#### **5.4.4 Three Campuses Compared**

The above profiles explore the variously imagined purposes and strategic objectives of university senior leaders' UAE IBCs (in fulfillment of research sub-question 1). What they also set out is the comparative warrant for these campuses, exploring in detail how similar imperatives for resources and perceptions of opportunities to capture demand in overseas markets has led to the creation of three British branch campuses in the UAE, albeit through distinct internationalization models and strategies.

Looking at the universities themselves, including their organizational pedigrees, all three have histories as amalgamated colleges or polytechnics with strongly vocational and professional training missions. UNE and GLU share common origins as 'New Universities' or 'Post-1992s' in England, which have been characterized as having a greater entrepreneurial orientation than the longer-established and more research-intensive pre-1992 universities (Asaad, Melewar, Cohen, & Balmer, 2013; Naudé & Ivy, 1999). ASU's history reaches back further as a former College of Advanced Technology or 'Plate Glass University', benefitting from three more decades of central government funding and a developed reputation as a specialized university. TNHE is not an exclusive area of activity for either of these groups, as it is a phenomenon actively driven by UK universities across the spectrum (Healey & Michael, 2014; Kosmützky & Krücken, 2014); neither is these universities' pursuit of resources unique in an increasingly unpredictable funding environment and competitive, marketized higher education landscape. What is noteworthy, however, are the transformatory aspirations of each of these universities, starting as relatively little-known organizations saddled by their humble origins and quickly seizing opportunities to

expand their reach beyond the limitations of local provision. These aspirations took different form: UNE looking to “punch above [its] weight” as a small university, GLU seeking to recraft itself as a high-quality, research-focused “serious university”, and ASU restructuring and branding itself as a global university. Thus while not all had global aims or explicit agendas to achieve a global presence, each had outsized ambitions to escape the constraints of their past by expanding internationally.

What appears to distinguish and have driven their decision to establish an IBC is a grand vision for transforming their organizations and a willingness to take considerable risk to enact these visions. Senior leaders expressed an urge or urgency to expand and seek out resources beyond those that their UK campus limited them to. Their transformatory agendas and TNHE activities simultaneously address problems of funding and limited organizational scope by seizing opportunities to become international actors with globally recognized names. These agendas have developed in different ways (as they are not equally recognized globally), but they have the appearance of sharing strategies for expansion beyond the UK, led by broad portfolios of TNHE delivery and aggressive organizational growth. Led by coordinated strategic frameworks for internationalization and ambitious visions at senior leadership, these three universities have dramatically expanded their footprint and scale of delivery, while channeling new revenue streams into redeveloping their home campuses and funding research activity (an especially important area for Post-1992s, which generally have lower research capacity which results in lower rankings metrics).

There is also an element of timing and opportunity in each of their IBCs’ origins. Each university was approached by UAE investors and seized the opportunity where more risk-averse leaders at other universities may have declined. Each saw the Gulf as key market and perceived an IBC as the optimal approach to enter and maximize their presence in that market, in light of competition from other TNHE providers (including other UK universities with a TNHE presence there). They described students in the

UAE as different markets that could not be effectively reached through international recruitment to the home campus, and believed that they otherwise lacked the brand recognition to make a sizeable impact through a smaller-scale TNHE activity. For all three universities, these UAE branch campuses were their first attempt at IBCs, with GLU and ASU going on to develop more in other overseas locations. The timing of the UAE's development as a transnational education hub aligned with a particular moment for these universities looking to add highly visible additions to their expanding TNHE portfolios. As directors at all three universities made clear, their UAE IBCs were their largest single transnational endeavors in scope and resources.

There are also distinctions between the campuses with regards to their design and development; some of these stem from the aim and scope of each university's ambition or market position (such as the size of each campus, number of programs offered, or its ownership model), and others being circumstantial to timing and opportunity (such as their location within the UAE, which is largely determined by free zone management). Their differences in approaches to marketing and brand coordination also appear to stem from their campus ownership model, with ASU in near total alignment and UNE mostly detached from the home campus (with GLU somewhere in between these positions). The strategy and scope driving campus growth also aligns with each university's vision for the role their campus plays in its wider internationalization strategy, with ASU envisioning its tripartite campuses functioning as distinct university hubs, GLU devising a series of feeder campuses, and UNE extending its access to revenue without much intercampus exchange.

## **5.5 Conclusion**

The aims of this chapter were threefold. Firstly, it provided the contextual parameters of the study: the UAE, with its higher education policy aims (construction of markets), policy spaces (free zones), and policy subjects (primarily expatriates and international students). Guided by a free market logic

underpinning the UAE's two-tier social provision, the UAE massified its higher education sector in a relatively short period of time and stimulated further growth through a supply-side strategy of concentrating private and foreign investment into educational and related industries. The construction of zones also played a role in deterritorializing UAE national higher education space, thereby transforming the sector into a major conduit for TNHE. The conditions for TNHE were already present, with the history of education in the UAE being one of international borrowing, its massive expatriate population, its position as a major node of globalization, its service sector leanings, and its fascination with prestigious, often Western, cultural institutions.

Secondly, by setting out these contextual conditions, this chapter illustrated how British educational exports fit in and thrive as one of the UK's key target export markets. The commodified forms that higher education take in the UAE closely align with the UK's revenue-seeking market model universities identified in **chapter 4**, making for an easy translation from one context to the other. UK universities in the UAE hold no obligation to fulfill national policy aims and need only offer programs which strategically assure their own sustainability, thus creating pared-down, strictly commercial institutions facilitated by AIPs and free zone derogations. These transnational formations are ideal for examining the ways in which overseas institutions are thusly marketed as British and equal to their UK home campus counterparts.

The final aim of this chapter was to illustrate how the intersection of UAE policy developments and UK TNHE enabled three particular UK universities to develop commercial IBCs in the free zones of Dubai and Ras Al Khaimah. These three universities each have ambitious portfolios of internationalization activity and TNHE provision, thus the importance in building a descriptive profile of their historical developments and organizational aspirations to provide context to their establishment of IBCs in the

UAE. This section also identified each focal IBC's key characteristics which the subsequent chapters will draw upon in their analysis.



## Chapter 6: Representation, Performance and Signification in British IBC Marketing

This chapter examines how British IBCs in the UAE represent themselves and the national higher education brand through a diffuse ensemble of marketing: websites, social media, prospectuses, and through use of the physical campus as a space for marketing. As an analysis of representation, it is informed primarily by discourse analysis of marketing texts and content and semiotic analysis of visual images. These analyses are aided by interviews with various staff at each institution to complement and substantiate findings. This chapter thusly aims to address the questions as follows. Firstly, how do institutions present themselves in material and performed representations? Within these practices, what are the key messages or thematic repertoires collectively signified in IBC marketing and how are these themes represented using texts and images? Secondly, how do these encoded representations discursively link the IBCs to the British national higher education brand, and how is the British national higher education brand constructed through representations in IBC marketing? These questions direct the analysis from a broad inductive look at the body of representations at each campus to the particular focus on the discourses of and around British higher education, linking the general marketing practices and themes to specific qualities of the national higher education brand. The aim of this approach is to capture how various discourses of British higher education are grounded and mobilized in particular practices and performances of its IBCs in the UAE. The themes that this chapter explores enhance understandings of how British higher education is imagined, and how its degrees are made desirable and distinguished from international competitors in the UAE market.

This chapter is therefore structured according to the following subsections. **Section 6.1** surveys broadly the marketing media and practices of the three focal IBCs. It draws on the empirical data produced through the analysis of 560 social media images, 154 webpages, 3 prospectuses (official university or campus brochures), researcher observations and staff interviews to distil and identify a set of marketing

practices which are consequential to the way the themes in the subsequent section are communicated and framed. **Section 6.2** draws together the key themes identified across the body of analyzed marketing images, with a deeper qualitative examination into the use of representations and the discourses of British higher education that they channel. Both 6.1 and 6.2 allow for discussion of differences between institutions while aiming to identify key areas of overlapping themes. **Section 6.3** looks at elicitations of the 'UK' and 'Britishness' in the media data, identifying and analyzing where intersections between these national referents and the key themes in 6.2 enable spaces for a transnational performance or reconstruction of the British brand of higher education. These constructions inform the discursive spaces of a student-consumer imagination in which the UK brand is seen, desired, and consumed. The chapter ends with a discussion of these constructions with references to the literature in **section 6.4**.

### **6.1 Introduction: Key Approaches to Marketing**

This chapter approaches marketing in higher education as an ensemble of practices or social technologies employed to govern consumer imaginations, engender identification between students and universities, and inform their choice-making. At the institutional level, marketing practices center on the management of institutional image and the communication of key organizational values with students and stakeholder audiences (Kazoleas et al., 2001; Mazarrol, 1998) through the strategic use of texts (e.g. university guides, brochures, websites, social media, and advertisements), interactive engagements (e.g. open campus visits, face-to-face recruitment), and branding (covenants, logos, slogans and aesthetics) (Chapleo et al., 2011; Constantinides & Zinck Stagno, 2011; Fagerstrøm & Ghinea, 2013; Gatfield et al., 1999; George, 2000; B. J. Gray et al., 2003; Hesketh & Knight, 1999; Klassen, 2001, 2002). However, as such communicative practices selectively draw upon representations and discourses to construct institutional images, they are inherently laden with ideologies (Askehave, 2007; Vavrus & Pekol, 2015). Visual representations of students, academic staff, and universities in

marketing often conform to stereotypes and tropes to appeal to popular imaginations of higher education and build institutional legitimacy (Bitektine, 2011; Blanco Ramírez, 2016; Papadimitriou & Blanco Ramírez, 2015); mimetic textual practices also texture audiences' estimations of value by appealing to external metrics of quality or prestige (e.g. rankings, accreditations, accolades) and popular discourses (e.g. 'research-intensive', 'world class') (Aula & Tienari, 2011; Jones-Devitt & Samiei, 2011; Ng, 2014; Sauntson & Morrish, 2011). These marketing technologies are variously applied in the recruitment of students to home campuses and IBCs.

The transnational arena presents foreign universities with the challenge of establishing their brand congruence, legitimacy and local relevance in a distinct educational market (Chee et al., 2016; Farrugia & Lane, 2012; Juusola & Rensimer, 2018; Yuan et al., 2016). However, the distinct market also affords universities new opportunities to reimagine themselves through selective narratives and representations, including their prestige, heritage, quality, or relevance to student consumers in the overseas market. Appealing to the national higher education brand is a vital strategy for building local legitimacy and perceptions of value by linking offshore institutions to the collective attributes of the national brand. Value associations are visually and textually signified through the deployment of national and cultural symbols, histories, products, and icons which conflate nation brands with their national higher education and signify its promise of various educational capitals (Lomer et al., 2016; Pamment, 2015). In doing so, transnational institutions selectively draw upon in-demand elements or values of the national higher education brand to frame its offshore formations or activities in particular ways. These practices broadly constitute a contextually and historically situated regime of value as they govern the formation of student identification with and value of particular higher education formations and link specific practices to the broad constellation of attributes associated with a nation and its educational institutions.

This section proceeds with an overview of the media examined in this study, firstly with the aim of establishing the scope of the analysis, and secondly by illustrating how these media are used for the purposes of marketing. This overview of the data enables a broader discussion of the higher education marketing environment in the UAE grounded in particular practices. Identifying these different types of practices enhances the subsequent analysis by factoring in how messages or discourses are signified through coded representations or particular performances, and how a collective higher education brand is constructed in an offshore context.

### **6.1.1 Data**

The media constituting data for this analysis are a range of sources, mostly visual and material in form. Their value as sources of data are based on previous studies on consumer imaginations and impression formation (explored in **chapter 2**) and a methodological approach to visual content which views representations as semiotic containers which can be analyzed using visual content analysis, social semiotics, and interactional analysis techniques (explained in **chapter 3**). Each of the three institutions had a strong digital presence, which produced an abundance of texts and images to be analyzed unimodally and multimodally. GLU and ASU used social media (Facebook and Instagram) heavily to communicate with current and prospective students, and therefore a semi-randomized selection process was used to reduce the number of included items to approximately 125 items per medium per institution. UNE had a limited Facebook presence and did not have an official Instagram account so a selection strategy was not applied; however, UNE did maintain an event blog on its website, which bolstered its webpage data sample count. The date range of online media selection for all three institutions spanned from 2011 to 2016 to correspond with the years within which interviewed students would have engaged with these media (or at an institution's adoption of the medium, such as 2014/15

in the case of Instagram). Webpages were captured by screenshot in October 2016<sup>38</sup>. These data are quantified in **table 6.1**.

**Table 6.1 Collected Data on IBC Marketing**

<i>Institution</i>	<i>Webpages</i>	<i>Facebook</i>	<i>Instagram</i>	<i>Prospectus</i>	<i>Photos and observations</i>
University of Northern England (RAK)	65	85	N/A	University-wide (with sub-section on RAK campus)	Campus visits, open day events, UAE-wide recruitment expo, billboards
Greater London University (Dubai)	49	126	124	Dubai-specific	
Adam Smith University (Dubai)	40	121	104	Dubai-specific	

Prospectuses (official campus-specific or university brochures for prospective students) from each of the institutions were also rich sources of textual and visual data. ASU and GLU had Dubai campus-specific prospectuses produced by IBC staff, while UNE had only a general prospectus with a few pages devoted to its UAE campus. Further to these material data, the analysis is supported by various observation data produced on research visits to each campus between October 2014 to March 2016. These data include open day events on campuses, a major recruitment and marketing expo, and visual advertisements such as flyers, billboards or displays in public spaces. Observations were conducted primarily with the aim of exploring the ‘scope’ of marketing situations and providing the researcher with insight into the social interactions that took place between prospective students, marketing staff, academics, and physical marketing props. Analysis of these data also draws upon interviews with select staff and students engaged in marketing in order to confirm and enrich the researcher’s understanding of observed practices. As a secondary source, interviews are not enumerated in table 6.1; furthermore, as the

<sup>38</sup> This date is significant insofar as websites change with some regularity. After website data had been collected, UNE and GLU had both made major changes to their websites, with a noticeable decrease in use of stock images depicting unrepresentative (i.e. White) bodies. Similarly, ASU added more images of Edinburgh and actual students to its Dubai campus Facebook page. These changes fall outside of the data collection period of this study but could be usefully included in future studies on longitudinal changes to marketing practices.

following section discusses, student participation in recruitment and marketing was commonplace, which blurred the distinction between marketing staff and non-staff for purposes of enumeration (i.e. a surprising number of students interviewed for **chapter 7** data also had held roles in IBC marketing to some degree).

The marketing materials constituting data were systematically analyzed using three different analytical techniques. Firstly, the large corpus of visual and textual data lent itself to content analysis to identify patterns and enable comparisons within the data (Bell, 2011; Hannam & Knox, 2005). This technique produced an overview of trends in the visual data, such as key representations, types of embodiments, and primary functions and audiences, which are illustrated in **section 6.1.2**. Key images were secondarily coded and analyzed using a visual semiotic technique to unpack layers of meaning and ideological structures embedded at the connotative levels of signification (Barthes, 1972; Echtner, 1999; Nöth, 1990). Data were thirdly analyzed through an interactional and multimodal approach to critical discourse analysis with the aim of understanding how images and texts perform ideological functions (drawing on Fairclough, 2001, 2013; Machin & Mayr, 2012). The findings produced through visual semiotic and discourse analysis were aggregated into thematic groupings, which are discussed in **sections 6.2 and 6.3**.

### **6.1.2 Types of Representation**

The analysis of the wider collection of marketing media identified a range of practices which drew upon the passive use or active participation of students and staff. Before looking at the thematic and discursive makeup of these representations, it is necessary to outline here first how those representations are performed. A brief examination of these practices – in of themselves constituting a local marketing methodology – enable the subsequent analysis of the key representations to contextualize practices in particular spaces, i.e. the UAE higher education marketplace, which is

distinguished from UK marketing norms in the ways that higher education is seen, marketed and consumed.

As representations of the campus, the university, and the UK higher education brand, the selective denotation of certain subjects and places forges cognitive associations between the subject of the images and the values those images aim to transmit (Jewitt & Oyama, 2004). In other words, these images can be strategically used to signify values or can less deliberately imply them through their presence. The corpus of representations for all three institutions strongly appears to have been carefully selected to form particular impressions and associations among their audiences. If indeed all representations have a marketing function, intentionally or not, the visibility of bodies matters for marketing, and this visibility was observed in three broad sets of marketing practices.

### ***Passive Participation: Showcasing***

Further to their service to current students, campuses appeared to function as a filtered viewing glass for prospective future students, with each event on and off campus as a spectacle for posturing and showcasing the university. This was evident in the researcher's observations of events open to the public and an analysis of each campus's online profile, in particular social media, which were used with frequency as a tool for showcasing past events and marketing future opportunities. Such events included, but were not limited to, public lectures, exhibitions of student projects, inter-university competitions, talent shows, annual festivals, international day celebrations, graduation ceremonies, career fairs, and events tied to various student clubs and sports. Each of these had an active subject – the current student – as participant or organizer. As a spectacle, they also appeared to be designed with a passive or indirect subject in mind: that of the prospective student. Student-centered events would regularly have a visible marketing presence, at a minimum collapsible university banners placed in the background as a backdrop for photographs, or more often the presence of student and professional

marketing staff providing program leaflets and prospectuses to friends, family members and visitors. Occasionally further props would be provided to frame and capture moments which would subsequently be used in print or social media for marketing. With each event serving an indirect function of building profile and impressions of the university to a potential audience, the students and staff were passive participants to this process of marketing.

This phenomenon of events having simultaneous functions (for current and prospective students) was observed in the digital media data collected on each of the focal institutions. As platforms for communicating each institution's identity and engaging various audiences, the websites and social media captured in the dataset reflected their dual function as a recruitment tool for prospective students and information source for currently enrolled students. The difference in the messaging was often stark and the pivot between the two was frequent enough to be easily noticeable to a casual observer. In the social media of all three institutions, images vacillated between enrollment offers and recruitment events for prospective students, followed by social events and opportunities for current students. This pattern was found in websites as well; on the GLU website, the pages dedicated to student research and academic enrichment programs began with promotional language, addressing prospective student audiences in the second person perspective and showcasing its offerings, but followed with mundane details only relevant to current students, including meeting times and locations.

To understand both how social media was used by each institution and what each particular image aimed to achieve with its denotations, screenshot items were assigned a discrete marker for their apparent function or purpose. If the item denoted images and text for a campus open day event or early enrollment offer, this was labeled under 'general recruitment' or 'specific program recruitment'; whereas if the denotation was of an upcoming social event or professional development workshop for current students, it was classified as 'advertising future events'. These analytical labels were applied



according to what the researcher perceived to be their primary purpose and audience. For example, while the publicizing of a student social event may attract the attention of prospective students, the explicit purpose and audience of the item would be to inform current students. The result of this process, enumerated in **table 6.2**, identifies explicit recruitment as the primary content of institutions' social media in most cases with external prospective students as their intended audience.

**Table 6.2 IBC Social Media by Function and Audience**

<i><b>Institution</b></i>	<i><b>Social media images</b></i>	<i><b>Primary function</b></i>	<i><b>Primary audience</b></i>
University of Northern England (RAK)	85	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student recruitment (26)</li> <li>• Advertising future events (15)</li> <li>• Purpose unclear (10)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• External prospective students (29)</li> <li>• Internal current students (29)</li> <li>• Audience unclear (20)</li> </ul>
Greater London University (Dubai)	249	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student recruitment (90)</li> <li>• Advertising future events (54)</li> <li>• Showcasing past events (33)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• External prospective students (98)</li> <li>• Internal current students (67)</li> <li>• External students &amp; general public (56)</li> </ul>
Adam Smith University (Dubai)	225	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advertising future events (72)</li> <li>• Student recruitment (69)</li> <li>• Showcasing past events (32)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• External prospective students (85)</li> <li>• External students &amp; general public (55)</li> <li>• Audience unclear (38)</li> </ul>

The analytical classifications in the table above are problematic, of course, owing to the non-discrete, overlapping functions and audiences of each image. In a strong number of images, the image appeared to have a primary and secondary purpose, and by extension an immediate and distal audience.

Advertisements for future events, for example, may be primarily intended to inform current students, but also serves to profile the university's activities to prospective audiences. Particularly in the social media profiles of GLU and ASU, events featured frequently as synchronous spaces for both a manifest and implied subject, with the underlying implication that prospective students could also partake in the qualities espoused by the image through their enrollment. Whenever current students were shown at a competition or forum in an off-campus public space, the caption would often frame the event using

promotional language, detailing which degree program the students were on, and providing links to the program or admissions page. Where any on-campus event was shown, marketing banners conspicuously appeared in the background advertising the university, its programs and special offers. In many images no explanatory captions were provided, creating spaces for varied interpretations in the absence of explicit messages. Those images without captions frequently depicted actual staff and students receiving awards or university leaders signing memoranda of understanding with smartly dressed professionals. In the absence of explanatory captions, audiences are left to assume the campus is highly awarded or partnered with prestigious organizations, suggesting a marketing effect if not the deliberate purpose of the image. All of these ambiguous images underscore the passive use of students and staff in marketing institutions using a medium with divergent audiences, as well as a constant environment of marketing embedded in the student experience.

### ***Stock Images***

The social media and website visual content was comprised of various images of university-age youth and professionally dressed adults, much of which turned out to be of stock origin<sup>39</sup>. To an audience less familiar with each campus or with the UAE higher education context, most of these stock images would be plausible representations of a European or North American university: diverse-looking student bodies in classrooms, composed experts leading the class, green grass on campus grounds, graduates in caps and gowns outside red brick buildings, and images of gainfully employed young adults in business attire (see **figure 6.1** for examples). The websites of GLU and UNE at the time of data collection drew so heavily on stock images that most if not all of the bannerheads and image tiles were of cheery,

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<sup>39</sup> Stock images can be identified by performing a “reverse image search” using a content-based image retrieval (CBIR) search platform such as Google Images or TinEye. By uploading an image or URL into a CBIR search, the user can trace related images (including manipulations thereof), provenience, and image popularity. For this study, images were considered stock if either they could be traced to a stock image vendor or were found in use on the websites of other organizations.

disproportionately White students, either deeply engaged in the act of being a student or looking directly at the viewer in what Kress and van Leeuwen refer to as 'demanding affiliation' through a reciprocal, inviting gaze that suggests equal power between the subject and viewer (1996, cited in Bell, 2011). This use of generic representation was always used intermittently. In the case of websites, it would be used to complete the framing of the page and bolster its appearance in tandem with occasional images of real students. In social media, stock images were more embedded as props for an offer or opportunity, with the image modified to include the university logo, signature frame, or text overlay. None of the hundreds of stock images could be found in home campus websites or social media, suggesting that their use was a practice exclusive to the branch campuses.

Stock images are polysemic and by their nature divorced of context or specific identifiers (such as place markers or distinguishable features) in order to enhance functionality and signify meanings across a range of applications (Frosh, 2001). Their polished appearance and orchestrated depictions employ a familiar visual logic which is not as easily captured in photographs of actual subjects. As these images function to communicate ideas to audiences, their usage prompts analytical questions of why a particular image was selected over a range of choices, why it was deemed more appropriate than an actual photograph, what values it communicates or implies, and how the subject of the image relates to those values. Each of the three campuses drew upon stock images in their websites and social media with varying frequency and use. If no bodies were depicted in the image, the setting would often be the significant element, with depictions of iconic British buildings or the Dubai skyline appearing most frequently. Other images drew upon representations of ordinary objects as props to complement the subject of the accompanying text, requiring a reading of the text to make sense of the image (often of educational clichés, like pencils, chalkboards, light bulbs, doorways, and various scientific instruments). The images of iconic places stoke audience imaginations by inviting the viewer to infer the link between the campus and depicted location (Sidhu & Christie, 2014); similarly with the various symbols employed

in stock images, the viewer is asked to read these as visual metaphors for opportunity, inspiration, creativity, curiosity, etc., and make associations between these values and the university.

Where it came to bodies depicted in stock form, however, there is greater semiotic space to read the image variously, with a range of possible meanings and purposes. Here especially, multimodal inquiry raises questions as to the selection of particular images as semiotic resources to enhance a text (Jewitt & Oyama, 2004). What is often depicted as a 'generic' educational scene may be read as an actual scene at the branch or home campus, while other images which more obviously have no recognizable provenience can still draw upon various bodies to represent the institution or its message. Stock images used in institutions' digital marketing typically served as visual vehicles for open campus event announcements, degree program advertisements or generic representations of staff. These images function firstly as semiotic placeholders (among an infinite range of choices, including non-corporeal or non-photographic images), and secondly as substitutions for actual images of students, staff and campuses. In doing so, they not only evoke imaginations of what British campuses and their students and staff might look like, but also which bodies are to be associated with university values (e.g. representations of student achievement or staff expertise).

The use of stock images also raises questions of embodiment, or how particular bodies communicate particular ideas as representations of the values embedded in the image (Bell, 2011; van Leeuwen, 2004). This is especially evident in the stock images in this study, where stock model students were most always depicted in stereotypical dispositifs of Anglo-American universities: hanging out, engaging in campus activities, classroom discussion, or productive teamwork – the clichés of higher education. Where students were not engaged with each other, they would demand affiliation from the audience, always with an inviting smile that suggested fulfilment or achievement. Problematically, the collective student bodies in stock images rarely resembled those observed on the UAE campuses. Stock model

students were overwhelmingly White, or where in groups, diverse in way which resembled representations of ethnic diversity in North American university marketing (see Blanco Ramírez, 2016, p. 195 for description of typical representations of student diversity in North American university advertisements) rather than that found in the UAE. It is possible that these images more readily play into audiences' expectations and imaginations of higher education generally or perhaps British universities specifically. Out of convenience or strategic intent, marketing staff then draw on stock images as they may more readily resonate with their consumer audiences than actual images taken at IBCs do. This practice in university marketing has been evidenced elsewhere as emblematic of 'flexible whiteness', where racially minoritized subjects are accommodated to normalize and universalize asymmetries of power while simultaneously erasing minoritized individuals by rendering their difference invisible. Where embodied representations are used to connote quality and excellence in higher education, these values are entangled in visually encoded racialized and gendered hierarchies (Esterá & Shahjahan, 2018, p. 12). At the same time, universities are inclined to project themselves as having diverse student bodies, regardless of whether their marketing speaks to those specific audiences, as diversity discursively coheres with excellence as a measurable benchmark of university quality (Urciuoli, 2003). Assuming these racialized hierarchies of representation are socially embedded in various but similar ways globally, it would suggest that student audiences equate White bodies and managed diversity (i.e. a sampling of different racialized/ethnicized bodies in representations) with excellence, conforming with how quality is mediated and read in higher education. As the actual student makeup of IBCs in the UAE is primarily South Asian, Sub-Saharan African and Arab students, the use of stock images provides marketers with a convenient tool for deploying racialized, embodied discourses of quality while also playing into expectations of difference in a foreign institution.

***Active Participation: Students and Staff as Marketing Agents***

In complement with static (print and digital media) representations, live embodiments were also a frequent element of higher education marketing in the UAE, drawing on actual students and staff to recruit prospective students face-to-face. These practices actively solicited the participation of students and staff in live events and viral marketing campaigns, and in doing so, foregrounded their bodies as model representatives of their campuses. Through their conscious participation at recruitment expos, open campus tours, and secondary school visits, university students served as deputized promotional agents of their institution. Interviews with these student representatives at each of the three focal institutions found that students from ASU and GLU were paid an hourly wage and given referral targets they were expected to achieve at events; UNE, meanwhile, drew only upon student volunteers. All three campuses offered students marketing ‘internships’ – in general a highly sought-after component of the UAE job market – for which students assisted at various recruitment events in exchange for the opportunity to add professional experience to their CV. An advertisement for a paid internship offered by UNE in 2012 illustrates these developments, soliciting interns as “Student Ambassadors”:

The primary task of the marketing intern would be to work at promoting [UNE] programs to schools, feeder colleges, associations, corporate institutions and the community at large... Ambassadors have to bring minimum five referrals every month... Interns bringing in 5 referrals within the month will receive AED 1800 [approx. \$500 USD] as internship stipend and will also receive other benefits... Ambassadors have to submit their performance report & work schedule once a week to the designated offices... Only serious and hardworking candidates need to apply... In case of under par or dissatisfactory performance by any of the appointed interns the internship could be withdrawn. (UNE Facebook, 2012)

Student participation in recruitment was not seen as exclusively for personal gain, however. Some interviewees spoke of a compulsion to “give back” to their university, to represent their university to curious audiences, and to spend a day amongst their friends. For staff on the other hand, participation in extracurricular marketing was expected as a non-negotiable component of the academic role at each of the institutions. Staff often noted in interviews that a major unspoken requirement of their role was to market their program (with program leaders responsible for yearly recruitment targets) or their campus

at recruitment fairs, open days and school visits. On the issue of compliance, one academic member of staff described participation as “you’re invited to do it, to volunteer, but if you don’t then someone comes around and asks why didn’t you volunteer for this, etc. So it’s kinda expected that you would.”

This sentiment was put to a senior manager at that same campus, who confirmed,

You're expected to and you have to attend marketing events, open days, you're involved very much with student recruitment, and things like that, so all those things that you wouldn't get.. I mean I've had people come over from London quite a lot, deans and people like that, and even marketing people and business development people and people like that who would say 'How did you get your faculty to be here on a Saturday on an open day? In London, they would never go near it.' And I said 'well they just don't get a choice, it's part of the job. It's an expectation, and if they don't want to do it they won't last very long'. (Director 1, GLU)

As students and staff serve as representatives and embodied representations of their campus, this raised similar questions asked of stock images - who gets shown and why? Researcher observations at recruitment events found the students often reflecting a curiously broad selection of the national and ethnic makeup of each university, as if to reflect a ‘diversity’ that all audiences could relate to. This diversely representative body jarred with the researcher’s observations of the actual students found on each campus. Whereas White students were a rarity in any of the three campuses, they appeared in marketing teams with disproportionate frequency, especially at GLU, where visitors to the GETEX higher education expo (Dubai, April 15-17, 2015) had the opportunity to pose for a ‘selfie’ with a White student dressed as a sentry of the Queen’s Guard in front of a faux backdrop of Buckingham Palace. One White male interviewee from GLU (who did not dress as a Queen’s Guard) reflected on his experience as a student recruiter,

They actually called me up...and he’s like, yeah, actually, we would like you to come work, and it’s going to be paid. And I was like, okay; I mean, I needed money to buy something. And actually, now that I think about it, it’s probably because they wanted to make it appear very international, because I’m one of the few White people that are there. It’s me and this other girl, basically; we’re the only two White [people]. That’s it. I’m not even joking. (Student employee, GLU)

This phenomenon was not the case with all three campuses at all marketing events, as UNE did not appear to have any White students enrolled. However, the notion of appearing ‘very international’ at

the other two universities did reoccur in student interviews, often without critical reflection on what, or who, constituted 'international' in a cosmopolitan space like the UAE. The underlying discourse spoke to imaginations of who belonged where, and what bodies played into expectations of a British university. As with stock images, the foregrounding of whiteness and managed diversity are likely to inform consumer imaginations as they cohere with racially coded visual discourses of quality in higher education (Esterá & Shahjahan, 2018; Urciuoli, 2003). Staff representation at marketing events also appeared to lean towards White Anglophone academics, as if mirroring visual marketing material, despite being a minority among IBC staff. This corresponds with Blanco Ramirez's (2016) critical survey of university advertisements in the US, which found academics and knowledge professionals were consistently represented using White male bodies. This encoding of expertise and authority in bodily form informs the consumer subject as to the authoritative quality they might anticipate from the prospective IBC.

In addition to live events, students were frequently called upon to model themselves as typical or ideal students of their university for digital and print media. The websites and social media platforms of ASU and GLU offered a selection of their model students or graduates, including their photographs, brief biographies, and quotes speaking to their experiences as students or reflections as graduates. The hard copy of ASU's prospectus took this further by featuring full-page glossy images of actual students posing as models, and variously staged campus scenes where students were conscribed to perform photogenic student experiences<sup>40</sup>. The bodies depicted in that publication were again a careful and concerted selection of ethnicities, genders, and appearances to present an inclusive, managed diversity at the campus; this was less the case however with the model students depicted on ASU and GLU's websites.

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<sup>40</sup> The 'staged' nature of these photographs was confirmed in interviews with students involved in such marketing.



Social and digital media also facilitated the active participation of students in marketing their own institutions, with a clever assortment of campaigns which firmly positioned students as entrepreneurial agents. Through institutions' social media platforms, students were called upon to share their experiences and voice their enthusiasm for their institution's brand ethos using smartphones and popular social media platforms. One campaign invited students to create a Youtube video log ('vlog') promoting the student experience (ASU Instagram, 2016); another asked students to take photos of UNE advertisements on moving objects like busses and taxis, then publish these on their own social media accounts and compete for 'likes' (UNE Facebook, 2014). These campaigns were incentivized with prizes for the most successful campaigners, but also drew upon the celebratization and self-promotional impulses of social media users. Online audiences were also encouraged to wear stylishly branded university apparel (GLU Instagram, 2015 and 2016), take photographs on campus and 'tag' the university (GLU Instagram, 2016), and comment on images and topics presented on social media platforms (various data). The appearance of a ready and enthusiastic participation by current students creates an impression of an exciting and dynamic campus environment, underpinned with the endorsement of students willingly participating as promotional agents. Such visual endorsement creates a metasemiotic loop where brands are continuously reanimated "while being reflexively marked as reanimations" through consumer engagements with the brand (Nakassis, 2012, p. 624). By participating in the signification of IBC brands over social media, current and prospective students alike perform the functions of marketing as brand ambassadors. The collective effect is an increased visual presence, both in physical and virtual form, of branded bodies channeling the logos, values, or the affective component of the student or campus experience.

Collectively these three forms of representation form an ensemble of marketing performances, with each drawing on a different social technology deployed to shape and govern the consumer imagination. All three draw upon the denotation of bodies in places, where both bodies and places carry meaningful

significations speaking to the nature of the IBCs being marketed. These significations are therefore analytically valuable as selected representations among many possible choices. Passive and active participation both draw upon actual or simulacra students and university places, although they differ in how they manage the performative dynamics of student and staff participation. While all three raise the question of which racialized and gendered bodies are denoted, it is the use of stock images which especially plays into coded racial hierarchies (as stock images are the easiest form to produce and manipulate), and the active participation of particular bodies to a less prominent but no less visually instructive degree. With regards to the medium, there is an interactive element to performance in social media and live marketing which enhances consumer-brand identification, although static images too can engage the audience by staring directly at the viewer and 'demanding affiliation'. The power or impact of each medium or type of representation is not measured in this study and thus an analytical hierarchy is not possible; collectively interpreting these data as selective representations of each IBC, however, does enable an analytical reconstitution of key associations, values and discourses, which is what the following section now turns to.

## **6.2 Key Themes**

Having laid out the context through which representations are made, this section distills those representations into key themes and identifies the dominant messages or ideas conveyed through marketing. Its purpose is to systematically capture what is signaled to audiences, rather than challenge what representations are or are not accurately reflected in reality. While most of these messages are strategically repeated to make impressions, certain elements of each theme appear less intentional yet in some way still do the work of institutional marketing. The themes explored in the section below are not intended to be exhaustive. They are aggregations of the most frequently appearing codes emerging from systematic analysis of the data; however, another researcher may have characterized these themes differently. There are also individual derogations within these themes, as the findings in all three

focal institutions did not always neatly fit into homogeneous groups or present findings with perfect overlap. This was expected given the three institutions' occasionally differing approaches to marketing.

Analysis of the data arrived at three coalescing themes, each explored in a subsection below. The first, professional education for employment, finds a common framing of IBC degree programs as instrumental education for professional career entry. This positioning closely coheres with educational policy discourses in the UAE generally, which constructs higher education as an instrumental process of job specialization and for participation in the global knowledge economy (Knight, 2011). The second theme is less a characteristic of IBCs and more a summative characterization of what they do via their marketing: cultivate desirous students. This theme explores the varied ways in which students are positioned as visual and textual subjects; in each of the ways they are framed, either as satisfied students or successful graduates, there are undercurrents of desire speaking to the affective currencies IBCs draw upon. The third and final theme is the global and international identities of the three IBCs, examining how they symbolically represent institutional links to their British home campuses and the national higher education brand while also signifying their legitimacy as 'global' institutions or brands with a belonging in the wider world. These three themes point in divergent directions – at IBCs, at students, or at the UK national higher education brand. But each theme focuses on the core representation work that IBC marketing practices do, allowing for a meta-analysis of these findings in **section 6.3**.

### **6.2.1 Professional Education for Employment**

Among the infinite range of possible representations, the most eminent theme by far across the three institutions was the professional nature of their programs, with aims of signaling their practicability and links to potential employment. That connection between education and careerism was not only made explicit across their social media, websites and prospectuses, but was also the nearly exclusive purpose

of education identified in their media. Rather than communicate the value of a universal or broadly general set of knowledge and skills for personal and professional development, marketing content was often very specific in the skills and qualifications offered and the career(s) each degree led to. Linking careers, careerism and professional education, UNE's Facebook content frequently alluded to "career changing" qualifications, "professional development", preparing students for "professional lives". Through their recruiting events too students were encouraged to find the UNE stand and "find a great career" or attend a "career changing event". GLU content similarly boasted of producing "highly employable and successful graduates", unusually providing employment statistics for its graduates. The top three most frequent words in its international prospectus were identified as 'industry', 'professional', and 'work'. Even its bachelor's program in film studies – not a degree typically known for vocationalism – was advertised as "The screenplay of your career in film". In less explicit ways, ASU also boasted of its "highly sought after" graduates, with frequent reference to professionalism, industrial relevance, job markets, and career enhancement. Its prospectus especially had the appearance and feel of a career catalog, with every page adorned with images of professionals or students dressed as professionals, and each degree program description punctuated by a "career prospects" section detailing the practicability of that qualification.

One consistent feature of the representations of professional education is its embodied forms depicted in each image. By design and by circumstance, the professional or expert shown was with few exceptions White, and often male, both in stock and actual representations. The stock variant typically depicted a central subject in professional business attire, set in a white-collar workplace or boardroom, either looking engaged in collaborative work or gazing directly at the viewer with an expression of personal satisfaction. These images were used frequently in GLU social media marketing with the degree name and university logo superimposed on the stock image. As a stock image, the angle, focus and color were manipulated to foreground the subject, framing the subject's professional disposition as

something to be desired; the text overlay then makes the association between that desire and the educational means to attaining it. As the subject embodies professional opportunity, the advertised degree frames opportunity as universally attainable; however, in doing so, it repeatedly draws upon particular bodies to represent professions and experts. This also materialized in actual representations of expertise, where the subject of the image was typically a university or disciplinary authority (e.g. visiting lecturer, featured member of staff, head of university) or vocational expert or head of a professional body. In these images the subtext was less an idealized depiction of what the viewer desired and more a profile of the strength of the institution's professional orientation and associations. ASU and UNE both frequently depicted images in their online media of visits with private-sector leaders or technical experts, and showed key moments of signing MoUs with professional bodies, often with no caption to explain its significance to the university or the viewer. Those experts, where they were not Emirati appointees, were invariably White and male, often contrasting starkly with the student body whenever the two were shown together. In both the stock and actual variant, these representations of expertise and professionalism play a role in forging associations between the audience's imaginations of experts and the university as the site of that expertise and of the opportunity to embody it. With the exception of ASU's prospectus which depicted mainly students or young actors doing professional work or applied learning, embodied representations of professionalism and expertise were generally disassociated from representations of students, creating semiotic space for audiences to infer what professional expertise looks like and how its inferred qualities inform career opportunities for each university's prospective students.

Another feature of these representations of professionalism and employment is the local embeddedness of professional opportunities offered. In general, the universities performed a *mélange* of global, British, and local identities (discussed in **section 6.2.3** and **6.3**); however, employment and professional opportunities themselves were almost always confined to within the UAE, giving each

university a locally embedded identity with connections to local industry and opportunity pathways. Social media and websites of all three institutions prided themselves on their links to industry and business in the UAE, offering internships and work placements to their students either in the public (Emirati government) or private sector. There were also numerous advertisements for campus career days, which hosted recruiters to UAE-based employers and derivatives of multinational firms. This selling of local opportunity would appear to cater to both lifelong expatriate residents (the dominant student demographic) and international students who envision the UAE as a site of professional opportunity. This was evidenced in frequent references to the UAE as a place to gain exposure to its “cutting edge business landscape” (GLU prospectus, 2015), with IBCs offering programs “specifically tailored to match the employment market demands in the UAE and in the wider economies of the Middle East” (ASU prospectus, 2017). While it is to be expected that opportunity structures are localized for undergraduates especially, this draws attention to the near absence of international employment opportunities presented through these media, with no overtly international discourse directed at the mobility of individual students or degree recipients with the exception of global MBA programs at ASU and GLU which cater to mid-career mobile professionals. The linking of these IBCs’ brand of professional education with UAE-based opportunities portrays a degree of local embeddedness that appears at odds with their international branding.

In the wider context of the UAE educational landscape, UAE-based IBCs’ framing of education as professionally oriented and career-driven fits neatly into a free market model of education for job training. From the perspective of the consumer, it also ties into the idea of Dubai and the UAE as the place of opportunity, where rapid economic growth and vast opportunity in commerce and engineering especially drive demand for these vocational skills. Where global and British identities are mainly an exercise in branding, the appearance of local embeddedness and opportunity provides these IBCs a substantive element with which to appeal to student-consumers in the UAE higher education market.

### 6.2.2 Cultivating the Desirous Student

The second theme is a diffuse cluster of affective dimensions encoded and communicated in the marketing material, drawing upon images and texts portraying each campus and its product in ways intended to resonate with the viewer's desire to fulfill their potential and realize their imagined future. Through the manipulation of language and images, they ask the viewer to imagine, feel, and respond to impulse. Depictions of students allow the intended viewer, the prospective student, to identify with the subject and see him/herself in the scene depicted. Across all media, there are three essential states in which students are typically represented in images: in their present state as university students, in their celebratory moment of graduation, and in their resultant post-graduation professional lives. All three of these forms drew upon text and imagery which command the imagination, and often demanded an affiliation by gazing directly at the viewer.

The depictions of current university students and the university experience showed a degree of variation in represented forms, as these tended to use a mix of stock images and actual photographs of real students. In general, the most frequent depictions were of satisfied-looking students, most commonly from stock origins, enjoying their generic university experience or wearing expressions of inspiration. As the images are generic and not photographs of actual UAE students, the subjects would most always be a careful selection of varying ethnicities, as if to imply diversity, but again this was a form of diversity approximating North American campuses rather than ethnic diversity typifying the UAE. Where the subjects were shown engaging with each other, the context was of stereotypical educational activities – walking and clutching books, debating with peers, engaging in classroom discussion – in generic educational settings. Where the subjects engaged with the audience, it would typically be one subject in the foreground separated from his/her peers in the background. The photograph would focus on the gaze and inviting smile of the central student, asking viewers to relate to the subject and imagine him/herself in the scene (as exemplified in **figure 6.1**). In these images, superimposed university logos,

offers, and captions would be the only content to contextualize the image and identify it with the institution.

Each focal institution had minor derogations which gave them a slight distinction in their marketing, and thus in the way in which they aimed to emotionally and cognitively connect with audiences. UNE was the only focal institution to ground its marketing in local character, not shying away from identifying as a branch for and of local students. While it drew on some generic, unrepresentative stock images of students in its social media and website, it also did so with images of women in headscarves and cloaks, of Emirati males in white tunics and headgear, and in advertisements with exclusively non-White bodies. These images adopted the same visual grammar of stock representations generally, but broadened the range of embodiments with which the viewer could identify. In stark contrast, ASU marketing distanced itself from local embodiments, drawing heavily on stock images with White bodies doing non-local youth activities like skateboarding, cycling and watching spectator sports. Its niche, however, was its frequent depiction of the imagery of erudition and inspiration – inquisitive expressions and engaged scholars – repeatedly embellished throughout with clip-art-style icons of the stereotypical tools of inquiry, e.g. microscopes, beakers, computers, books, light bulbs, question marks, flowcharts, and fountain pens. These clichés of inspiration and discovery were used with repetition to symbolize opportunity for prospective students, framing the university as that space of self-fulfillment and as the gateway to personal development. GLU marketing went beyond the other two in its emotional affiliative appeal to students desiring the essential ‘university experience’. Unlike ASU and UNE, its explicit brand messaging throughout its marketing promoted young, active lifestyles, a collective team identity, and notions of proud tradition and accomplishments specific to the Dubai campus, which at the time of data collection was only just over a decade old. To supplement actual and stock images showing students enjoying their GLU experience, photographs of its campus or sports teams would use a monochromatic filter to connote a sense of nostalgia or memorial legacy, with a caption that read “where it all begins” or “you



are here”, inviting the audience to imagine themselves as part of the ongoing tradition and engaging the viewer’s latent desire to become a fabled student of GLU.

In contrast to the varied representations of students in the present state, depictions of graduation ceremonies and post-graduation careers were nearly isomorphic across institutions. The iconic cap and gown, now a globalized standard of academic regalia, featured regularly across all marketing media as a symbol of an accomplished future state of being for the prospective applicant. Stock images of the usual clichés of Anglo-American academic ceremonies – throwing caps in the air or receiving a degree scroll from a senior male figure – were deployed in opportune visual spaces to establish the affective links between audiences’ desires and the university, and to provide a generic visual vehicle for a particular marketing message. As visual filler, the multimodal link was purposed to attract secondary school graduates (e.g. “Calling all Grade 11 leavers! Join us at [ASU], Dubai Campus...”, ASU Facebook, 2015), to advertise degree programs and open day events (UNE Facebook, 2016, among others), and to build excitement for each institution’s own commencement ceremony (e.g. “Graduate, celebrate and commemorate your special day tomorrow with your family, friends and fellow graduates!”, GLU Instagram, 2016). As with stock images generally, images contained no features which would ground them in a UAE context, suggesting that the commencement trope was universally recognizable, allowing for easy transfer of cognitive and emotional appeal.

**Figure 6.1 Stock Representations of Students**



*Stock images found on UNE Facebook, 2013, 2015 & 2016 (top left); ASU Instagram, 2016 (top right); GLU Instagram, 2016 (center left); and both GLU Facebook, 2016 and ASU Instagram, 2016 (bottom). Images displayed here were retrieved from stock image vendors by the author. Images used in institutional marketing had been manipulated to include university logos and text overlays detailing open campus dates or degree programs being offered.*

Actual photographs documenting universities' commencement ceremonies also featured prominently in institutions' social media, using the occasion as a spectacle and marketing prop to impress audiences with the grandiosity of the event. While the images themselves closely mirrored those of the stock ones, their function would be slightly different. For ASU, the first major display of its commencement ceremony was to frame that campus's tenth anniversary, while GLU used images of its ceremony to build excitement, consolidate student-university identity and sell university branded merchandise on its social media. The hype and spectacle was again a synchronous occasion to use current students in marketing to prospective ones. In this situation, the image subjects were actual graduates embodying the iconic moment that audiences could instantly recognize, and in cases of prospective student audiences, desire to participate in.

The third dominant representation of the student in IBC marketing media was that of students as professionals occupying important or meaningful white-collar positions in various industries, embodying the desires of the consumer audience. Such images, inevitably of stock provenience, depicted well-groomed young professionals in office settings, gazing at the audience to establish an affiliation between the present viewer and imagined future self shown in the image. As observed in the first theme, the representation of the professional-to-be was always linked to an opportunity that the university offered, such as a new degree program, a fee discount, or career day event, for example. The message behind the image implied that the university not only enabled such opportunities but helped to actively facilitate audiences' desires to realize their imagined futures. The language of achievement and transformation was rife among such representations, always with reference to the future. UNE's "career day" pitched to imminent secondary school graduates asked the viewer to "Imagine a great career post your undergraduate qualifications.." (UNE Facebook, 2015), while a GLU MBA advertisement commanded the viewer to "Transform your career and be the person you were meant to be" (GLU Facebook, 2016). Always with slightly less sensational rhetoric, ASU's image of students collaborating in

a design project was accompanied with the caption “If you have a dream, we will help you achieve it. If you don’t have one yet, we will help you find it!” (ASU Facebook, 2015). In the UNE and ASU examples especially, calls for imagination were not linked to concrete visions of a particular career path, but instead broad promises to channel vague desires for self-improvement through university custodianship in an almost pastoral contract to would-be consumers. These and similar marketing media seized upon the narrow employment-based function of UAE higher education by selling the career itself as much as the means to attaining it.

Further to the duality between present state and future state framed in the marketing above, there is an affective element to these particular data speaking to audiences’ need for haste and decisiveness. As a regular feature of IBC marketing, audiences are ordered to seize upon their impulses and avail limited opportunities to join the university, receive a fee discount, or participate in an upcoming event. The most commonly elicited phrase in the corpus of marketing data was “Don’t miss...”, commanding the viewer to respond without delaying or rationalizing. This expression was most commonly found in social media advertisements, where the imperative in the boldfaced caption complemented images of calendars, ticking clocks, and other symbols connoting fleeting opportunity. Such techniques were often linked to the future consequences of the viewer taking or withholding action, for example “Hurry to secure your future. Apply and enrol before 31<sup>st</sup> May 2014 and get an Early Enrolment Grant of AED 4,000” (GLU Facebook, 2014) or “You only have a few days left to transform your life!” (by earning a “top notch accredited UK Degree qualification”) (UNE Facebook, 2014). In pressuring viewers to respond with haste, these messages connected short-term incentives with audiences’ deeper desires and goals, thereby placing responsibility on the viewer to seize opportunities.

### 6.2.3 Globality – Global and International Identities

As a third collective thematic area, the focal institutions position themselves broadly as global and international, albeit in often diffuse and inconsistent ways. The IBCs described themselves as ‘global’ and/or ‘international’ institutions, primarily in their prospectuses and websites, where there was more textual space for substantiating these appellatives:

The RAK campus offers a truly global and international opportunity to study and understand your chosen discipline in a multicultural and dynamic global environment. You can earn a genuine British degree, which is recognised throughout the world, without the need to travel to the UK. However, if you do wish to undertake some of your studies at [UNE home campus], we have an exchange programme that allows you to travel between our campuses and continue your studies seamlessly. (UNE prospectus, 2012)

Our university is a global university committed to meeting the needs and ambitions of a culturally and internationally diverse range of students, by providing challenging academic programmes underpinned by innovative research, scholarship and professional practice... [GLU-Dubai] is part of a global network of 44,000 students enrolled across four campuses: London, Dubai, Mauritius and Malta. Around 30% of our student body are international students. (GLU prospectus, 2015)

[ASU] is a truly global university – with a lively and vibrant academic community of over 31,000 students, from more than 150 countries, studying for degrees worldwide. This was highlighted in the 2015 QS World University Rankings, which ranked us in the world’s top 10 universities for the international mix of our students. Whether you choose to study in Dubai, Malaysia or the UK, [ASU] offers a proven learning environment and excellent facilities and study opportunities, and delivers the same high quality education, reflecting our goal to share knowledge across the globe, enriching the lives of the people we meet and the countries in which we work. (ASU prospectus, 2017)

For GLU and ASU, there is an explicit claim to being global or international as it pertains to the diverse backgrounds of the students or the multiple locations of their campuses; whereas, for UNE, these claims pertain to the nature of the campus location, the universality of their degree, and potential mobility of the student between campuses<sup>41</sup>. All of these features of the campuses are adumbrated here as explicit qualities that collectively confer a ‘global’ brand identity and articulate the use of ‘global’ or

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<sup>41</sup> UNE does not have explicit branch campuses as the other two institutions do. Instead it maintains a large number of degree franchises or validation programs with international partner institutions. At the time of writing, the ‘exchange programme’ had not materialized beyond brief student visits, mostly from the RAK campus to the home campus.

'international' as marketing self-descriptors. They are used with a strongly positive connotation and assumed to be qualities desirable to student-consumer audiences.

'Global' as a self-descriptor, however, was not employed in explicit form with overall frequency in the marketing data. Aside from the explicit references in the prospectuses and website statements, the bulk of marketing images *implied* this quality through representations and discourses which broadly constituted features which might be considered global. With each of the three institutions the degree of explicitness or implicitness varied, but each drew upon broadly similar and consistent language of globality to construct themselves. While these sub-themes are diffuse, the evidence for each of them is robust. The global identities and ambitions of UAE-based British IBCs were identified as a consistent theme in the influential 2014 QAA report on UK TNHE in the UAE (2014), yet that report leaps from a cursory look at mission statements to inter-campus features and organizational models, rather than how each institution's branding broadly mirrors those mission statements. What follows here are the different self-depictions that fall under an umbrella of appearing 'global' and the underlying implications for each.

One area of representation in globality draws on each university's international connectedness or global reach, emphasizing their foreign provenience and multinational profile to distinguish themselves from local higher education competitors. Images were rife with representations of globes, maps, travel, and international icons. The attendant lexicography spoke of global programs and opportunities, international associations and students, worldwide networks and holidays, world-leading qualities and world events. ASU's strapline for several years was "Distinctly Global", with their strategic plan titled "Global thinking, worldwide influence". Both ASU and GLU promoted their multi-campus models as destinations for students to transfer, with ASU packaging the opportunity under an inter-campus scheme entitled "Go Global". GLU drew heavily on the optics of being multi-sited with a row of clocks in

its lobby behind the Dubai campus reception, one for each of its campus locations. All three advertised in their social media their overseas recruitment activities and events held in locations outside of where their campuses were based. All three campuses offered travel and study opportunities to global destinations, including UK but more often to other popular European and Asian cities, either as part of a degree program or as an extra-curricular activity. Advertised degree programs were typically infused with global perspectives to cater to an international student market, with descriptions heavily featuring a “global curriculum”, “global context” or “environment”, “focus on global trends”, “global issues” or “global strategy” and offering “global experiences”. For GLU, these were built into the program titles, with offerings in “Global Governance and Sustainable Development”, “Global MBA”, and “International Tourism Management”. Further to these programs, focal institutions typically profiled their links to global organizations, multinational corporations and prestigious international bodies to draw students in on the prospect of holding associations or future employment with such bodies, including internships with Dubai-based multinationals, or membership with the Chartered Institute of Marketing or Institution of Civil Engineers. References to global connectivity were manifold throughout the data, enforcing the notion that these qualities could be shared with the individual student who partakes in the global university. It also supposes a certain portability on the part of the university, that if the non-global student cannot come to the campus in the UK, the university will come to them wherever they are.

While other texts and images in the data spoke to Dubai and the UAE in what would be an effort in localizing or contextually embedding an international institution, many of these paradoxically played into campuses’ global identities. Mentions of Dubai were always with reference to its attractiveness as a global destination and hotspot for business and opportunity; rhetorical efforts were then made to associate these qualities as befitting a university which sees itself as global. As the GLU website (2016) posited, “The added benefit for students in Dubai is their exposure to a rapidly developing, dynamic and cutting edge business landscape, which competes with the world’s most significant cultural and

economic hubs." Dubai in this regard is employed as a metaphor for globality, wherein the space where the campus is situated is comprised of discourses of global admixture, melding together global character of the university and the location. As is common with the UAE and Dubai especially, these discourses are prone to superlatives, with notions of the biggest and tallest being core to Dubai's identity (Kathiravelu, 2016). GLU's website characterized Dubai as "one of the world's most cosmopolitan cities" (2016) while ASU's social media linked the campus's petroleum engineering program to the "World's largest oil & gas event" (ASU Instagram, 2016). ASU further highlighted its presence at the World Future Energy Summit, while also commemorating world quasi-holidays, including "World Teachers Day", "World Book Day", and "World Laughter Day" (ASU Facebook, 2015 and 2016). These superlatives are generally understood as spectacle, but it was noteworthy to see campuses play into it as part of their marketed identity.

A second analytical cluster of representations speaking to a global identity is the composition of each campus's students, and to a lesser degree, its staff. Across all forms of marketing was a reinforcement of notions of student diversity, an ethos of multiculturalism, and a de facto environment of cosmopolitanism. In some instances the link between globality and multicultural students was made explicit, for example "As an institution, we consider ourselves a global university and are committed to promoting diversity and providing a world-class education to students from all backgrounds, reflecting Dubai's melting pot of cultures and nationalities" (GLU website, 2016), while in others it was implied, such as "many nationalities, one home" (UNE poster, 2016). All three campuses celebrated an annual "International Day" event where the broad traditions and customs of their students were performed and paraded in semi-public spectacle to showcase the diversity on campus. These photographs of actual students jarred with the more frequent stock images where diversity of student bodies was more closely managed. All three campuses drew on stock images of highly diverse groups of students interacting with each other to emphasize this point. One particular image depicting a multicultural group of students (**figure 6.1**, bottom) was used by both ASU and GLU with only slight modifications to differentiate them.



ASU occasionally made explicit its message on some of these images with captions reading "[ASU] is recognized for its academic excellence and multicultural campus life" and "#multiculturalism". By showing the occasional image representative of local diversity, UNE was unusually forthcoming in identifying its students' origins, with "...thousands of students from not only the M East but also from Africa, the CIS countries & the Indian sub-continent." (UNE Facebook, 2014). With the exception of some of these UNE images, however, the general representation of student diversity found in the social media images could be read as a form of multiculturalism that takes place "out there" rather than inside the UAE. This has the effect, whether intended or not, to cast the university as an ensemble of international students drawn from around the globe, when in reality the three campuses are overwhelmingly comprised of expatriate students already resident in the UAE<sup>42</sup>.

A third and final connotation of globality was mainly represented textually by referencing claims to a de facto global recognition of each university's name and its degrees. The phrase "internationally recognized" was found ubiquitously in various permutations throughout the marketing data in all three institutions. ASU's prospectus made eight references to its qualifications, research, or the institution itself being "internationally recognised" (2017); GLU had five social media and website images positing the same about its degrees. UNE used a similar phrasing in its prospectus, which claimed "You can earn a genuine British degree, which is recognised throughout the world..." (2012), however in most instances UNE drew upon a homologous signifier – accreditation – which it referenced in seven of its social media images and was used repeatedly throughout its webpages. The claim to being "accredited" operates with the same logic and passive construction as "internationally recognized", with the accreditor implied as a foreign guarantor of quality. Both of these phrases confer an implied

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<sup>42</sup> A KHDA report (2016) puts the aggregate figure for Dubai at 67% expatriate residents; however a high number of the international students who came to Dubai solely for their studies are enrolled on *graduate* level programs, making the undergraduate figures for expatriate residents even greater.

international status with an implicit global audience, and typically militated around other international branding phrases such as being “world class” (UNE Facebook, 2014, and website, 2016) and “world renowned” (ASU website, 2016). The collective effect of these phrases was always to distance the university from its local operational context and exotify itself. By appealing to the ways in which IBCs are non-local through international accreditation or recognition, it confers an implicit universality and globality intended to attract student-consumers who desire to appeal to international employers or emigrate using the recognition of their degree.

The three themes explored above cluster the corpus of marketing data into different focal practices. The first theme on professional employment is in effect an appeal to the demands of the local higher education market. These universities in their UK context are complex organizations with a wide range of functions relating to teaching and research for various beneficiaries. In their branch form, however, their marketing representations identify them as narrow professional training providers for fee-paying students and as attuned to the middle-class career aspirations of existing or would-be UAE residents. For this theme particularly, each of the three IBCs were fairly consistent in their practices. The second theme broadly captures the affective dimensions of recruitment reflected in three idealized states of the student experience: the current student, the graduate, and the post-graduate professional. Each of these characterizations, heavily represented through stock imagery and universalized tropes of higher education, are employed to appeal to the desires of prospective students and forge cognitive-emotional relationships with university brands. Institutions only showed divergence in their representations of current students, as these nuances of the student experience form a central component of each IBC’s brand (in crude brushstrokes, these might be: ASU as a serious, prestigious choice for internationally-minded students, GLU as the fun, authentic British university experience, and UNE as the unapologetically local and low-frills yet life-changing opportunity). The third theme brings together the parallel representations symbolizing the global or international character of each campus. This was

found to manifest through three dimensions of each university: their international connectedness, the international constitution of their student bodies, and the foreign, international nature of the degree they offer. Despite divergences in denotative practices and syntagmatic texturing (such as how claims to being global are substantiated in their prospectuses), the deeper connotations were ideologically consistent by repeating the underlying narrative that each campus is global and foreign by nature of being a British transnational institution. Across all of these marketing practices, the deeper, connotative convergences are what maintain alignment between these IBCs and the British higher education brand (e.g. overarching brand narratives like producing employable graduates, degrees being globally recognized). At the same time, subtle differences in denotative practice are what enable each IBC to distinguish themselves to their respective market segmentations.

### **6.3 Mobilizing the British Higher Education Brand**

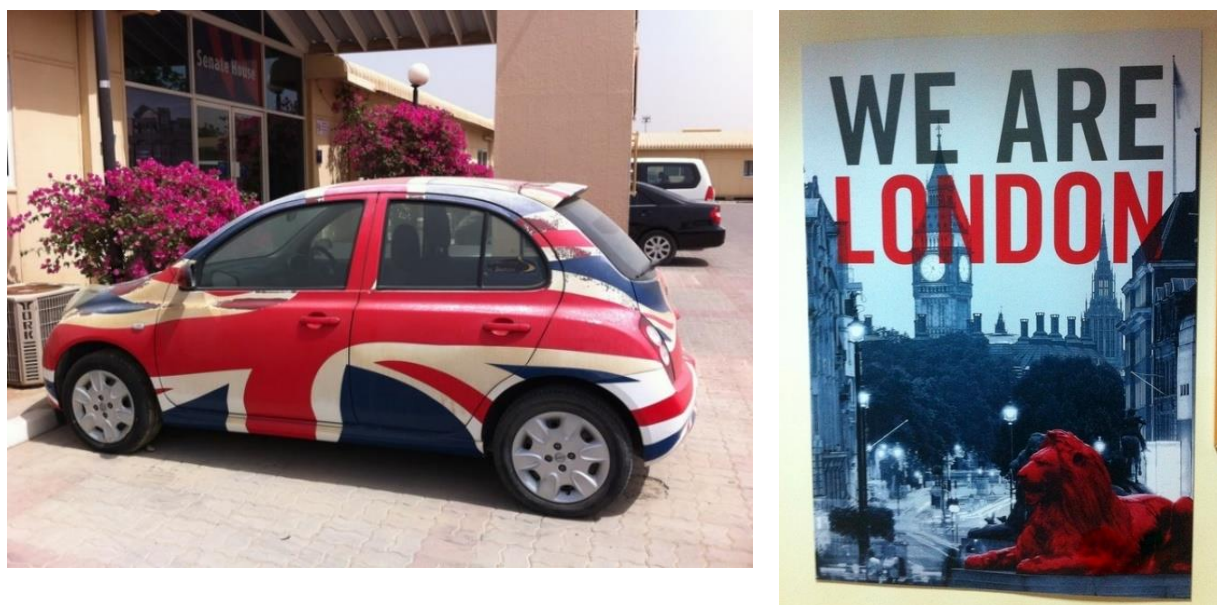
Whereas the previous section examined the collective themes denoted and connotated in the marketing data, this section now pivots to look at where those data intersect with national signifiers - that is, references to the UK or Britishness that qualify those data in particular ways. All three campuses mobilized various UK representations in their marketing, from the casual, frequent referencing of “British degrees” to the ostentatious branding of the campus using popular national symbols of British identity<sup>43</sup> (seen in **figure 6.2**). At one level these are no more than attempts to commercialize the popularity of British culture and its global familiarity in order to brand a campus and draw in students. These overt representations channel the more explicit desire to consume a fashionable brand entity (e.g. the “Cool Britannia” aesthetic popularized in the late 1990s) in the same manner as popular symbols or personalities used in marketing products by qualifying the product or its message. Inversely,

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<sup>43</sup> Including the ASU branch campus, which despite being a Scottish university, leaned heavily towards identification with the British higher education brand and away from any distinction as a Scottish institution (as observed in **chapter 5**).

however, these images also provide an opportunity to analyze the UK as a collective brand of higher education, discursively constructed through its visual and textual deployment. In this regard, the overt representations, as well as the more casual references to the UK, can be analytically revealing where identified in proximity to other discourses or selling points. With a deeper interrogation of not only the frequency and proximity between these discourses, but what they speak to and where they manifest, it is possible to reconstruct the UK national brand through its discursive marketing formations.

**Figure 6.2 Nation Branding on Campus**



*Left: Union Jack-themed car outside UNE campus entrance; Right: London imagery-themed signboard displayed in GLU campus corridor (photographs taken by researcher, 2015)*

While each institution drew upon various discourses of the UAE higher education marketplace – quality, value, universality, globality, and others – to different degrees, they were similarly tinted with UK references which collectively spoke to a British national brand. This section identifies and analyzes references to the UK in relation to the functions and meanings of marketing images and texts, looking at how various discursive features of campuses and their degrees are qualified through a British lens. It uses the term discourse to refer to the educational objects that are socially constructed through communicative practices in the UAE, such as quality or recognition. These are considered discourses as

they have policy effects (IBCs must meet certain standards and be externally recognized) and critically shape how consumers see and judge different higher education providers.

### **6.3.1 The National Dimensions of Quality**

One ubiquitous and highly visible discourse in the UAE educational marketplace is that of 'quality' in the abstract and 'quality-assured' in its applied form. Quality as a grounded, local definition in the UAE market can be elusive given the highly internationalized nature of the sector. Quality in its applied form can be located in regulatory policy around quality assurance and accreditation; however, in its zeal to benchmark itself against the countries it borrows so many of its institutions from, the UAE even applies externally defined standards of quality to its national and local private institutions in its accreditation criteria. The appeal to international standards is explicitly linked to compatibility for competition and labor mobility (CAA, n.d.; UAE MoHESR, n.d.). For those IBC institutions not accredited under the UAE national framework, such as the three focal institutions in this study, quality is certified by a regulatory panel (e.g. Dubai KHDA or RAK Academic Zone) as equivalent to that found in its sending country. Quality, therefore, is exogenously defined, and as a discourse is inseparable from its international progenitors. This leads to heterogeneous and overlapping enactments of quality within the UAE (Rawazik & Carroll, 2009), and in this disharmony, impressions and embedded assumptions about national quality matter. Discourses of quality in the UAE are therefore closely linked to branding and reputation.

Due to the external appeal to quality, the discourses of quality found in marketing data are draped in the language of British education and the visual symbolism of Britishness. Some of this is substantive and refers to particular parameters of quality that have a bearing on the IBC and an impact on its degree holders. Others, however, simply draw upon popular imagery and appeal to a national brand, backed by shared imaginations of a familiar and desirable place. Appealing to the national brand in such a way

allows lesser known UK universities (like UNE or ASU), or lower ranked UK universities (like GLU and UNE), to distinguish themselves from their international competitors in a crowded UAE marketplace and link themselves to the strong reputation of the UK national brand. With this, IBCs can redefine and assert themselves in any manner of qualities – recognized, high quality, and top-ranked, in their overseas context – whether they would be seen this way in the UK or not.

The twinning of Britishness and educational quality was a frequent feature in the marketing data, often with their pairing made explicit through repeat phrases in highly visible places. Where they were most visible they were least substantiated, typically employed in marketing banners and straplines (e.g. GLU’s “More Than Just a Quality UK Degree” and ASU’s “high quality British education” marketing catchphrases). In less-prominent textual spaces as well, these catchphrases were casually used without any effort at drawing attention to them or substantiating them. For GLU, the phrase was used as an integral part of the product referent:

We want to ensure that whilst the students are here in Dubai they can get their **quality UK education** alongside new experiences and life long memories whilst keeping safe. (GLU prospectus, 2015, emphasis added)

At [GLU Dubai], you can get a **quality UK Degree** in Dubai. For further information, contact... (GLU website, 2016, emphasis added)

Similarly for ASU,

[ASU] was the first British university to open in Dubai International Academic City, in 2005, bringing with it the prestige of a **high quality British education** offering flexible study options for ambitious students throughout the Gulf region and beyond. (ASU prospectus 2017, emphasis added)

Are you looking for a **quality British education** and the chance to expand your professional and training options? Visit us tomorrow at... (ASU Instagram 2016, emphasis added)

With a slight divergence for UNE, UK degrees were not only paired with quality but tied to its British assurance of quality:

If you are open to the idea of earning a **quality accredited UK Degree** right here in the UAE, attend our Open Day! (UNE Facebook, 2012, emphasis added)

The best value destination for **accredited British education** gives you a chance to be a winner, 3 times over (UNE Facebook, 2014, emphasis added)

In the main it appears that these terms were used coterminously as marketing language employed to attract interest rather than inform audiences. With the exception of UNE deviating slightly from the template, all three institutions regularly used these pairings or derivations thereof to refer to their degree programs as having a British form of quality without substantiating what such quality entails, which of its components constitute a British degree, or how this differs from other international articulations of quality. The use of “accredited” may be unique to UNE’s operational environment in RAK as the emirate has had a history of hosting unaccredited and low quality degree franchises; however the repeat use of quality seems redundant and serves mainly as marketing language<sup>44</sup>.

The framing of educational quality and the degree as ‘British’ fits into the context of the UAE licensing regime, where international providers are beholden to their home country accreditation standards and are required to evidence an equivalency in quality at their UAE campuses. As the definitions of quality are externally defined, the marketing of quality also grounds its evidence in those external standards and makes clear the transitive relationship between the branch and home campuses. Each campus had a small number of spaces in their prospectuses, websites, and to a lesser degree social media, where ‘British’ quality was substantively articulated to the consumer. Each of these articulations referenced its quality assurance procedures, its UK accolades, and local licensing and inspection as the equivalency basis for quality at the UAE campuses.

We achieved the highest possible endorsement from the UK's Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education. And those rigorous procedures apply to all of our academic courses, wherever they're taught in the world. If you study at our campus in Dubai, your course undergoes the same validation and monitoring system as the course our students in London enjoy - with the

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<sup>44</sup> A cursory web search for the phrase "High quality British education" suggests it is a discourse and phraseology particular to educational exports. Search results appear to exclusively concern British providers overseas or UK-based providers marketing to international students.

same exams taken simultaneously in both cities and identical Honours degrees awarded. (GLU website, 2016)

If you are a student on a [University of Northern England] Programme at one of our UK or International partners you should expect the same high quality education that you would receive if you were at the [home] campus. (UNE website, 2016)

With over 180 years' provision of world-renowned education in the UK, [Adam Smith University] was the first British university to open a campus in Dubai. At our brand new purpose-built campus in the heart of Dubai International Academic City, you will gain a degree that is taught and examined to the same exacting standards as on our UK campuses, preparing you for a successful future in your chosen career. (ASU website, 2016)

Each of the above excerpts asserts an identity in the educational inputs (British education, standards, quality assessment) to construct notions of equivalency in their outputs: a UK degree produced in a new campus environment. In doing so, the campuses depend on either the consumer's appreciation or ignorance of the UK quality measures that undergird the degree (e.g. being royally chartered, or receiving strong endorsement from the QAA), as only GLU substantiates at length what the QAA is and does, and which qualities were specifically identified as good practices at the Dubai campus. With the exception of GLU's quality overtures, these marketing platforms draw upon collective British articulations of quality, with the expectation that, as a known brand of education, they will be sufficiently familiar or trustworthy to an overseas consumer audience to speak for individual institutions.

### **6.3.2 Universal Recognition**

A second, powerful discourse of British higher education in the UAE is its recognizability or universality as a recognized form of education, specifically its degree. The substance of this discourse draws heavily on the British notions of quality and quality assurance examined above, as well as the comparative reputation and prestige of the collective UK higher education brand. Drawing on the principles of degree equivalency, the discourse of degree recognition (and to a lesser degree authenticity or legitimacy) links up with themes explored in **section 6.2**, specifically the British degree as having a global character, and



its holder being conferred advantages of mobility and employment. The discourse positions UK education as globally recognizable and universally legitimate such that the holder of a UK degree is entitled to that same recognition, and with it the material consequences of employment and mobility. This is occasionally made explicit where campuses advertise their inter-campus transfer schemes, global study trips, or list of notable international employers of their graduates. For the most part, however, it is implied through symbolism and connotation linking the global image of the UK educational brand with particular degrees being advertised.

A key element of the universality discourse is the focus on the British national origins of the degree rather than its institutional progenitor. As quality is articulated through a British lens (as argued above), familiarity with the UK, its higher education, and quality assurance is assumed in ways that it is not for the institution, which may be a relatively unfamiliar or obscure university name. With this national brand recognition, the marketing straplines appear to heavily emphasize the opportunity to hold a British degree, not one from a particular institution. The banner masthead for UNE's Facebook page instructed audiences to "Study at the Best Value British University in the UAE. Earn career changing Accredited UK Degree Qualifications" (UNE Facebook, 2013), while the heading on ASU's display at recruitment expos read "Gain a Top UK Degree" (researcher's observations, 2015). Numerous GLU social media images called for students to "Enrol today for a Quality UK Degree" or "Study in Dubai for a Quality UK Degree" (GLU Facebook, 2015). These expressions, phrased in the imperative, were often the explicit and singular message of the advertisement. They would be linked to the institution by its heraldic logo, but contained less substance regarding the quality or recognizability of the institutional brand; instead, these advertisements featured popular British iconography, notably the repeat use of the national flag and silhouettes of the London skyline. One GLU advertisement, eschewing any other message, contained a vivid photo of a traditional red phone booth in the foreground, Big Ben (Palace of Westminster clocktower) in the background, and a caption that exhorted "Hold a UK Degree!" (GLU

Facebook, 2014). These expressions of universality – that a British degree is a British degree, regardless of where it comes from – speaks volumes of the perceived (and unexamined) legitimacy of the UK educational brand, which is used here to position the degree as a national product, backed by national reputation and national quality assurance measures. The institution is featured in other ways, thus creating distinctions between providers, but where degrees are discussed, the discourse appears flattened to speak to the collective national brand.

With the emphasis on the degree as the key product, there is strongly implicit messaging that its universality is something that can be materially acquired or embodied. This intersects with the key themes explored in **section 6.2**: for professional education, it suggests a universal employability or recognition by employers; for globality, it suggests a degree of enhanced mobility. Both of these draw upon the universalized recognition of the British degree as a legitimate and reputable credential vis-à-vis other national competitors, although such comparisons are only ever implied. The phrase “internationally recognized” speaks to an undefined (and potentially unlimited) range of compatibilities, including employers, migration regimes, and other universities worldwide. Such a phrase was ubiquitous in the ASU prospectus (2017) to describe the degree award, and for GLU it featured regularly as part of its strapline offering an “internationally recognized, quality UK degree”. UNE used the phrase to a lesser degree, again with the substitution of “accredited” to denote its recognition. By earning an internationally recognized degree, the holder might reasonably expect to embody some of the expressions of the degree’s universality. With regards to employment, access to an international career is purportedly enabled through the degree:

Graduates of our postgraduate courses are highly successful, many working internationally for some of the world’s most respected employers. (GLU Facebook, 2014)

Whether in London or Dubai, [GLU] students are prepared for a significant role in the global economy. (GLU prospectus, 2015)

[ASU] graduates are highly sought after by employers worldwide, and our 77,000 alumni working in key positions around the globe are testament to our success. (ASU website, 2016)

It is a British award recognised and highly regarded by global oil and gas companies (ASU prospectus, 2017)

In these statements, the UK degree is framed as universal and unhindered, appropriate to any employment context internationally, and applicable wherever its holder goes. Similarly for academic mobility, the framing of the UK degree as universally recognized implies a right to migrate beyond the national space where the degree was earned. This was mostly articulated through the inter-campus transfer schemes of each university, but also as a product of degree matriculation. In one repeat example in the ASU prospectus, the heading asks “Why Study [degree program] at [Adam Smith University] in Dubai?”, to which the bulleted lines answer with “It is a British award that is recognised all around the world” and “previous students have gone on to undertake PhDs in the UK, USA, Canada and Australia” (2017). Here again the juxtaposition of global visuals – the destination cities of GLU’s Global MBA, or the city skylines in which GLU and ASU hold campuses – compound the implication with a vivid representation of the spaces the universities occupy. Nothing of course is made explicit (and doing so might limit the imaginative impact), but the link between a British-origin degree and the national brand that accords it its global currency is repeatedly foregrounded as a key element of each institution’s marketing.

### **6.3.3 Historically Grounded Superiority**

The third discourse which constructs UK higher education as a national brand in the UAE market is one which informs the brand’s superiority over other national brands. As a diffuse ensemble underscoring each reference to the UK, it draws together the substantive dimensions explored above (quality, universal recognition) with deeper narratives of the UK as a globally known and historically dominant set of qualities and values. It is thus a discourse which borrows heavily from the image of the UK itself to represent its higher education.

With few notable exceptions, the data contained little explicit reference to UK higher education in the collective form; most instead referenced its institutions (e.g. the QAA), its outputs (a universally recognized degree), or the nation itself (UK history and its symbols). There was also curiously no reference to other national providers to give audiences a comparative appreciation of British education. Audiences were presented with only texts speaking to the qualities of particular forms of British higher education, coupled with images of British institutions, places, symbols, or people. Where individual institutions also sought to demonstrate their relative superiority, reference was made to UK rankings and accolades rather than international metrics or UAE-based plaudits<sup>45</sup> (as shown in **figure 6.3**). Statements were therefore comparative of and between other UK universities despite those other universities lacking physical presence in the UAE market.

Nevertheless, underpinning the marketing material of all three universities is a consistent narrative of excellence. This is rarely made explicit or substantiated in the same way as other features of the British degree are, but rather insinuated through an ensemble of superlatives – top, top-ranked, world-class, prestigious, distinguished, outstanding, and first and only, among others. The language appeared to reflect popular buzzwords of the UAE market, echoing broader discourses commonly used across the UAE to rationalize the country's mass importation of foreign institutions. Notwithstanding the differences in the market and target audience in the UK, these same superlatives would not typically be used to describe British universities in UK-based marketing.

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<sup>45</sup> With the single exception of GLU's MBA program, which is advertised as being ranked by Forbes Magazine as #1 in Dubai, in the top 25 in UK and top 50 in Europe (GLU Facebook, 2016).

**Figure 6.3 A UK-only Rankings Table Displayed at an Open Campus Event**

The image shows a large vertical banner for 'the guardian' University League Table 2015. The banner is titled 'UNIVERSITY LEAGUE TABLE 2015 - THE COMPLETE LIST | EDUCATION | THEGUARDIAN.COM'. It contains a dense table of university rankings with columns for various metrics. A person is standing to the left of the banner, and two black pendant lights are visible above it.

*From ASU open day event (taken by researcher in March 2015).*

The images employed in the marketing of each campus often portrayed historic British places, UK national icons, and other familiar symbols of the UK as a national entity; images of the relatively modest and unspectacular UK-based campuses were very rare. While it must be noted that the majority of images in the dataset were not images of British places, those that were employed were always of somewhere recognizable to a global audience, such as the Royal Mile in Edinburgh or Trafalgar Square in London, not the quotidian scenes of the suburbs which ASU and GLU occupy in their UK home cities, or of the quaint Northern town where UNE is based. Where British culture was signified in images, it was always of familiar, almost stereotypical customs. For ASU, a Scottish university, this was an image of man in a kilt and Scottish traditional regalia playing a set of bagpipes. For UNE, its marketing occasionally featured the banal national imagery of the British flag and cups of tea. For GLU, this cultural

branding took the form of London tube and street signs with altered text, infographics using the iconic tube map template, the mimetic “Keep Calm” poster, the red double decker London bus, the Queen’s Guard with iconic bearskin hats, and red phone booths. In some regards these are all banal cultural clichés employed to add appeal and familiarity to an unfamiliar university name. However, seen as a collective ensemble of familiar national representations, they take on potency as symbols of a historic, globalized power, made visible through imperial relations and consumable through concerted post-imperial nation-branding efforts. When linked with assertions of international superiority, these images call the audience to (re)imagine the UK as a place with a richly historic past and an elitism in its collective institutions which carry into the present.

Two of the campuses attempted to link themselves more explicitly to the distant past by telling the history of their incorporation. GLU’s website and prospectus provide a timeline of institutional developments reaching back to the inception of the various late 19<sup>th</sup> Century vocational institutes in the UK which would later merge to form the university; its social media also included a recurring “Throwback Thursday” which featured monochromatic images of those institutes along with a brief, sentimental narrative. To a lesser degree, ASU dates itself in some of its marketing to the 1820s, while the lobby of the Dubai campus is framed by portraits of the two 19<sup>th</sup> Century founders of the university. Both institutions present themselves as having an extended historic pedigree, when as UK institutions they are generally understood to be new, late 20<sup>th</sup> Century universities<sup>46</sup>. All three universities also have heraldic, almost medieval logos which appear regularly in the margins of every marketing image. GLU’s logo, which features its namesake county’s coat of arms emblazoned with three swords and a crown, was introduced in 2012 following a university rebranding exercise. These narratives of having a deep history borrow from imaginations of the UK itself as a place of rich and extended history, and project a

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<sup>46</sup> As they were not officially ‘universities’ until recognized by legislation in 1992 and royal charter in 1966 respectively.

notion of prestige into modern and relatively un-prestigious institutions. By extending their pedigree, they also collectively inform the UK higher education brand as a historically and globally superior institutional form and grant legitimacy to its global expansion.

The constructions of UK higher education constituted through marketing analyzed in this section – quality, recognition and superiority – discursively link each of the branch campuses with collective and fairly consistent representations of the UK and its higher education, bringing them under a common umbrella of a knowable, familiar and relatively monolithic brand. While each campus extends its own representations of its university and distinct features or programs, the overarching messages in the data repeatedly redound to the quality of the British degree and character of British education. Some of these references are substantive, such as the explicit delineations of quality, the UK quality assurance process, and its direct application and relevance to the branch campus. The references to universal recognition and superiority are less explicitly substantiated, instead conveyed through repetition and implied through allusion to other familiar elements of the UK itself. These cultural elements are thusly the codes through which brand discourses are channeled, not messages in of themselves. These expressions of ‘Britishness’ provide an easy, familiar set of cultural images for marketing abstract qualities of a foreign education system, and provide a medium for characterizing and differentiating the brand from international competitors. As noted above, no explicit comparison or even reference to other international higher education brands were found in the marketing data. This absence is made noticeable by the presence of implicit references to choice and competition, where students are implored to “hold a UK degree” (over other kinds) which is globally recognized (suggesting that others may not be) and is attended by “all the advantages associated with being a British university” (GLU website, 2016). When held in this light, it reveals the extent to which the UK brand is simply a degree product with a collective brand identity, and the branch campus serving as a vendor and broker of the brand’s values.

One critical element of the collective brand representation is the extent to which operational context matters. The key features of the British brand as identified in the marketing data are specific to the UAE marketplace and emphasize particular features that resonate with local consumers. Definitions of quality and quality assurance guarantees are far more visible in the UAE (and likely transnational contexts in general) than in the UK given the UAE's multifarious layers of national and international quality assurance regimes co-operating and coexisting in a single higher education space. With the patchwork of accreditations and operational regulations, higher education quality in the UAE shows great variance (Rawazik & Carroll, 2009), leading to the need for transnational institutions to make their case for visible quality and robust assurances. In this milieu of institutional heterogeneity, the UK brand foregrounds its familiarity, tradition and reputation to convey a trustworthiness to consumers, one which does not need to be communicated within the UK at the level of the national brand. Context dependency also applies in the case of recognition, where being recognized and legitimized is of greater concern to a UAE expatriate purchasing a foreign degree credential and applying it to the global labor market. Employers within the UAE as well encounter a wider range of international credentials which need to be compared and assessed. Lastly the coded representations which signify historical superiority simply do not apply in the UK market. Institutions may independently make the case for having a deep pedigree and prestige, but the ways in which this is encoded would be wholly different, with less marketing by association (such as the use of the British flag, Scottish kilts and London busses) and different terminology to capture different markets. With the transnational shift in context and target market, the British brand is thusly inflected with discourses which reflect the desires and concerns of a non-British overseas market.

#### **6.4 Conclusion**

This chapter has analyzed marketing materials from the three British branch campuses, examining how values and messages are symbolically represented and encoded in textual and visual forms. Despite



some variation in the types of representation employed between the campuses, three overlapping thematic areas were identified either as institutional identities or ways of performing them. When this marketing is looked at within the context of a TNHE marketplace, what these analyses show is not only the ways institutions see, imagine and perform their identities in overseas externalized contexts but how they align themselves with local consumer interests. The UK national brand operates within and between these representations, consolidating the identities of relatively unfamiliar institutions under the aegis of a known, monolithic national brand which also adopts local inflections. The institutional themes identified in **section 6.2** link up to the national signifiers in **6.3** suggesting these representations operate in tandem and are deeply intertwined.

The findings of this analysis broadly cohere with those identified in the marketing literature in **chapter 2** and offer insight into how university marketing functions in transnational contexts. With regards to the marketing of individual institutions, content in these IBCs' marketing support Binsardi and Ekwulugo's (2003) claim that British university marketing reflects students' primary concerns about a university's product and price over its geographical place. The product offered by IBCs was repeatedly communicated through references to international degree recognition, accreditation, and professional opportunities, while price was always foregrounded through time-sensitive registration offers and pricing schemes. These features constituted IBCs' brand identities, which aligned with student audiences' values (the process of 'student-university identification' examined in Balaji et al., 2016; Hemsley-Brown et al., 2016 and others) by appealing to their desires for career advancement and flexible cultural capital. As critical studies of higher education branding observe, however, these brand identities may be less unique features of each organization and more convergences in performative branding practices (such as phraseologies popular to higher education and the Gulf region like 'world-class') and corporate brand templates which communicate common promises of universities (Aula & Tienari, 2011; Bennett & Ali-Choudhury, 2009; Ng, 2014; Wæraas & Solbakk, 2009). It is in these debates

that the transnational context becomes a space of tension between, on the one hand, maintaining 'brand congruence' with the home campus brand identity and, on the other, appealing to local concerns such as those of graduate employability in the UAE market, or degree authenticity and portability in the highly internationalized UAE labor market (Farrugia & Lane, 2012; Yuan et al., 2016). The IBC marketing analyzed in this chapter leans heavily towards the latter, although does not break with universities' own brand identities in doing so.

A visual reading of marketing content, as performed in this analysis, found representations of place to play a considerable role in communicating meaning. Rather than address physical place of the university, however, the connotative elements in its visual content repeatedly signified values and associations of the collective British higher education brand. Marketing images comprise a major component of the nation branding toolkit, which mobilizes Britain's cultural symbols, heritage, products and institutions to speak for its higher education brand (Lomer et al., 2016). As globally recognizable symbols of elitism, tradition, and historical excellence, these images service IBCs specifically by building cognitive and affective associations with the values of the national higher education brand, regardless of whether the individual universities are themselves elite or excellent in their home context. The analysis also found the frequent denotation of popular university tropes (stereotypical campus scenes, graduation ceremonies, and professionals) to be consistent with internationally comparative studies of university advertising where bodily representations are found to conform to gendered and racialized visual templates (Blanco Ramírez, 2016; Estera & Shahjahan, 2018; Papadimitriou & Blanco Ramírez, 2015). Such denotations provide familiarity and signify legitimacy to audiences, while at the connotative level, they serve as ideological codes for authoritative knowledge, quality, and universality. While it is unlikely that these generic (stock) images were employed to represent the national brand in the same manner as the British imagery, their connotations have consequences no less for the branch campuses they speak for, and as the interviews with marketing staff and volunteers would suggest, these marketing practices

are guided by conscious strategies to these ends. The multimodal interplay between encoded visual representations and texts which explicitly spell out the superiority of British institutions allows the viewer to establish cognitive associations and imagine all British universities accordingly. Marketing in transnational space thus appears to draw powerfully upon various representations of place and people in order to firmly craft IBCs' identities simultaneously as globally recognized, locally relevant, and authentically British.

As this chapter has identified how institutions represent themselves in transnational spaces, the following chapter will examine the other end of the equation: how student-consumers receive, imagine and interpret these institutions vis-à-vis their experiences of marketing and of the institutions themselves.

## **Chapter 7: Student Sense-Making and the Social Imagination**

This chapter examines how students, as consumers and participants, choose and make sense of British higher education and their university's IBC. Following a brief overview of the conceptual and empirical basis for the chapter (**section 7.1**), the analysis proceeds to examine the ways in which students articulate their choices and the ways their responses point to consistent narratives, or imaginaries, shared among consumers of UK education in the UAE (**section 7.2**). It then interrogates these imaginaries by identifying the underlying discourses shaping the way students talk about and imagine Britain and British higher education (**section 7.3**). Interviews with IBC staff are also incorporated to supplement the findings of student interview data and facilitate the relationships between students and institutions within the wider context of the UAE higher education market.

### **7.1 Introduction**

Before examining the choice-making process, the chapter briefly reintroduces the guiding theoretical and conceptual contributions framing this analysis of student sense-making and imagination. These works inform the scope and aims of the methods used by pointing to what constitutes data and how these data can reveal coded thematic repertoires on the objects of which they speak, in this case British higher education. It then briefly discusses the defining features of UAE-based students, as well as the distinguishing factors within student sub-categories and between them and students and staff in other educational markets.

#### **7.1.1 Students as Imaginative Agents**

Students are at the heart of this chapter and indeed the study, framed variously as consumers of higher education, subjects of marketing, and agents expressing desires through their choices (Guilbault, 2016; Maringe, 2006; M. Molesworth et al., 2011; R. Naidoo & Jamieson, 2005). With an appreciation of these first two characterizations, it is the third which is central to this analysis as it attends to the ways in

which students make sense of their engagements with TNHE. Notions of sense, as well as desire and belonging, are collectively informed by social and normative imaginations of higher education, notably what (or even whom) it is for, what form it should take, and what aspirations it materializes (Collins et al., 2014; Rizvi, 2005). In the highly internationalized context of the UAE higher education market, students must make sense of competing models of higher education by engaging with their marketing, making choices by enrolling, and applying experiences of their chosen university to their lives (Rensimer, 2015; Wilkins et al., 2011). Students' articulations of this sense-making process provide valuable analytical entry points to understanding how students imagine particular higher education forms such as the British IBC and the specific ways it is imagined to fulfill the perceived functions of higher education over competing models. These theoretical framings bring together diverse scholarship on desire in international student mobility, the productive interface between individual agency and social imaginations in international education, and formations of student identity and belonging in transnational educational spaces (Collins et al., 2014; J. Matthews & Sidhu, 2005; Raghuram, 2013; Rizvi, 2005, 2006).

This chapter also returns to the concepts of national branding and national higher education brands, this time from the point of view of students who engage with them through their encounters with value regimes (Beech, 2014; Lomer et al., 2016; Sidhu & Dall'Alba, 2012). In this framework, value is socially constructed through layered experiences of British education and its globalized expressions, from its early dissemination and incorporation in schooling models throughout the colonial landscape, to contemporary flows of higher education and its attendant marketing practices (Phillipson, 2011; Tikly, 2004; Walker, 2014). This layered approach enables an examination of contemporary practices while recognizing preexisting, widely shared norms around which forms of higher education are valued or seen as superior. Theorizing how value regimes operate or influence social imaginations of higher education takes a broad view to what constitutes a regime given how transnational flows of higher

education follow existing patterns of markets and consumer demand (Garrett et al., 2016; V. Naidoo, 2009). In this sense, national higher education brands are already seen in various ways and their local representations may reflect where consumer subjects see value. This chapter thus builds off of existing literature on the UK national brand (Lomer et al., 2016) and student choice-making in transnational contexts (Wilkins et al., 2011) to show how the interrelationship between student choice and university representation is localized, embedded in social practices and reflective of the prerogatives of students in a particular market context.

### **7.1.2 Data**

This chapter analyzes how students perceive and imagine value in higher education and how they apply this to their choice of British IBCs. It therefore draws on the narratives provided by students themselves, and secondarily from staff, in co-production with the researcher. In taking a constructivist approach to understanding sensemaking, the objective is not to verify or challenge their accounts, but to analyze the ways in which students imagine British higher education and understand how those imaginations inform their post-degree plans. The emphasis is therefore on the shared beliefs, popular (mis)understandings, and variously aligned interpretations and perceptions across heterogeneous actors.

The data come primarily from 52 interviews with students who at the time of their interview were attending one of the three British IBCs for their undergraduate degree (see **Appendix A**). Interviews averaging one hour per participant were conducted with individuals or pairs. Their progress within their degree programs varied, with some having only started and others in their final year; several had transferred into their programs from other universities. All but three interviewees were of traditional university student age (between 18 and 23), with those three being in their late 20s or early 30s. Degree

program choices varied across a range of mainly vocational offerings – engineering, IT, business, media, law and applied social sciences – without any particular concentration in the sample<sup>47</sup>.

The two factors most critical to this analysis were participants' nationalities and residential status, with inherent overlap among these categories. As discussed in previous chapters, the distinction between expatriates (those who already resided in country for some purpose other than study) and international students (those who travelled with the explicit purpose of studying) matters greatly for understanding mobility, destinations and choice-making processes, both generally (**chapter 2**) and in the UAE specifically (**chapter 5**). In the case of the UAE, where the expatriate population is comprised of acute concentrations of particular nationalities dominated by those from the South Asian subcontinent, the expatriate student population also skews in this direction, notwithstanding the choice of some families to send their university-age children “back home” or to a third country for study. As a burgeoning destination for higher education, the UAE also attracts mobile students who travel as international students with the primary purpose of tertiary education. While there is some overlap with expatriate nationalities, international students in the UAE frequently hail from Anglophone Sub-Saharan Africa and neighboring Arab countries. The highly structured networks of visa sponsorship, employment opportunity and thus migration in the UAE make student nationality and residency closely intertwined.

While the precise membership criteria of the expatriate community are undefined and often applied discriminately to migrant families by nationality, race/ethnicity and class (Koutonin, 2015), it is applied here to those who originally migrated to the UAE for some purpose other than education, either alone or with families. In the case of traditional age university students, their parents typically had emigrated for work and the children were brought with or born in the UAE. Such children are sponsored by their families to legally reside until 18, at which point they must typically attain their own employment visa

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<sup>47</sup> Degree programs did naturally concentrate by institution, however, given the programs offered at each.

sponsor, switch to an educational visa, or repatriate to their country of citizenship<sup>48</sup>. The boundaries between an expatriate and international student are thusly blurred at the edges – some international students in this study’s sample had existing family networks or were familiar with the UAE through family business, while some expatriates came to the UAE with their families only one year before entering university. Furthermore, the label is circumstantial, as today’s student may be tomorrow’s expatriate; international students may see a student visa as a valuable entry point for post-degree employment (Gribble & Blackmore, 2012). While the problems of these operational definitions are acknowledged here, the general characteristics of expatriates and international students – nationalities, backgrounds, mobility pathways, and indeed experiences – broadly map out into two distinct and coherent groups. This distinction is maintained in this chapter as it yields analytical differences for exploring concepts of choice-making and imaginations of British higher education.

The fifty-two students interviewed for this study were nearly evenly divided across the three focal institutions, with approximately one-third of the participants being international students, as shown in **Table 7.1**. To illustrate the interconnectedness of nationality and residency in the UAE, **Table 7.2** breaks the sample down by regional origin. The totals for each region not only corresponded with the general makeup of the non-Emirati population of the UAE, but also reveal a key point of divergence between South Asian students in the sample (overwhelmingly expatriate) and Sub-Saharan African students (entirely international). With differing relationships to the UAE, these students’ choice-making processes, experiences, desires and sense of belonging are also appreciably distinct.

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<sup>48</sup> An upper age limit is set at 18 in the case of males, while family sponsorship can be extended to any age for unmarried females.



**Table 7.1 Student Participants by Institution and Residency Status**

	<i>Expatriate</i>	<i>International</i>	<b><i>Total</i></b>
<b>University of Northern England</b>	14	2	<b>16</b>
<b>Adam Smith University</b>	12	5	<b>17</b>
<b>Greater London University</b>	10	9	<b>19</b>
	<b>36</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>52</b>

**Table 7.2 Student Participants by Regional Origin and Residency Status**

	<i>Expatriate</i>	<i>International</i>	<b><i>Total</i></b>
<b>South Asia</b>	29	1	<b>30</b>
<b>Sub-Saharan Africa</b>	0	11	<b>11</b>
<b>Middle East &amp; North Africa</b>	4	2	<b>6</b>
<b>Europe</b>	3	2	<b>5</b>

Expatriate children in the UAE all share the experience of secondary, and depending on when they immigrated, primary education; due to the highly stratified structure of schooling in the UAE, they are segregated from Emirati nationals and often clustered by nationality into fee-paying international schools catering to expatriates' home country curricula (Ridge et al., 2015). Many of these schools are Anglophone-medium and are accredited to conform to international diploma models (e.g. IGCSE, A-levels, International Baccalaureate, CBSE or FBISE)<sup>49</sup>. Some of these models terminated with a comprehensive high-stakes national exam after 12 years (e.g. CBSE, FBISE, or International Baccalaureate) while others were elective and subject-driven (e.g. IGCSE and A-levels) ending either at age 16 or 18. These differences matter for their varied pathways into higher education, as each university prescribed minimal entry requirements for each model, leading to strong differences in

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<sup>49</sup> IGCSE and A-levels are UK-based examination models; International Baccalaureate is an international diploma curriculum popular in North America; CBSE and FBISE are the Indian and Pakistani secondary school exam boards.

These distinct national models had little noticeable effect on students' preference for British higher education. Some students coming from British international schools noted their sense of compatibility, while students from CBSE or FBISE described their ordeals navigating the stark pedagogical differences from secondary school to university, but there was little noticeable difference in the ways they qualified their preference for their British IBC.

starting ages when factoring in the various alternative routes to entry (such as the Foundation Year programs offered at GLU and ASU or Edexcel Higher National Diploma offered at UNE).

One key distinction for expatriates, particularly those from South Asian diaspora, is the centrality of family in shaping educational choices, including the heavy involvement of parents in choice of university and degree program. Pressure is often placed on students to study practical vocational fields that command higher salaries and prestige (medicine, engineering, law and business) in order to become financially independent and support the family. Unlike popular narratives in the UK and US which hold higher education as a middle-class rite of passage or process of humanistic inquiry and self-cultivation (Aviram, 1992; Blumenkrantz & Goldstein, 2014; Gibbs, 2002), higher education in the UAE has a strong vocational orientation with HEIs focusing on skills training for employment (Knight, 2011). This orientation, as well as the financial cost of tuition fees, aligns with many South Asian expatriate families pressuring their children to complete their education and find remunerative work as quickly as possible. This pressure also has a strongly gendered dimension, with females often educated for positionally advantageous marriage prospects and males to earn enough to support their elders and future families. Expatriate families' higher education choices are thusly informed by practical concerns of cost and employment prospects, as well as social and cultural obligations within family structures.

International students may face similar family dynamics and financial pressures. Their key difference is their dislocation from family and social networks, with a relationship to the UAE which comprises less familiarity and sense of belonging, and therefore leading to different encounters with their IBC (Rensimer, 2016). There were two contrastive bodies of international students in the sample. Some in the sample skewed towards older independents with greater involvement in their educational choices and financing (particularly in the case of students who transfer from a home country institution to complete their final year at an IBC). The sample also contained a cohort of relatively privileged, young

international students whose parents saw IBCs in Dubai as a safer, geographically closer or culturally resonant alternative to sending their child to the UK, US or Australia for their university education. The former group were mostly Sub-Saharan African nationals attending UNE and GLU (institutions offering the final year 'top-up' transfer option) while the latter were a more internationally diverse group of foundation and first year students at ASU. Despite international students' distinct social networks, their aspirations informing their university and degree choices were not widely dissimilar to those of expatriates; in essence, the two groups had more in common as students and consumers of transnational education in a diversified educational market than their differences enabled.

The analysis in this chapter also draws on interviews conducted with 15 UAE-based university staff as a secondary data source (see **Appendix B**). While their nationalities or ethnic backgrounds were not considered in this study as they were for students, many of the staff participants had experience working in the UK higher education sector, either for the home campus of their same institution or other TNHE programs, as well as non-British TNHE programs in the Gulf region. Given their close relationship to the students and their privileged position within their institutions, interviews with staff enabled informed macro-commentary on the dynamics between students, institutions, and the UAE higher education landscape. At the same time, they frequently drew upon the same discourses and codes, allowing for analytical appreciation of how meanings are maintained between university actors in a shared social space.

## **7.2 'Choice' and Choosing British IBCs**

How students see British higher education is articulated in many regards through understanding their reasons for choosing it over other national higher education brands, and for choosing one British IBC over others. The way students envision a university, its programs and the value of its degree has an impact on the choices they make (Wilkins & Huisman, 2015) and powerfully shape the boundaries of

what is imaginable, desirable or even essential to students and their families. Those choices are driven by instrumentalities of higher education in a competitive labor market, values and shared preconceptions of what kind of education is necessary and good, and the learners' desires to transform themselves (into trained professionals, educated global citizens, or something else) and generally secure their future wellbeing and livelihoods. How a UK degree or British education is seen to fulfill these pursuits rests upon how the British higher education brand and its universities are imagined, valued, and desired (Lomer et al., 2016). It is therefore necessary to understand and analyze students' articulations of value in relation to their choices of university and how they envision those values being accorded or enacted through their engagement with that university.

In order to address the question of why students choose British IBCs, this analysis needs to first look at the choice-making process and the parameters of 'choice' in the context of students in the UAE. As studies have found (Gale & Parker, 2015; Geddie, 2013; Raghuram, 2013; Rensimer, 2016), and indeed this study (**chapter 2**) has argued, higher education choices are made in the grounded context of individuals' complex lives, accounting for the numerous structural barriers and sociocultural obligations that shape the range of possible choices. Wilkins et al's (2011) study on IBC students in the UAE found that traditional models for explaining international student mobility (i.e. "push-pull factors") were insufficient for understanding those at UAE branch campuses, as most students are expatriates already living in-country. They further point to the different motivators for UAE international students, who are typically pushed due to access barriers in their home country, from expatriates, who are drawn to stay near family, friends and familiar environments. While the latter could feasibly create scenarios where student choices are entirely dictated by the range of local options, the UAE higher education supply is broad and arguably outpaces demand, thereby creating an internal market with its own dynamics of competition on cost and unique selling points (Wilkins, 2010). Thus while UAE expatriates may be

compelled to stay in country for social or financial reasons, their range of choices is still wide<sup>50</sup>. The international student, on the other hand, has even fewer constraints on their range of choice, as the UAE is only one among many possible destinations for their international study. In both cases, therefore, there is sufficient breadth of choice given to the individuals participating in this study to exercise some degree of agency over their higher education choices. That said, however, the study maintains the view that choice is always circumscribed both by structural impossibilities and social imaginaries of what is possible. The latter, however, is particularly rife with collective values and desires which are often omitted from students' discussion around choice.

Choices and the values that inform those choices are neither static nor singular (Maringe, 2006; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Soutar & Turner, 2002), making it difficult to disentangle students' stated reasons for their choices and deduce the relative importance of each consideration. For this reason, this analysis approaches choice statements jointly and relationally. We cannot, for example, fully understand affordability without accounting for the range of what is being afforded, nor can we isolate perceived degree value from the geographic space a student intends to apply it to. It is also in this approach where implicit statements about British higher education are made even where the speaker is not making explicit comparisons.

As one departure from the rationalist literature on student decision making, this study examines choice factors with an understanding of 'choice' as circumscribed and therefore relational (dependent on the scope of other options), contextual (particular students in a particular higher education market) and based on a set of unspoken values and assumptions (particularly around what kinds of higher education have value or carry prestige and why). While choice statements are not analytically useful when

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<sup>50</sup> The UAE has some 110 higher education institutions; most do not discriminate by nationality but do charge varying fees.

divorced from context and relational choices, the subsections which follow are broken into three broad thematic categories for coherency. The first looks at the practicalities and affordances of the British degree in the context of the UAE labor market, including program cost, time to completion, and distance from home. It leaves out features of the UAE or Dubai which might be considered attractors, focusing here on specific elements of the British university as an international degree provider with a physical presence in the UAE. The second broad category looks at students' articulations of employability and their imaginations of future selves in relation to their British degree. The third and final category is the global aspect of the British brand, again grounded in the context of the UAE, a multinational space where a majority of residents' international mobility pathways are limited to the UAE and home countries.

### **7.2.1 The Practicalities of the British IBC**

This section looks at the tangible and often essential preconditions that draw students into the three British branch campuses providing undergraduate degree programs in the UAE. Some of these features are endemic to the British brand or degree structure, such as the number of years of study, while others are particular to the market in which these universities operate, such as the competitive cost of tuition. All, however, speak to the perceived advantages of the British brand in the UAE and to the types of students they cater to. As these features concern practical matters, respondents were able to articulate their justifications with relative ease. Respondents would list discrete reasons for their choice, sometimes in order of importance to them, with a consistent rationality that often reflected a considered calculation behind each choice. In this regard, their behaviors accord with the majority of literature on rational choice-making and 'pull' factors (Maringe, 2006; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Soutar & Turner, 2002; Wilkins et al., 2011), which identify the proximal, tangible and conscious reasons for choosing a university.

These practicalities are essentially about costs – financial, time, opportunity, and personal (e.g. separation from family, stress resulting from a difficult program). Thus when students spoke about cost and affordability, they were effectively making statements about the value of their university, often in relation to other choices. When asked about the importance of financial cost of attending their chosen university, many accorded it importance in the context of their commitment to family, as all but the few older participants had their fees paid by their parents; none, however, said that the cost of fees was the sole decisive or limiting factor in their choice. Rather, they would use the financial cost to justify choices narrowed by other factors, notably the national origin (brand) of the university, program availability, or commuting distance from home. As the three universities had different price points and targeted slightly different student markets, responses to cost varied by institution. As the fees at UNE in RAK were about 30% lower than the competitors in Dubai at the time of data collection, it was generally seen as the most affordable route to a British qualification in the UAE and thus attracted students for whom tuition cost and related expenses carried more importance.

Analysis of the data revealed diverging narratives on affordability between international students and expatriates, particularly South Asian expatriates. For African international students, especially the five Nigerian participants, coming to the UAE was articulated as the most cost-effective path to a British degree. Several took advantage of compatible higher education systems at home to complete the first several years of their higher education before transferring to the UAE to “top up” by completing the final year, and therefore the degree, at an offshore British university. Cost was in relation to the default desire, which was to study in full or transfer to the UK, but the prohibitive costs posed barriers, including UK student visas which require applicants to prove their ability to fund a significant portion of their expenses at the time of application. Although tuition fees at ASU and GLU were not dissimilar to the fees charged at the UK home campuses, analogous peripheral costs in the UAE, such as student visas, were lower and requirements were fewer, making the UAE attractive for cost-conscious international

students seeking a British degree specifically. “Topping up” (admitting final-year transfers) was practiced at UNE and GLU, both English institutions, but not ASU, which as a Scottish university did not enable easy transfer of analogous sub-degree qualifications (i.e. the national and higher national diploma equivalent to the first and second year of university in England). As ASU fees were higher, it also attracted slightly more affluent international students for whom cost did not factor at all in their considerations. As those students pointed out, living and studying in Dubai over multiple years was not necessarily a cost-effective alternative to other international destinations, and in their case their families preferred that they studied in the UAE for cultural, religious and personal safety reasons.

Expatriates, on the other hand, gave further depth to notions of cost. While tuition fees were part of the picture, the burdens they most commonly articulated were time and opportunity costs, which held similar financial implications for their families. Expatriate students, especially those of South Asian background, were under intense pressure from their families and broader diasporic communities to complete their education as quickly as possible to begin gainful employment. Particularly for South Asian female participants, completing higher education came as a precursor to marriage, which was also attended by financial pressures and cultural expectations which made an earlier completion important. These students frequently spoke of either “saving time” or “wasting time” by identifying the quickest route from secondary school to a bachelor’s degree, or conversely, making post-secondary school choices which lose time, namely returning to their home country for a year or changing degree programs and having to start over. One female expatriate participant transferred to GLU after it introduced a bachelor’s program in law, but she felt so bound by the stigma of having “wasted a year” that she kept it secret from her new classmates for years and hid herself from classmates who might have recognized her from secondary school. South Asian participants consciously described it as particular to their communities, but non-Asian expatriates were also proponents of such attitudes and saw it as a phenomenon particular to the Gulf region.



The British IBC comes into view here as its undergraduate degree structure in almost all cases has a shorter time to completion than other international competitors in the UAE market and other university models. Universities in England typically offer a bachelor's degree with honors in three years. Participants frequently compared this with other options in the UAE, including the American-style universities and Indian and Pakistani branch campuses, all of which offered four-year degree programs. Other innovations within the British qualifications framework seemed to encourage shortcuts when translating foreign secondary school qualifications into university credits. Expatriate students coming from Indian (CBSE) and Pakistani (FBSE) curriculum international schools were given the option at GLU and ASU to forego the final two years of their secondary school in exchange for the completion of a "foundation year" program which fast-tracked entry into the first year of university. UNE offered a similar scheme via a third-party provider of vocational qualifications which compressed the same final two years of secondary school into the first year of university, enabling students on such a path to complete their degree by as early as age 20. At ASU, a bachelor's with honors required four years owing to its origin as a Scottish qualification, but enabled students to leave with a bachelor's (without honors) after only three years. One ASU recruiter interviewed noted that most students, and indeed employers, held little regard for the honors denotation, and thus found the fourth year to be "a hard sell" among students in the UAE (Marketer 1, ASU). South Asian students grounded their choices in context of viable alternatives, most often the several popular Indian IBCs in Dubai and RAK, as well as universities in India (all being four-year degrees), and saw the British IBCs as a shortcut to a degree, employment and personal autonomy. Conscious of the higher fees at the British campuses, they applied with rational calculation the logic that less time in education meant not only one less year of fees but also one year in potentially gainful employment and a foothold in their envisioned career. To this effect, the 'British' quality of the degree was secondary, but not absent from the calculation. As one UNE participant put it, "People end up paying lesser and they don't waste another year.. [plus] the British degree of course.

Those three things are important” (Afzal, UNE student). This sentiment was repeated by participants across institutions, but especially at UNE where the lower fees attracted more cost-conscious students.

The other major practicality of the British IBC, which is not entirely separable from the three-year degree structure, is the perceived relative ease of the British degree program over competitors. Both expatriates and international students across the three institutions lauded the British style of program delivery, with its narrow, focused curriculum and encouragement of independent, self-led learning, resulting in relatively minimal classroom contact hours. Asian expatriates saw this as a departure from their secondary schools and contrasted it with friends’ experiences at Indian and Pakistani IBCs, where students were kept in classes for longer hours and constantly examined on a broad range of subjects, a model which privileged comprehensiveness and theory over application and specialization. Some students embraced this pedagogical shift as personal freedom, either to develop themselves or to simply study less. The consistent commentary among them, however, was that it provided a stress-free and relatively easy route to a bachelor’s degree, which especially appealed to those participants who saw higher education as an inconvenient but necessary pathway to their imagined careers. While it appealed to these students on grounds of providing a contrastive experience, the curricular structure of British IBCs also aligned with the expectations of expatriates coming from British international schools and international students coming from former British colonies, as both cited their prior schooling as a form of familiarity and comfort that made the British brand more knowable and therefore accessible. Those participants typically listed a range of international universities they had considered prior to enrolling but viewed their familiarity as an asset and chose based on what they saw as the easiest option for them.

These practicalities which the British IBCs offered both expatriates and international students all concerned costs of one kind or another and therefore materialized as rational choices. What these

choices also illustrate, however, is their relational and contextual dynamics as statements of value. What these practical aspects signify about British higher education is its value to particular students in the UAE higher education market as either an escape from something else (a more challenging route to a degree) or a pragmatic means to some other material outcome (e.g. employment). They do not suggest an intrinsic appreciation or preference for a British education itself but rather its value as articulated with regards to what it does for the individual. In the context of commercialized educational delivery in the UAE, higher education is highly instrumentalized as a commodity and linked to participation in the professional and vocational labor market. These findings (summarized in **table 7.3**) illuminate that relationship between commercial delivery of mainly vocational programs and student-consumer demand for such qualifications.

**Table 7.3 Key Findings on the Practicalities of British IBCs**

<i>Key commonalities</i>	
<b>All students</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Value is relational, determined by student's range of alternative options; cost of fees is therefore secondary to other costs (e.g. opportunity, time) and advantages;</li> <li>• British IBCs are seen as most practical due to lower overall cost, less time to completion, and strongest value for money (in the purchase of a British degree);</li> <li>• British IBCs provide an easy route to a bachelor's degree due to independent learning focus and relatively little classroom time.</li> </ul>
<b>Expatriates</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cost is broadly framed (inclusive of time and opportunity cost, familial pressure);</li> <li>• Face strong pressure to save time; British IBCs appeal with honors degree in three years and shortcut pathways from secondary school;</li> <li>• IBC provides route to British degree without leaving family and disrupting social networks;</li> <li>• Location of campus within UAE matters as it militates against time and affordability.</li> </ul>
<b>International Students</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• International students do not talk about cost of alternatives in UAE, but do compare to fees in home country and prohibitive cost of studying in the UK;</li> <li>• UAE visa and other immigration hurdles are less cumbersome and are compared to those in UK.</li> </ul>

<b>Key distinctions</b>		
	<b>Expatriate students</b>	<b>International students</b>
<b>ASU</b>	Considerably more costly than returning to home country, but seen as strongest degree offered in Dubai; appeals to students who choose to stay in Dubai over travelling abroad for degree.	Cost is peripheral with primary calculation being university's strong reputation against difficulty of program
<b>GLU</b>	Seen as academically easier and less costly route to a British degree in Dubai.	Also described as academically easy and convenient compared with home country institutions; GLU allows some "top-up" degree transfers from home country in final year of study.
<b>UNE</b>	The most affordable route to a British qualification in the UAE, attracting students for whom fee costs and related expenses carried more importance; competitors in Dubai and related expenses seen as prohibitively costly; comparisons made mostly with other providers in Northern Emirates.	Same transfer opportunity as GLU, making UNE the most cost-effective path to a British degree for those for whom cost of study in UK was prohibitive.

### 7.2.2 Employability (Local Brand Recognition)

This next section examines data on perceptions of employability and the relationship between students as future British degree holders, imagined employers, and students' place in a future labor market. This relationship was found to be articulated by students through discussions of degree value in comparative context and expressed as statements about their futures, which are underwritten by their British degree and the doors it will hypothetically open for them. These statements of value seemingly point to a powerful social imaginary, certainly across the UAE, which holds a British degree as a widely recognized and superior form of capital for the purposes of employment both within the UAE and the global labor market. Analysis of these data does not seek to challenge the veracity of students' truth claims but rather understand how such statements are grounded and how they speak to collective imaginations of British higher education's symbolic and material power.

As established in **chapter 6**, British IBCs in the UAE present themselves both in their marketing and program design as closely linked to local labor market demands and as attentive to students' desires to facilitate their entry into a vocation. Indeed the marketing and interview data both draw attention to a wide range of extra-curricular activities aligned with popular professions including student clubs, contests, internships and guest presenters from key industries. Students across institutions also cited curricular programming such as job skills, presentation skills, and CV building workshops to enhance employability. Expatriate students made frequent comparisons between their British institution and international alternatives such as the Indian IBCs and American-style local institutions, and they were strongly of the opinion that their British universities prepared them better for their intended professions by focusing explicitly on specialist subject matter over competitors' broad approach to university curricula. When asked how having fewer contact hours and less overall instruction gave them an advantage with employers, one ASU student explained that,

in the end we do get the same information. Because once we get into the market, they're not looking at what you went through in your four years, they know it but they're not bothered about it. They're bothered about what is that final quality of product that you have. Indian university – the employers look at what information does he have, at the same time if a person comes in with a UK degree and they both carry the same message to them they'll be like, I'm not bothered about what you did in your four years, you might have worked 15 hours, this person who has come from the UK university has worked only 14 hours but he's still giving me the same information. So for them, that's what they are looking at. (Chandresh, ASU student)

Such views were often implied in students' responses to curricular differences but were seldomly explained in such rationalizing terms as the above. What this student's commentary illustrates is two related imaginative knowledge claims which the data consistently showed. The first is the act of claiming to know what employers want in employees, especially with regards to the type and origin of their degree. The second, as a corollary of the first, is the claim that UAE employers prefer British degrees over any other. Thus in imagined scenarios where candidates bring similar qualifications to a job opening, respondents consistently asserted that the British degree would be preferred by employers. The strength of this claim varied, with some believing that "the degree just gives you a little bit of an

edge” with local employers (Dave, ASU student) while others asserted that finding employment with a British degree is easy because employers trust the quality and content of British universities; every statement was made with confidence that this view was universally shared across the UAE. Supporting explanations for this view varied; some left it unsubstantiated while others tried to unpack the claim by pinpointing particular skills British degree holders bring to employers. These attempts revealed how firmly held their view was, even where they acknowledged that the grounds for their conviction were unclear or inconsistent. The following extended outtake comes from an interview with two South Asian expatriate students at ASU. Having both grown up in Dubai and best friends since meeting in secondary school despite coming from divergent socioeconomic backgrounds, they held identical views on many subjects, especially the value of British higher education. Their responses are indicative of how students typically made meaning of their choices and how their efforts to sustain a statement as true point to what might be understood as a social imaginary on the power of British higher education in the local labor market.

Researcher: Right. So the British connection, explain that to me. You had that already narrowed down to British because of your [secondary] school and then the American universities were too expensive.

Dave: and career prospects.

Rudy: for employment.

Researcher: how does that help you more than American or Australian?

Dave: how do you explain that? [*He laughs*]. It’s somewhat similar... at the same time... hmm..

Rudy: did they find that the British curriculum over here.. I dunno

Dave: yeah it works that way, it just works that way. They value it higher.

Researcher: who’s they?

Dave: companies in general. When an employer employs you, when he sees that you come from a British sort of background or education..

Rudy: no, no.

Dave: when you see like an Arab person who doesn't know English very well but if he can be employed, you know, that's good cause he can work in a bigger field, be more communicative, get more shit done, you know. That's the reason. It doesn't go any further than that. There's no deeper insight.

Rudy: unless you're studying at [American University of Sharjah]. There it's actually *really* recognized that they're brilliant people and get a job fast.

Researcher: All right, so this is like the second best option.

*They squabble over which is best.*

Dave: okay, let's just say there are a lot of second bests. Yeah, and this is in that range.

After the students settle on where and how British higher education ranks in the UAE labor market, they then apply the same rationales to hierarchizing British institutions. Again, they speak with conviction when knowing what employers want and what values they share with these respondents.

Researcher: Okay. So Dave, since you're studying business, why didn't you study at Greater London University?

Dave: at GLU?? [ASU]'s just better.

Researcher: How?

Rudy: ranking.

Dave: ranking, and some universities are not like .. okay other universities are like good and stuff, but not all of them are as well recognized as Adam Smith University, at least over here. Like if you go 'I studied business at GLU', they're like 'okay that's cool'

Rudy: but if you're like 'I studied business at Adam Smith', they're like [*slaps hands together*] 'come in!'

Dave: yeah, it's not like 'come in', but like 'oh, that's a bit better'.

Researcher: How do you know?

Rudy: people. We know people!

Dave: we know people who have gone in jobs find it harder to get into a job with a Greater London degree than with an Adam Smith degree. Cause we've been living here for so long we see people, we see how their degrees work. We ask them 'yo, have you got a job yet.' They're like 'nah man, nah.'

Rudy: my friends are done with University so literally I hear from them.

*Dave explains how his girlfriend's father is a construction project manager and thinks that ASU degrees are better than GLU.*

Dave: because Dubai's a small place, you know it's not huge. People talk a lot. So if one person goes 'yo I employed this guy. He doesn't do that much of a job, he's got this type of degree.' And one of the reasons people get jobs here is because of *wasta*<sup>51</sup>.

Researcher: So if there is a strong *wasta* effect the degree shouldn't matter.

Dave: well yeah, it really doesn't matter. But at the same time you could say that *wasta* could be 70 per cent and your degree could be 30.

*Rudy explains how he got two separate high paying part-time jobs with Emirates because of his connections.*

The above dialogue is representative of the interview data, wherein students when probed further would stretch their justifications to circular or contradictory lengths to maintain their position. In this particular exchange, the students pointed to proximal indicators (rankings), to anecdotal evidence (word of mouth), and ultimately retreated to the degree having only a partial impact against a greater determinant of employment in the UAE (*wasta*). Other respondents also spoke of the centrality of *wasta*, while some felt that its impact was negligible compared to relevant work experience. In both cases, however, the degree was an essential precondition with its relative impact value predicated on the diffused reputations of the national brand primarily and institution secondarily. The assumed gravity of the British degree was so widely held that on multiple occasions respondents showed similarly discomfiting incredulity that its position should need to be substantiated.

Respondents repeatedly devised a loose hierarchy of national higher education brands preferred by UAE employers with British higher education either at the top or among a narrow top band of Western models. When asked where value was located in their degree program, responses consistently articulated it not as something intrinsic to the educational model or particulars of each institution but rather as a collective function of what the degree delivers in the job market. The value of their degree,

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<sup>51</sup> An Arabic colloquialism for social capital or interpersonal connections which open doors (i.e. nepotism)



articulated by one student, is “what it will get you” in terms of job security and salary (Alpana, GLU student), and she and other respondents saw British higher education as the most effective brand in producing these desired material outcomes in the UAE market. Such narrowly instrumental views of value concentrated among expatriates, although such responses were hardly limited to those who admitted to looking for the easiest route to a degree. There was a link, rather, to the practicalities and related constraints (**section 7.2.1**) which reduced the range of choices to those within the UAE<sup>52</sup>. Among available choices within the UAE, British degrees were universally perceived as delivering the greatest employment outcomes for expatriates, both in absolute terms and relative to time-cost considerations. The picture for international students was less consistent as some chose their particular university while others chose on the basis of its regional location, but most were wedded to the notion of attending a British university from the start. They equally shared the view that a British degree secured employment in the UAE, in their home countries or even in third locations<sup>53</sup> but they were more agnostic about its relative superiority over other popular brands (e.g. American or Australian degrees) with regards to employment. These findings are summarized in **table 7.4**.

The exact mechanism which underpins the British degree’s currency is explained in the next section, as it applies with universalizing logic to securing UAE employment as well as future opportunities abroad.

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<sup>52</sup> Alpana, for example, sought offers from two highly prestigious institutions in the US but was ultimately asked to stay in the UAE by her father who was concerned by the distance. Within the scope of her limited UAE options, she saw her British university as the best path to her career in advertising.

<sup>53</sup> Only the Nigerian international students made reference to the value of a British degree in their home country labor market although the Saudi Arabian students also aspired to return to their home countries. Many of the others came from mobile families with broad international ties and had vague aspirations to either stay in the UAE or follow their families to third locations.

Table 7.4 Key Findings on Employment Aspects of British IBCs

<i>Key commonalities</i>		
<b>All students</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Value is assessed by what the degree does for the individual in enabling opportunities leading to salaried and secure employment;</li> <li>• Employment value of British degree was widely perceived yet circumstantially or anecdotally evidenced; its universal recognition and international cachet was believed to play central role in underpinning this value;</li> <li>• British degree seen to “give an edge” over comparably qualified candidates in the UAE job market.</li> </ul>	
<b>Expatriates</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Made comparisons with UAE-based alternatives, seeing British IBCs as having strong focus on specialized knowledge and employable skills;</li> <li>• Held strongly instrumental views of degree value;</li> <li>• Saw British degree as providing greatest employment outcomes over other providers.</li> </ul>	
<b>International Students</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Saw degree as securing employment in the UAE, home countries or international destinations in the Global North;</li> <li>• Perceptions of British degree’s value over other Western degrees for employment in the UAE was less emphatic than expatriates’ estimation.</li> </ul>	
<i>Key distinctions</i>		
	<b>Expatriate students</b>	<b>International students</b>
<b>ASU</b>	Perceived ASU as having strongest reputation among British IBCs within UAE, with university and national brand reputation driving employment.	For some, ASU was costlier but most effective way to get a toehold in UAE job market.
<b>GLU</b>	Articulated employability through national brand reputation, rather than institutional reputation.	Same as expatriates, but with comparison to employability of home country degree.
<b>UNE</b>	Similar to GLU, expatriates articulated employability through national brand reputation, rather than institutional reputation; leverage seen as comparable to other British IBCs at more affordable cost; UNE also seen to have greater internship opportunities and local industrial links, aided by smaller student numbers.	Same as expatriates.

### 7.2.3 The 'Global' Brand

The third thematic category broadly encompasses the foreign and international dimensions of British higher education which factor heavily in students' articulations of value and desire in their higher education choices. These features align closely with the lived experiences and aspirations of expatriate and international students, both of whom operate in transnational spaces and experience varying degrees of displacement as embodied migrants (Dunn, 2010) with precarious residency in the UAE (a unique space where only UAE nationals hold entitlement to permanently belong). In the context of the UAE international education market where consumers can choose among international education brands, students' perceptions of which brands are considered 'local' and which are 'global' are governed by collective imaginations of what is desirable and made possible through particular foreign degrees. These perceptions speak to how they see opportunities in their higher education choices and how they imagine themselves as constituents of the 'global' spaces and pathways that such institutions forge. Having a foreign degree is therefore not only symbolically meaningful to students drawn to mobile lifestyles but doing so holds vast material potential to convert aspirations into actual mobility opportunities. As the previous chapter demonstrated, the British brand dominates this imaginary with its market representations of being a global brand with global reach. According to student interview data, such representations closely align with their perceptions of the global character of British higher education in diffuse and sometimes contradictory ways, including increased international employment opportunities, migratory pathways, and assurance of future livelihoods. Such benefits accrued to its degree holders stem from the perceived universal reputation of the British brand and its legitimacy, which is backed by the monolithic national Quality Assurance Agency and the weight of Britain's extended history of universities.

### ***Universal Recognition***

Analysis of student responses identified a number of IBC features with international or global components which made the collective British brand desirable and individual British IBCs viable options. At the center of it was a uniform trust in the international value and portability of the earned degree, which it was imagined would open opportunities and secure futures for degree holders as a sound investment in symbolic capital. The fundamental mechanism underpinning its value and potency is the universalizing logic of degree recognition, which legitimates and hierarchizes human capital and formalized knowledge through the process of translation across educational geographies. As the UAE's transnational labor market creates a global intersection of recognized qualifications, the international higher education marketplace and its regulatory bodies persistently shape discourses around the accreditation and legitimation of various educational forms offered in and outside of the UAE. Perceptions of different international degree providers and degree value strongly militated around accreditation – how many accreditations, from which accrediting bodies, and from which countries – articulating a set of values with which each institution is judged. Students' explanations of which institutions were accredited and by which governmental body were not often exacting in their accuracy, but were consistent in their prolific use of regulatory terminology like accreditation and recognition to describe which degrees and institutions held value and why<sup>54</sup>. When probed as to what these terms mean operationally, responses typically pointed to vague program qualities and nondescript agencies ("they") who either govern accreditation processes or evaluate them. With even the faintest understanding of the mechanics behind the terminology, however, students asserted the importance of such labels in terms of what it enables the degree holder, and this was the most consequential factor underpinning the perceived value of foreign higher education generally and British universities in

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<sup>54</sup> As a subjective assessment, I found this striking in its uniqueness. Nowhere else in my various international educational experiences have I encountered students so astutely conscious of accreditation or what it even means for a university or program.

particular. The currency of accreditation lay in its making a locally-earned degree recognizable and convertible not only in the transnational labor market in the UAE but in all expressions of international mobility, including working, studying and emigrating elsewhere. Although there were occasional expressions of concern for the recognition and legitimacy of individual institutions, statements were widely made with reference to the British higher education brand as a recognized, legitimate and superior form of degree capital.

The mechanics behind recognition, or how the UK's quality assurance system works to ensure consistent standards across its institutions, did not ever appear in students' assertions. Similarly, statements made about equivalency – the university's assurance that the branch campus' curricular inputs, teaching standards, assessments and awards are substantively identical – mirrored marketing language and were notably asserted by students who had not been to the UK campuses nor had any relationship to them. Rather, functioning like a belief system, students maintained they knew that their campus was sufficiently equal and that the UK degree was authentic. These explanations invariably were embedded in a consistent view that anything originating from the UK, or outside the UAE, was authentic and of greater worth than a degree or an educational form with roots of any depth in the UAE. This global-local dichotomy framed the exotic otherworldliness of British education and British branch campuses, even though campuses were made up of UAE actors (expatriate staff and students) and had taken on local character (celebration of local holidays, practice of local customs regulating student behavior, etc.). In the equivalency discourse asserted by both students and staff, the institution remains exceptional and detached from the local cultural and political sphere while maintaining its distinction via its relationship to the UK<sup>55</sup>. The value of the degree to students was therefore its foreign origination, as it did not

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<sup>55</sup> This is remarkable considering that two of the three focal institutions had local ownership of the entire operation (akin to a franchise arrangement), and in all three cases, the campus infrastructure was owned and actively managed by local companies.

ground degree holders in any localized pathway or was in any way subsidiary to home campus degrees.

As an unadulterated degree equal to that of the home campuses, it held greater currency as “something from out there” that could be earned locally, unlike degrees from the American-style local universities or UAE private universities.

The maintenance of belief in degree equivalency appeared to be robust out of necessity, even where respondents expressed doubt over substantive equivalence, given the importance of having a commensurate, foreign-originating degree. Despite equivalency of the degree qualification, the branches themselves were not necessarily identical to the home campuses in size and provision. There were thusly revealing moments of anxiety in students’ responses where they expressed fear that employers would be able to identify them as having studied at the branch rather the home campus, and that those employers would hold the opinion that branch campus quality, and therefore its degrees, were inferior. Students at ASU and GLU both voiced concern that their certificate would contain the KHDA seal which would identify the degree as having been earned at the branch campus<sup>56</sup>. Several ASU students talked about or had planned to attend their graduation ceremony in Edinburgh (as they are entitled to do, pending UK visa eligibility), what one critical respondent expressed as “get[ting] around the system” (Sara, ASU student), simply to avoid this feared localization of their degree. That student pointed to the ASU Dubai campus’s lower entry requirements (which an ASU recruiter confirmed) as a qualitative difference between the home and branch campuses that employers would somehow be aware of and use to inform their judgments. A majority of respondents, however, expressed their confidence that regardless of which campus the degree was earned at, the degree maintained its value

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<sup>56</sup> I was unable to confirm with KHDA whether this is indeed true, although students’ concern over it is what is particularly relevant here.

as an artifact originating from the UK and an expression of the UK itself, and this view was held consistently across the three focal institutions<sup>57</sup>.

### ***'Going Global' – International Opportunities and Enhanced Mobility***

The UK degree's foreign origination was perceived to have had broad consequences for its adherents' futures, particularly the mobility opportunities it secured or enabled. The fundamental mechanism underpinning its potential was the assumption that it is globally recognized as legitimate and of superior quality, and was therefore more secure, fungible and universally valued by international employers and migration regimes alike. Such value was frequently expressed through its inverse: those degrees which were seen to provide fewer mobility pathways beyond the UAE (such as the American-style local universities) and those from expatriates' countries of origin (such as the numerous Indian and Pakistani branch campuses). Degree value was expressed in terms of what it could do, including negative phrasings like opportunities which would be curtailed. The following exchange is between two South Asian expatriates studying at GLU. Both were previously high-achieving students at two different Indian (CBSE) secondary schools and showed a strong interest in academics and their university choices. They both settled upon GLU by ruling out non-Western alternatives, locally owned institutions, or leaving the UAE for their studies.

Researcher: So it gives you some kind of a global access?

Nazma: Yes. That's also part of the reason why. Everyone was like, [Indian IBC], you're kind of just restricted to here; but then GLU, you'd have more opportunities elsewhere as well. That's how, at least, people think out here, and that's what I've heard when I speak to people.

Researcher: Okay. So how do you know that?

Nazma: That's how people think out here. Because my parents, their friends and, again, their kids who are also going to university; and that's kind of their opinion as well, that globally

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<sup>57</sup> It is difficult to parse these statements by institution because they are reflections on the collective perceived value of the UK higher education brand. Individual institutions were not seen as more or less authentic from the degree equivalency perspective, although ASU staff did frequently assert that their Dubai campus was the only actual British branch campus (i.e. non-franchise) serving undergraduates in the UAE, which they felt made them more of a legitimate development with a less explicitly commercial aim.

Greater London University would give you more access. So, again, it's just the degree, kind of – it just allows you to get more access to different places.

Alpana: It's not really GLU, but the fact that GLU is technically a British university. And it's the fact that because you have a British degree, it takes you more places. (Nazma and Alpana, GLU students)

In the above excerpt, both students are speaking of the purchasing power of the British brand in the international labor market, where the fungibility of non-Western degrees is broadly understood by consumer audiences to be lower. These statements sat in tension with commentary on the quality of some local universities like the American University of Sharjah, which respondents generally saw as reputationally superior and far more academically challenging, but again was understood to severely limit international mobility opportunity as it originates from the UAE<sup>58</sup>. Students' choices of university were thus strategically placed to maximize perceived opportunities beyond the UAE, and this applied to expatriates and international students alike. Students displayed an awareness of the difference between the global reputation of the British brand and that of their particular institution but inevitably redounded to the collective brand for the opportunities it was perceived to enable. Where institutional reputation was perceived as strong, such as ASU, it enhanced perceptions of future prospects by adding to the recognition of the British brand name. Where it was relatively weak, such as UNE, students occasionally acknowledged this (by referencing its lower UK university ranking or local campus quality) but ultimately disregarded it as the British degree superseded all comparable options issuing degrees from India, Pakistan or the UAE.

In a majority of cases, respondents did not see themselves as planning to stay in the UAE indefinitely – and were vividly aware of the limitations for such in light of UAE immigration policy – and thus the British degree served as a form of security against unknown or unplanned futures. Expatriates without

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<sup>58</sup> Whilst it is independently run as an 'American-style' local institution, it holds accreditation from the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (USA), and its programs are further accredited by respective American professional bodies, making it as 'recognized' in quality assurance parlance as international branch campuses are.



clear emigration plans saw their degree as flexible cultural capital, guaranteeing opportunities beyond their home country if UAE residency was discontinued. International students either saw it the same (if coming from a country they had no desire to return to) or as a convertible qualification that enabled work in the UAE as well as a future back home. In some regards, tenure insecurity in the UAE, which expatriate males experience from the age of 18, informed their strategic purchase with students safeguarding against the possibility of having to leave at some point.

If I get a Pakistani degree or whatever, I take it outside, you never know about life.. What if I go to Canada? Some other place in the future and all. If I go to some other place and I give them a Pakistani degree? As compared to British degree, the Pakistani degree won't have much value. (Abdulrahman, UNE student)

This strategic choice-making was often explained by students as the difference between a parochial and global qualification, even though both come from international branches of non-UAE universities.

Highlighting the explicit instrumentalism of higher education in a globalized labor market, one Pakistani female explained how her father insisted that she attend Pakistani international secondary school to learn her national culture and tradition, but then choose a university “from the outside” in order to keep open opportunities to work and study in an Anglophone Western country (Fawziah, UNE student). In her case, as with others, the degree issued from her British IBC met the criteria of an “outside” qualification which was perceived to enable the most mobility opportunities however undefined at the time of her interview.

Similar to domestic employment opportunities, the evocation of the ‘recognition’ discourse appeared heavily throughout students’ statements on international opportunities, generally with an elusive agent recognizing the authenticity or value of their degree. When articulating its potential, students clustered international employment, further studies, and immigration together as possible pursuits which are enhanced by holding an internationally recognized qualification. This fundamental subscription to the recognizability of their degree underpinned its value as a form of flexible cultural capital, which faculty

members at two different institutions described as an international “currency” which “gives you wings”, or enabling mobility. Given the transience of the UAE as a space of impermanence for migrants, expatriates and international students both had transnational elements in their future plans which they discussed as being enabled in some way by their degree. One of those faculty members described his GLU students as strategically setting up international futures using the IBC as a vehicle for their mobility. He framed IBC students as distinct from UK home campus students in their pragmatic decision-making and motivation to ultimately seek out opportunities outside the UAE, particularly in Britain and the Anglophone world (Lecturer 2, GLU). Regardless of whether the symbolic power of an international qualification can truly override the structural limitations of global migration regimes, the British IBC was understood by students and staff as a strategic vehicle for delivering opportunity pathways to the outside world by drawing on the global cachet of the British degree.

Respondents expressing a desire to emigrate, whether first or final year students, articulated mostly vague and incomplete visions of their international futures. Only a small handful knew precisely which Western destination they had in their sights, typically because of a family connection or a favorable stereotype of that country; similarly, only a small number knew which universities they intended to apply to for their graduate studies (of which only one had her heart firmly set on continuing with GLU at the home campus). In most cases, imaginations of future employment or residency in the West were understood to manifest through an overseas graduate degree program as the stepping stone to foreign employment, and in some destination countries, progression towards permanent residency or citizenship. No respondent with ambitions of leaving the UAE stated intentions of studying a graduate degree program in the UAE<sup>59</sup>.

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<sup>59</sup> This is in spite the high proportion of graduate-only international institutions in the UAE (refer to **chapter 5**).

One distinctive feature of the British branch campuses in the UAE is the opportunity to transfer to the home campus (or other campus locations) midway through a degree program<sup>60</sup>, which is popularly marketed as an opportunity to experience the UK. Such a feature positively resonated with respondents as it affirmed the authenticity of their branch campus and supplemented students' international mobility aspirations. Despite respondents' favorable attitude to holding the potential to transfer, respondents were mostly averse to doing so, citing family, friendships, relationships with branch campus faculty, changes to affordability, and the general convenience of "stick[ing] to what they know" (Akram ASU student and marketing volunteer). Naturally the sample of respondents in this study would reflect those who chose not to transfer (as they were selected on the basis of being in the UAE), but very few respondents even knew of others who availed themselves of the opportunity, suggesting it was not a widely shared element of the campus experience. A senior manager at GLU confirmed that after the first year, students typically settled in and preferred to remain in their familiar environs, despite the fact that the transfer option was a popular draw for students who wanted to study in the UK at some point in their undergraduate degree (Director 1, GLU). This sentiment was universally reflected in expatriate respondents' outward mobility narratives, with the addition of parents often discouraging it, especially in cases of female students. Rather, students and their parents both saw graduate studies as the appropriate moment to leave the UAE, with the understanding that their pending undergraduate degree enabled the opportunity to do so. For international students, the case was somewhat different as their mobility histories had already necessitated leaving their home country to study. As their reasons for traveling to the UAE to study differed from expatriates staying in-country, most were set on remaining in the UAE for the duration of their undergraduate program, although several of the younger, more privileged international students at ASU maintained that their branch campus could be a stepping stone

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<sup>60</sup> This was a feature of GLU and ASU only. For UNE there was a short 'study tour' offered in lieu as its academic timetable did not align with that of the home campus.

to the UK campus if they demonstrated to their parents that they could be academically successful in their first or second year in Dubai. Both experiences of declining to transfer, however, underscore a temporal dimension which is generally unexamined in research on choice-making. Students appear to be drawn to global mobility features like intercampus transfer but find their priorities and rationales changing as their university experience matures. For such students, the branch campus enables an experience of the British university by proxy, with the reward of a globally recognized and mobility-conferring degree, without assuming the costs or risks in having to negotiate the unfamiliar and the unknown.

### ***Embodying the Global***

The option to transfer, like other global elements of the British brand, may be playing into the affective dimensions of respondents' choices and sense-making. Further to their material implications for mobility, such components service students' desires to circulate and become globally mobile cosmopolitans. Despite most of the interview data suggesting that respondents' choices were informed by practicalities of the institution and affordances of the international degree, there were occasionally revealing statements that linked these material aspirations to a yearning for emotional and cognitive self-fulfillment or legitimation. Students hinted at the linkages between their international institutions and their global aspirations, with the (often implied) outcome that the individual, through the university experience and particularly through attaining the degree, embodies its global character and is validated as some kind of loosely imagined cosmopolitan. This sentiment was expressed in a variety of ways, but is summed up best by a Nigerian international student who saw the global recognition of her degree as a global validation of herself:

I want to go somewhere where I get my certificate, and I go in, and like 'ah! You're welcome, you're welcome. It's been accepted, you're being recognized. You *are* recognition.' (Victoria, UNE student)

By way of enabling opportunities and mobilities, the global element of the degree in the above statement was seen to transpose itself unto the student, raising her perceived worth in the eyes of an imagined global gaze and evaluative audiences. For some, that global gaze and yearning for recognition was less something waiting out there and more a phenomenon within the UAE itself, whereby the respondent imagined they could escape the confines of being placed (in terms of nationality, which has wide-reaching effects on how people are treated or regarded by others in the Gulf) with a claim to being a British student or graduate. One described this as “confidence” that he hadn’t previously held as a Nigerian national (Rashid, GLU student). Another, a Pakistani expatriate, articulated his imagined feeling of validation when being recognized as a holder of a Western degree within the workplace culture of the UAE:

I don’t know how to describe it, I can’t get an adjective. It’s well known like once you talk about British or American or something like that, they’re like oh yeah, he has a British degree, he has an American degree. It just feels good. (Abdulrahman, UNE student)

This student’s expressions of feeling exceptional evidences the way the foreign and global nature of the British degree allows him to distinguish and exempt himself from the bodily confines of his ethnicity and the stereotypical representation of his national origins as an expatriate intent on staying in the UAE. In this regard, rather than opening doorways to the West via enhanced mobility, the global element of his degree is brought to bear on his self, enabling him to be less of a placed, parochialized national of a particular country and instead adopt a cosmopolitan identity as a transnational actor backed by a powerful international degree. As with students claiming to know the hiring priorities of international employers, there is a strong component of imaginative work where students project their future selves as somehow more global and more valid in the possession of a foreign degree. Students’ articulations of their future mobility pathways vis-à-vis their British branch campus suggest that these imagined embodiments have both material and affective consequences, and play a powerful role in shaping their

imaginations of the potency of British higher education in their lives. These findings are summarized in table 7.5.

**Table 7.5 Key Findings on Global Aspects of British IBCs**

<i>Key commonalities</i>		
<b>All students</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Value stems from IBCs' ties to Britain and detachment from local higher education; value stems from global reputation and recognition of collective British brand over individual institutions; equivalency between home and branch is essential to securing degree value and legitimacy;</li> <li>• Choice of British IBC seen to maximize international mobility, including opportunities for international employment, study and emigration;</li> <li>• International degree comes with affective association of global recognition and personal validation as a transnational cosmopolitan.</li> </ul>	
<b>Expatriates</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Saw British degrees as opening international pathways and mobilities, in contrast to local or Asian IBCs which limited opportunity to UAE;</li> <li>• Degree served as flexible cultural capital, enabling international opportunities in the face of discontinued residency in UAE;</li> <li>• Opportunity to transfer to home campus held broad appeal but was seldom utilized as students grew accustomed to IBC environment (and parents discouraged it).</li> </ul>	
<b>International Students</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Saw British degrees as compatible with their own internationally mobile futures, enabling work in the UAE, home country or third location (typically in Anglophone Western countries);</li> <li>• As de facto international actors, international students in general had more refined future (global) aspirations, but no clearer articulations of how the degree serviced those aspirations.</li> </ul>	
<i>Key distinctions</i>		
	<b>Expatriate students</b>	<b>International students</b>
<b>ASU</b>	Strong reputation of institution complemented perceptions of global opportunities; however, some students expressed concern that institutional reputation did not extend to the branch campus and were thus keen to avoid being recognized as students from the Dubai campus.	Same as expatriates with regards to institutional reputation; some wealthier international students saw their tenure at their IBC as temporary (in order to be geographically closer to family) and aimed to take advantage of transferring to UK home campus.

<b>GLU</b>	Students saw the global strength of the UK national brand as pivotal to international mobility, rather than strength of institutional name despite its strong use of London in branding; institutional identity as London university held broad appeal for enhancing recognition of degree, but transferring to home campus did not.	GLU seen as a globally recognized institution due to its numerous international locations and evocative branding as a London-based UK university.
<b>UNE</b>	Emphasized Britishness of degree over institutional name in assessing global recognition value; students compared recognition against their home country degrees or local alternatives; expatriate UNE students more often framed the value of the global features of their degree as giving them a wider safety net against an unknown future, enabling work in the UAE and eventually somewhere in the Global North.	Same as UNE expatriate students, but with value of global degree recognition applying in equal measure internationally (UAE or an Anglophone Western country) and in student's home country.

This section has examined the three broad thematic categories which analysis of the student interview data indicates are the major attractors of the three British IBCs in this study. While it has been argued that desires and choices are relational and cannot be understood in isolation of context, the range of choices, and broader dynamics that inform career aspirations, global mobilities, and other imaginations of future selves, this section presented conversations and narratives, which in spite of the diversity of respondents, points to a coherent body of findings across the three institutions. These findings implicate the dominance of the collective British brand in informing both students' imaginations and their choices. All of these imaginings of British higher education are contingent on these particular students as expatriates or internationals in the UAE, and point to the contextual groundedness of this particular market in informing how British higher education is made desirable by students and employers and seen

as convenient, universally recognized, and global. The analysis now turns to how Britain fits into these findings.

### **7.3 Unpacking Britain in UK IBCs**

This section examines how value is imagined and constructed in the context of the UAE educational marketplace. It seeks to identify first where Britain (as a place and a brand) and Britishness (a quality) – both descriptive containers and polysemic assemblages – are articulated and mobilized in the imaginative construction of British higher education. It does so by examining the responses of student and staff participants who talk about value with specific reference to British higher education, who in doing so may be reifying various qualities identified in the analysis of marketing. By identifying which institutional elements are understood by participants as ‘British’, the social and material spaces between what is global, British, and local are made visible, allowing for a clearer understanding of how the British brand operates in transnational spaces like the UAE educational marketplace. The data informing this section are drawn from interviews with students and staff across the three institutions, and do not concentrate into robust categories. Therefore, in contrast to the previous section, it is not possible to neatly parse findings by institution or type of student. The objective of this analysis is rather to identify and synthesize the broad ways Britain is imagined and constructed across actors as representatives of the social imaginaries that this chapter examines.

#### **7.3.1 Britishness as a Metaphor for Implied Qualities of the National Higher Education Brand**

When the student and staff interview data are analyzed syntagmatically (that is, looking at how one word or phrase sits in relation to its surrounding text), there is compelling evidence to suggest that terms like ‘UK’, ‘Britain’ and ‘British’ are used metaphorically, either as substitutions for abstract ideas or as a shorthand reference to implied qualities. The analytical use of metaphor here stems from constructivist views of language which hold that ideas or statements can be creatively mapped on to



distinct conceptual or semiotic domains by bringing them into interaction (Heracleous, 2004). According to Black (1979, cited in Heracleous, 2004, p. 184), metaphors not only characterize “aspects of the target domain which were already there”, but also engender and ascribe new associations between the two domains, infusing in them a creative potency to reframe or reconstruct operative concepts. The use of metaphor in social theory has been explored at length within post-structural traditions, particularly human geography, where places are creatively textured and re-inscribed through their deployment in discourses (Barnes & Duncan, 1992). The metaphor is thusly instrumental in engendering associations and “render[ing] complexity comprehensible ... by meld[ing] familiarity and unfamiliarity, similarity and difference, [and] the real and the representational, to kindle a ‘creative spark’” (Bok, 2019, p. 1090).

As **chapter 6** demonstrated, Britain operates variously as a metaphor in the analyzed IBC marketing. Firstly, terms like ‘British’ are elicited without making explicit what particular aspect of ‘British’ is meant, letting the imagination of the audience insert meaning rather than spelling out the explicit demarcations of quality or globality. The precise meaning is implied by the speaker and assumed by the audience, while the signifier itself is mobilized variously, worked and reworked in different uses and contexts to achieve marketing ends. Secondly, at that level of abstraction there is the avoidance of awkward cultural impositions that make a transnational campus undesirable. Britain is used in the marketing data as a vehicle to communicate abstract desirable features – quality, globality, superiority, employability – not specific attitudes, mannerisms, interpersonal dispositions, or cultural particulars that might also come under the umbrella of ‘British’. According to the data, the students showed surprisingly little interest in Britishness as a set of cultural forms. Some expressed a mild curiosity towards banal cultural forms of Britishness like sports or traditions, embodied in university activities like ASU’s “Scottish Highland Games”. As **section 7.2** above highlights, the specific ‘British’ elements of the UK IBCs that students based their decisions on were those meta-qualities which were not necessarily or even uniquely ‘British’ but stemmed from a higher education system and brand which commanded widely shared imaginations

of its strong reputation and material impact on its degree holders. If the power of the degree is constitutively linked to the power of the social imaginary underpinning it, the British metaphor is instrumental in signifying the core elements of the brand. In a social imaginary, therefore, the power of the metaphor works both ways: as a tool of marketing and as an analogous body of meanings constructed by student audiences. Wherever these terms are employed in speech, they too attend to various meanings which construct British higher education and Britain as the progenitor of that higher education system in specific ways. This section examines how and where meaning is made, capturing implied qualities in a series of broad categorical metaphors.

### ***British as Metaphor for Globality***

The previous section presented evidence demonstrating how students choose the British brand for its perceived enhancement of global opportunity. Many of the statements in which students and staff expressed this view, however, also suggest that the descriptor 'British' carries strong connotations as a reference to global qualities, or is itself something decisively extraterritorial in its constitution.

Some statements evidence a direct substitution of one term for the other, such as the statements examined in **section 7.2.3**, where the relationship between British and global or international is one of equivalency. This relationship was confirmed variously in interviews, for example, stating "I think that's the logic in their mind. Like if it's British, it's international. Like they have this thing in the back of their mind 'oh okay so I'm getting a UK degree, so it's an international degree'" (Ragav, ASU student). Such logic was applied consistently to the educational brand and its degree; however its application to staff and student bodies was more complicated owing to its discursive intersections with race and nationality. Students' commentary on what was seen as *not* British, typically in reference to an Asian IBC or the concentration of Asian bodies on campus, characterized these features as 'local', thereby flavoring subsequent comment on British elements as global or diverse by contrast. In the following exchange, a

Zambian male international student at GLU expresses his disappointment with his foundation year experience, which he found to be lacking the diversity he had expected in a British institution:

Researcher: Oh okay, that's interesting. So does GLU-Dubai feel British to you then?

Milton: No, no [*he laughs*]. It doesn't.

Researcher: What does it feel like if it's not British?

Milton: It feels.. Indian. Because I think everything.. [*speaking softly now*] everyone is from either India or Pakistan so it feels like a *local* university [*said with emphasis*].

Researcher: Give me more about this local university. What do you mean by local, the students? The faculty? The content?

Milton: I think it's, for me, I think it's.. It's both. Both the staff and the students because the majority of our teachers are either Pakistani or Indian. We only have, I think we only have one.. British teacher, only one, who teaches me. The rest are either from India, Pakistani, same as the students. Most of them are from that side, so yeah.. It doesn't feel like I'm at a British university, it just feels like I'm in school. Just in school. (Milton, GLU student)

That student went on to contrast his IBC experience with his imagination of the home campus in London, which he described as being of entirely 'British' staff and multicultural students of "all different types". Imaginations of home campuses varied, but the sentiment that the branch campus felt insufficiently British due to the influence of its dominant demographic was shared especially by non-Asian and international student participants, having relatively less exposure to the demographic concentrations of the UAE and expecting more diverse bodies as reflected in the prospectus. In general, students' accounts of which bodies counted as British varied and were often problematic, but they articulated what and who they considered to be 'local', and therefore not British or global, when asked how their campus felt and how they imagined it would be. This notion of Britain as a place of diverse or multicultural bodies dovetails with other commentary on Britishness as a global community or body of globally mobile agents. In the exchange below, a faculty member at ASU gives a meandering account of what constitutes Britishness in the faculty and therefore in the character of the university:

Researcher: Do you think it feels British?

Lecturer: Yeah. It's not pretending to be British, it's not failing to be British, it's definitely a British university.

Researcher: How so?

Lecturer: Umm... I think because the faculty are so well-traveled. Just speak to any given faculty, they've traveled around the world, they've lived everywhere, they've studied in the UK, they've worked in the UK, there is that connection with UK. Very few of them haven't actually been to the UK. So they all understand the British education system.. umm.. And they're all very, very academic. And very experienced, very sorta global and worldly. None of them come giving their nationality.. It's all about the British education system. (Lecturer 1, ASU)

This statement presents a hub and spoke relationship between Britain and the globe, allowing for diverse international actors to represent Britishness through their global trajectories to/from Britain and through its institutions. The subversion of national difference to a collective 'British' subjecthood speaks to actors' entitlement to 'worldliness' and echoes the globalizing mission of Britain's imperial past as a discursive label for the people and institutions brought under its gaze. Her description of the globetrotting faculty also parallels the stated aspirations of students, who seek cosmopolitan or transnational actorhood as derived from the perceived power of an international degree.

The metaphor appears to work by suppressing cultural specificity in favor of intercultural compatibility. Similar to the ways in which the national differences of faculty were described as being sidelined in the above quote, students also made reference to the inclusiveness of their campus as a British feature (again contrasted with local and Asian international providers). Some also astutely pointed out the distinctions between British education as a worldwide institutional system and British content in the curriculum. Through this distinction they were able to defend its 'Britishness' as an international model without it necessarily feeling British in character or content.

I think they're trying to break away from that Scottish-British thing [*as her friend adds "stereotype"*], because they're trying to be more multicultural, especially since they have the new campus in Malaysia now... I don't feel like it's Scottish, but it doesn't matter to me, as in.. as long as the same thing is being taught here, I don't need to get the feel of it being a Scottish or British university... Like even my school had a British curriculum but it didn't feel like a British school. But I was comfortable with that. (Sara, ASU student)

By avoiding specificity and embracing multiculturalism, the British IBC gets to be global while maintaining an umbrella British label that is palatable to diverse student-consumers and desirable to those who perceive the advantages of its global reach. Despite all three IBCs originating from and leading with their UK-based home campuses (and two of three having specific geographic references in their names), they have effectively become placeless while maintaining a thinned-out identity from its origination. As one Asian expatriate from ASU asserted, “The degree you get here is from Scotland... It doesn’t say anything Dubai or restricts you to a certain place” (Akram, ASU student).

### ***British as Metaphor for Superiority***

Wrapped up in the relationship between British and global, there are qualitative elements which also draw upon these signifiers to encode statements of value into participants’ responses. These statements adumbrate various ideas of a superior academic quality or reputation which are inseparable from the global and local dualism which is used to frame their degree of quality. As a foreign import and globally renowned good, ‘British’ was used by participants as a metaphor for a systemic culture of quality and standard which was not to be found locally, except where it described the IBC made equivalent through its relationship to the home campus and to the UK. When a senior leader at GLU was asked to what extent there was an appetite to localize the campus identity, she asserted,

I think the university itself, to be honest I think they are just concerned about the impact it has on their reputation, so they want it to be British enough as far as the academic side of things, but the rest of it.. it's up to us really. (Director 1, GLU)

Her commentary illustrates how British or Britishness in the context of transnational education carries specific connotations to academic quality, and not necessarily a cultural character or identity to the campus itself. Senior leaders at UNE and ASU provided remarkably similar statements on the ways in which the core Britishness at those universities’ IBCs is the maintenance of academic quality consistent with the standards and reputation of the national brand. All three leaders asserted their comfort in their campuses adopting local cultural inflections, from the staff and student bodies to the activities and

appearance of the campus, so long as the core 'British' quality and reputation of its academic components could be maintained.

This narrow construction of 'Britishness' in the transnational context advanced a problematic dichotomy between the national brand (the UK degree) and its local enactment (IBCs). By parsing the two in their responses, students and staff typically attributed any negative experiences to local implementation or adaptation while deflecting criticism away from the seemingly unassailable national brand. Where students spoke pejoratively of the 'local' campus culture (again as code for South Asian), found the campus feel or activities lacking, or the infrastructure not meeting their expectations, these were consistently attributed to inadequate 'local' provision and were therefore deemed not 'British' or representative of British higher education. They frequently maintained belief that the home campuses were larger and superior, and the student engagement with the home campus via activities and social spaces was richer, but that quality of the curriculum and instruction at the branch was nevertheless equivalent and therefore acceptable<sup>61</sup>. This dissociation between the brand and its enactment not only steered negative commentary towards the local provision but at times even directed the most unlikely positive attributions to the national brand, making British higher education in the collective sense impervious to critique<sup>62</sup>.

One unusual body of responses from students across institutions linked notions of superior quality to a set of values or moral codes of conduct which they attributed specifically to British academic practice. Those values which students across all three focal institutions described were the academic, intellectual and interpersonal practices espoused and often enforced in their degree programs, including

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<sup>61</sup> As one student put it, "you miss out on something, [but] you can't have the best of everything." (Ragav, ASU student).

<sup>62</sup> This finding speaks to a particular model of IBC where the campus is mainly a vehicle for the delivery of a quality-assured curriculum and degree program. It may also depend on the relationship between the degree provider and the AIP, as the ownership model in Dubai and RAK were both privately owned for-profit outfits and consequently gravitated towards minimal or cost-cutting provision.

communicating effectively, dressing professionally, and observing academic referencing and avoiding plagiarism. As the quote below from an Indian expatriate student at ASU illustrates, these skills are attributed to British educational conduct, which is contrasted with that of local schools and South Asian IBCs.

So when a person says they studied in a British university, it not only means that the curriculum and the way they studied was good, right, but also the way that they speak, the way that they present themselves and their work. Their confidence, the way they work, it shows through that degree. Because over here [ASU], until I got here, I never knew what Harvard referencing was. I never learned it in high school. They actually teach you over here how to write your essays, get them down, how to present... At the same time we had presentations in high school, like in [Asian IBC] as well, but none of them kept their regulations and rules according to your attire and the way you walk and talk. Over here, you're marked on the way you present, what you wear, the way you talk, the way you speak, how confident you are.. on your presentations. No one ever taught us that in [Asian IBC], you know? (Dave, ASU student, and formerly a student at an Indian IBC in Dubai)

With the local competitors framed as the antipode, a set of practices common to Western academia and professional settings internationally gets credited to the British national brand of education as a superior practice of quality and a moral code which is embodied by actors in British institutions. When staff talk about the competitive advantage of British IBCs in the market, a number of them linked their institution's success and that of their students in finding employment to these practices.

We try to actually enforce British values: honesty, integrity, working hard. These are things that obviously people do value, and they come here expecting they will learn things the way they are supposed to be done... that is why I think people come to a British institution... to have access to that kind of education. (Lecturer 3, UNE)

Students, on the other hand, spoke proudly of their sense of academic integrity and relative moral stance, as if transformed by their education. Their embodiment of the values these practices underpinned informed a new professional ethos and occasionally even imagined national identities. Referring to academic referencing and avoidance of plagiarism, one international student proudly claimed, "It makes me feel like a British student, a British person. Not really a Nigerian" (Victoria, UNE student). This statement captures the metaphorical properties of Britishness, where 'British' serves as

shorthand for a series of academic qualities and values with a relative superiority over competing educational models and brands.

### **7.3.2 Britain as an Originating Source of Higher Education**

In the same manner as the British metaphor, the notion of Britain as a place also carries shared meanings and imagination when employed in the context of British higher education. As a referent and signifier to the place of origin of the British national brand, the elicitation of the term 'Britain' by participants in the context of TNHE accords it particular meanings or attributions. While not exhaustive, this section explores two prominent ways in which Britain is discursively shaped or used in participants' commentary on their IBC or its market representation.

#### ***Britain as a Place of Legitimacy***

The most frequent and consistent discursive formation of Britain in the context of its IBCs is that of Britain as a place of legitimacy or authenticity vis-à-vis its transnational offshoots. As the currency behind the authenticity of IBCs and their degrees hinges on an equivalency with the home campus, students and staff both made numerous references to specific quality assurance processes, linking them to statements defending the authenticity of their campus and the de facto equivalency of its degree. There is a clear and consistent directionality to the relationship between campuses, which requires legitimacy to flow outward from the UK to international markets where UK academic quality and value operate alongside competing national brands. When asked how a campus feels British or maintains a British identity, staff asserted the robustness of the relationship of its teaching faculty between campuses with regards to curriculum management, examination, marking moderation, and observance of university regulations. There was, however, a persistent asymmetry between campuses in terms of their input into these activities, with most lecture and teaching content developed at the home campus, exam questions set by home campus faculty, and moderation of marking shared and validated by



program leaders in the UK<sup>63</sup>. The degree of branch campus staff input in academic and quality programming varied slightly by institution, but did so consistently with reference to home campus practices and “British standards” (Lecturer 1, UNE). Some staff noted the frequent visits from faculty at the home campus to carry out quality inspections, as well as the annual visits from senior leadership to observe the graduation convocation. The involvement of the home campus in all aspects of the academic components was how IBC staff conceived of their campus as authentically British.

This same pattern of sense-making was evident to an unusually detailed degree in students’ responses as well. As an East European expatriate student at GLU explained,

So every essay that we did – first, our tutor in GLU in Dubai checks that and after this, tutors in London. Two of them are checking the same essay. So any grade that we get from the tutor here is a provisional grade until confirmed by London tutors... So it’s the same as if you studied there. (Martina, GLU student)

One common thread in the above excerpt is the defense of academic equivalency between the campuses, which as **section 7.2.3** argued, is fundamental to degree value in offshore contexts. What is omitted from this discourse is the direction of legitimation, which requires the UK as both the material and discursive place of authenticity, to validate a branch campus or make its degree identical. This observation contributes to student responses which generally advanced geographies of legitimacy, wherein educational forms originating from certain places are deemed more or less legitimate than others. Legitimacy in a comparative lens takes on a hierarchical form not only between national brands, but between universities within the UK, and between home and branch. Preferring the word ‘proper’, students drew comparison between their British IBC and competitors as “getting the proper education I wanted” (Shruti, GLU student), and between home and branch campuses, “I know the campus there [in the UK] is a proper campus. It’s like, they own the place or whatever” (Giovanni, GLU student).

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<sup>63</sup> Much of this can be attributed to the architecture of this branch campus model, which replicates its academic departments and degree programs but is still governed at the institutional and departmental levels by the home campus.

Comparing British universities also attended to hierarchical geographies within the UK, with London in such responses being the epicenter of legitimacy. While UNE and ASU student respondents generally linked their educational pedigree to an aggregated UK (and an occasional reference to Scotland as a place of difference in the case of ASU), some GLU students attributed their university's pedigree to London specifically (opting for "London degree" or "London university" over British). Two astute students, however, contested the authenticity of their own university and its London branding, asserting that it was not "proper London" since the GLU home campus technically lies on the outer edge of the city.

In the main, statements on quality and value were attended by a geographic point of reference which made the legitimacy link between campuses through an association with Britain as the source of quality and value in higher education. This appears to be in keeping with the hub and spoke model of British IBCs in the UAE, but also replicates a pattern of educational export which resembles institutional exports in Britain's colonial past, with a one-way flow of educational content, oversight and legitimacy.

### ***Britain as a Desirable Place***

The ways in which Britain was articulated by participants as a desirable place are also important in unpacking the relationship between imaginations of Britain and consumption of its higher education. The affective component in this case is readily located in students' statements about Britain, which reflected a deep familiarity and sense of connectedness to its educational institutions, history, and language. For most participants, Britain posed as an imagined place which students were drawn to, not necessarily as a destination (although many expressed their interest and plan to visit or study there), but as a place which represented all the positive attributions of the kind of higher education they valued. This affective relationship closely aligns with Deleuze's concept of desire in the sense of wanting to circulate amongst the expressions of the desired object (Collins et al., 2014). Students saw their campus

as an extension not only of the home campus or the national brand, but at times an extension of the UK itself. As the student in the following quote illustrates, some saw this association as desirable and strategically useful to their own identities.

Well, it's a branch of the UK. So that's sort of one factor that went into me deciding to come to Adam Smith. So it's like, it's a branch of the UK university. And I looked up ASU there in Scotland, and it seemed pretty good. So I was like, okay, the connection is going to help out great. (Wagaye, ASU student)

In contrast to Wagaye, an Ethiopian student, the associative power that attends to being a student or subject of British education was for many students a relationship or identity which was already formed through the experience of schooling and socialization in a former British colony. Students, notably sub-Saharan African international students, pointed to their familiarity with British school systems, making explicit reference to the colonial legacy and its impact on educational preference: "You know, ...in my country, [there's] this mentality because we were colonized by the British, it must be the best" (Milton, GLU student). Some saw their relationship to British education as an asset, in the sense that their familiarity would facilitate their transition into and performance in higher education. There were others, however, who provided less of a rational or tactical accounting, seeing their familiarity as broadly informing preference and desire. These students' statements attended to a sense of belonging that, according to them, informed their choice of and attachment to British education, including their post-degree educational plans.

Expressions of desire articulated in imaginations of Britain were not exclusive to post-colonial subjectivities, however; students across the sample did so, including those who confidently eschewed any sense of connection to Britain as a result of their degree program. There was generally a vagueness or incompleteness to such statements, which may be a key element of desire mobilization (as noted previously, students displayed little to no attraction to specific British cultural forms). Their sense of intrigue was kept in motion by the object being unknown but knowable, with an elusive moving goalpost

for those who had experienced Britain in some form in their past (for example, GLU's home campus not being 'proper London'). This played nicely into the hands of branch campus marketing, especially in the case of GLU, which often mobilized familiar British iconography with had no direct connection to the university (as examined in **chapter 6**). In an interview with a GLU international student from Zimbabwe who also volunteered her time as a student representative at marketing events, there was a strong but difficult to define attraction to the university's origination that prospective students wanted to identify themselves with:

Maya: I know that British culture is valued.

Researcher: Value? What do they think British culture is to them? Is it like studying at GLU and learning about British things? Is it a way of dressing, walking and talking? Is it the accent?

Maya: No, I feel like that's... well I know it's not walking or dressing. It's more psychological. I still feel like if someone were to ask a typical GLU-Dubai student like 'where did you go to school?' They would honestly say GLU. 'The one in London?' And they could possibly say yes... They would want to have said I went to school in London. I don't know what it is, but... even back home, British education is valued a lot. Like 'oh, where did you go to school?' 'I went to school in England.' 'Oh, wow!'

As the student notes, much of this desire is concentrated on London specifically, as it is integral to GLU's marketing and identity.

Maya: I feel like the 'We are London' makes them feel like they are a part of something bigger. That's how I see it. Like, we are a part of something bigger and it's not just Dubai. It's not just Dubai.. well I feel like people at GLU have this idea that London is really like the 'ish'<sup>64</sup> place to go... When I was working at GETEX, someone asked for the 'We Are London' bag, and I said why don't you want the 'We Are Dubai' bag? and she said, 'well it's in London isn't it?' Oh, I'll go get you the London bag then [*she laughs*]. I just feel like they want to be part of something bigger.

What the above excerpt illustrates is the way in which particular geographies can hold broad appeal as imaginary destinations and inform desired identities, affiliations or experiences. As an unknown but knowable place, Britain at the aggregate level and London specifically are constructed through student imaginations as either desirable destinations or referential places where desirable higher education

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<sup>64</sup> Slang for something socially desirable

originates. Branch campuses are thus perceived by students as extensions of these places and carry over their affective and normative elements when making sense of the branch.

#### **7.4 Conclusion**

The literature on international student decision-making typically frames choice as an open-ended field of destinations and institutions informed by preferences, affordances, and structural barriers (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002, 2012; McMahon, 1992; Wilkins et al., 2011); in larger empirical studies especially, the student is assumed to be guided by a universally knowable rationality that enables comparison and modeling across wide geographies of student mobility. These studies also privilege the individual agency of students (or their parents) as choice-makers, rather than view choice as a spectrum between possibility and desire which is collectively informed by a social imaginary of international higher education. By applying this constructionist approach to specific contexts like the UAE marketplace, the relationship between students' choices and the wider market and cultural ecology in which those choices take place can be problematized. An ideographic approach enables appreciation of context-specific factors that make students 'UAE expatriate students' or 'Nigerian international students' specifically, and understand how they conceptualize their choice-making, what is valuable and what is desirable. Their strategic decision-making may reflect a high degree of calculation and rationality, but their logic is not one which necessarily translates as a model for understanding other contexts.

**Section 7.2** demonstrated this by examining which broad factors governed their (range of) choices and how they made sense of their decisions; some choices were simple arithmetic calculations (practicalities), some were perceived as returns on an investment (employment and mobility), and some were informed by broad desires that had no clear extrinsic payoff. What all of these demonstrate is that, firstly, perceptions of value with regards to higher education and degrees are layered and highly contingent, and are constitutive of relationships between students, the higher education landscape, and

the labor market, among other cultural influences. As one senior leader at ASU observed in an interview, the range of choices and therefore the nature of decision-making in the UAE market is entirely different to that in the UK. Even if the students were identical to those in the UK, they would never make the comparisons that they make in the UAE, such as ASU versus GLU, or UK versus Indian degree providers. Outside of the UAE, these providers occupy two separate markets with distinct students, informed by a distinct set of choices. UAE students thusly see value in British universities in ways which are highly distinct from those in other contexts.

Secondly, degree value is socially situated, as it is embedded in social imaginations, which include those of employers, policymakers and other gatekeepers. In a globalized space of international qualifications, the UK degree has a positional value and may carry greater weight or impact for the Nigerian international student in the UAE job market or the South Asian expatriate looking at outbound mobility opportunities (relative to degrees from UAE local institutions or Asian IBCs). One expatriate student spoke directly to this when giving his estimation of his university, noting that “it’s a good degree, at least for here...”. One implication of situated value is its potentially recursive nature: regardless of why local employers actually prefer British degree-holders, their hiring preferences are observed and spread through word of mouth, marketed through university statistics and recorded by government agencies monitoring employment outcomes. As long as there is a widely-held assumption that British education is superior, the social imaginary produces outcomes or expressions of greatness that reaffirm that belief.

Drawing on statements of value expressed through students’ explanations of choice, **section 7.3** enabled a more critical examination of how articulations of Britain and British higher education constitute discourses of what kinds of international higher education are global, legitimate, superior, and desirable. It is interesting to note that the data speaking to these narratives showed strikingly little contrast or contestation. A number of students voiced their discontent with marketing practices

(particularly with regards to racialized representations of students or claims to being a top university), and several identified particularly undesirable elements or descriptions of Britain (e.g. as a cold and dreary place, or potentially dull), but as metaphor or discursive container for other properties, articulations widely conformed to collective attributes in the manner identified above. Looking at social imaginations of Britain as the source of students' desire retrains the focus on how value, desire and choices are constructed within value regimes. The section identified four thematic repertoires where Britain or Britishness was used by students and staff as a signifier or metaphor for other qualities in its higher education, making the referent, Britain, shorthand for such qualities. These are particularly important in the context of the UAE market, where multiple national brands compete for the same students, and those students are often seeking enhanced global mobility and authentic, universally recognized degree qualifications. Unpacking how Britain and 'British' higher education signifies degree legitimacy or globality is therefore pivotal to understanding how students make sense of this particular higher education brand in its offshore, transnational form.

## Chapter 8: Conclusion

This chapter brings together the previous seven chapters by synthesizing the collective findings and arguments of the study, placing them back into scholarly debates, and holistically reflecting on the research. It begins by revisiting the findings presented in each of the chapters and putting the key arguments into dialogue with each other and the research questions to produce a unified overarching thesis (**section 8.1**). Following on from this, the chapter proceeds to enumerate the various theoretical, empirical, and methodological contributions that this study makes to the scholarly literature it is based on (**section 8.2**). As the dissertation is grounded in policy studies, it then attempts to apply some of the findings to a series of implications for future policymaking, although as a critical study it avoids making outright recommendations (**section 8.3**). Before closing, it briefly reflects on the changing state of IBCs in the UAE and worldwide, and what these changes spell for a further research agenda (**section 8.4**).

### 8.1 Synthesis of Findings

Analysis of the data has led to multiple research findings, presented throughout the previous three chapters. Further to summarizing key findings here, this section interprets and synthesizes these findings into overarching arguments which address the research questions and constitute the major conclusions of this study. As findings stem from different sites and actors, the discussion retraces the vertical scope of inquiry from the UK origins of each IBC through to their assembly and enactment in the UAE.

Analysis of interviews with senior leadership at each of the three focal institutions established the broader context, providing an understanding of the distinguishing features of UK universities operating IBCs in the UAE (presented in **chapter 5**). Through this analysis I found that each of the universities framed their overseas ambitions similarly through logics of perceived opportunity and a material need for extending their market reach. Their histories as British universities varied, but they shared



institutional profiles as relatively new and lesser known universities constrained by limited opportunity for growth in the UK, particularly with regards to international student recruitment. Leaders recounted how their organizations looked to overseas delivery as not only a means to escaping their financial limitations, but as an ambitious vision to transform their universities into globally known institutions with multiple sites of provision. Focal universities' transnational portfolios evolved differently guided by distinct internationalization models and strategies; thus for ASU and GLU, their UAE-based IBCs were spokes in a hub or networked model of campuses, while for UNE their IBC was an isolated event which later found its place as the university's largest of many international franchises. The common thread between focal universities, further to their globalizing aspirations, was what directors at each university characterized as an increased appetite for taking risks. They saw IBCs as an opportunity to expand market access and as an ambitious and high-reward form of internationalization that either met their need for growth or corresponded with their visions for transforming their universities in the global higher education market.

Senior leaders also emphasized the importance of the UAE as the site of delivery, owing to its geographic proximity to target markets in South Asia and the Arabian Gulf, its large population of expatriates seeking international degree qualifications, and its business-friendly approach to transnational provision. In this regard, leaders imagined the UAE to present a unique opportunity to experiment with IBC delivery (which could be incrementally scaled up without prohibitive upfront investment), to expand their international visibility, and in doing so, cater to a student market they believed would see value in their degree product but would be inaccessible without establishing a local campus. This shared agenda to transform and reimagine each university as a global institution with a globally known name aligns with findings from the analysis of marketing data (**chapter 6**), which suggests that delivery in overseas markets affords spaces for universities to recreate themselves, not only for concerns of local audiences, but in ways that their campuses in the UK do not allow. This is

evidenced in GLU identifying itself as a major London university, by each describing themselves as world-class or top-ranked, or most importantly, by cloaking themselves in the flag of the British higher education brand.

The globalization of British higher education detailed in **chapter 4** and the development of the UAE higher education market in **chapter 5** provide the contextual links between these two findings. Firstly, the willingness – and indeed even the autonomous ability – of British universities to establish an IBC is uniquely contingent upon historical policy developments within the UK governing how institutions are responsabilized and driven to compete for resources. The emergence of a ‘quasi-market’ for domestic students and free market model for international students created new arenas for competition, replete with commercial practices and market agendas transforming the governance and delivery of higher education. Further to these transformations within and between British universities, the early political functions of higher education within the British Empire elided into an economic agenda to deliver to and expand upon post-imperial global demand for British higher education. As transnational delivery models emerged, Britain’s established reputation for higher education afforded new opportunities to capitalize on global demand. While placed in competition with other leading exporters, UK higher education in the UAE is responding to demand from mostly international expatriates for whom British education is imagined to constitute high value and quality in its teaching and degree award. This context is necessary to understanding the strategic visions driving contemporary TNHE agendas, and IBC phenomena specifically, in the UAE; thusly I conclude that an analysis of contemporary transnational practices must be couched in a historical or longitudinal view to the globalization of British higher education, and that the foundation for widely held estimations of British universities stems from an historic regime of value.

Analysis of the marketing data in **chapter 6** pivoted to how UK universities are represented in transnational spaces, finding that particular qualities of British higher education are variously encoded

and mobilized through symbolic imagery, textual phrases, and select embodiments. In an environment of constant marketing where IBC events and communications always have a promotional function, the UK university is continuously performed and signified through practices layered with meaning. Through this analysis I found some variations in practices and representations at the denotative level which allow for subtle distinctions between the three focal institutions; upon examining their connotations, however, the emergent themes pointed to their close alignment in terms of their local relevance, their desirability as part of a recognized and trusted brand, and their global significance or connectedness. Each of these elements appeared to be strategically deployed to appeal to the particular needs and desires of the UAE student, including their professional focus leading to employment opportunities, their global recognition which opens post-degree mobility pathways, and responding to students' desire for self-realization through the ritualized completion of an international degree program. Some connotations were made explicit, while others were deeply embedded in the repetition of representations, many of which conformed to gendered and racialized visual templates. As interviews with students in **chapter 7** evidenced, students carried particular expectations of 'diversity' corresponding with their imaginations of British universities and sharply contrasting with their articulations of 'local' bodies (i.e. the majority South Asian expatriate population). These imaginations of who belongs and who embodies British higher education were not challenged in any robust way by the marketing data, and if anything, were reinforced through their selective repertoire of representations.

Further analysis of the marketing data traced the construction of the British higher education brand, looking at where data vectored with references to Britain and its universities. Through this approach I found that eliciting 'Britishness' performs a variety of discursive functions for IBCs by bringing them closer to the national higher education brand, making them knowable, familiar and indeed valuable education providers. The quality of their education and degrees was consistently textured by being British, leaning on the reputation of the brand often without making explicit to audiences how abstract

notions of quality were translocated to educational experiences in the UAE. In spite of institutions' varied individual reputations, the degree each campus offered was framed as universally recognized by virtue of being British, thus according it legitimacy and symbolic power which students could consequently embody. As interviews with students confirmed, this discourse of universal recognition was seen as the paramount feature to their educational aspirations, whether this meant an advantage in the labor market or legitimation in the gaze of migration regimes. The marketing of 'British' degrees drew upon the same powerful social imaginary held by students, employers and gatekeeping authorities as a common language and currency of degree capital. While institutions made explicit their relationship to the collective brand through repeated references to accreditation, they similarly capitalized on its currency by invoking often oblique references to the UK as the place of origin for prestigious higher education forms. By appealing to particular historical and contemporary representations of the UK and its universities, institutions connected their own pedigrees, and consequently their local reputations, to social imaginations thereof.

Analysis of student interview data brought the findings of this study into deeper perspective, as it illuminated the meanings students accorded higher education choices to their lives. As I argued in previous chapters, the choices most IBC students in the UAE face are unique to that context, as the UAE higher education market creates a space where students can choose between different national higher education brands and between universities which would not be in competition with each other outside of the UAE (such as the three focal institutions). Students are thusly tasked with making sense of each institution, both in its collective and branch-specific form, and assessing how their aspirations are met by the IBC of their choosing (where seeking education outside the UAE is not a possibility). Unique to the UAE context, particularly for expatriate students, is the reality of impermanent residency weighing on their futures and impacting their decisions, as are the demands of the labor market (which is linked to residency through an employee sponsorship scheme) in their adopted home. It follows therefore that

for many, the range of choice is circumscribed, and that the value placed on higher education forms is highly contingent and intricately tied to the unique political and social dynamics of the UAE. This was not dissimilar for international students, who equally articulated value in their higher education through the career and mobility opportunities it afforded them, except with aspirations less attached to a sense of belongingness and future in the UAE particularly. Both types of students' perceptions of value, and thusly their choice-making, were layered between more proximal, practical calculations and deeper affective desires to embody the qualities reflected in the British higher education brand.

This study found that students spoke in specific and consistent ways to social imaginations of British higher education which corresponded with brand aspects identified in marketing representations. The equivalency of their degree, curriculum, and standards with those of UK home universities was robustly defended not only by marketing staff, but by students who needed to maintain belief in the value of their degree. Its authenticity was always legitimated by its exogenous UK origination and its exceptionalism as something divorced from the UAE, despite the location of the campus where the degree is earned. Further to degree authenticity was participants' resolute trust in the shared value and fungibility of the degree as an investment in a recognized and trusted form of symbolic capital. This trust was evident in students' claims to their degree being internationally recognized, and by extension, the students themselves being conferred with all the associated qualities of their British degree. Many students affirmed their belief in the relative superiority of a British degree by claiming to know what qualifications employers and migration regimes hold in highest regards. Its value was understood and made meaningful in terms of what it delivered the degree holder in terms of employment opportunity or global mobility. These articulations of value thusly functioned as a series of faiths or truths, pointing to a powerful social imaginary shaping how students see and act upon different higher education forms, not only through their enrollment choices, but their maintenance of such understandings. These imaginations of the value of British higher education were mirrored in marketing, specifically their

potency in the UAE labor market and their universality as a globally recognized and therefore portable and convertible form of degree capital. Just as the connotations within marketing converged around dominant features of the collective British brand, so too did students' articulations concentrate on these shared aspects of the brand over those of their individual institutions.

This study concludes that the same phenomena are reflected in the relationship between representation and imagination of British higher education. As **chapters 6** and **7** argued, Britain and Britishness operate as metaphors or substitutes for a series of qualities constituting how UK higher education is seen, consumed, signified, and translocated globally. These metaphors are mobilized in marketing and in the ways students and staff articulate value, both of which draw selectively on associations of British ideas, values, institutions, images and histories which make its higher education knowable in particular ways. The social imaginary is thusly invoked and sustained through both specific enunciations and meaning-laden codifications of what constitutes a 'British' degree, university, or its higher education brand.

These arguments, however, critically draw into question the breadth and depth of the social imaginary of British higher education across the UAE educational landscape. In theorizing the imaginary beyond the actors and relationships examined in this study, the findings would suggest that to be upheld, imaginaries (of any specific educational form) require mass, diffused participation, not just of students and IBCs, but graduates, parents, employers and even policymakers. Students firmly held that employers shared their views on the superiority of the British degree in the UAE labor market, although they articulated its value on grounds effectively detached from the learning outcomes of their degree. If employers perceive its value similarly (that is, as grounded in external metrics and recognition schemes), the imaginary is reduced to tacitly shared understandings of degree hierarchies within a credentialing regime that sells opportunity and upward/outward mobility by making individuals 'legible' to evaluative

audiences (like employers or foreign governments). This reasoning extends to national policymakers, who, in creating onshore international education opportunities, see strategic value in credentialing populations with universally legible degree qualifications for the UAE's deeply internationalized labor market. The implication would be that everyone is invested in maintaining the imaginary, even if the educational *substance* of the degree's value is not shared or necessarily well understood. The occasionally unavoidable cynicism in student participants' commentary gives this view appeal, although it problematically may require an element of prescience on the part of everyone involved. From a choice perspective as well, it suggests students and employers are all operating on a rational logic of maximizing degree outcomes and understand and share the value to be gained in these choice-making practices, when this is evidently not always the case.

The evidence presented in this study is equally supportive of an alternative to a strictly instrumentalist educational imaginary. Despite students articulating value in material terms and at times critically drawing question to the broader phenomenon they were part of, the metaphor of Britain and Britishness still carries affective qualities that resonate with students' aspirations and translate into material desires. As the analysis in **chapter 7.3** argued, the metaphor speaks to a number of diffuse properties of Britishness – a moral code of conduct, a professional ethos, a global or cosmopolitan state of belonging, all operating in contradistinction with 'local' states of being – which are variously enacted through participation in the imaginary. The metaphorical properties are core to the mythical texture of Britishness which gives its name value and meaning, while its material promises, although not necessarily fictive, are still imagined in a projective sense. This is perhaps where imaginations of British higher education diverge from the appeal of other international brands. While the other Western Anglophone branch campuses may offer instrumental advantages comparable to those of the British IBCs, it is the cultural cachet of Britain and the symbolic significance of the historical British university which hold a greater discursive resonance with global audiences and add an affective layer to the

choice, providing the student-consumer a safe, knowable form of escapism beyond the instrumentalities of the degree as a credential. In this regard, participation in the fantasy of the British university need not be done unconsciously (there is no reason to assume anyone is being 'duped' by marketing for the social imagination to operate as a sense-making matrix); the imaginary in this sense simply serves to structure meaning, student identity and experience beyond the instrumental. However problematic or undeserved it may be, that too is where degree value lies from a social constructionist perspective.

## **8.2 Contributions to the Literature**

This study has produced a number of theoretical, empirical and methodological contributions to scholarly knowledge on the topics it covered. In its examination of a spatially and conceptually expansive phenomenon, it engaged with a range of related fields of research, including the literature on student choice-making, international student mobility, marketing and branding in higher education, and international and transnational higher education. By engaging with these literatures through a post-structural analytic informed by the twin concepts of the social imagination and regimes of value (Appadurai, 1986, 1994, 1996; Rizvi, 2006), it broke new ground by conceptually framing the problem of international student perception and choice-making as one which must be understood in relation to context, representation, and other value-forming practices which materially shape and discursively govern student sense-making. This lens enabled an approach which examined the phenomenon holistically as an ensemble of meanings, desires and agencies, rather than isolated 'factors' influencing choices as found in managerial literature drawing on push-pull frameworks (Li & Bray, 2007; Maringe, 2006; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002, 2012; Shanka et al., 2005; Wilkins et al., 2011). The holistic approach was further enhanced by its adoption of a comparative case study design (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017), which conducts its examination of the phenomena across three axes: horizontal (between institutions), vertical (from UK campus strategy to UAE student), and transversal (tracing the development of UK IBCs historically). The concepts of social imagination and regimes of value are situated in these axes,



particularly the vertical and transversal, where ideas, practices, and institutions diffuse and create new meanings and values over time and across geographic space. These diffusions of meaning from the UK educational export industry at one end of the vertical axis to the student at a UK IBC in the UAE at the other end was captured in the conceptual framework devised at the end of **chapter 2**. Putting the conceptual framework in conversation with the findings, this section discusses the contributions of this study to each of the bodies of literature informing it.

Within the debates on international student choice-making and mobility, this study made an original contribution by being the first to approach the topic of 'choice' using a post-structural lens, and social imaginations as a conceptual heuristic for understanding how students make sense and inform choices. The findings that this approach produced challenge dominant framings of the international student as a calculating consumer and choice as a highly agentic, individualized process shaped through a universally knowable rationality (Baldwin & James, 2000; Chen & Zimitat, 2006; Guilbault, 2016; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Wilkins, 2013b; Wilkins et al., 2011). Furthermore, rather than examining choices themselves or the processes of choice-making (Maringe & Carter, 2007; Shanka et al., 2005), it examines the norms, values and affect which underpin choice. The study does so by theorizing sense-making in relation to the global flows of ideas that agential actors are situated within and the discursive work that regimes of value inscribe. The use of interpretivist approaches to examine student imaginations and marketing representations in tandem contribute empirically to two disparate domains. The study found that sensemaking and value production is layered, and that choices and desires are collectively shaped by practical concerns over costs, distance, and ease of study (corresponding with Maringe, 2006; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Soutar & Turner, 2002; Wilkins et al., 2011); an instrumental need to accumulate flexible cultural capital, transnational identity capital, and social advantage (Brooks & Waters, 2011; Fong, 2011; T. Kim, 2010; Ong, 1999); and deeper, meaningful validation as a cosmopolitan recognized and reflected in the expressions of a British degree (corresponding to Collins et al's (2014) conceptualization of desire

within mobility). These findings illuminate the layered meanings behind singular university choices, which were enabled by an ideographic and interpretive approach. This examination of how students make sense of international brands and apply meanings to their lives through their choices offers a richer way of understanding student choice-making. By understanding choices as outcomes produced by social imaginations which collectively inform what is desirable and thinkable, and by value regimes which inform how brands are to be desired or seen, it makes both a theoretical and empirical contribution to the literatures on these topics.

The transnational focus of this study also makes for an important theoretical contribution to mobility debates, as the relationship between mobility and choice within the context of transnational provision is widely under-researched. In contrast to recent studies adapting and applying the push-pull framework to choice-making in transnational contexts (Wilkins, 2013b; Wilkins et al., 2011; Wilkins & Huisman, 2015), this study framed the problem rather through an analytic of possibility (accounting for material or structural constraints to mobility) and desire (how value is constructed through social technologies and imaginaries of international higher education) (Collins et al., 2014; Madge et al., 2014; J. Matthews & Sidhu, 2005; Raghuram, 2013; Rizvi, 2011). In the context of the UAE, these jointly operate to structure and govern the educational opportunities and choices of a strongly expatriate population for whom IBCs mostly cater to. The study makes an empirical contribution by examining how choices in transnational markets may be widely circumscribed by the various limitations informing immobility (Brooks & Waters, 2011; Findlay, 2011; Rensimer, 2016; Verbik & Lasanowski, 2007), as well as the contingent ways in which students perceive international degree providers as fulfilling strategic aspirations or imagined futures and how these students enact and make sense of choices.

With regards to the literature on marketing and branding in higher education, this study illustrated how national higher education brands are transposed across geographies through the mobilization of

representations, practices, and other social technologies which govern consumer imaginations. Building on post-structural and postcolonial analyses of the branding and marketing practices of the educational export industry which draws students to the UK (Beech, 2014; Madge et al., 2009; Sidhu, 2002, 2006), this study examined how such practices are enacted in transnational spaces where they compete alongside other international higher education brands to engender brand affiliations and distinguish themselves from competitors. The transnational component also adds an empirical dimension to recent scholarship on the covenants of the UK national higher education brand (Lomer et al., 2016) by identifying how various symbolic and economic advantages of a UK degree are signified in the marketing of offshore institutions. Similar to that study's findings of a recursive relationship between the UK nation brand (culture and heritage), higher education brand (quality, excellence, employability, etc.) and graduates (endowed with various capitals), the findings in this study illustrated how the UK and its IBCs were encoded in particular representations and signified particular qualities of the brand relevant to UAE students such as their professional and global identities, which students could subsequently embody through the degree. It also demonstrated how lesser-known UK universities extend their legitimacy and thus the value of their offering by closely affiliating with the national higher education brand in their own marketing.

The examination of IBC marketing practices further adds to the empirical base of critical research on representation in higher education marketing by looking at how images and statements signify the qualities of IBCs through repetitive denotations and meaning-laden connotations. Stock depictions of bodies and places in marketing images were consistent with studies on university advertising finding a conformity to gendered and racialized visual templates (Blanco Ramírez, 2016; Estera & Shahjahan, 2018; Papadimitriou & Blanco Ramírez, 2015); the transnational framing, however, adds an analytical layer in which particular bodies (which are mobilized to represent institutional diversity or expertise) and places (which are mobilized to represent traditions or prestige) also inform an imaginative

geography of the UK as a distal place of high-quality and internationally renowned academic institutions, which by proxy, speak to the quality and legitimacy of its IBCs. Knowledge of other performative and mimetic practices in educational marketing such as popular phraseologies and superlatives (Aula & Tienari, 2011; Ng, 2014; Wæraas & Solbakk, 2009) or the use of rankings and accreditations (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Jones-Devitt & Samiei, 2011) is also enhanced by examination of these practices in the transnational context, illuminating how universities reimagine or strategically recreate themselves in offshore markets. The visual content analysis of Facebook and Instagram in higher education research constitutes an empirical contribution, as no prior studies using these sources as visual data could be found in the literature.

The tripartite analytical approach used in **chapter 6** is also an innovative methodological contribution to the analysis of representations in website content and social media. Using the techniques of content analysis, visual semiotic analysis, and interactional (critical discourse) analysis in tandem and in such order produced layered, complementary findings that were ultimately enhanced through each iteration and distillation in the analysis of both semiotic encodings and the constructive work of discourses. This analytical approach can be applied to all types of visual data, especially social media, through a coding frame which effectively captures the multimodal interplay between visual imagery and text (Bell, 2011; Hannam & Knox, 2005).

Finally, this study constitutes a major contribution to scholarship on international and TNHE research theoretically, empirically and methodologically. As has been argued throughout this dissertation, the IBC literature is overwhelmingly focused on campus models, institutional and national policy rationales, managerial challenges, and curricular issues, typically through a descriptive, wide-angle lens (Farrugia, 2012; Garrett et al., 2016; Hawawini, 2011; Khodr, 2011; Lane, 2010b; Lane & Kinser, 2011, 2013; Miller-Idriss & Hanauer, 2011). These studies attend to ahistorical market and institutional policy drivers

governing contemporary practices rather than the sense or meaning made by individual and collective actors constituting offshore campuses through their lived experiences. This study proffered an alternative framing of the global rise of TNHE, in particular British IBCs, as an historically contingent phenomenon which is enabled by both contemporary logics of neoliberal globalization and past logics of colonialism and empire (inspired by Sidhu, 2006) bringing together desiring students and commercial practices in the production of transnational education markets. Situating IBCs within this broader frame enabled a richer theorization of IBCs as complex expressions of asymmetric global flows.

The comparative (vertical) case study design and ensemble of qualitative methods are empirical contributions to a field critically lacking in these approaches (with notable exceptions, Clarke, 2015; Kane, 2011; Lim, 2009; Stuart, 2015; Vora, 2014), and thus lacking in understandings of how IBCs are variously embodied and contested. This study contributes particularly to the gap identified by Brooks and Waters, who in their chapter on UK TNHE found that,

Despite this interest [from the QAA on how UK institutions maintain academic standards and the quality of education within partnerships], very little is known about the *students* undertaking these degree courses - their backgrounds, motivations or experiences. (2011, p. 123)

The ideographic approach used here enabled the foregrounding of participants' voices to illuminate how IBC students articulate value in higher education and perceive particular forms of TNHE as superior, authentic, and therefore meaningful to their lives and aspirations. The vertical study design then aided the analytical linking of those articulations to the enactment of a particular form of IBC conforming to Hawawini's rigid 'missionary' model (2011, p. 25) to examine the phenomenon through both bottom-up and top-down approaches. This design also constitutes a novel methodological approach to the examination of IBCs, bringing together the two distinct yet interrelated inquiries of, on one hand, university marketing and representation, and on the other, student sense and choice-making. This

analytical strategy is theoretically and empirically generative and can easily be adapted to other contexts and institutions.

### **8.3 Implications for Policymaking**

As the previous sections argued, the findings from this study contribute to a critical, ideographic approach to theory; the findings are not, however, necessarily generalizable or applicable to other contexts, as the contextual specifics in the UAE play such a pivotal role in the findings and the phenomena themselves. While these findings predominantly address gaps in academic scholarship, they do hold immediate relevance to the governance of institutional, sectoral and regulatory practices examined here; therefore its findings may enable a limited prognosis on policies or practices in response to some of the specific issues identified in this study. They also lead to critical questions of ongoing practices, with implications for future TNHE developments.

The voluminous literature on IBCs frequently frames the tensions between IBCs' international identities and local relevance as a persistent issue (Altbach, 2010; Kinser & Lane, 2014; Lane, 2011a; Owens & Lane, 2014). As this study illustrated, UK IBCs in the UAE foreground particular features desired by expatriate and international student audiences but widely maintain international and global identifications in their marketing. The combination of their particular organizational models as 'global' universities and the free-zone commercial modality devised by the UAE leaves little to no scope for these IBCs to ever 'localize' by way of breaking away from their parent university, becoming an Emirati institution, or hybridizing with Emirati universities through partnerships (as IBCs elsewhere have, historically and contemporarily (Healey, 2014; Lane & Kinser, 2014)). But so long as these IBCs are marketing themselves to overseas audiences as authentically British institutions, it is essential that the representations used to communicate their institution are accurate and mindful of their potential to mislead audiences. Effectively, the marketing practices of IBCs should be locally representative and

relevant, and this is achievable through external and self-regulation without disrupting the brand harmony between the branch and home campuses.

One problem area in IBC marketing is in the textual signification of university qualities and accolades, as these attributions are often location-specific and speak solely for the home campus. While many advertisements examined in this study used superlatives which have no grounding in external metrics (e.g. UNE's "state of the art campus" or ASU's "top UK degree"), some also apply specific measures of student experience, academic quality, or research caliber of the home campus to speak to the qualities of the branch campus. Where this is done, statements are usually qualified with a reference to the UK (e.g. ASU's event banner claiming to be "ranked among the top 15 universities in the UK"); other times they are deployed with no contextualization (e.g. the UK university league table illustrated in **figure 6.3**). In either case, the logic of quality and value transferring from one location to the other persists (evidenced in student participants' citation of specific accolades, often incorrectly). The obvious problem with these practices is that they apply exclusively to the home campuses based on assessments conducted exclusively at the home campuses. To date, UK IBCs do not participate in the National Student Survey (NSS), which is the de facto lead assessment of the undergraduate student experience, or the Research Excellence Framework (REF), the national exercise for assessing the quality of research for the purpose of funding allocation and benchmarking (D. Matthews, 2014; Mellors-Bourne, Jones, & Woodfield, 2015). Both of these metrics consequently inform university positions in UK league tables and global rankings. The application of rankings to a branch campus is therefore highly misleading, and at best a proxy indicator for the prestige value of the university's degree in the international labor market. A better practice might be the citation of awards recognizing merits of the branch campuses specifically, such as the Forbes Middle East Higher Education Awards, a new award scheme which assesses institutions across a series of indicators based on input from local actors and businesses.

Visual representations in IBC marketing also constitute problematic practices where they draw on stock images, particularly of unrepresentative bodies or remote places, to signify associations with diversity, expertise, heritage, or excellence. Their ubiquity in marketing, particularly social media, not only builds false impressions but also comes at the expense of opportunities for actual images which more accurately represent the campuses, their students and staff. Despite students articulating an awareness of unrepresentative images in their own campus' marketing, there were still numerous comments expressing surprise or disappointment in the ethnic makeup of their student peers or lecturers, citing their expectations of a more 'British' campus. This is inherently problematic, not simply for the fact that students are being misled, but for the racialized discourses that marketing images fail to challenge, or worse, perpetuate. If British IBCs employ primarily early career academics from the region and recruit students overwhelmingly from South Asian expatriate communities, they should in equal measure display such in their marketing. Likewise, the use of stock images of generic university spaces should be avoided where actual, accurate representations are easily achievable and increase transparency.

Where ethical self-regulation is not adhered to, the host country licensing authorities and UK regulatory agencies (QAA) should closely monitor and enforce full transparency and compliance. Authorities governing the Dubai and RAK free zones regulate IBC practices to different degrees, and both appear to have had an impact on focal institutions' marketing practices since the collection of visual data. Further to the regulation of representations, the Dubai KHDA in particular has implemented a robust data access scheme grounding its IBCs in indicators measured locally for relevance to IBC students and degree holders. This appears to be a model, which if accurate and readily accessible to prospective students, could further reduce misperceptions of graduates' potential employability. In providing key comparative institutional figures, these bodies should consider partitioning data by student type (expatriate or international) to further enhance fair recruitment practices.



On the wider issue of UK TNHE and the strategic value of IBCs to the UK, the critiques that this study advances do not lend themselves to easily practicable policy prescriptions, and any attempt at proffering normative statements on what higher education should be for or should do would disregard the reality of the entrenched market models in both the UK and the UAE and the close alignment in interests between them. Notwithstanding the deeper symbolic issues raised by the commercial exportation of nation-branded educational institutions, let alone the cosmetic changes to marketing practices addressed above, universities operating IBCs need to contend with a critical question within each of their practices and objectives: do IBCs constitute in *equal* measure a part of the collective UK higher education landscape, or do they constitute something outside, in spaces of exception? In close cooperation with the QAA, universities with transnational components should work to ensure that offshore students have equally powerful avenues for speaking back to the UK higher education sector, that staff have comparable opportunities to conduct funded research, and that marketing is governed with the same exacting scrutiny as it is inside the UK. Extending the existing tools for disciplining these domains – the National Student Survey, the Research Excellence Framework, and the Competition and Markets Authority, respectively – to the transnational context might achieve these ends; they are, however, neoliberal technologies designed to *instill* competition between universities and cultivate market subjects, not simply regulate them. Nevertheless, exercises like the NSS and REF produce accolades for UK universities which are inappropriately applied to their offshore campuses. It follows therefore, that if UK higher education is to be exported, marketed and consumed in such an unabashedly neoliberal fashion, perhaps so too should it be attended by its disciplinary technologies. This might encourage universities to shift the gravitational center of their institutional identities and strategic focus to a more equitable stance between their campuses. However, IBCs can do better than these regulatory solutions and are well positioned to lead the discussion on adaptive approaches which account for particular dynamics within transnational contexts.

#### 8.4 Scope for Future Research

In lieu of this study's cautious approach to the generalizability of its findings or their application to policy, it does point to a potentially broad agenda for future research on TNHE within the methodological approaches advanced here. The full scope of British TNHE is vast and under-researched, and this study, despite its findings speaking to the national higher education brand, drew upon only three UK universities in one offshore location. As **chapter 4** observed, there are a further 31 UK IBCs in 17 countries (excluding UAE) as of 2016, to all of which could be applied the same critical questions of representation and imaginations, and looking at how the UK brand extends and reperforms itself in different sociopolitical spaces. There is enormous potential in this to conduct comparative work between different countries hosting UK IBCs or across UK universities' sites of activity (e.g. GLU's campuses in Mauritius and Malta, or ASU's campus in Malaysia). A comparative lens might enable a more general theory on the social interface between performances of the UK brand and interpretations thereof by offshore students across varying geographies, notwithstanding their significant contextual differences.

An alternative research agenda may productively expand its focus on the UAE context. While UK TNHE was the phenomena that this study examined, its bespoke qualitative methodology and post-structural analytical approach bringing together the production of meaning in marketing representations and the interpretive sensemaking of student audiences could be applied with equally empirically fruitful results to other dominant TNHE brands with a visible presence in the UAE. The Australian, Indian and USA IBCs all have an expanding presence and strengthening toehold in the UAE TNHE market; although their operational presence and marketing activities differ from the practices observed here on UK IBCs, their inclusion in further research would address the same focal concerns of how higher education brands are translocated and repurposed in offshore locations, and how students form justificatory logics, affect and meaning around their relationships to them. Another point of contrast for the UAE context is a

comparison with the foreign-styled local universities (e.g. American University of Dubai, British University in Dubai), as these institutions adopt foreign university models, organizational cultures, identities, and occasionally foreign aesthetics. They do so, however, without parent universities and thus without claims to being identical to another campus with the same name. Such a comparison would tease out pivotal points of symbolic value identified in this study around foreign-issued degrees (in contrast to foreign-styled degrees), or how institutions communicate their brand covenants without the discursive power of monolithic national brands or historical pedigrees.

Further research in the UAE is also merited on the grounds that the higher education landscape in that country is rapidly changing, with a slowdown in the overall growth of IBCs. While it is still a major hub for TNHE and only second to China in overall IBC count, a combination of market saturation, a change in strategic policymaking, and regional geopolitical instability may be dampening new growth (Garrett et al., 2016). The largest seismic change in the IBC market, however, has been the entry of the University of Birmingham in 2018 as an undergraduate-serving UK university with an ambitious agenda to compete with UK and non-UK institutions in the same market. Like many fledgling IBCs in the UAE, its inaugural enrollments have been modest and its campus is temporarily housed in generic academic suites in Dubai International Academic City while it awaits construction of a standalone built-for-purpose campus. In contrast to the other UK IBCs, however, it stands out as a high-ranking Russell Group university with a firm pedigree as a major UK university and a strong reputation for its teaching and research output. A follow-up to this study would benefit from Birmingham's presence in the UAE to strengthen or challenge the findings of this study, particularly with regards to performance of the UK higher education brand and its marketing practices. Does it perform its identity through similar use of metaphors, or does it even need to draw on a collective brand given its weighty institutional profile? A similar investigation into its strategic vision would aid an understanding of whether its leadership perceived the university as direct

competition for the other UK universities, or whether they imagined serving a niche market particularly for high achieving students.

Returning to UK TNHE, a longitudinal examination of changes in global demand for British higher education is greatly needed for the policy ‘elephant in the room’: the result of the 2016 European Union membership referendum. Despite the political and economic ruptures resulting from the UK Government’s decision to initiate the withdraw from the European Union, UK universities find themselves in a curiously conflicted state of being. On one hand, the sector has spoken with one voice that British universities will suffer a decline in European student enrollments, academic staff circulations, and research funding and partnerships (Marginson, Van Der Wende, & Wright, 2018; Universities UK, 2018). At the same time, the realignment in the UK’s core trading partners away from the EU and towards the US and Commonwealth of Nations presents universities with vast potential for expanding its reach in international markets<sup>65</sup> (UK Trade Policy Observatory, 2017). This reorientation dovetails with the UK Government’s 2019 International Education Strategy setting an international student recruitment target at 600,000 by 2030 (currently 460,000) and increasing educational exports to £35 billion per year (currently £20 billion). The strategy, which directly responds to the deleterious effects of Brexit on UK universities, proposes enhanced targeting of four “high-value” regions – China, MENA, Latin America, and Southeast Asia – for increasing its educational exports (HM Government, 2019, p. 19). With the exception of Latin America, these regions are uncoincidentally the existing markets for UK TNHE. These policy prescriptions point to fascinating avenues for further research, particularly with regards to the changing image and performance of the UK national higher education brand. In the same manner as British-branded luxury goods reporting an uptick in global demand post-

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<sup>65</sup> According to 2019 QS International Student Survey data (ICEF Monitor, 2019), the Brexit realignment is already showing in international student numbers. With a sharp decline in EU student interest in studying in the UK following the referendum (attributable primarily to the increase in tuition fees), the data also showed an uptick in post-referendum interest from the MENA region and Commonwealth countries.

referendum (Bacon, 2017), UK TNHE will inevitably respond to opportunity with aggressive expansion in its post-European target markets. But how will it represent itself in doing so? Equally important, how will the student-consumer imaginary of the UK change in these markets as a result? The 2019 International Education Strategy will guide future growth regardless of the outcome of the ongoing Brexit process, but as Stern (2019) points out, its relationship to international higher education is important insofar as it has foregrounded the role of international students and educational exports in current political and policy discourse, which is likely to intensify claims to their instrumental role in sustaining the British higher education sector.

In keeping with the critical responsibility of scholarship, this research begs urgent questions of the broader role of UK higher education. Responding to global competition and material need to finance their growth ambitions, the universities in this study have so dramatically expanded their missions and their constituencies, making them unrecognizable as the provincial, modestly funded, locally grounded institutions they were only three decades prior. Their IBCs are a reflection of these changes, but only comprise one component of their broader transformatory strategies. The future of these IBCs in their current formations is unclear, as their commercial function hinges so tightly on market dynamics of competition and consumer demand in an ever-changing economic and policy environment. What is clear in the TNHE era is the flexibility and speed of capital in responding to new opportunities in other global locations, aided by the discursive reimagining of higher education as a market solution to variously identified educational problems. The IBC 'gold rush' may likely wind down, but the broader phenomena that they reflect, principally among them the rise of monolithic educational export industries and the tethering of higher education to national economic aims, are only just beginning to be fully recognized and their effects understood. It is therefore ever more critical for higher education scholars and practitioners to interrogate the purpose – and practices – of TNHE.

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## Appendix A: Table of Student Participants

Student participant	Pseudonym	Institution	Student type	Gender	Nationality	Date Interviewed
1	Musa	GLU	International	Male	Nigeria	March 21, 2015
2	Haneen	UNE	Expatriate	Female	Pakistan	April 24, 2015
3	Victoria	UNE	International	Female	Nigeria	April 24, 2015
4	Fawziah	UNE	Expatriate	Female	Pakistan	April 28, 2015
5	Hamza	UNE	Expatriate	Male	Pakistan	April 28, 2015
6	Ragav	ASU	Expatriate	Male	India	April 29, 2015
7	Maya	GLU	International	Female	Zimbabwe	April 29, 2015
8	Abdulrahman	UNE	Expatriate	Male	Pakistan	May 9, 2015
9	Harjit	UNE	Expatriate	Male	India	May 9, 2015
10	Faisal	UNE	Expatriate	Male	Afghanistan	May 9, 2015
11	Hamad	ASU	Expatriate	Male	India	May 10, 2015
12	Chandresh	ASU	Expatriate	Male	India	May 10, 2015
13	Akram	ASU	Expatriate	Male	Pakistan	June 3, 2015
14	Milton	GLU	International	Male	Zambian	June 3, 2015
15	Alice	GLU	International	Female	Zambian	June 3, 2015
16	Shruti	GLU	Expatriate	Female	India	May 1, 2016
17	Talia	GLU	Expatriate	Female	India	May 1, 2016
18	Afzal	UNE	Expatriate	Male	India	May 3, 2016
19	Shazia	UNE	Expatriate	Female	Sudan	May 3, 2016
20	Bini	UNE	Expatriate	Female	India	May 3, 2016
21	Mark	UNE	International	Male	Nigeria	May 3, 2016
22	Alpana	GLU	Expatriate	Female	India	May 4, 2016
23	Nazma	GLU	Expatriate	Female	India	May 4, 2016
24	Rashid	GLU	International	Male	Nigeria	May 4, 2016
25	Jamil	GLU	International	Male	Saudi Arabia	May 4, 2016
26	Saad	GLU	International	Male	Portugal	May 4, 2016
27	Vanya	GLU	Expatriate	Female	India	May 8, 2016

28	Jaganath	GLU	Expatriate	Male	India	May 8, 2016
29	Abdulaziz	GLU	International	Male	Saudi Arabia	May 8, 2016
30	Theo	ASU	Expatriate	Male	Zimbabwe	May 8, 2016
31	Clarice	GLU	International	Female	Pakistan	May 10, 2016
32	Dunya	ASU	Expatriate	Female	Iran	May 11, 2016
33	Devika	ASU	Expatriate	Female	Pakistan	May 11, 2016
34	Sara	ASU	Expatriate	Female	India	May 11, 2016
35	Zaina	ASU	Expatriate	Female	Egypt	May 11, 2016
36	Marwan	ASU	International	Male	Nigeria	May 11, 2016
37	Mukhtiar	UNE	Expatriate	Male	Pakistan	May 12, 2016
38	Afsana	UNE	Expatriate	Female	Bangladesh	May 12, 2016
39	Shawkat	UNE	Expatriate	Male	Bangladesh	May 12, 2016
40	Zargul	UNE	Expatriate	Female	Pakistan	May 12, 2016
41	Munawar	UNE	Expatriate	Male	Pakistan	May 12, 2016
42	Dave	ASU	Expatriate	Male	India	May 13, 2016
43	Rudy	ASU	Expatriate	Male	Sri Lanka	May 13, 2016
44	Cody	ASU	International	Male	Kenya	May 13, 2016
45	Stephanie	ASU	International	Female	Hungary	May 13, 2016
46	Bashir	ASU	International	Male	Ethiopia	May 13, 2016
47	Wagaye	ASU	International	Female	Ethiopia	May 13, 2016
48	Giovanni	GLU	Expatriate	Male	Italy	May 14, 2016
49	Martina	GLU	Expatriate	Female	Croatia	May 14, 2016
50	Maymoonah	GLU	Expatriate	Female	India	May 14, 2016
51	Nina	ASU	Expatriate	Female	USA / Jordan	May 16, 2016
52	Siddiqah	GLU	Expatriate	Female	India	May 22, 2016

## Appendix B: Table of Staff Participants

Participant	Pseudonym	Institution	Role	Location	Date
53	Marketer 1	ASU	Marketing & Recruitment	Dubai	March 18, 2015
54	Director 1	ASU	Senior leadership	Dubai	March 24, 2015
55	Lecturer 1	ASU	Faculty	Dubai	April 23, 2015
56	Lecturer 2	ASU	Faculty	Dubai	April 29, 2015
57	Director 2	ASU	Senior leadership	Dubai	May 4, 2015
58	Marketer 2	ASU	Marketing & Recruitment	Dubai	May 22, 2016
59	Marketer 3	ASU	Marketing & Recruitment	UK	May 3, 2017
60	Director 3	ASU	Senior leadership	UK	May 5, 2017
61	Lecturer 1	GLU	Faculty	Dubai	June 1, 2015
62	Director 1	GLU	Senior leadership	Dubai	June 1, 2015
63	Lecturer 2	GLU	Faculty	Dubai	May 16, 2016
64	Marketer 1	GLU	Marketing & Recruitment	UK	April 6, 2017
65	Director 2	GLU	Senior leadership	UK	May 2, 2017
66	Manager 1	UNE	Management	Ras Al Khaimah	November 10, 2014
67	Lecturer 1	UNE	Faculty	Ras Al Khaimah	April 24, 2015
68	Lecturer 2	UNE	Faculty	Ras Al Khaimah	April 28, 2015
69	Manager 2	UNE	Management	Ras Al Khaimah	April 28, 2015
70	Lecturer 3	UNE	Faculty	Ras Al Khaimah	May 1, 2015
71	Manager 3	UNE	Management	Ras Al Khaimah	May 1, 2015
72	Director 1	UNE	Senior leadership	UK	January 18, 2017
73	Director 2	UNE	Senior leadership	UK	May 24, 2017
74	Marketer 1	UNE	Marketing & Recruitment	UK	June 19, 2017
75	Marketer 2	UNE	Marketing & Recruitment	UK	August 9, 2017
76	Director 1	KHDA	Senior leadership	Dubai	April 30, 2015
77	Director 2	KHDA	Senior leadership	Dubai	June 7, 2015
78	Manager	KHDA	Management	Dubai	June 7, 2015
79	Manager	British Council	Management	Dubai	May 28, 2015
80	Manager	UK Trade & Investment	Management	Dubai	June 22, 2015