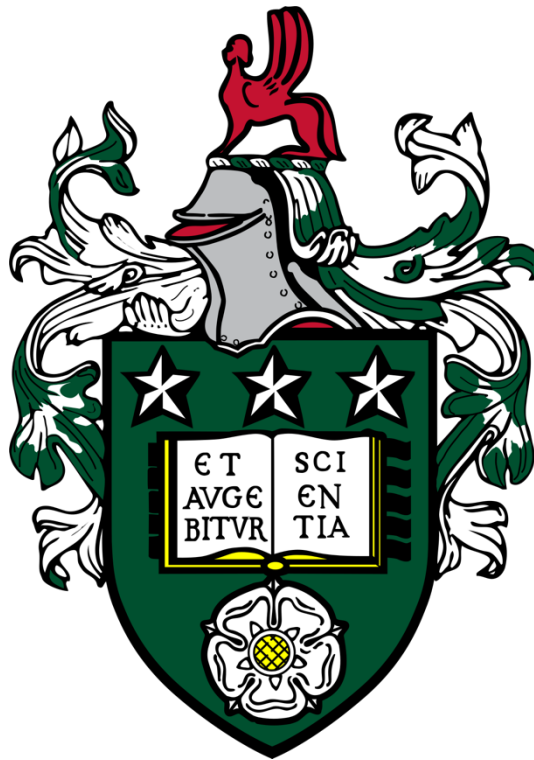# Othered from the Offset: Decolonial Narrative Analysis of Female Indian University Student Experiences in the North of England

Submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Declaration

I confirm that the work submitted is my own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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Dedicated to all my family, past, present and future

Acknowledgements

Abstract

Attending Western universities remains popular, with international students making up a fifth of UK university income. India is a top three country of origin for international students in the UK, with 126,535 Indian students studying in 2021-2022. This educational connection highlights the ongoing relationship between Britain and India post Indian independence. An important consideration is how the British Empire, and colonial legacies have informed Indian international student experiences in UK universities. Despite turbulent political and cultural times, universities remain sites of belonging, and due to increased political and historical awareness, international students' sense of belonging is an important consideration for UK higher education. I ground this project in the decolonial principles of having an ethos of power sharing and the challenging of colonial and Western positions of power; these have helped me to operationalise my decolonial orientation. This thesis follows the narratives of three Indian women, exploring their experiences as international students and their study-related and free time communities. Miguel Zavala's (2016) decolonial strategies of counter/storytelling, healing and reclaiming informed an in-depth qualitative approach.

Two data generation periods of reciprocal interviews were carried out during and after the Covid-19 pandemic. I interpreted, from the women's narratives, their in-betweenness. In-betweenness conceptually exists as experiencing a lack of belonging, leading to indecision. I contribute to the development of an additional decolonial strategy to help participants work through their in-betweenness which connects past colonial implications and present experiences to prepare for future self-decolonisation. The key messages illustrated conflicting feelings about being labelled as international students and the value of a strong national identity. This shaped the women's understanding and experiences of their study-related and free time communities. Recommendations include the acknowledgement of the colonial legacies within British universities and better collaboration between students, staff, and management to decolonise the international student experience.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

List of Abbreviations

HE	Higher Education
BHE	British Higher Education
BAME	Black and Minority Ethnic
GS	Global South
GN	Global North
NI	Narrative Inquiry
SRC	Study Related Communities
FTC	Free time Communities
EP	Exploratory Practice

Tell me, what's your story?

1 Starting the Conversation

1.1 Overview of the Research Project

Higher education is an industry continually expanding through globalisation, attracting students from various parts of the world to study abroad (Sidhu et al, 2021). Through the nature of a globalised higher education the market is competitive; despite this, as found by a recent Universities UK survey (2022), Britain is considered one of the top destinations for international students. This research utilised a decolonial perspective to explore the experiences of three Indian women studying at a university in Northern England. It used narrative analysis to examine their connections to their communities in relation to study-related activities and free time.

Through colonialism, the British Empire had control over ninety-four countries including India (O'Neil, 2024). A connection can be made between India, Britain, and a globalised higher education. For example, Arora and Stirling (2023) highlight that the colonial, historical, and political connections between the UK and India have resulted in a long-standing British style education system in India. The British-influenced Indian education system is reflected with lessons taught in the English language, which has subsequently reduced language barriers for Indian students studying in the UK or English-speaking universities. Ultimately, reinforcing a Western hierarchy of education (Mohanty, 2006). This is illustrated by Indian students being the largest population to come to study in the UK in 2022/2023 (House of Commons Library, 2024) and India's growing influence in the global knowledge economy, driven by increased investment in STEM fields (King and Sondhi, 2019). As we work through this project, and in the chapter section Understanding the Landscape of Western Higher Education, the British Empire, student mobility, globalisation through labelling of students as international, and community in education will be explored.

The British Empire occupied land, approximately 48% of world countries (O'Neil, 2024), resulting in the domination of Other peoples. Putting the power of the British Empire into perspective, the British Empire's geographical occupation was of 13.71 million square miles, equal to 25% of the Earth's landmass (National Archives, 2021). India was a significant part of the British Empire, with the country being referred to as the *"jewel in the imperial crown"* by Benjamin Disraeli, Conservative Prime Minister.

Despite India being described as such, the British Empire had an adverse effect on India, having a central role in the shaping of India's political, cultural, and economic context.

Shain (2020) addressed the need to tackle the remaining hierarchies of power that enable racism and colonialism Western within higher education. For example, hierarchies that enable a concentrated power of authority reinforce colonialism. This is reiterated with Banton's (1969) classical understanding of racism, which remains relevant, is based on biological factors and skin colour that have been created to justify the exploitation of the land. Barker (1981) then introduced the term 'new racism', a covert racism avoiding direct racial terms and the continuing racial practices of the past. This 'new racism,' although coined in 1981, has become more dominant, acceptable, and embedded in the UK. This is through the desire to protect oneself from the 'invasion' of another's culture. Therefore, racists become those who do not accept or outwardly show the culture and lifestyle of the adopted nation (Barker, 1981). I have purposefully used classical definitions of racism by Barker (1981) and Banton (1969) to demonstrate the failure of change in British society in relation to the treatment of people who do not look or supposedly behave in a White 'British way.'

Barker's (1981) 'new racism,' can be linked to Dennison and Geddes (2019) review of the connections between racism, politics and culture through language. They highlight how racism has become more accessible through covert language, which raises cultural insecurities, promoting shifts to right populism by existing parties to win votes by Western governments. With this in mind, I ground this project in the decolonial principles of having an ethos of power sharing and the challenging of colonial and Western positions of power; these have helped me to operationalise my decolonial orientation (see section 4.5 for further detail).

Similar research on student experience has been conducted. For example, Bhopal's (2011) research explored female Indian students labelled international in the South of England through 32 in-depth interviews. A key finding in the study found that students, regardless of gender, who were engaged and actively participated in their university communities developed higher social capital and were able to leverage their British higher education (BHE) to negotiate their positions back home in India. The key

differences between this current research and Bhopal's (2011) study were the decolonial outlook this project carried throughout the research and analysis process. In addition, Bhopal's (2011) study was conducted in pre-covid society and within the South of England. This research took place in post-covid society and in a city in North England. It is necessary to continue the research on international student experiences because of the influence of colonialism on international education particularly for UK universities.

This thesis will shed new light on the experiences of Indian women studying abroad through reciprocal interviews and analysis of their narratives. By examining their life and educational journeys, we will gain insights into the effects of colonialism and Western hierarchies in higher education.

1.2 Research Aims and Questions

Through a decolonial narrative lens, this study explored three Indian women's experiences of being labelled as international students whilst studying in a city in the North of England. This research project is guided by the following questions:

1. What does it mean for Indian women at a university in the North of England to be labelled as international students?
2. How do the women understand and experience communities linked to study-related activities and free time?
3. What are the connections between the women's international student experiences and their study-related and free time communities whilst studying in England?

The research questions were purposefully broad to encourage a wide range of linking topics to help gather and develop the women's narratives. The first question was a leading departure point for this research project because it drew attention to the women's labelling as international students within a globalised university, calling into focus their experiences as international students.

The second research question aimed to explore the women's experiences of community linked to study-related activities and their free time. Study-related activities

refer to informal or formal activities such as lectures, seminars, workshops, tutorials, and supervision meetings; free time refers to experiences away from formal or informal learning. This question required engagement with broader historical and cultural lenses that would contextualise experiences of the participants, working toward creating a better experience for students coming to study abroad. The third question crucially bridged the first and second question together seeking to demonstrate any links between being labelled as international students and their experiences of communities linked to study-related activities and free time. This provided an opportunity to recognise patterns such as labelling, and the potential impact this may have on how students labelled as international engage with their communities whilst studying in England.

1.3 Why This Research Now?

It is important to first contextualise world issues and their related connections to this research project. For example, the 2024 UK racist riots (Olusoga, 2024), Trump's 'make America great again' (Smith and Pengelly, 2024), Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party fighting for Hindu nationalism (Subramanian, 2021) , Macron's controversial laws on the hijab (Oztig, Gurkan, and Aydin, 2021), Britain's culture war on 'woke' (Hinsliff, 2021), Israeli settler colonialism (Salamanca, Qato, Rabie, and Samour, 2012), Palestinian genocide (OHCHR, 2024), and the Windrush scandal (De Noronha, 2019) are a few examples of how these separate yet connected issues are linked by power that has been used to sow division within and between nations. These divisions resonate with Empires, imperialism, and superiority. The 2024 UK racist riots, Rhodes must fall, Black Lives Matter Movement, the Me-Too movement, and the murder of George Floyd, have been pivotal events in recent times that have fuelled discussions within communities around the world about our respective countries, politics, identity, and societies connection to racism and human rights. These discussions have been accelerated within the global health pandemic of Covid-19, which had altered the way in which societies operate, and humans interact. The running of day-to-day lives had been altered with working from the kitchen dining table, or a make-shift office becoming second nature. The day-to-day experiences had in both the workplace and universities have had to be adapted, leaving experiences extremely limited and individuals alone and vulnerable.

Bringing the focus back to this research project, Britain has a vast history due to its colonial past and endeavours through the British Empire. The relationship that will be explored in this project will be between Britain and India. Arguably, Britain and India's relationship remains complex, as illustrated by Miller (2020) in her assessment of India's post-colonial rebuilding of its nation, the British Empire has resulted in rogue trading laws, the dismantling of the Indian autocracy, the capitulation of the Indian economy and India's current nationalist state, as well as anti-immigration attitudes in Britain toward Black and Brown people.

Despite Britain's heavy involvement and influence in Indian culture and politics, people in public discourse (Southcomb and Hood, 2024) and academia (Sanghera, 2023) continue to debate Britain's entanglement with India. It similarly falls amongst other historical events, such as the Windrush scandal, that have remained absent in Britain's historical narrative (Bhambra, 2017). Hall (1997) explains these phenomena of ignored historical events or absence in history as selective amnesia, post-colonial amnesia, or a silence conspiracy that emphasises a British 'nation-centred grand narrative.' The notion of selective amnesia still remains today with many of the historical atrocities being ignored.

Hall's (1997) understanding of ignored historical events feeds into Britain's exuberant history of presenting superiority. Sanghera (2023), brings attention to the history of conservative leaders' speeches and their references to the British Empire's greatness that remains. In 2021 Priti Patel, former Conservative Home Security, 'reformed' the asylum system through a point scheme that rated asylum seekers based on skills and qualifications (Home Office, 2020). Her point scheme aggressively fuelled the 'good' and 'bad' narrative of the foreign Other, further emphasising an *us* and *them* rhetoric. With 'good' immigrants needing to contribute to society in a 'meaningful' way for them to be accepted as British, otherwise condemnable acts often being attributed to the 'other' that visually exists in our immigrant skin colour. Again, this is exacerbated with the now cancelled proposal of sending immigrants to Rwanda (Lynch, 2024), further demonstrating the power held within politics to control the narrative surrounding Others. Oliver Dowden, former British culture secretary, warned universities against re-evaluating UK history "*defend our culture and history from the noisy minority of*

activists constantly trying to do Britain down" (Walker, 2021) continues the narrative of 'selective amnesia' (Hall, 1997). These few examples demonstrate the lasting impact of the British Empire on others, which emphasises the work that remains to challenge the narrative around the British Empire.

The lack of acknowledgement of the controversy of the British Empire is further illustrated by the German term 'die Vergangenheitsbewältigung.' This term translates to 'confronting our past,' which acknowledges a country's history regardless of complexity and controversy. This term is discussed by Seiffert (2021) who explained that the term came into German vocabulary post-WWII to process and crucially confront the historical period of Nazi Germany within German society, culture, and literature. The existence of the German term is in stark contrast to acknowledgement of the British Empire in the English language. This is because, there is no relative term in the English language that recognises Britain's colonial past or how it has shaped politics and attitudes toward immigration, race, identity, and belonging. Therefore, it is necessary to reshape the colonial narrative as a series of interlocking events that did not end with the British Empire. Instead, the grandeur of the Empire was reborn under the tutelage of the Commonwealth, reaffirming the many power structures and ideologies of relevant knowledge that exist today creating colonial legacies. Further exposure to the controversies of the British Empire must be maintained through active discussion of the communities that already exist and continues to expand within the UK and higher education.

1.4 My British Indian Entanglement

Khawla Badwan (2021) notes the importance of recognising our research practices and how we engage in place and identity because these perceptions can be reproduced when engaging with our research. Better research can be constructed by critiquing our own narratives and research contexts, to understand how they contribute to discussions about place and identity. Therefore, this section explores my role as an Indian woman facilitating this project.

In combination with Badwan's (2021) understanding, I utilise Slembrouck's (2015) assessment of the role of the researcher in narrative analysis. They illustrate the

importance of the researcher recognising their multiple roles. My role as a researcher is not singular. I bring multiple roles to the research process, some of which I share with the women in this project. This includes being a woman, sharing Indian heritage, and being a student. My family history and the culture I was surrounded by locally in the Midlands have helped shape these roles. These roles will be shared as fragments of my narrative that will be weaved throughout the thesis. This is because narratives are often used to share knowledge and preserve native and indigenous ways (Datta, 2018; Zavala, 2016). Therefore, I begin by briefly explaining the heritage of my grandparents, my mother and how that has contributed to who I am as a person.

It is important to note here that when I was thinking about what I was going to write in this section, I remembered commentary by Tuck and Yang (2014), where often Western based research on minority peoples comes from places of hurt, or victimhood, with the sense of always being observed. However, although this research touches upon the hurt and pain of colonial legacy, this project sought to highlight the strength in our stories of being the Other, and the continuing development of our narratives to bring attention to the light that exists within our experiences.

I am the eldest of four children, and I am British Indian Punjabi. I am racialised as Indian. I consider myself as a diasporic Indian, I have Indian heritage through my grandparents and connectc to the culture and traditions that they have continually practiced. My grandparents are Indian Punjabi and come from a traditional Punjabi caste from the North of India. They came to the UK in 1958 as citizens of the (former) colonies. My grandparents settled in London, having six children, nineteen grandchildren, and three great grandchildren. My grandparents continue to practice their Punjabi heritage and culture.

I cannot imagine how alien it must have been to be in a new city with such new customs. The food, the clothing, the language, and the weather, are all different, contributing to the struggle to adapt to something new without leaving the old behind. Family get-togethers revolved around reminiscing about my mother's and her siblings' childhoods, talking about how they were raised and the confrontations they faced between British and Punjabi culture. This struggle in identity between being British and Indian Punjabi was ever-present in our family. This was not helped by the racism they

endured, fiercely through the 80s and 90s in North London and again more viscerally in 2024.

The confrontation between being British and Indian Punjabi extended to our discussions on formal education. British universities, according to the Times Higher Education World University Rankings for 2025, remain top alongside US institutions. These rankings suggest a level of superiority, linking them back to the legacy of the British Empire (Swartz, 2023). However, for my grandparents, they were wary of how through formal British education the history of their Punjabi heritage could be distorted. Their feelings were reflected in Gupta's (1997) qualitative study that remains relevant today with the current immigration and mass migration of people globally, which interviewed four Indian women in New York, to which I shared similar experiences. The women often found themselves negotiating their identity between two different and often contrasting cultures causing confusion and tension.

I was raised in a city in the Midlands, a city I experienced as culturally diverse. My compulsory education came from state schools within the city. My primary and secondary schools were culturally diverse, they were places we would learn openly about the different faiths, cultures, and traditions that the people in the class celebrated. This acknowledgement helped me to celebrate my British and Punjabi identity. However, despite being able to manage these identities, there was a fear of forgetting my Indian Punjabi heritage. Perhaps, a deep trauma from the colonisation of India?

The continuity of racism and anti-immigration toward Black and Brown immigrants in Britain has dominated British politics and media for the last decade and a half, I have found a strength in my connection to my heritage and what I outwardly present as a person of colour.

I continued into higher education; this was a family decision that had to be discussed with my grandparents. My decision to continue to study was met with initial concern, but my extended family understood it was an opportunity to improve my social/capital opportunities. However, concern for personal safety and fear of cultural loss naturally did not wane through my time studying. Upon reflection, this is something I have grown

to respect and understand with the deep-rooted racism and societal pressure to change your fundamental way of *being* to appease the majority.

I felt similar levels of ethnic diversity and Indian/South Asian culture whilst remaining in my home city for my first degree; this felt different when I moved further North to study. The difference between growing up in Central Midlands and moving more North came with unexpected consequences. I became more aware of my *Indianness* and how British I would appear. Was my consciousness of my identity similar to those of the women in this research? Did they face similar self-reflection on who they were when they moved to England? Questions I answer in section 7.2.

Despite my childhood and early adolescence being surrounded by different cultures, the British Empire and its political and cultural relations with its former colonised countries were topics I was not introduced to. I studied A-level history and learnt further about the triumphs of Britain during the World Wars, with no mention of the 3 million soldiers from the Commonwealth, including the 1.5 million Indian soldiers that aided Britain in its victory (National Army Museum, 2024). I began to educate myself on the British Empire, and the Eurocentrism imposed on India, the exploitation of trade, the failings of moral and political duties, the second-class citizenship enacted on Indians in India during this period, and the generational trauma created. This process is complex and will continue to be difficult as I learn, un-learn, and re-learn further about the effects of colonisation. Finding sources that I was able to relate to and understand has been difficult; Sanghera's Empireland (2023) was of great help in giving me foundational knowledge of the effects of the British Empire on India, and the Brown History social media account provided me with a variety of knowledge and resources that have furthered my understanding.

I bring to this research the personal knowledge and experience of being a woman and student of colour, where many barriers exist to pursuing higher education such as finance, family commitments, access etc. By including my personal background throughout my thesis, it has enabled me to be both an insider and an outsider to the topics we were exploring. It afforded a strengthened position to interpret the present social, historical, and personal dynamics. I overcame cultural and social challenges by sharing similar experiences which encouraged the women in this project to feel

more at ease when sharing personal information and experiences. Whilst I share being a woman, a student, and an Indian with the women in this project, I was born and raised in England, which has created different cultural experiences to being an Indian. Therefore, explaining the differences of our cultural experiences of being Indian enabled an opportunity for self-reflection and an incisive level of criticality of the lived experiences shared through the narratives, which have helped encourage and support the women's positions as authors and experts of their narratives.

Therefore, it was necessary for me, as a British Indian woman, to have these discussions with other Indian women to better understand our experiences of living and learning in the North of England. This research project provides an opportunity to voice narratives and journeys here to the UK, exploring the legacy of the British Empire within the UK HE and its connections to colonisation.

1.5 Feeling Restricted with My Academic Writing

Tuhiwai Smith (2012) notes, research itself with established traditional methodologies, are colonising and exclusionary. This point of view is shared by Dawson (2020) who comments on knowledge production, and methodological tools being largely developed in the West, Europe, and North America. This means that coloniality of knowledge is reproduced in established methods, disciplines, and attitudes that shape critique (Maldonado-Torres, 2020). This highlights how power is maintained, and change becomes minimal or non-effective.

I recognise my positioning as a British Indian from a Western university exploring Indian women's experiences of higher education. Therefore, with this understanding, I recognise the power that I have as a researcher, it is undeniable that there is a privilege to be able to carry out studies that explore the researcher's topic of interest and intrigue. Canella and Lincoln (2015) explain decolonisation in educational research to be a pathway to deconstruct power relations even if we are engaging in projects that seek to deconstruct that, we as researchers can unintentionally create and recreate power dynamics that we want to make equitable. Therefore, we as decolonial writers writing within colonial legacies in the Global North have to challenge the theories that dominate our fields and refocus our understanding of knowledge

production and theories to also be from the Global South. Theories from the Global South hold significant value within and beyond its geographical borders, theories which come with their own reflections on culture, history, that should be worked into practice in higher education.

Tuck and Yang (2014) powerfully write about 'Refusing Research,' and how the social sciences in the West have typically been about collecting stories of experiences, pain, and trauma for commodification, all without the benefit to the people who have shared their stories. This aligns with Moosavi's (2020) commentary on jumping on the 'decolonial bandwagon,' that brings attention to universities and research bodies championing decolonial research from a Western and Eurocentric perspective that decolonises without actually decolonising. I connect Moosavi's (2020) concern to Bhambra et al's (2020) phrase of decolonisation being an 'educational movement.' This 'educational movement' within higher education in recent years has been fuelled by necessary campaigns such as Black Lives Matter, Rhodes Must Fall, and Why is My Curriculum White? These political, historical, and cultural campaigns have reignited the ongoing process of unlearning, relearning who we are, and what our British higher education systems stand for (Fakunle, Kalinga, and Lewis, 2022).

The movements to decolonise education, have mainly been encouraged by grassroots, social media, and community movements that have entered into the public discourse. My concern with such movements is that decoloniality in education then becomes worthy because of the interest it garners with students and staff from minoritised backgrounds, which creates the façade of decolonisation without actually changing the structure that research, universities, or academia work within. Again, this can be linked back to Bhambra et al's (2020) decolonisation of the university, particularly with reference to the topic/ research interest of decolonisation bolstering interest and the economy of the university. More needs to be done to prioritise decolonial theories, crucially reframing knowledge from the Global South as equal and valid beyond the Global South.

So, although I have known that this research project would, with the best of intentions, be taking a decolonial perspective, operationalised through an ethos of power sharing between the researcher and participants, as well as challenging colonial and Western

power positions through narrative; it does not mean that communicating this across in a way I feel is acceptable in the world of academia has come easy. I feel at times I have been restricted by colonial norms in academia, with feeling I have to write with a particular style, language, and structure, ultimately having a disconnection with what I *want* to write, and I feel I *have* to write. In a way, even feeling stifled with coming up with creative solutions because of the fear of my creativity or ways of thinking not being accepted. I recognise how my feelings of not being accepted are tied to the legacies of colonialism not only within university structures, but as a person of colour in a society that has repeatedly reiterated that people like me do not belong.

My feelings toward academic writing are further complicated by the inherent link between language and coloniality. Language can be used to perpetuate unfair systems that reinforce or rename colonialism. For example, the legacy, history, and politics of the British Empire arguably remains in plain sight through the formation of the Nations of the Commonwealth, a group involving former colonised countries. The Nations of the Commonwealth is made up of 56 countries, with Charles III the head of 15 states. The use of language used to rename the former colonised countries within the Commonwealth is powerful as it continues the complicity of the British Empire under a different guise without acknowledging the cultural, historical, and political damage.

As I sit here and write this, I am working through my own in-betweenness, that equates to a sense of not-belonging (see section 3.4 for a more detailed discussion). The in-betweenness I feel here is from being an individual in an academic box trying to complete this research degree in a constant state of questioning what I know and have learned within institutional and self-imposed restrictions, whilst battling uncertainty of my own academic capabilities created from feeling like I do not belong in this academic space. Despite the difficulty I have had and probably will continue to have with feelings of in-betweenness in academia, I refer to De Sousa Santos's (2018, 2016) influential understanding of the use of reflexivity to allow ways of knowledge and ways of being of the Global South to become dominant. What I take from this, is that we need to reclaim our spaces as minority peoples in this space of academia, we need to recognise our influence and voices in knowledge production, as without this we cannot ourselves be open to accept our ways of being, and the epistemologies of the Global South, if we cannot accept our own voices as being valid.

1.6 Structure of the Thesis

This thesis is split into 8 chapters, detailing the context of the research, theoretical support, the women's narratives, discussion of the narratives in context, and finally the conclusions and future prospects that this project has.

Chapter one, (Starting the Conversation), addressed how this research began, drawing particular attention to the historical, political, social, and cultural factors that exist surrounding the relationship between Britain, and India, and how that effects the dynamics of internationalisation of higher education in England for Indian students labelled international. Also, within this chapter, presented is an overview of the Research Aims and Questions, the importance of Why This Research Now? and finishes on my involvement as a British Indian (My British Indian Entanglement) and how this has impacted my experiences of carrying out this project, illustrating the importance to recognise the complexity of navigating different cultures.

Chapter two (Setting the Scene: British and Indian Geopolitics and Education) continues from the previous foundations set by the overview of the project. It crucially begins with giving the reader a broader understanding of the dynamic relationship between Britain and India through their time as coloniser and colonised, and how the British Empire has impacted India's national identity today. This then moves on to exploring the role of Indian women in post-colonial India, with the particular focus on identity as an Indian woman in India, and what this means in relation to Indian and Western culture. The chapter then appropriately outlines the British and Indian education systems, highlighting the influences of British Empire on setting up India's educational system. The chapter concludes by defining and contextualizing key terms such as *Global South*, *Global North*, and *Western* within the framework of this decolonial project.

Chapter three (Understanding the Landscape of Western Higher Education) continues with narrowing the focus of the project with specifically focussing on the educational aspects in relation to colonialism and decoloniality. The chapter opens with the discussion to understand how concepts such as *internationalisation* and *globalisation*

have influenced rhetoric's surrounding higher education in the UK, with attention to how this has affected students who are labelled international. This then leads into the exploration of student mobility in higher education addressing the challenges faced by students who wish to study in England. The chapter then moves on to detailing how language and identity is connected to place (location), which ultimately synthesises the experience of the Other to be heavily influenced by erasure of non-Western identity through increased value on the use of the English language. This then moves on to discuss the formation, and understanding of what a community is, and its association to belonging, which is then linked back to universities as sites of belonging in both a learning and social capacity.

Chapter four (Un-packing Decolonial Theory in Detail) discusses my understanding of knowledge production and how this informs my understanding of decoloniality and this project. The chapter moves on to describe an extension of acknowledging and enacting decolonisation through the recognition of in-betweenness and uncertainty, which addresses how in-betweenness and uncertainty are significant components to the practice of self-decolonisation. The guiding principles are presented with the chapter concluding on setting out the decolonial principles of the project.

Chapter five (Bringing Decolonial Narrative Research to Life: Research Methodology) details extensively the departure points for this research via the research questions. I also discuss narrative inquiry, exploratory research principles and decolonial methodology. The pilot study is then outlined, with exploration of how this influenced the main study. The data collection for the main study is then described, alongside participant selection, and profiles, leading into how the data was collected and analysed. The chapter importantly concludes with the implementation of research ethics.

Chapter six (Life and Educational Journeys) is the presentation of the participants' experiences. Each participant is presented individually to give space and respect to their narrative. The chapter opens with Bunny, then each narrative is similar in presentation with it being sectioned into three main parts: part 1 presents the background information of the women including their connections to India, and their schooling, part 2 moves on to them describing studying abroad, making this decision,

as well as exploring their identity as being labelled international which led to feelings of misrepresentation in England, part 3, the final part of their narrative describes their experiences of their study-related and free time communities whilst living in England. Although the narratives are written in a similar structure there are both similarities and differences shared, this is highlighted at the end of this section through a comparison.

Chapter seven (Reading In-between the Lines of the Narratives) is my interpretation of the women's narratives through my perspectives as a researcher, Indian, and student. The chapter is sectioned into three key messages, the first message is of the women's certainty of their Indian identity. This included establishing what it meant to be Indian in England, and how this was informed by their Indian education. The second key message from their narratives was on how being labelled as an international student affected their experiences, causing confusion on how they perceive it, as well as how it led into the categorisation of students into Western and non-Western countries. The final key message that was extracted from their narratives was how in-betweenness was recognised in the women choosing to belong or not belong to their study-related and free time communities. This also included an exploration of how the women chose to navigate their community, as well as dealing with the changes in how they experienced their communities because of the pandemic. This chapter ends with an overview of the narratives, with how they answered the projects research questions (Answering the Research Questions through the Narratives).

Chapter eight (Finalising the Conversation, For Now) looked to bring the thesis project to a close. The chapter includes a detailed look at the theoretical, empirical, methodological and pedagogical contributions. As well as the issues identified by the project, and possible solutions. The chapter is brought to a close with my personal reflections and final remarks.

2 Setting the Scene: British and Indian Geopolitics and Education

This chapter looks to set the historical scene for the research project. Within this section the Indian- British colonial, and post-Empire relations are discussed. I then focus attention on the role of women in post-colonial British and Indian society. This leads to a discussion of the British- Education system. The latter part of this chapter works on setting the understanding for key terms such as *Global South*, *Global North*, and the *West.* I use this as a foundation to explore decoloniality of university.

2.1 Indian and British Colonial Origins and Post Empire Relations

Santos (2018, 2016) describes colonialism as a historic process that has centred around the invasion and occupation of another land; a system that erases the perceived negative differences of the occupied land and peoples that justified domination, enslavement, oppression, and looting of peoples from lands that were deemed inferior under the guise of modernity. All of which has contributed to the destruction of non-Western knowledge, coining the term 'epistemicide.'

As highlighted earlier by Santos (2016), it is important to consider the cultural changes, and the moral justifications used by Britain to occupy India. Between Britain and India there were significant differences between religions, culture, and traditions, which created a supposed justification for the British Empire to invade through the grounds of religious missionaries and savagery. This meant that the significant differences between the countries, as pointed out by multiple commentators such as Sanghera, (2023), Khosla, (2020), and Tharoor (2018) allowed for the continuation of the British Empire through a perceived moral obligation under the façade of the transformation of a *rabid* society into a *better Western* archetype. However, because of India's diversity in faith practices, the differences made it very difficult for the British Empire to implement policies that both rural and urban communities would abide by without disrupting the production of manufactured goods. The lack of implementation of the law remained for the duration of the British Empire.

An example of Santos' (2016) colonial description of invasion and occupation is illustrated by Britain's colonial and capitalist undertaking through the East India

Company and the British Empire. For example, as Eacott (2016) described, the East India Company was made up of parliamentarians, traders, and investors to 'transform and modernise' Indian society. Through the Company, India's manufactured goods were being exported to Britain, Europe, and the US. India was one of the largest exporters of silks, spices, tea, and cotton, its share in manufacturing exports of raw foods and textiles were at 27% in the 18th century; India under stricter colonial rule meant exports dropping to 2% (Tharoor, 2018). This was further substantiated with the Calico Acts of the late 18th century, which meant India could not directly trade with Britain; exports turning to Europe and the US; the British Empire gained significant global power and economic stability through government protection and transatlantic trade (Eacott, 2016). India's independence as a manufacturing nation were cut off as their resources were drained to fuel the British economy and its rise to power. Ultimately, regressing India's ability to stand economically and culturally independent.

Despite Britain's economic and cultural hold over India, there were attempts made by Indians for independence, such as the Indian Uprising/ First War of Independence of 1857. This uprising was a war against the increasing Westernisation of Indian society and culture, and the dismantling of Indian aristocracy through the Doctrine of Lapse. The Doctrine of Lapse was a ruling initiated by the British to prohibit a Hindu ruler without a natural heir, resulting in lands and positions being stolen (Indian Mutiny, 2021). The mutiny ended in defeat for India, the emergence of a class system, and a middle class with a strong connection to Indian nationalism (Sanghera, 2023). The second uprising, or better known as the Jallianwala Bagh massacre of 1919, was a catalytic event for India's demand for independence. General Reginald Dyer and his men of 50 had shot around 1000 unarmed working-class civilians peacefully protesting the capture of two Indian nationalist leaders on the Sikh festival of Vaisakhi. Although Dyer was removed as General, imperialist funds raised £4.4 million, adjusted for inflation, as a retirement fund (Sanghera, 2023). A physical reminder of the support from the British nation to continue its colonial rule and Western imperialism.

It was some years later, on August 15th, 1947, that the formal relationship between Britain and India had come to an end. The end of the British reign over India resulted in a rebirth of national image for both India and Britain. For India, it meant the divide of the country, most famously by Lord Louis Mountbatten between India and Pakistan,

the divide between India and Pakistan was the cause of mass-scale violence, destruction, and mass displacement.

For Britain, its image as a great ruling country over many colonies had already begun to adapt, with the formal creation of the Commonwealth taking effect in 1931, including former colonised lands which recognised the British monarchy as its head of state. Britain's image was to continue to change with the citizens of people of former colonies act of 1948, allowing people of former colonies to move freely to Britain. As Sanghera (2023) explained there was an influx of immigration from India to Britain in the 50s, 60s, and 70s as part of this act. Immigration of Black and Brown people had a significant effect on the heightening racism through the 80s and 90s, becoming more insidious in the later decades through the noughties and to the current day (Starting the Conversation). This demonstrates that migration has occurred often at many points during British history but has not been explicitly included in British history textbooks and history school curriculums perpetuating racial divisions (Sanghera, 2023).

The intersection of religion and caste in relation to Indian identity in India had played a significant role in the control and deployment of the British Empire as mentioned earlier in this section. This meant a persistent resistance for the upholding of the Indian national identity. For example, how 'Indian' can be understood is tied to the discussion on Britain and India's national image. Vucetic (2019) conducted a discourse analysis on the formation of the national identity courses of Britain and India post- British Empire. This research looked at national newspapers, policies, educational texts/curriculum, and film and media from both India and Britain. In independence, India wanted to carve out an identity different from the one forged for them under British reign. On this new path, India worked on land reform, rebuilding the industrial sector, and invested in education, pathways that have helped to build a strong Indian national identity. Through the findings, it was shown that in Indian media and film there were many multiple layered representations of Britain. In particular, the hypocrisy of law was highlighted through the media, film, and Indian national newspapers with references to the Jallianwala Bagh massacre in Amritsar. The Indian people saw the brutality and violence behind Britain's façade of civilisation behind imperialism (Sanghera, 2023). Although the formation of India's national identity, exploring Indian national identity, and the colonial relationship between Britain and India is not the focus

of this project, understanding the historical context and connections will contribute to understanding how the participants understood themselves and their experiences whilst in England.

2.2 The roles of the Indian Woman in Post-colonial British and Indian Societies

This research project focuses on three Indian women's experiences of studying and living in England. Indian women are a group that contributes significantly to the cultural and economic context of both Indian and British economies; however, women are often side lined in their contributions to education and society (King and Sondhi, 2019). This section will explore Indian women's identities in post-colonial Britain and India.

Khan and Shaheen (2017) highlight in their reviewed report of Race and Class in Post-Brexit Britain, the term Indian is often included under Asian, and within the British acronym BAME, Black, Asian, and minority ethnic. The term Indian can be vague, and as pointed out in Ramjii's (2006) research on Indian identity of British Gujarati's, the study illustrated that the common association made with the term Indian is the connection and continuation of cultural practices regardless of location. This is confirmed by Bates's (2006) study that reviewed colonial and post-colonial constructions of Indian identity, which situated the importance of continuing cultural practices to create unity and connection to a larger community which recognises its historical past and developing narratives of Indian identity.

In addition, female gender identity is tied to multiple labels and perceived stages in a woman's life: daughter, wife, daughter-in-law, mother, and grandmother. Puri (2002) explored matchmaking of women in post-colonial India and how earning an education can be used to bargain for better personal life choices and the choice of a marriage partner. Puri (2002) conducted 54 in-depth interviews with middle-class Indian women and found that the women who were married and or mothers experienced evolving levels of independence and control depending on whether they were a wife or mother. Behaviours that were outside of what was expected by the family were usually accredited negatively to Westernisation or modernisation and were frowned upon. It remains a custom in India for marriages to be arranged by a matchmaker or family member. Although Puri's (2002) research explored women's roles through the label of

wife and mother, there is room to explore further with understanding the identity of what it is to be an Indian woman in post-colonial India and Britain across different classes and denominations of faith internationally. Although this study is over twenty years old, it still holds relevance today, and in this research project, as parallels can be drawn with the use of labels and how they affect identity and experiences, demonstrating the power that labelling and identity roles have in relation to everyday experiences. For this study, I will be using the descriptor *Indian women* as a way to describe the participants. However, I am aware that this is simplified wording, and within being Indian, there is a depth of cultural and historical vibrancy that exists and with this wording I recognise the weight of history that is carried by the *Indian woman*.

Arur and Dejaeghere (2019) conducted a three-year qualitative study looking at the impact of an American life skills programme for girls in Brahmanical India. The life skills programme was intended to help support young girls to become independent and make informed decisions by learning critical thinking, social skills, and problem-solving skills. The issues this presents for women is the emphasis on the skills from the programme are on the individual and not the structures that surround the girls (economic, political, social, and familial). In addition, their research assumed that these 'Western' skills were the most useful for the women who partook. This feeds into and reaffirms Western knowledge as superior within non-Western domains. Questions remain when the programmes are created through a Western gaze, only to reinforce marriage as a top priority for young girls in rural India. In contrast to Arur and Dejaeghere's study (2019) the women in this research project came from cities in India and will provide an urban perspective to their experiences in higher education within a British- Indian context. It should be noted that the women came from different class backgrounds that contribute to their decisions to study abroad (see chapter Life and Educational Journeys).

King and Sondhi (2019) explore the barriers for Indian male and female students labelled international in the UK. Their research used a combination of online questionnaires with UK and Indian students who had studied abroad, alongside in-depth interviews with UK and Indian students. The key findings highlighted the value of familial wealth and culture that contributed to decisions made when studying abroad. An interesting finding was that Indian female students felt more pressure to

maintain their Indian culture. Although King and Sondhi (2019) similarly explore the barriers to international Indian students, this current research differs in wanting to understand women's experiences of communities they were a part of and how they understood the communities that surround them through their narratives, and their experiences specifically to being labelled as international students.

To summarise, there are many roles and identity factors that exist to help form the narratives of Indian women. This makes it even more important to be mindful of the roles that labelling, and identity roles have to influence experiences of studying abroad in a Western country. The term 'Indian' is used widely in this thesis, the definition of Indian develops through the discussions with the participants (see section 7.2.1.1). As a departure point 'Indian' will be understood as an identity connected to Indian nationality, including diasporic, culture, and heritage.

2.3 British and Indian Education Systems

This section demonstrates the similarities and differences between the British and Indian education systems, including a brief discussion on British higher education, to help contextualise the participant's schooling experiences in the later sections.

The British education system begins with children's compulsory education from age 5 to 16. All British education is taught in English. The student then has choices to continue to stay on to full-time education (further education) or start an apprenticeship or traineeship (Government Digital Service, 2023). The entry age for universities in Britain is typically 18, with students completing either their first degree, an undergraduate course, or postgraduate degrees, as taught (with classes) or research; this includes masters and PhDs (Edvoy.com, 2023). In 2019, the UK was third, behind the US and Australia, for the most popular destination for international students (Universities UK, 2022). Indian students coming to the UK to study at a university in the UK have been on a steady rise since 2017 (Higher Education Statistics Agency, 2023). The number of Indian students (87,045) in the 2021/2022 academic year was just behind China (99,965), with the most students coming to the UK to study for their first degree (Higher Education Statistics Agency, 2023). Students from India in 2022/2023 academic year was the top origin of country for students to study at a British higher education institute surpassing China (House of Commons Library, 2024).

Unlike the British education system, the Indian education system has multiple levels and is the world's third largest, behind China and the US (Sharma and Sharma, 2015). As explained by Krishnamoorthy (2019) in their assessment of the Indian education system, the overhaul of the Indian education system is accredited to the colonialist Thomas Babington Macauley; the main themes of Macauley's overhaul of the Indian education system were the replacement of Persian as the official language, for English to be introduced as the language of instruction in all schools, as well as the translation of Western knowledge into the vernacular. The use of the English language as a language of instruction can be connected to the Kachruvian Inner Circles (Kachru, 2009, 1985, 1965). This consisted of three circles, the inner circles included countries where English is the primary language, for example the UK; the outer circles are countries where English is a common language, or used for official business use like

India, and the expanding circles where English is used for global and international communication. The Kachruvian circles demonstrate the devaluation of languages from the Global South in relation to politics, economy and education.

Under India's Right to Education Act 2020, an act was implemented to ensure compulsory education for every child between ages 3-18, with the curriculum taught in English and Hindi (Futurelearn.com, 2021). Several governing bodies regulate and are responsible for Indian education, with it being state-dependent (UnAcademy, 2023).

Using census data and surveys, it is estimated that over 19,569 languages and dialects are spoken in India, with only 22 officially recognised by the Indian government (Babbel, 2019). Hindi and English are the official languages of the central government in India; however, individual states can adopt any regional language as their official language (Babbel, 2019). This demonstrates the coexistence of languages in India, reflecting the vast religious, caste, and cultural variations. However, tensions can emerge with which Indians are included and excluded in formal and informal settings, reiterating colonial hierarchies of power through language. This is further reiterated by the English language remaining a significant pillar of the Indian schooling system and for international higher education, with many reports highlighting schools in varying districts applying to change from Hindi-medium schools to English (Sadhu, 2021). For example, both mine and the participants linguistic backgrounds have been heavily influenced by our English-based educations (see 7.3.1 for further details).

The continuation of English language dominance in Indian education is reflected by how English is perceived in non-native English-speaking countries, with India being ranked 52nd in English proficiency in the English Proficiency Index (EPI) (2022) across 111 countries. The highest ranked countries for the EPI were the Netherlands, Singapore, and Austria. The lowest ranked were Libya, Yemen, and Rwanda. When students come from India to study in the UK, they are labelled with the term international. Often labels can be used to assign an understanding to a group, people, information, or culture to help with comprehending the subject matter (Jones, 2017). This research project explored the use of the international label for students from non-Western countries. As Holliday (2010) explains, there is a danger of using labels that

can lead to othering, over-generalisation, and reductionism of what is being labelled. What does the role of being labelled international play in this research project?

2.4 Exploring the Global South, Global North, and the Western Ideology

I purposefully include this section to explore how terms such as the *Global North*, *South*, and *West* have been previously used and understood. I am also mindful that terms such as these can deepen binary divisions. However, I do not intend to do this; I instead use these terms to illustrate the constructed realities of a colonised Global North, Global South and West. These terms function as tools for critical reflection through analysis.

Typically, the use of the Global South (GS) and Global North (GN) refer to countries positioning of power in the world economic system (Calvo, Cairns, França and Francisco de Azevedo, 2022). This can mean that the Western-centric conception of humanity is not bound by geographical location (Grovogu, 2011) and can be extended to the approaches of knowledge being undermined and undervalued (Santos, 2018). Therefore, the creation of a metaphorical, non-geographical concepts such as the Global North and Global South work to reinforce this.

Caroline Levander and Walter Mignolo's (2011) pivotal understanding of the Global South in the GN is applicable for this research. Their understanding positions the Global South in the Global North as a geopolitical concept/ metaphor that has replaced the controversial *third world* and *developing countries,* yet the Global South maintains the same derogatory meaning. These terms have been used historically to create further distance between the West and the 'rest.' This is reinforced through terms such as Western or Global north or Eurocentrism, they refer to dominant forms of colonial knowledge that exclude concepts, ideas, and methodologies from colonised lands (Tuhiwai- Smith, 2012).

De Sousa Santos (2016) explains that a Western-centric conception of humanity is not possible without the concept of a sub-humanity to conquer, rule, and develop. Therefore, the terms Global South and Global North reinforce a colonial hierarchy of knowledge and wealth, grouping countries according to economic standing, and

creating a dependence of support from the Global North, such as the IMF, World Bank and the G7. Linking this back to Santos's (2016) notion of humanity and sub-humanity, the Global South becomes a non-reality, its issues, peoples, and knowledge failing to meet the Western standard, a drain on Western aid. The very concept of the GS and the GN continues to erode our global societies, with the perceived gap continuing to grow.

It is necessary in this research project to reframe the Global South. I utilise Levander and Mignolo (2011) who demonstrate the perception of the Global South in the Global South as a powerful concept that ignites new visions of knowledge, where there is a global political and decolonial society at work. Grovogu (2011) takes this further and reminds us that the Global South is a movement that captures multiple possibilities of cohesion when formerly colonised lands and peoples engage in political projects of decolonisation. Through these epistemologies of the South, they provide opportunities for transformations in our societies across the globe.

The Global North in this research project will be understood as the metaphorical conceptualisation of countries with political and economic power led by Western thinking and knowledge production. The Global South will be understood similarly as a metaphorical conception that engages with decolonising knowledge. Although the use of these terms can be understood as controversial and as a dichotomising tool reinforcing Western stereotypes, reframing them in this project reclaims them. I utilise Santos' (2018, 2016) understanding of the Global South as a dominant space of epistemological becoming that holds its own in production of knowledge systems. Therefore, learning to unlearn the use of the Global South as a secondary and inferior collection of countries in knowledge, culture, and history, disrupting the colonial order.

The Global South and the Global North conceptualisation can be linked to the term West. Similarly, to the GS and GN, the understanding of what the West is perceived as is complex and dynamic because of its use in everyday language and its associations with politics, culture, geography, and ideology. Holliday (2010) describes the West as a construction of ideals typically associated with modernity and progression. This can be linked to an imagined West that creates an idealised individual that serves the self, feeding into a West versus rest rhetoric (Holliday, 2010).

As Holliday (2010) explains, this assumed binary narrative of the West could be because of the perceived Western influence on the economy, politics, culture, and identity particularly on non-Western countries.

As Holliday (2010) points out in his assessment to be labelled as Western or Westernised, it has attached perceptions of individuality, modernity, and progression, which can imply a superior culture. This assessment fits into the traditional perceptions of the West within the Global North, as highlighted by Calvo et al (2022) which explored Brazilian and African students' experiences via in-depth interviews, which demonstrated their feelings of pre-existing inequalities (i.e., funding based on the economic status of the students) as the main issue. Despite this, there is no reason that traits associated with the West are not found in other cultures and non-western traits in the West. It is important to establish our cultural realities, which can transcend nationalities, creating multiple multi-faceted identities. For these reasons, it is important to keep the discussion of what is Western open, continually reflecting on this, particularly through interviews and analysis. The term West(ern) will be considered in constant transition with associations to modernity, progression, independence, and freedom.

2.5 (De)- Coloniality in the University

This exploration of (de) coloniality of university education can be linked to the terms Global North and West, terms which are discussed in the previous section. A dominance is found within these spheres because of the strength of governance and validity presumed in the construction and politicisation of knowledge, power, and hierarchies in science, education, and learning (Vishwanath, and Mummery, 2019). The understanding of decolonisation in education is broad because of the varied colonial effects in how knowledge is created and re-created. The movement to decolonise the university is in part because university systems are in some way a derivation of Western knowledge, for example the Indian education system (see 2.3).

I use Bhambra et al's (2020) commentary on decolonising the university. She shared three iterations of decolonising the university that will be explored in further detail below. The first sees decolonising, incorrectly, being an extension of diversity and

inclusion and representation politics. This type of decolonising university presents visual solutions to decolonisation, meaning having more people of colour in classrooms, reading lists being expanded beyond the White classics, having research collaborations, as well as having a visually diverse boardroom of executives. This means that decolonisation in the university is framed as a way that challenges the visual Whiteness of spaces and exclusion of minorities.

With this first perspective of decolonising the university, recent examples are posited by Doharty, Madriaga and Salisbury (2021) who in their study exploring faculty of colour experiences of decolonisation and diversity, that there was often a conflation between decolonisation and diversity. In agreement with them, decoloniality should be about addressing struggles of colonial rule and the dominance of Western knowledge, however, as they found, it meant an increased workload on people of colour, where they often faced high levels of anxiety and discomfort (Rollock, 2019; Sian, 2019). Linking this back to Bhambra et al's (2020) commentary on decolonising the university, there is a clear disconnection on how decolonising an institution such as a university should be carried out. Often decolonisation principles are placed under the umbrella of EDI (equality, diversity and inclusion), and this is not helpful, as this reinforces existing structures that exist, rather than seeking to create new ones that work on recognising existing power dynamics and structures within universities (Bhambra et al, 2020). Noxolo (2016) also addresses the issue of decolonising universities to be more than just about the widening of participating through having a more diverse student population, but enacting real change, that recognises difficulty to access, burdens of student fees and challenging Western knowledge dominance. Challenging the visual Whiteness of university spaces works as an option to decolonise, but this must be in tandem with people of colour being included and leading decolonial structural changes.

Bhambra et al's (2020) second perspective focuses on creating a university free of colonial legacies, institutional racism, and market forces. The aim of this outlook ultimately to transform teaching and research that critically challenges colonialism and unlearns it. Essentially, through this understanding the university becomes for the public. This direction of decolonising the university therefore becomes about challenging the market logics of the university (*internationalisation* and *globalisation*).

Arguably this perspective tries to move away from the capitalist purpose of universities existing as a direct pathway to individual financial success.

I align closely with the second perspective of decolonising the university because it addresses the political and historical significance that universities have in the process of learning, unlearning, and transforming or recreating knowledge and knowledge systems. This was found to be void in the first perspective of decolonising the university. I appreciate that this second perspective by Bhambra et al (2020), although can be challenging to impliment, this perspective includes reflection to interrogate its own systems. As Hall and Tandon (2017) comment via their review of 40 years of collaborative work and knowledge, most university systems around the world are some sort of derivation of Western knowledge, this is exemplified in Indian education (refer to section 2.3 for further detail), highlighting the challenge of decolonising higher education.

I apply Bhambra et al's (2020) framework of decolonising the university to this research project, specifically their understanding that universities should be places of continual refinement. This aligns with decolonial theory, which focuses on challenging colonial knowledge and delinking from colonial sources and ways of knowing (Zavala, 2016). This is summarised by Meyerhoff (2019) who comments that through historicising the university it creates a space for us to question who benefits from higher education. It is here we recognise that the university is made up of more than just students and academic staff that are typically replaced on their short-term contracts, there are administrators, cleaners, cooks as well as the students who drop out, can't afford their fees, etc. The issues surrounding the decolonising the university should not be limited to students and staff; it is about how the patters that are in place form the 'normal' day-to-day functioning and maintenance of colonial legacies.

Bringing this thinking back to Meyerhoff's (2019) question of who does the university benefit, brings my attention to the colonial legacies that are reiterated within the university through funding grants and initiatives involving the Global South. This was exemplified through the Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF), which was a £1.5 billion fund shared by the UK government to the academic community via research councils. This funding's primary goal was to work on the 17 united nations sustainable

development goals, strengthening the research capacity and innovation in the UK and the Global South. Noxolo (2016), an indigenous decolonial author, points out that initiatives such as the GCRF are rooted in colonialism, where funding has been given to the UK a country from the Global North, to set up and extract knowledge and experiences from the Global South. Initiatives such as these, although they can be perceived as positive steps to building long-term relations, instead reiterate a snatch and grab mentality of knowledge, where the Global South's knowledge, knowledge production, and culture benefits the Global North, to bolster a reputation of nation power.

Moving on to the Bhambra et al's (2020) third perspective she presents decolonising the university to bolster the economics of the institution, by making the university arguably more contemporary through discussing on 'trend' issues, there is the possibility of attracting a wider range of students to pay fees. The politics of decoloniality are removed to make way for profit.

Similarly, to the first perspective presented earlier in this section of the conflation between diversity and decoloniality, there is a shared superficiality with what decoloniality is within the university with how it is seen as profit making tool. I make the link here between internationalisation and decolonisation. Although internationalisation in HE is a contested concept (see section 3.1), the strong links to profiteering off of international students is undeniable. Montgomery and Traher (2023) point out, internationalisation is linked closely to student mobility, and attracting a wider range of students through the pushing of decolonising agendas which can be understood as a tactic of exploitation. This feeds into an existing colonial cycle under the guise of decolonisation of education, as it creates a feeling of non-Western communities and knowledges as dispensable or only needed because money can be made from it.

Bhambra et al's (2020) perspectives on decolonising a university give valid insight into how decolonisation can affect the structural functioning of the university as an institution. This brings me back to sharing my understanding of what decolonisation in the university is. I see decolonisation in the university as an opportunity to challenge colonial knowledge and systems which perpetuate our existing understanding of

society and what society is. My research and personal attitudes toward decolonising the university align strongly with the second outlook of decolonising universities, as a way to transform teaching and research through interrogating the knowledge/systems that we are in and receive.

Addressing all the perspectives presented above, I reflect on what the university is as a 'place' and what makes decolonisation so difficult in the university? A potential reason for this is that the West is associated with freedom, being unfixed, and always in a state of movement to progress. Following this outlook, the university should be an institution that also transitions, however arguably the university has remained stagnant in addressing colonial ties to knowledge production in a structural way. This is supported by there being multiple iterations of what decolonising the university is with each one having a different agenda. As Snaza and Singh (2021) comment, what is it about the university that we want to preserve and protect? And by preserving and protecting the current structures in place, who does that include and exclude? Above all, each perspective highlights the need for universities to transition with the inclusion of decolonisation.

2.6 Summary of Setting the Scene: British and Indian Geopolitics and Education

The chapter began by looking at giving the reader an understanding of the complex relationship between Britain and India, addressing the colonial relationship and how that informed the countries' national identities. The roles of Indian women were also discussed in relation to colonialism and post-colonialism, which led to contextualising the British and Indian education systems, with the particular focus on how the Indian education system was based on the British. The Indian education being modelled off of the British because of colonialism highlights the lasting influence on which the British had in altering Indian power structures. The final part of this chapter went over how terms such as West, Global South and North, can create and perpetuate the colonial power that was discussed at the beginning of the section. Therefore, it was necessary to reframe the terms in particular the Global South. As well as taking another perspective of re-writing the understanding of the Global South in the Global South as informed by commentators such as De Sousa Santos (2018,2016), and

Levander and Mignolo (2011) amongst others. I then discussed the complexity of decolonising the university, informed by Bhambra et al's (2020) understanding of this theory in practice at this level, which leads on to stating my feelings of in-betweenness and uncertainty as an academic during this writing process. This chapter follows on to explore the landscape of the research project through a discussion on key literature that will demonstrate the need for this project.

3 Understanding the Landscape of Western Higher Education

This section provides an understanding of key debates within this project, exploring the role of globalisation, student mobility, language, and identity, as well as belonging and not belonging in communities.

3.1 Internationalisation and Globalisation of Higher Education

Internationalisation and globalisation are two terms often used within higher education and higher education research that have been interchangeably used. However, despite similarities they do have significant differences that influence our understanding of the higher education landscape.

As Tight (2021) illustrates in their review of internationalisation and globalisation in higher education research, both terms are popular and linked to how higher education is understood on both a local and national scale. From Tight's (2021) analysis of books, and journal articles from the last 20 years, internationalisation has typically been understood as the changing of higher education on a local level through influences of different border-crossing systems and activities. This can be linked to an earlier explanation by Tiechler (2004) on internationalisation, which typically associates this with an increase of knowledge transfer, cooperation, and an emphasis on international education and research. However, arguably, as Sicka and Hou (2023) state in their review of the American higher education system, internationalisation is sought through the appeal of the global. Muñoz (2022) states that this typically means reaching a wider audience is achieved through marketability, academic, and cognitive capitalism.

Muñoz's (2022) understanding can be applied to Haigh's (2014) review of the internationalisation of higher education and the global citizen, they recognised 8 key levels of evolution in the development of the term. These are: 1. Recruitment of international students, 2. Teaching international students, 3. Growing an international university through competition, 4. Compliant with standards set by international agencies, 5. Internationalisation of curriculum for local learners, 6. Education for global citizenship, 7. Connected through e-learning and 8. Being concerned for the citizens

of the world. These 8 levels are suggestive of a movement of internationalisation in higher education being based on Tight's (2021) transfer of knowledge to higher education becoming a business enterprise through expanding the market across and beyond national borders. This reinforces Tiechler's (2004), very applicable warning of higher education continually being misunderstood as higher education on a global scale.

Haigh's (2014) review of internationalisation demonstrates colonial tenets through the capitalisation and exploitation of knowledge production and reproduction as a service. Further to this, Montgomery and Trahar (2023) comment on internationalisation as a tool to perpetuate colonialism as it continues to be associated with the commodification of students, and curriculum. This is reiterated through Haigh's (2014) points one to five mentioned above. This means that internationalisation perpetuates colonial legacies as they follow the 'global norm' continuing competition and capital (Mwangi and Yao, 2021). This is in addition to struggles of funding since covid-19, issues with student migration, and Brexit (Marginson et al, 2018). Again, this can be linked back to higher education being further consolidated as an arena for an elite few who can surpass those barriers. As well as continuing to fuel non-Western communities and knowledges to be dispensable or only included because money can be made from it. Internationalisation therefore becomes a conflict with decolonisation, which seeks to highlight marginilised voices. This further substantiates the use of internationalisation as a way to destroy and diminish knowledge systems and ways of being from the Global South. This crucially illustrates the need to reframe the value and perception of the Global South in higher education in the Global North (De Sousa Santos, 2018, 2016).

I expand De Sousa Santos's (2018, 2016) understanding between internationalisation and diminishing knowledge of the Global South through commentary by Liu (2020). Liu (2020) states that Western knowledge just moves to non-Western domains, where internationalisation of higher education then becomes Westernised. Internationalisation therefore becomes a mechanism that feeds into colonial legacies. This is reiterated by the dominance of the English language, for example found on many university research sites, the leading countries for higher education are the US, UK, Australia, and Canada (Tucker, 2023). These are four economic, political, and

culturally dominant countries where the English language is dominant, highlighting that the internationalisation of higher education only occurs through English, and knowledge of that language being enough for participation (Liddicoat, 2016).

Knight and De Wit (2018) explored the cultural dynamic via a review of internationalisation, its broadness, approaches, rationales, and strategies in different contexts in higher education over the past 20 years. Despite the increase of internationalisation, with more international campuses and supposed improvement to inclusion, there remains an anti-global, anti-immigration and chaotic political climate around the world. This, in turn, influences the international relations held within higher education (Knight and De Wit, 2018) and student visa regulations. Knight and De Wit's (2018) exploration of internationalisation will be extended in this research study, as it will explore the colonial relationship between British and Indian education and the specific experiences of Indian female students labelled international.

This leads on to understanding globalisation in the context of higher education (HE), however, this term alongside internationalisation remains a contested term (Lingard, 2021). Although the concept of globalisation is not new, Hall's (1997) early understanding explained three significant consequences of globalisation: national identities to be eroded through cultural homogenisation, national and/or local identities fortified through resistance to globalisation to preserve national identity and cultural heritage and the emergence of new identities from a hybridisation of cultures. This was similarly found by Dodds (2008), through their content analysis of literature, that although globalisation had contesting interpretations, globalisation of higher education alluded to marketisation of the sectors, as well as flows of financial capital, people, information, and culture. Globalisation therefore became a way to secure power, through situating higher education as a central point for dictating the maintenance or development via international competition. Despite the age of Hall's (1997) and Dodd's (2008) understanding, the consequences of globalisation, remains an important perspective that can be applied to today's understanding and impact on higher education and local communities.

This research project explores Indian women's experiences within higher education, drawing upon the following concerns about globalisation within higher education. Khoo

(2011), provided commentary that perceived globalisation as either a means for economic or political influence or a cultural and environmental dynamic formed and emphasised by the internationalisation that comes through globalisation. Khoo (2011) demonstrates the link between the two terms which reiterates Tight's (2021) understanding of internationalisation and globalisation to show a connection between higher education moving from a national to international level. Castles and Davidson (2020) explains globalisation being built on principles of free trade, investment, and the free movement of people. However, the arguments made by Sklair (2021) crucially remain applicable, where globalisation can be a way to exacerbate global inequalities, and the reimagining of Western imperialism through education. It is necessary to explore how a globalised higher education system impacts the women in this research and how that influences their experiences as students.

Morris (2022) extends Khoo's (2011) earlier commentary, describing consumerist views that reflect education as a purchased service where the purchaser becomes entitled to a higher-quality product. Student consumer orientation sits within policy changes around English higher education. The Dearing Report 1997 informed the Labour government of how universities should maximise participation by young and mature students. The focus was on what they could gain and how they could influence their life through a good quality degree and money. i.e., employability and future salary. This influenced the Teaching and Higher Education Act (1998) which enforced an annual tuition fee charge of £1100. This created an opening to increase fees, as following this Act, an increase in fees was continually proposed from 2003, with the implementation of variable fees of up to £3000 introduced in 2006. By 2011, annual tuition fees were raised to £9500, increasing competition between universities. In 2015, students were included under the Consumer Rights Act. In the same year, the Teaching Excellence Framework was proposed, a guide that ranks students' teaching and learning experiences to attract students to universities. This was implemented in 2016. The rankings of universities therefore contributing to the existing distance between the Global North and the Global South (De Wit, 2022).

The policies mentioned illustrate the move from universities being institutions that helped curate self-development, critical thinking, and knowledge within that discipline (Molesworth, Nixon, and Scullion, 2009), to institutions that reiterate the colonial

legacies and capitalist benefits that remain in higher education. This is reiterated by Sicka and Hou (2023), and Gacel- Ávila (2005) who points out that internationalisation can be understood as an opportunity for mutual relationships between nations, promoting respect, but globalisation undermines this, and leads to homogenisation of students.

In addition, Morris (2022) looked at consumerism that is associated with globalisation and its links to student well-being and autonomy through self-determination theory. Morris (2022) found that higher education institutions treated students like consumers, increasing competition between universities. This is supported by other research (Temple, Callender, Grove, and Kersh, 2016; Lomas, 2007) that found universities deployed heavy marketing campaigns and branding to entice students, promoting student-led learning, feedback, and standardised contact hours, emphasising the student as the consumer. Ultimately, Morris's (2022) understanding presents universities as institutions driven by customer satisfaction, neglecting academic student development. Although the premise for Morris's (2022) research aims differ from this project, she draws attention to an important perspective on universities and the consumerist relationship with students under globalisation. The role of internationalisation and globalisation will be explored through my reading of the women's experiences of studying in North England in Chapter 6.

3.1.1 The Development of the International Label

The globalisation and internationalisation of British higher education has led to the use of the international label. A 'globalised' BHE has meant an increase in students from around the world and a reification of students based on their passport identity. Jones (2017) explains that the labelling of students as internationals, is used to explain individuals moving to a country specifically to study and is often a simplistic and common way the labelling is interpreted by universities. These explanations can be considered uncritical of the dichotomies that this label can create (Straker, 2016).

The globalisation and internationalisation of BHE have broadened the landscape of how students are categorised administratively. The labelling of students often reflecting a difference in tuition fees and access to funding (House of Commons

Library, 2020). The students were grouped in BHE into home, EU, and international. To qualify as a home student, the student must be a settled resident of the UK or ordinarily be residing in the UK for a minimum of three years with their main reason to be in the UK not being education (House of Commons Library, 2023). Pre-Brexit, students from the European union who chose to study in the UK had access to home student fees and funding (House of Commons Library, 2020). Students who did not fit into Home or EU were categorised as international students. Post-Brexit, the labelling of students has been simplified to home and international; the status of home students remaining the same, however, international students now including students from the European Union without access to home student fees or funding.

I make the connection and reflect on the intersectionality between the categorisation of students from the Global South and racialisation of their experiences. Pre-Brexit labels separated Western and non- Western students, with the exception of students from the US and Australia, two countries which are considered to have highly reputable higher education systems (Tucker, 2023). Predominantly, students who are categorised as international are from India, China, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia etc, countries which are considered as part of the Global South. The demographic reality of international students is perhaps reflected in the tuition fee structure with international students paying significantly more than home or EU students pre-Brexit. The difference in fee status highlights the commodification of Western knowledge from BHE universities as a valuable asset that is up-marketed to countries from the Global South.

There lies a deep-seated racialisation of students who are not White passing, exacerbating racial bias and racism and associations to students being deficit in language, culture, and education. The deep-seated racialisation of people from countries considered as the Global South remains and is reinforced by separate programmes and additional support, which can limit international students' sense of belonging to their institution (Sovic, 2008). The label then fails to emphasise student diversity: as Jones (2017) and Straker (2016) indicate, involvement and engagement in higher education should not be separated by labelling of students. It is important to recognise the influence of racialisation of students of colour in relation to international student experiences to help encourage conversations on race, identity, and belonging.

Through recognition of these intersecting factors universities can work toward unravelling the systems that uphold racialisation, as well as work toward improving support systems for students.

In addition, Leask's (2015) critical review leads with an example of how the labelling of international can be problematic, with the descriptor asserting that students labelled as international think and do things in certain ways. She elaborates this further, that by having this separation of students based on country of origin, it creates an assumed deficit thinking because of presumed difference in thinking. In addition, Leask (2015) highlighted the labelling of students as international creates social and cultural problems, with the emphasis on the student conforming to the host university's culture and behaviour. The labelling of students as international fits into the internationalisation and globalisation agenda of higher education institutions. The categorising of students in this way therefore reiterates Tight (2021) and Tiechler's (2004) points of universities using internationalisation as ways to increase transfer of knowledge across and beyond national borders, whist encouraging globalisation of the university as an enterprise that commodifies the students' international experiences.

The terms internationalisation and globalisation, as highlighted in this section can be problematic in higher education. However, it is necessary to understand how the terms will be acknowledged in this research project. Therefore, I will acknowledge the terms to be interlinked where internationalisation is used to encourage transfer of knowledge, whilst being used as a gateway to globalisation of universities as a global enterprise that emphasises marketisation of its product. In this project, I will be aware of the attached assumptions that can occur with the terms international and globalisation and will seek to explore the impacts, if any, on the women in their narratives.

3.2 Student Mobility in Higher Education

Globalisation of higher education has been propelled by significant technological and infrastructure improvements which have increased student mobility (Brooks and Waters, 2022). However, the ease of this mobility is questionable, as movement

between geographical boundaries can become restricted through political migration policies (Tsolidis and Kostogriz, 2008). The ease to which students can migrate for studying in the UK from a non-Western country, has been impacted the political decision of Britain leaving the European Union (Brexit).

Brexit has meant a restructuring in the process of how international students are accepted at UK universities. The new policy, which was rolled out in the summer of 2021, allowed students to remain in the UK for a maximum of 3 years if offered a salary of above £26k. Policies such as the one above exacerbates the disparity between who can come to the UK and who cannot, which can be linked to interculturality, the process of the communication between different cultures/ethnicities or traditions, and in this case the differences between Western and non-Western countries. Holliday (2010) summarises the term interculturality within the university as problematic due to its marketisation within the university setup, highlighting a superficial diversity to attract more student revenue, creating disparages between expectations of the sold product i.e., the course material.

Interculturality being problematic is reinforced by the British government's nostalgia for the power the British Empire held over colonised lands and peoples. This is exampled by the emphasis put on by former prime minister Boris Johnson's with his call for global talent in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) to come to the UK, *"the UK has a proud history of scientific discovery, but to lead the field and face the challenges of the future we need to continue to invest in talent and cutting-edge research"* (Gov.co.uk, 2020). This has meant proposing a scheme to fast-track international students and researchers for the UK stay to reinforce the 'British is Best' image. This example demonstrates the double standards that exist in relation to immigrants, that inadvertently supports a 'good' or 'bad' immigrant rhetoric.

In addition to Brexit, the covid-19 pandemic has significantly impacted British and non-British student mobility. Before the pandemic, university settings thrived on human interaction and experiences, creating multiple study-related groups that encouraged socialisation to enhance formal learning as well as create connections outside of study-related activities (Wenger, 1998). These disruptions have meant significant adaptations to students' knowledge acquisition. Despite the sudden shift to online

learning, prominent universities have gradually moved university programmes online over the past decade (Bao, 2020). The same issues remain of inclusivity of online education, with resources such as laptops, tablets, or mobile phones being needed to facilitate the materials transferred online (Barbour, Hodges, Moore, Lockee, Trust, and Bond, 2020; Filius, 2019). Students chose to remain at home instead of moving to new cities and living on their university campuses (Unesco, 2021). These changes in education leave questions about the quality of education for students labelled international (Florian, 2014) within the structures of British higher education (Arur and DeJaeghere, 2019).

3.3   Connecting the Spaces through Language and Identity

Language creates opportunities to connect people to places contributing to the remapping of identities in multiple geographical places (local/national). This section explores the significance of language concerning identity in education.

Sociolinguist Khawla Badwan discussed how identity becomes dependent on recognising the Other (2021) in place. The recognition of the Other is referred to by Gee (2004) as discourse identity; identity formed through written or spoken communication. Discourse identity is created through multiple forms of language that can be described as being socio-politically charged with the Other being recognised as different because of the supposed differences for example, having a 'foreign accent' this then becomes linked to a foreign place. So, although language can be understood as a bridge to communicate, it can also be used as an identifier to alienate. The use of language in this way connects to a constructivist approach as it is through that language shared that assumptions of the Other are made. Despite Badwan's (2021) understanding of language and identity aligning within a constructivist approach to connecting spaces through language, it is necessary to be mindful of how language can be used to create narratives around identity. Although this project has a decolonial outlook, there is the need to recognise the power that language has in forming or remapping identities, especially in relation to students who are labelled as international, when they are exposed to multiple nationalities.

Further to this, Badwan (2021) explains that language is used to mould individuals socially to the environment that they are in, where particular identities of a culture or environment, such as a school, produce normalising narratives. Baxter (2020) reiterates this, positioning language as a force to coerce, reproducing particular social desirability through language learning. For example, schools can act as potential sites for conflicting identities as, if the child is multi-lingual, the use of a dominant language in school can becomes a place of entrapment to suppress identities to fit into the mainstream culture.

Continuing the positioning of language as a force to coerce, Badwan's (2021) critical review of language and identity found that having an emphasis on an English-only policy in British education dismisses migrant children's learning in other languages. Again, this is reinforced by educational principles that tend to hold the view of national modes of life as static, instead of fluid. She asserts that this inadvertently also contributes to the unconfident development of migrant children's identities, highlighting that they tend to cut ties with and shy away from histories, heritage, and roots, which presents the danger of seeing families and school as two separate and sometimes contradictory worlds, leading to alienation. Although this does not directly apply to the age demographic of this project, Badwan's (2021) understanding demonstrates the crucial connection between language and educational institutions from an early stage.

Cities tend to be linked to dynamism, complexity, and diversity, which can be associated with the variances of existing languages (Badwan, 2020). Badwan (2021) explains that identity is centred on the history of a place; therefore, narratives become situated around the people, what the place is known for, and aspects of cultural heritage associated with it.

Badwan's (2020) earlier research which looked at 2019 policy reports in the City of Manchester, supports the concept of place enriching language. The report identified the importance of nurturing linguistic diversity. She found that acknowledging language diversity helps with identity mapping and construction through the co-production of understanding who 'we' are in the present. Therefore, the connection can be made to how place, and language contribute to the richness of narrative. However, recognising language diversity, for example, with the City of Manchester, is

unique and requires significant funding and maintenance with grass-root projects. This crucially helps challenge colonial views of the world as illustrated by Pente and Ward's (2018) research that explored via heritage projects, immigration, community and decline of an industrial town. They found that who we are, our identity, is influenced on the narratives formed of that 'place,' which can create a sense of belonging or rejection.

Another research project that is applicable to understanding identity and language is Wang's (2022) exploration, via interviews, of transnational identity of Chinese student returnees from the UK to China. Critical components to identity remapping, acknowledged by Wang (2022), were the feeling of being in-between the home culture (Chinese) and the culture the student entered (British). This meant that identities were negotiated and did not typically fall into strict dichotomies. Instead, identity was flexible in each place. However, how can this inform the student's experiences as an international student? Utilising Gill's (2007) research, it is important to consider the flexibility of the student's identity, which relies on how much the student decides to adjust to the presumed intercultural environment. This flexibility influences international student experiences through determining how they navigate their new culture. Subsequently, it becomes necessary to be mindful of the pressures that students labelled as international face, with student who are exposed to multiple national identities, can be pressured into forming a reproduction of the local cultural behaviours and traditions (Morris, 2022).

Language, identity, and place are essential factors in this research project as this project aims to explore the narratives of Indian women studying in a university in a city in Northern England. Narratives are formed with language and the language the women choose to use will help to begin or continue conversations and form the narrative they choose to share. Related interests to this are their identity in place which includes India and Britain. Although this project has elements of constructivism, which is discussed in chapter 4, the research seeks a decolonial outlook which looks to re-narrate the pre-constructed pathways that language has created through reclaiming ownership of identity through narrative.

3.4   Community and [Not] Belonging

This section explores the concepts of community and belonging. Both terms, because of their use in everyday language, as well as with within academia, has created multiple avenues in which it could be understood, interpreted, and experienced. This section will look at some of these ways, and how they will be applied to this project.

I begin with using a classical iteration of what community can be, and I discuss this through Gusfield's (1975) explanation of community being formed through two overarching factors of geography. The first factor looked at communities based in relation to local residence and character development, the second is the formation of human relationships and personal development which are not related by location but are also not mutually exclusive. The issue with Gusfield's (1975) iteration of the term is its limitation to geographical boundaries which is reflective of the time. However, since the inception of this definition there has been the development of improved technology, which means that these geographical boundaries can be, and have been reduced with the inclusion of online applications that have allowed for visual and audio connections across the world (Luo, Zhang, and Qi, 2017).

Since Gusfield's (1975) definition of community, alternative views of the term have since been developed. Another view of what a community is and what it is comprised of is from Mannerini and Fedi, (2009). In their research conducted in the North-West and South of Italy, they explored the multiple senses of community, through 76 semi-structured interviews, they explained the difficulty to navigate community because of its use across multiple disciplines. They continued with explaining the term to be associated to undifferentiated identity, emphasising unity instead of diversity, spontaneity, and emotion instead of reasoning, as well as cohesion instead of conflict. This definition focusses on the strength that a community can provide if the group share a unified identity. Mannerini and Fedi's (2009) exploration can be interpreted as an idealistic and positive outlook of the term, however, it is important to be mindful that the term can elicit multi-faceted feelings and experiences. However, with their definition, the risk of having undifferentiated identity leads to the colonial possibilities of communities.

The coloniality of community has been commented on by Dutta (2018). Although Dutta's (2018) commentary is from the perspective of community psychology, there is a need to recognise how communities can inherently reproduce problematic and hierarchical relationships that reflect wider Global South and North 'norms,' which again reproduce some peoples as subservient to the community needs. She states that this is perhaps because communities, although can be seen in a positive light as mentioned previously in this section, it does have the power as a collective system of people to marginalise the already marginilised through character reification.

Research conducted in Hawaii by Goodyear-Ka'opuas (2013) based on her, other young educators and local parents founded one of the very few Hawaiian cultured schools that struggled against the US mainstream curricula. Their research highlighted the battle against the ideas of settler colonialism and mainstream education. She portrayed detailed narratives of the struggles they faced within the school, and the fight to value their Hawaiian knowledge and ways of being. From this research and experiences of setting up the school, she commented on the strong coloniality of community, in that communities can typically be linked to history in the way that groups imagine, produce, and reproduce knowledge about the future. The community that Goodyear-Ka'opua (2013) and her associates created was a community for and with the notion to value non-Western, or mainstream education and ways of being as equal. Thus, demonstrating the importance of community to be reframed within the Global North as a tool to encourage the production and reproduction of knowledge from the Global South.

Expanding the understanding of community further, the concept of community can be discussed in relation to the sense of belonging. Miller's (2003) research on belonging to a country, was based in Australia, addressed its colonial past in relation to Aboriginal peoples. Although Australian and Indian histories are different, Miller (2003) highlighted the problematisation of who can or cannot ask about who belongs to a national identity. She concluded with the findings that belonging is something that must be created through a transparency of who and where we come from.

Developing Miller's (2003) inclusion of the term belonging alongside explaining community, belonging is also considered a scholarly concept that is ambiguous

because of our understanding and applications of the term in everyday language (Laˈhdesmaˈki et al., 2016). A simple yet effective definition of the term is suggested by Probyn (2015) who described belonging as a desire for an attachment to people, places, or modes of being and ways in which individuals and groups are caught within wanting to belong and become. Probyn's (2015) iteration of belonging can be linked to multiple conceptualisations of community which will be discussed below.

Research conducted by Sakata, Winston-Proctor, and Harris (2023), explored Black and Minority Ethnic students' experiences in an Elite British university through interviews and focus groups found that the notion of community was entwined with a sense of belonging. Interestingly, the participants in that research described a sense of belonging as having a community that was inclusive of minority and marginalised groups. Other key findings from the research were that students felt it was hard to find a sense of belonging and could not relate to the peers on his course, as well as some of the participants naturally gravitated to people who shared the same ethnicity or racial background. Sakata et al's (2023) research is relevant to this project as it highlights the complexity of the term community within a university environment, and how the term community cannot be described without discussion of other linked concepts or experiences.

So far community has been explored in relation to physical geographical boundaries, which have been alleviated due to technological advances. Additionally, the problem of communities as potential sites for reproducing colonial and Western imperial hierarchies has been addressed. Antonsich's (2010) connects these concepts by adding psychological and political wellbeing to community experiences. They understood psychological belonging as a personal or intimate feeling of being at home in a place i.e., place belongingness and belonging as a discursive resource which constructs, claims, justifies, or resists forms of socio-spatial inclusion/exclusion equating to political belonging. By adding the element of political belonging to community experience geographical boundaries are further reduced.

For example, Laˈhdesmaˈki et al (2016) discussed political belonging as something that can be commonly associated with geographical boundaries, social and temporal spaces, factors prompted by migration, mobility, and displacement of people across

national and international crossings. Previous studies on migration and mobility, have highlighted belonging as having multiple simultaneous place attachments that create multi-sited belongingness (please see Bennett, 2014; Marcu, 2014 for further discussion) and feelings of in-betweenness (see section 4.3).

Alongside 'wanting to belong,' there is also choosing not to. Harris and Gandolfo (2014) explored not-belonging, which was explained as the comfort of not having to be something prescribed by group rules as typically belonging and non-belonging as structures determined by hierarchies of power. The recognition of non-belonging or not-belonging is powerful as it can also provide a chance to explore what encourages us to not want to belong. This understanding is relevant for this study as often there is the sense that without this belonging to a group there is a disconnection or failing of the student experiences.

The term community is conceptually ambiguous, so, as the second research question suggests, community will explore how the women define community and explore their community experiences through their narratives. As a departure point for understanding what a community will be understood as in this research project, the following definition will be utilised. Community will be understood as a dynamic concept that includes several interconnected elements. First, I include having a sense of belonging, as discussed by Sakata et al. (2023), and also political belonging, as explored by Lähdesmäki et al. (2016), which help define geographical boundaries. In addition, community is seen as social, shaped by the environmental and personal context, and temporal, meaning that communities can evolve over time, influenced by the continual journeys of people, their places, and events (Clandinin et al, 2006). These factors are closely tied to migration, mobility, and displacement, which lead people to cross national and international borders. Importantly, this definition also acknowledges that communities can be colonial tools, often rooted in historical processes of how groups produce and reproduce knowledge, shaping their understanding of the future (Goodyear-Ka'opua, 2013).

3.5 Universities as Sites of Belonging

The experiences of belonging and the importance of this were altered significantly on the 11th of March 2020, when WHO (World Health Organisation) declared that the coronavirus (covid-19) had put the world into a global health pandemic. The social lockdown, the restriction of in-person contact, that followed drastically affected the day-to-day functioning of our local and global communities, revealing many vulnerabilities and uncertainties about how communities could return (Penkler, Müller, Hanson, 2020).

Specific to this research project, it is important to discuss universities and how they became affected sites of belonging. Typically, universities comprise of various communities, through membership that relies on face-to-face or close-proximity contact. As Adnan and Anwar (2020) illustrate in their research on online learning in Pakistan during the pandemic, that the social restrictions meant a seismic shift in how student learned and spent their free time, with learning and socialising moving online. This demonstrated the impact of educational changes across the world. These changes can be connected to, as mentioned in previous sections (section 3.4), to the importance of free time communities and positive peer interaction through being community members provide in relation to having a sense of belonging. Commentators such as Manago, Taylor and Greenfield (2012); Maunder (2018); Rovai (2002) highlight how having a sense of belonging to a broader university community, from study-related activities or free time interests, helps to increase satisfaction and experiences with students' respective academic courses.

Therefore, it is important to look at how universities are places for co-creation and coproduction of knowledge and sociocultural experiences. As explained by Dollinger, Lodge, and Coates (2018), co-creation looks to include student feedback, opinions, and a wide range of resources to offer increased value to both the student and the institution. This idea of co-creation feeds into the globalisation and marketisation of higher education as an enterprise which seeks to expand its demographic through a perceived quality control of product (degree courses). However, as previously discussed the globalisation of higher education has encouraged a level of consumerism, raised competition, and therefore created the space for co-creation

which deployed promoting student-led learning, feedback, and standardised contact hours, all emphasising the student as the consumer (Temple, Callender, Grove, and Kersh, 2016; Lomas, 2007). But this does not mean that there have been many collaborative pathways to enable the effective co-creation of better university environments for learning (Dollinger et al 2018). It is essential that better pathways are enacted upon to create a collaborative space through decoloniality because the university landscape continues to change drastically, on a global scale, due to massification of degrees (Mark, 2013).

Moving to co-production, an early definition presented by Gibbert, Leibold and Probst (2002) explain that although similar to co-creation, co-production crucially aims to have active participation by both the university and its students, to identify current and future needs. However, this becomes difficult with limited accessibility. As, without accessibility, valuable co-creation cannot happen. Knight and De-Wit (2018) demonstrate in their assessment of the trends of the internationalisation process of US universities, that without valuable co-creation it resulted in a broken process for both the students and the institutions, where the knowledge created and shared needs to be experienced as a reciprocal process of mutual benefits and exchanges. This again can be connected to the previous points made (section 3.1), where Tiechler (2004) highlights that internationalisation is the focus on knowledge transfer. This assumes an exchange of knowledge which is alluded to by Knight and De-Wit (2018), where in fact, this understanding could help toward reducing the value placed on Western knowledge.

In this research project co-production and co-creation are connected by the activity of learning. It is an important term that can be used to facilitate community formation. Therefore, learning, similar to the previous terms discussed, should be defined in this research context. I note here a classical definition by Lachman (1997) which refers to it as a process informed by experiences that results in a change of behaviour. However, this definition of learning as a simple function does not consider that changes of behaviour may not be necessary or occur as a simple change *(*De Houwer, Barnes-Holmes and Moors, 2013). In Houwer, Barnes-Holmes and Moors (2013) assessment of what learning is, adapts and develops Lachman's (1997) definition of learning. It comprises of 3 components: 1. Changes to the behaviour of the person,

behaviour is referred to as an observable response, however this does include conscious thought, as this then is observed by the person 2. A regularity in the environment that the person is in, for example a classroom or lecture hall and 3. A causal relationship between the regularity of the environment and the behaviour of the person, i.e., the classroom which may contain other students, may encourage, and create a regular behaviour change of the student to read at the beginning of their class. This project will recognise learning using De Houwer et al's (2013) understanding of the term, with the primary focus of learning to be based on their first component (changes to the behaviour of the person).

Therefore, through understanding learning as a way to change behaviour consciously, this can contribute to the formation and involvement within communities. Learning then becomes an activity where communities can be created and maintained by extending social networks (Nichani and Hung, 2002). Wenger's (1998) theory of communities in practice will be used to explore the conceptualisation and engagement of a community with Indian female students who are labelled international at a university in the North of England. Communities of practice are about a shared membership that does not need to be in person, with a shared endeavour in which the community members learn together. It is based on the following principles for communities in practice to occur, there must be meaning (a way of experiencing the world) practice, (having shared resources and ways of addressing shared problems), community (engaging in joint activities) and identity (how learning develops our sense of self, knowledge, and belonging to that community). Communities of practice are about collaboration between community members but are not limited to the community, as they are living curriculums (Lave and Wenger, 1991).

As highlighted through this section, there is a strong connection between belonging and geographical location, specifically the feeling of returning to the local, as suggested by Badwan (2021;2020), which brings into focus this research project's aim of exploring how belonging to the local location affects the understanding and engagement of communities.

3.6 Summary of Understanding the Landscape of Western Higher Education

The literature presented in this section begins with providing an overview of the internationalisation and globalisation of higher education, and how those terms have influenced the nature of education on both a local and national level. The literature presented demonstrated the marketisation of higher education through both the terms and how it has altered student's expectations. This then is connected to explaining how student mobility in higher education has been propelled by globalisation, which is linked back to British colonial histories of seeking power and greatness on a global scale. Acknowledging the barriers of student mobility and effects of globalisation then helps to connect language, identity, through space (location). This part crucially draws attention to the value placed on the English language, and how again, this reinforces a 'West is best' rhetoric through this one language. This part also illustrates the dangers of homogenisation through educational policy that recognises identity as static. Through discussing identity, language, and place, this created the pathway to explore the communities that are formed, as well as the sense of belonging or not belonging that is experienced by students. This final part of the section then also addressed the university as a site of belonging and what that meant for students in relation to feeling connected to their geographical location, and how that may or may not have impacted their sense of self, whilst considering external influences such as the pandemic and what that meant to the changing of how communities were experienced.

4 Un-packing Decolonial Theory in Detail

This chapter maps out the relevant decolonial theories to help create a foundation for the principles that will help guide the research aims and questions. As a reminder the research questions are: What does it mean for Indian women at a university in the North of England to be labelled as international students? How do the Indian women in this research project understand and experience communities linked to study-related activities and their free time? What are the connections between the women's international student experiences and their study-related and free time communities whilst studying in England?

4.1 My Understanding of Knowledge Production

I discuss my development in understanding where knowledge comes from, and the paradigms that I have begun from and now find myself within to help connect all parts of this thesis. I initially took a position within the classical constructivist paradigm, as I agreed that our realities are continuously constructed and reconstructed depending on our environmental surroundings. It has since developed to include knowledge and realities to be (re)constructed with recognition of colonial legacies. By this I mean non-Western knowledge, its roots in which it comes from, and how it should be recognised as equally valid and important. I engage with the idea that knowledge is learned through the 'informal.' Knowledge from the non-Western is crucially created and distributed through stories. Stories are our lifeblood, and it is vital that we keep this alive, in the words of Edward Said, "history is made by men and women, just as it can be unmade and rewritten… our Orient becomes ours to possess and direct" (Said, 1977)

The construction of realities and knowledge through the awareness of colonial legacies and the intention to decolonise knowledge production works well with narrative analysis. Narratives are constructed and are operated at different yet connected levels. For example, as noted by Hollway and Jefferson (2017), narratives are on an interactional level which can oscillate; this could include narratives that differ, are conscious, or unconscious within the shared language bringing in multiple dimensions to the narratives. However, again, the issue with this, is that constructivism

does not consider the power relations that exist within the narratives, seeing the colonial legacies as a part of the narrative without questioning them.

I connect this to Reissman's (2008) research, who addresses in their commentary of narrative analysis, that through applying a constructivist approach, it does consider the broader interpersonal, social, historical, and cultural relations. This creates the understanding that narratives are co-constructed in various interconnecting spheres, including but not limited to interactional, historical, institutional, and discursive. The narratives shared then become concerned with the social function or contribution to society. Although they draw upon significant areas of interest, particularly historical and institutional, it does not consider or explicitly acknowledge the colonial infrastructures that exist within a narrative. Without recognising the inequality informed by colonialism, each narratives contribution will vary depending on the narrator's experiences of colonial legacies.

The narratives shared in this project recognise historical, institutional, and social factors amongst others, it is necessary to understand my role and involvement as the researcher, British- Indian woman and student. This is because the narratives shared would be partly informed by the questions that I ask. This within a constructivist approach stresses continuously changing elements of narratives, understanding them as incomplete products that are impacted by societal, historical, and cultural factors they are situated within (Bakhtin, 1981). However, as highlighted with this section, a decolonial approach encourages in-depth discussions that create the opportunity to approach difficult topics such as power, colonialism and Westernisation, that help seek the origin of that knowledge and experience, whilst valuing it equally to other knowledge and knowledge systems (Ziai, Bendix, and Müller, 2020). Through moving to a decolonial approach of knowledge production in higher education it also situates the understanding of how data is influenced and presented by the researcher and the experiences they encompass. Crucially, this recognises that not one researcher is expected to interpret the data in the same way as another (Ewan, 2001).

4.2 Decoloniality

Decolonial theory is vast with various conceptualisations on reimagining Western knowledge systems existing (Dunford, 2017; Andreotti, 2009). However, Andreotti (2009) noted that each theoretical approach only offers a partial and limited perspective; one theory cannot cover this research project's intersecting topics and areas. Decolonial principles, also needs to be mindful of becoming symbolic, or as Tuck and Yang (2014) put it, a metaphor. Therefore, it is vital that decoloniality is seen as a resistance, and as a way of being, as although colonial structures may have been formally dismantled, the repercussions of those structures remain. Therefore, I will approach this section with decolonial theories that have influenced the principles that will guide the project, which will be presented at the end of the chapter.

Decoloniality cannot be fully understood without understanding colonialism. Colonialism is linked, by many authors, to enlightenment, modernity, and capitalism (Dunford, 2017; Tlostanova and Mignolo, 2009; Maldonado-Torres, 2004; Mignolo, 2002). These vehicles of justification have driven Western knowledge and hierarchy as universal, de-valuing and dismissing knowledge systems and ways of life from the Global South.

Tlostanova and Mignolo (2009) explain further, that conceptually coloniality is the justified outcome of modernity that has allowed for enslavement, barbarism, and dehumanisation of the Other. They continue to explain the colonial imagining as including and going beyond capitalism to affect lifestyles, morals, and structure of authority. Tlostanova and Mignolo (2009) classify these into four spheres: economic control (the fight for land, natural resources, and the exploitation of labour); the struggle for control of authority (as a battle for power); control of the public, based on sexual normativity and 'natural' gender relations; the control of knowledge through education, and the colonising of existing knowledge. This can be linked to Mignolo and Escobar's (2013) acknowledgement of the coloniality of power which becomes a system of power used to dominate minority peoples, labour, and land to benefit the colonisers, mainly European, becoming more widely accepted as a legitimate economic process. Therefore, the notion of progress and development becomes dependent on coloniality for its existence (Maldonado-Torres, 2004).

I now discuss the origins of decoloniality, which stem from the scholarly work in sociology originating in South America linked to Marxism. Notably, Quijano's (2007) decolonial work explored the coloniality of power, which pointed to the coloniality and eurocentrism of knowledge production. Building on Quijano's work, Mignolo focused on elaborating the concept of modernity to coloniality. The key connecting factors of decoloniality is the production, and reproduction of knowledge which can be expanded to what research is allowed to be created and carried through, and which voices are being allowed to speak (Ullah, 2023). Here, De Sousa Santos's (2016) work on the Global North and Global South are applicable. He crucially coined the term 'epistemicide,' a term used to signify the injustice that knowledge originating from the Global South is brutally ignored, unrecognised, or dismissed completely as knowledge in the Global North. Therefore, De Sousa Santos (2016) illustrates the need for decoloniality to engage with the geopolitics of knowledge production as a necessary process to realise epistemic colonisation.

This research project is situated within the education sector, and it is crucial to understand how decoloniality can be applied to education. A classical understanding is presented by Wallerstein (1991). He developed the world systems theory, which envisioned a global citizenship project through education, emphasising decoloniality and diversity. Wallerstein's (1991) theory categorised countries as core (wealthy), peripheral (poor), and semi-peripheral (moderate wealth) countries. The core countries exploited peripheral countries for their resources and labour, with semi-peripheral countries exploiting peripheral countries or being exploited by the core countries. However, this system remains problematic when the knowledge being reimagined is created from a Western philosophical perspective (Mignolo, 2002).

Similarly, to Wallerstein (1991), Dussel (1993) partitions modernity into a Eurocentric and planetary system. The Eurocentric partition is central to development, being born only in Europe and then expanding to other parts of the world. The planetary system works with the idea that sees Europe at the centre of the world system, which does not interact with other 'planets' but manages them through imperialist values and functions. A significant issue with the world/planetary system is that they are based on gaining power from land, labour, and exploitation of class and gender without recognising the value of indigenous knowledge, values, and culture (Lugones, 2010;

Andreotti, 2009). This is reflected with the planetary system centring around Europe, recreating European, colonial and imperial principles.

The decolonial principles that guide this project needs to be imagined breaking from the Eurocentric/ Western geopolitical boundaries in place, as described by Dussel (1993). This can be taken in many directions, some of which I will explore here. The question that continues to evolve is how we can create knowledge beyond the world systems (first-world, Global North, third-world systems, Global South) and Eurocentric ideals? (Grosfoguel, 2008). Maldonado-Torres (2004) incorporates the notion of diversality into decoloniality. Diversality creates space for non-Western knowledge, culture, politics, and social memories. Mignolo (2002) points out that making space for new knowledge creates new social orders of acceptance of difference. I bring this discussion to the setting of higher education where there is a space of creativity and negotiation between the university, the teacher, and the student.

So far, many of the understandings of decoloniality presented address classical systems that situate Western knowledge, society, and culture as the pinnacle. I bring attention to Miguel Zavala, the son of immigrants who grew up in Southeast Los Angeles. He is a scholar whose main research interest sit within decolonising research pedagogies. I draw particularly on Zavala's (2016) paper, which continues the conversation of decolonisation within the sphere of education. He specifically addresses the need to rebalance the power within formal educational systems such as schools, colleges and universities, through strategies that decolonise and empower the student. This decolonial approach to rebalancing power involves counter/storytelling, healing, and reclaiming. Strategies that are interconnected but non-sequential.

The use of counter/storytelling is broad and can be applicable to many theories, pedagogies, and methodologies often utilised in Critical Race scholarship (Hauber-Özer et al, 2021). Counter/storytelling is a technique that involves conscious engagement and reflection in language which challenges mainstream narratives in education (Goessling, 2018; Dixon and Anderson, 2017). It is a method that contributes to the reframing of knowledge production and reproduction, rooting indigenous, colonial, and personal experiences through communication resisting

narratives of modernity and Eurocentrism (Zavala, 2016). I additionally interpret and include storytelling informed by Clandinin and Connelly's (1989) to be made up of events, experiences, opinions, or feelings that are shared, and can be malleable depending on when, how, and where the story is told or re/told.

Counter/storytelling can also act as an outlet and route for the process of healing. The healing practices that participants have are dependent on the individual, examples are addressing colonial legacies verbally, vocalising healing from trauma, mindful practices etc that plays a significant role in cultural learning and community (Zavala, 2016). This is supported by Badwan (2021), who understands that a self-reflexive journey rooted in language can help explain the oppression experienced. Continuing with Zavala's (2016) decolonial strategies of education, reclaiming identity and spaces involves recovering cultural identities, practices, and relations to land. I appreciate the flexibility of this approach because its interconnected nature which creates freedom of expressions when discussing experiences. Connecting these strategies is language. Language creates communication and space for developing understanding of experiencing colonial legacies providing an opportunity for healing (Duran and Duran, 1995) and reclaiming.

I now bring the discussion on decoloniality back to this research project. The basis for decolonialism in this study is influenced by a number of commentators such as, Arur and DeJaeghere, (2019), Mignolo (2011), Santos (2018, 2016) to be a lens that will examine knowledge production and practices concerning knowledge production and reproduction, as a visible process to disrupt the coloniality that exists, and regain the non-Western knowledge lost due to 'epistemicide.' This will be acknowledged through the complex and dynamic relationships of pre-colonial- post-colonial, West-within-non-West, and non-West-within-West and ideas of superiority within and between societies. This will be supported through language to help deconstruct and de-link common assumptions with our knowledge production, allowing for reconnections across knowledge structures whilst not being limited to geographical borders, time, or identity (Arur and De Jaeghere, 2019). To imagine a decolonial existence, communication between all peoples must remain open, which requires an active reflection of the researcher, and all parties involved to help better understand their

belonging and recognise how places has influenced the perspective of thought (Mignolo, 2011).

4.3 In-betweenness: a Decolonial Byproduct

The discussions so far on decoloniality, particularly around knowledge production in dynamic and complex spaces such as universities, can lead to experiences of in-betweenness. Although in-betweenness can be found in decolonial theories (Maldonado-Torres, 2004; Zavala, 2016; Arur and DeJaeghere, 2019), it is not explicit within the context of higher education and the international student experience.

There are many iterations on how being 'in-between' or a sense of 'in-betweenness' can be understood. For example, as mentioned previously, Wang's (2022) research explored transnational identity in *in-between spaces* through student mobility of Chinese student returnees from the UK. It was found that the Chinese students had experienced a sense of in-betweenness. They demonstrated perplexed feelings for attachment to both cultures, creating contrasting transnational identities. Chinese students came to the UK transitioning from *them* to *us* and returned to China as 'foreigners,' therefore, in-betweenness became centred around a mixed sense of belonging. Although Wang (2022) crucially brought attention to the complexity of in-betweenness, questions remain on how the students navigated and resolved their moments of uncertainty. In this study, Wang's (2022) understanding of in-betweenness will be developed to illustrate the importance of having a sense of belonging beyond the intersections of Western hierarchies and colonial legacies which defy any imposed geographical boundaries, as well as looking at the connections between Western hierarchies and colonial legacies. It is also important to recognise the role of a *globalised* university when understanding the complexity of identities and the moments of uncertainty that can be formed within them. However, international experiences of identity transformation must move away from international students readjusting to established cultural normalities (Marginson, 2014) to encourage and enhance reciprocal learning and equal collaboration between East and West (Rizvi, 2011).

Another iteration of in-betweenness is from Khawla Badwan. Badwan's (2021) interpretation of 'in-between' differs from Wang's (2022) by drawing attention to how identities are negotiated through emotional discourse. She understands being 'in-between' to exist within varying social positionalities through discourse when individuals feel they do not fit the mould (Badwan, 2021). Badwan (2021) further described in-between as an emotional phase that requires patience, perseverance, and bravery when dealing with conflicting identities. In-betweenness here does not account for the struggles, or negative emotions endured to feel patience, or perseverance. Questions remain on what feelings are expressed during this time? Is there a level of uncertainty the individual expresses during this emotional phase? Interestingly, Badwan's (2021) iteration illustrates a positive outlook on being in-between, as strengthening the individual's character. However, this positioning does not consider the broader structures in which the individual may be situated, leaving space for this research project to discuss in-betweenness from a decolonial outlook and explore the perspective of women living abroad and as students in higher education.

Alternatively, Said (1978) associated feelings of being 'in-between' with isolation and alienation creating a sense of strangeness and out of place-ness. Mobile lives can further exacerbate these feelings of isolation through globalisation, making it hard to settle in the in-betweenness because of the change in culture, languages, and customs of different places (Badwan, 2021). This connects to Marginson's (2014) construction of identities as reflexive and evolving along a continuum, with the self constantly transforming in mobility.

Tsolidis and Kostogriz (2008) included a political lens to understand being 'in-between'. They explored the identity of Greek students in Australia learning the Greek language in shared spaces such as Australian school classrooms. Tsolidis and Kostogriz (2008) highlight that national identities and being recognised with a national identity is considered a privilege that reflects acceptance into that society. Even though the Greek students were learning about their Greek heritage, the learning of this was conducted in a Western-dominant space that influenced their 'Greekness.' Crucially, the addition of this political lens helped situate the feelings of being 'in-between' as

another factor of Western hierarchy that can exist when learning about non-Western culture in Western spaces.

My understanding of in-betweenness is informed by Wang's (2022), Badwan's (2021), and Tsolidis and Kostogriz's (2008) iteration of the term, alongside thoughtful consideration of the women's experiences will be presented in chapter 7. Therefore, in this research project, I highlight how in-betweenness can become a significant component in the process of self-decolonisation which crucially brings acknowledgement to the colonial legacies that remain in our experiences. This leads to uncertainty, in which feelings of indecision or insecurity are faced, demonstrating the difficulty of decolonising within such deep-rooted structures. It is important to acknowledge the complex emotions experienced during in-betweenness and moments of uncertainty to allow time for self-decolonisation. We also need to give ourselves recognition for, as Badwan (2021) explains, the patience, perseverance, and bravery that can be found in in-betweenness. By recognising the women's experiences, which will become present in the remaining parts of the thesis, I have developed in-betweenness as a powerful strategy to navigate the continual decolonial process.

4.4 Guiding Principles: Zavala's Decolonial Strategies

Although there are notable decolonial theories that can be used to support this research, Zavala's (2016) decolonial strategies of education will be the main guiding points for this project. I will use counter/storytelling, healing and reclaiming. These strategies differ from the aforementioned decolonial theories through its strategies that can be applied to decolonise the self through recognising colonial legacies particularly within education. I strongly align with using Zavala's decolonial strategies (2016) as there is a level of openness and flexibility in how they can be interpreted and applied. The presentation of the strategies is presented non-sequentially.

As previously mentioned, Zavala (2016) uses counter/storytelling to acknowledge colonial legacies or impositions in narratives shared, healing through decolonial practices, i.e., cultural learning, or the continuing of traditions, and reclaiming of cultural identities. These strategies recognise the value of language as a way to

communicate experiences of coloniality. Although Zavala (2016) categorises the act of decolonisation through strategies, it is important to be mindful of the binaries that can be created through the categorisation of decolonial acts (Vieira, 2019). I recognise this through understanding decolonialism as a continual process not limited to geographical borders, time, or identity (Arur and DeJaeghere, 2019).

Counter/storytelling

Reflexive process that involves the women to name, remember and share their experiences, creating language to communicate and re-establish erased culture and traditional knowledge.

Healing

A social/ collective and spiritual/psychological process to heal from historical trauma that could manifest as physical, social, cultural and psychological.

Reclaiming

Reclaiming culture, practices, identities, and spaces.
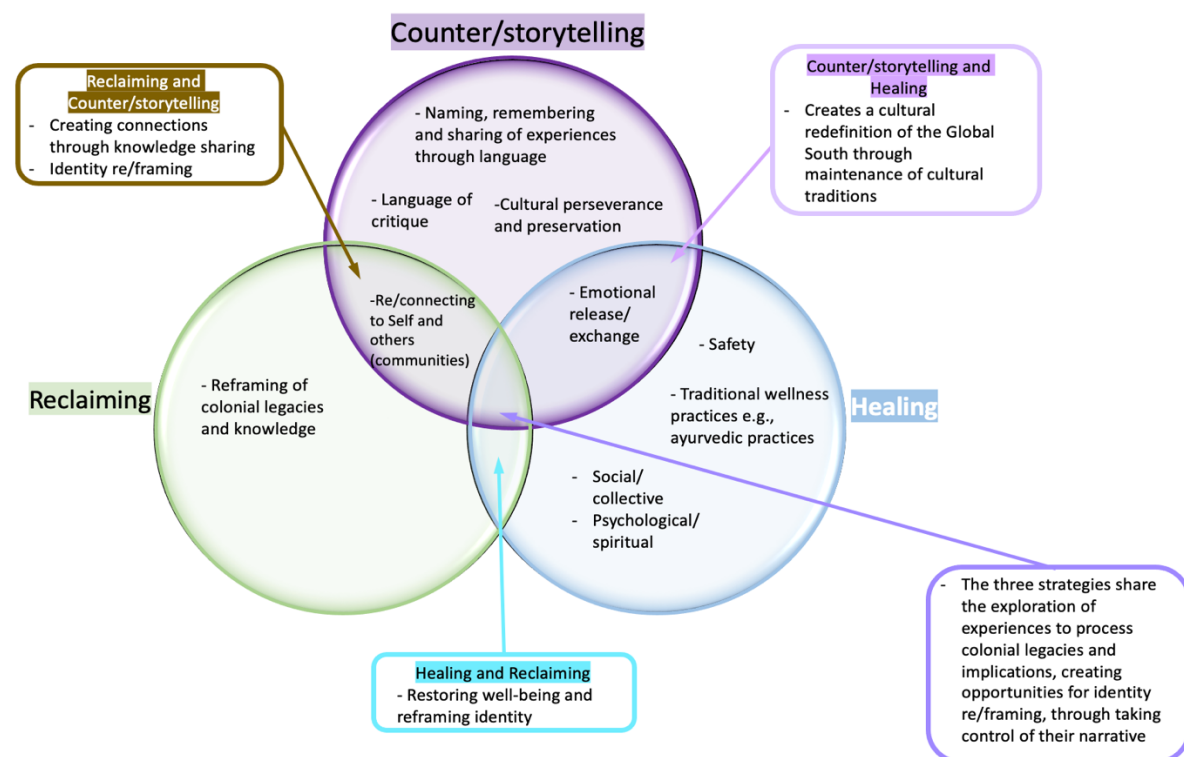
Figure 1: A Venn diagram showing my interpretation of Zavala's Decolonial Strategies and interconnectedness of the strategies

4.5   Decolonial Principles of the Project

As this section has highlighted a decolonial outlook is central to this project in highlighting colonial and power structures that reinforce Western knowledge and knowledge production as central to educational and societal progression. Therefore, the following will be decolonial principles (an ethos of power-sharing and challenging colonial and Western power positions) that will help guide the project in addition to the framework above.

1. Ethos of Power Sharing

An ethos of power sharing will be enacted through having the use of narratives, and member checking (section 5.11.4). The narratives, although partly informed by my questioning, will consist of the experiences, and opinions of the women who have partaken in this project, de-linking existing colonial rhetoric through ownership of their narratives. Through seeking an ethos of power sharing in this project there is the opportunity to highlight lost identities through the narrative sharing, highlighting the reclamation of those identities.

2. Challenging colonial/ Western power positions

Challenging of the colonial power positions within higher education and society will be explored through a reflective assessment of the institutional structure that the women were in, and how for example the labelling of students as international can be experienced as reinforcing Western knowledge systems and imposed superiority. Through this recognition and voicing of these challenges it would encourage self-empowerment and determination to be confident in the value of non-Western knowledge and knowledge systems.

4.6   Summary of Un-packing Decolonial Theory in Detail

This chapter engaged with relevant viewpoints on decoloniality, looking at Mignolo (2021, 2002); Maldonado-Torres, (2020, 2004); Wallerstein (1974; 1991), De Sousa Santos (2018, 2016) and Zavala (2016) amongst others, to create a foundation to understand how decoloniality can be applicable within the sector of higher education.

The section on decoloniality highlighted its conceptual vastness as well as, the importance of decolonial theory in British higher education to help acknowledge colonial legacies. This led on to exploration of the principles that would be used for this research project. Although many notable viewpoints were presented, Zavala's (2016) decolonial strategies provided a process for how decoloniality can be enacted with students using counter/storytelling, healing, and reclaiming. This section ends on setting out the decolonial principles of the project demonstrating the importance of ensuring an ethos of power sharing and challenging of colonial and Western power positions. This chapter moves on to the research methodology of the project addressing three research questions: first, what does it mean for Indian women at a university in the North of England to be labelled as international students? Second, how do the women understand and experience communities linked to study-related activities and free time? Third, what are the connections between the women's international student experiences and their study-related and free time communities whilst studying in England?

5   Bringing Decolonial Narrative Research to Life: Research Methodology

5.1   Introduction

In this chapter, I explain the theoretical reasonings and support for the methodology, data generation, and analysis of the exploration of the three women's narratives. As a reminder, the departure point for the research project was to explore the participants' experiences of being labelled as international students and their experiences in communities linked to study-related activities and free time.

The first section of this chapter opens with the research questions, explaining how they were chosen and how they have helped guide the data generation and data analysis. I provide a data generation timeline that introduces and highlights the steps taken to carry out the data generation. I then begin with explaining the colonial attachment to traditional research, specifically the power dynamics, Eurocentric biases, and marginalisation of non-Western perspectives. My decolonial methodological intentions (5.3) aim to inform a method that recognises and challenges these colonial legacies. This section explains the thought process behind my intentions by discussing the existing qualitative frameworks and considerations of narrative inquiry, exploratory research principles, and decoloniality. This part details the support from these frameworks and how I used key decolonial methodological intentions to formulate an appropriate data generation method for this project.

The chapter then outlines the pilot study, focusing on the data generation tools and method. This leads to the implications of the main study, which include contributing to the decolonisation of research methodologies. The data generation process follows for the main study, including the participant selection and access, alongside small biographies of the participants. An overview of the preparation for the first and second data generation is followed by a step-by-step guide to how the narrative interviews were carried out.

The chapter then moves on to explain the data analysis process. I look at existing theoretical frameworks, how I developed experiences of in-betweenness as a decolonial methodological tool to analyse narratives, and how this was carried out.

This is followed by the member-checking process. I round this section off with trustworthiness in Qualitative Data generation and Analysis. I finish this chapter by identifying the ethical concerns of the research project and the protective procedures I had implemented to keep myself and the participants safe from harm.

5.2   Research Questions

This study aims to extend the discussions that have begun on the globalisation and internationalisation of higher education, as illustrated in Chapter 2. This research's particular focus is on female Indian students and their experiences of being labelled as international students, as well as their experiences of community linked to study-related activities and free time. I will address the following research questions: The following research questions will frame this research:

1. What does it mean for Indian women at a university in the North of England to be labelled as international students?
2. How do the women understand and experience communities linked to study-related activities and free time?
3. What are the connections between the women's international student experiences and their study-related and free time communities whilst studying in England?

5.2.1 Data Generation Process Timeline

February 2022

Engaging with Participants

Sent out emails to Schools/Faculties and Societies. Put Posters in common rooms of Social Sciences and Education department common rooms.

Had communications with a relevant society to help share my research project.
Gave four weeks for replies of interest.

March 2022

Organising First Data Generation

Two participants, Bunny and Alexis, had agreed to participate in the research. Dates for their first online one-to-one interviews were agreed. They were sent the information sheet, consent form, and topics table documents one week before their interview.

April 2022

Member Checking

The participants interviews were transcribed and summarised in a Word document and was sent back to them to be reviewed. They were asked to review the document within four weeks.

May 2022

Organising Second Data Generation

A second round of interviews (face-to-face) were planned.

Through word of mouth, a third participant, Maneet, joined the research through Alexis. Maneet was nervous as she had never participated in research before and wanted to do a paired interview.

Member Checking Second Data Generation

Another summary was created for the three participants and given to them to review. Four weeks was given as a timeframe to return the document.

A follow-up interview with Maneet was planned.

A summary was provided for review with the same four week timeline.

June 2022

Figure 2 Timeline to give an overview for data generation process

5.3 Decolonial Methodological Intentions and Practical Steps

Decolonial methodological intentions were key in helping design the data generation and analysis. These intentions refer to my deliberate choice and application of research methods that can challenge and work toward dismantling power dynamics in knowledge production and reproduction. The primary goal of this methodology was to create a data generation process that was sensitive and reflective of the decolonial principles of an ethos of power sharing and challenging colonial/ Western power positions (section 4.5). This methodology combined elements of narrative inquiry and analysis, exploratory research and reciprocal interviewing. These approaches were informed by commentators such as Hollway and Jefferson (2000;2008), Clandinin, Estefan, and Cain (2013), Allwright (2005) and Hank (2017;2015) through Zavala's (2016) crucial decolonial strategies of counter/storytelling, healing and reclaiming, and will be explained further in the section.

I was also mindful of my personal experiences as a researcher, Indian woman, and student to help understand the subjectivity and sensitivity of shared and discussed experiences. The decolonial methodological intentions for this methodology will be to understand the quality of life regardless of length of stay in the country, to involve everyone as practitioners, and for mutual development. These intentions, alongside exploratory research principles, narrative inquiry, and decolonial theory, form the data generation and analysis. Further details of how these processes were designed and carried out are explained later in the section.

5.4 (De) Coloniality of Research

It is essential to recognise the inherent coloniality of traditional research and how the decolonial principles have been used to decolonise the research process. Through the commentary of Auriacombe and Cloete (2019), I acknowledge that Western/Eurocentric research tends to follow concrete, pragmatic, quantitative approaches to knowledge production and reproduction. I utilise the questions that have been asked by Silva, Fernández, and Nguyen (2022): How can we resist the coloniality of research? How do our positionalities and identities inform our practice? As a reminder, decoloniality in this research project refers to knowledge production

and practices concerning knowledge production, and reproduction as a visible process to disrupt the coloniality that exists and regain the non-Western knowledge lost due to 'epistemicide' (Santos, 2018, 2016). Therefore, the researcher must be aware of the Western perspectives that drive empirical-based research. As the researcher, this makes it necessary for me to be vigilant, reflexive, and consciously engaged with how I can be complicit in further embedding coloniality in research. I am to do this by reframing my positioning within colonial research structures throughout this project via the deep engagement and responsibility I have with the voices I am sharing.

5.5   Qualitative Guidelines and Considerations

To answer the research questions for this project, I utilised a qualitative combination of classic and contemporary practices through narrative inquiry, exploratory research, and reciprocal interviewing guides alongside decolonial methodology. I draw attention to the relevant aspects of these frameworks, creating a hybrid methodology that allows for collaborative knowledge and minimising power imbalance through an ethos of power sharing.

5.5.1   Narrative and Story

Narratives and stories, in any form are a way to connect, connect to the people who are speaking, writing, viewing or listening. It is important to note here the subtle but important difference between a story and a narrative. As explored by Shell-Weiss (2019) and Gabriel (2004), stories are used as the foundations, telling the reader or the listener about the event(s), the people, and place(s), which feeds into narrative, and the organisation of this. In this research project, the term narratives will be used to explore the research questions set out previously. Narratives will take the understanding set out by Clandinin and Connelly, (1989) as a series of stories, involving events, experiences, and feelings that contribute to the overall organisation of information collected with the women who partook in this project. In this section, narratives and story will be explored working toward how I will be using narratives and story in this research.

Shell-Weiss, (2019) comments that through our narratives we maintain our connection to our past and future generations. This allows for decolonial principles to be facilitated

through narratives. It is responsible to understand the development of narratives and how they were used in varying fields. For example, narratives in psychology, linguistics, and anthropology, sought to imagine how we make meaning with our words (Rabinowitz, 2005). However, as Shell-Weiss (2019) discussed, narratives can be used decolonially, they can be disruptive and self-critical to the existing hierarchies of power that already exist.

5.5.1.1 Narrative Inquiry

Narrative Inquiry (NI), as presented by Clandinin, Estefan and Cain (2013), is a form of qualitative research, that is used to understand the experiences and views of people in a way which emphasises constant transition. It can be used collaboratively to inquire into both the researcher and participants stories. NI is applicable to many different approaches, such as biography, autobiography, life story, life course research, storytelling, and letter writing (Savin-Badin and Van Niekerk, 2007). It is necessary to be mindful that narratives are utilised differently by each qualitative researcher. Therefore, in this research project I had chosen to undertake the use of sharing narratives through reciprocal interviews (section 5.5.2.1).

I used the formation of narratives as a way to explore knowledge of communities and academic experiences. For this I utilised Connelly and Clandinin's (2006) three commonplaces: temporality, sociality, and space. Temporality refers to the understanding of people, places, and events as continual processes in constant transitions over multiple interactions and reflections on earlier life experiences. Sociality concerns both social and personal conditions: social conditions bring attention to environmental factors that help form the individual's context, and personal conditions refer to the hopes, feelings, and desires of the person. The last commonplace, place, denotes the physical location the inquiry takes place within, bringing attention to the physical conditions and environment of the place of inquiry. These commonplaces have been used as a guidance throughout the research project to allow narratives and experiences to be understood as constant transitions.

An alternative way of employing narrative inquiry, was through Polkinghorne's (2010) participant narrative led approach of paradigmatic analysis of narrative and narrative

analysis. Paradigmatic analysis begins with the narrative being shared and then categories are created led by the direction of the primary researcher. Narrative analysis produces narratives shared through connecting elements and details provided by each participant. Both of these processes have positives in that the narratives are produced by the participants. For this project, a combination of both was the most appropriate choice as it allowed for maximum flexibility with the negotiation of voice through the narratives told.

Narrative inquiry was combined with an exploratory practice framework. Exploratory practice, informed by Allwright (2005) and Hanks (2017, 2015) draws upon the concept of empowerment to the collaborators, mutual development, and support, connecting theory and practice. Polkinghorne's (2010) narrative inquiry aligns well with Connelly and Clandinin's (2006) commonplaces through the connected understanding of narratives being in constant transition.

However, it is important to recognise that the traditional understanding of narratives exists within a constructivist approach. The constructivist approach, as demonstrated by Esin, Fathi and Squire (2013), acknowledges how social order is created through language, communication, and interaction. This understanding is applied to explore how identities are formed in various psychosocial contexts. In contrast, Hamdan (2011) explored the use of narratives in their research, examining how Arab Muslim women perceived their roles and gender while living in Canada. This research reframed narratives as a method to deconstruct negative stereotypes and narratives that exist of Arab women living in the West. The women took control by sharing their narratives, highlighting the importance of context in understanding and interpreting these narratives.

It became imperative to be attentive to and transparent with the colonial links that narratives can carry especially as I was the researcher facilitating the conversations but also shared similar life roles such as being a student, a female, and Indian. Again, I highlight the decolonial principles in this research of an ethos of power sharing and challenging colonial hierarchy (see section 4.4). The research context is within higher education; with this in mind, it is necessary to be aware of the possible different positions of power. Therefore, a reflective assessment of my understanding of the

women's experiences as international students and of their communities linked to study-related activities and free time aided my self-empowerment becoming more confident in my decolonial methodology.

In a recent study conducted by Lenette, Vaughan, and Boydell (2022) on understanding COVID-19 experiences in New Zealand, 52 participants were asked to complete a story, and they did so with 'endings,' 'completing' the story. Their project aimed to explore how they could engage with narrative inquiry in a culturally safe way with participants. They found that although participants could use stories to help share diverse knowledge systems and understandings, it became apparent that the methodology was a critical factor in opening an avenue for disruption of knowledge rather than reinforcement. Using this research's findings as decolonial guidance, it is vital to acknowledge that Western production of narratives implicitly requires a beginning, middle and end. This is pointed out by Connelly and Clandinin (1990), who consider narratives traditionally to be lineally constructed. This research project will embrace the flexibility of the narratives shared and lean on the collaborative process between myself, as the researcher, and the women participating.

In addition, a factor to be considered was the role of the researcher. When using narratives as a data generation method alongside exploratory research principles, the researcher could often act as a conversation facilitator, becoming immersed in the experiences. For example, the researcher shares their experiences, reflecting and responding to the participant's language, issues, and connections to the research project (Hanks,2017; Clandinin et al., 2007). I carried the role of facilitator by recalling personal memories and stories to help understand the participant's communities and culture through that group, reducing exploitation of the group/community (Jones, 2017). This is supported by Ellis, Adams, and Bochner (2011), who found that for successful qualitative research to be conducted, the researcher must consciously reflect on their own experiences whilst acknowledging the subjectivity, sensitivity, and influence that may be had when collecting and interpreting data. This creates an environment for the researcher and participant to negotiate their purposes of data, intentions, and texts used in the field, as highlighted by Hollway and Jefferson's (2008; 2000) four fundamental principles of open-ended questions, careful listening to the

participant's language, avoidance of why questions, and follow-up with questions or clarifications using language or phrases from the participant.

5.5.2 Exploratory Research

Exploratory Practice (EP) research, as explained classically by Allwright (2005), is an inclusive practitioner research framework initially developed within language education and focussed on collaboration between teachers, learners, and researchers. As Hanks (2017) described in her assessment of exploratory research, integrating research and pedagogy, she crucially illustrates EP to centralise active engagement between the sites of research drawing on empowerment. In addition, exploratory practice principles are pertinent for this project as EP emphasises small-scale, locally relevant research and has previously been shown to help build an understanding of experiences for students as illustrated in Hanks's (2015) research, which explored through interviewing, the use of EP with two teachers and six learners.

The EP framework, informed by Allwright and Hanks (2009), is set around seven principles, however for the purpose of this project I discuss three of them in conjunction with decolonial principles set out in the section

Decolonial Principles of the Project. The following are the decolonial methodological intentions used for data generation:

1. Understanding the importance of quality of life through given learning experiences. The women were in England between one-to-three years depending on the length of their degree. It was necessary to consider the value of quality of life regardless of how long or short the women's time in England may have been.

2. To involve everyone as practitioners developing their own understanding. This principle works in tandem with decolonial principles and methodology demonstrated by Zavala (2016) in that decolonisation of the colonial legacies around us, requires the fundamental process of decolonisation of the self. For example, the telling of one's narratives, or sharing their healing practices or reclamation of identity.

3. Working cooperatively for mutual development in a continuous way. I have combined two EP principles here as they connect through the understanding of data to not be generated for the sole benefit of personal advancement of the researcher. This means that the participants involved in the research feel as though they are gaining equally. Again, this works in alignment with decolonial principles of an ethos of power sharing and challenging of colonial/ Western position has through member checking. (Please see Appendix 9: Example of Member Checking Process).

5.5.2.1 Reciprocal Interviewing

I combined exploratory research principles with reciprocal interviewing. Reciprocal interviewing was a method developed by Brown and Coles (2018), that looked to gain details of narratives without judgement through questioning. This was used as an entry to enhance the participant-researcher collaboration by being attentive to the participant and vice versa. The participants were encouraged to ask the researcher

questions on the social, cultural, political, pre-arranged and interview topics during the narrative sharing process. The participant acted as an equal inquirer to the researcher which aligned with the decolonial, and narrative inquiry principles used for this project. This methodology was a reminder of possible power imbalances during the interview and worked toward correcting this by giving the participant the role of inquirer/interviewer in the interview. This is highlighted by Dempsey's (2018) research on migration, negotiating positionalities and ethical considerations, where she found that the methodology chosen can be used to encourage the challenging of the *us* and *them* dichotomy, insider/outsider researcher dilemma, disrupting what can be an unbalanced interview between the researcher and participants.

I have adapted the use of traditional interviewing by encouraging the interviews to be reciprocal creating a conversational tone. I wanted the reciprocal interviews to feel fluid, and the discussions to feel organic, as opposed to a structured interview where participants are asked questions for responses without engagement in their answers with the researcher. Connelly and Cclandinin's (2006) overview of qualitative research highlights that this style of data generation through a conversational style is a common starting point and creates a good entry point for being attentive to the participant. Therefore, I have utilised Hollway and Jefferson's (2008, 2000) four principles to help facilitate the production of the interview in a conversational style for a narrative inquiry:

1. To use open-ended questions so that the participant can narrate freely.

2. To elicit stories through careful listening of the language the participant uses.

3. To avoid 'why' questions as these could have appeared condescending, creating a researcher-researched experience.

4. To follow up answers with questions or clarifications using language or phrases from the participant to allow for specific explorations of the narrative.

An example of how I implemented these narrative inquiry principles is below:

[[1]S] You know your school back in India what were they like?

[[2]M] I was in the same school since nursery, so I spent all my years, 14 years in one in, same four buildings, I grew up [with] my best friends. We've been… I've been seeing them since I was four.

[S] What was it like at your international school? Was it a British education-based school?

[A[3]] I study in this common state. It's an Indian government [school].

[M] I was at a semi -public, private school board. Most students were Indian. I think we just had two people who are not from India. But it was a very it was like a public school, but, but privately owned.

It was necessary to ensure that there was a strong connection between the research questions, methodology, the aims of the project, and the time at which the data generation would be carried out. A considerable factor that influenced this was the covid-19 pandemic, as it had reduced face-to-face interaction, which reiterated the importance of researcher and participant safety. I needed a data generation process that reflected the social changes that were occurring and would enable the participants to safely participate.   Therefore, an online reciprocal interview conducted in a conversational way allowed for these considerations. This method also reflected the educational shifts made in teaching and learning during the pandemic. This approach balanced good participant involvement and practicality with carrying out the data generation process.

5.6   Summary of Decolonial Methodological Intentions and Practical Steps

As explained in section 4.5, Zavala (2016) specifically addressed the need to rebalance the power within formal and informal education. The decolonial approach used in this methodology aimed to rebalance power involving counter/storytelling, healing, and reclaiming. As a reminder counter/storytelling is a technique that involves naming, remembering, and sharing of events and experiences challenging mainstream colonial narratives. Through this act, a language of critique is formed

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[1] [S] is the researcher
[2] [M] is the participant pseudonym initial
[3] [A] is the participant pseudonym initial

allowing for recognition of colonial legacies rooting indigenous, colonial, and personal experiences through counter/storytelling. Healing and healing practices are dependent on the individual and can be social/collective and spiritual/psychological. Reclaiming identity and spaces involve recovering cultural identities, practices, and relations to land. This approach is interconnected but non-sequential, creating dynamic ways for freedom of expression through language that names, remembers and shares experiences which acknowledges colonial legacies. As part of the strategies, it is important to be mindful of the self-reflection, and the personal journey of self-decolonisation that the participants can make as narrators, as well as the researcher as the listener, as well as in relation to communities and the broader social world.

This methodology draws its strengths from the use of employing a data generation method that centred around decolonising principles. This meant prioritising the narratives of the participants involved through centralising their voices. This was achieved through the combined use of narrative analysis and Zavala's (2016) decolonial strategies. Again, this enabled the narratives to be at the centre of the project. This was supported by member checking, to help illustrate the value and importance of the participant's voice and knowledge.

In addition, using decolonial strategies helped establish a collaborative process to share and reshare knowledge. Crucially decolonial theories through practice such as counter/storytelling, can help to resituate knowledge from the Global South (De Sousa Santos, 2018, Mignolo, 2011). This was supported by Hollway and Jefferson's (2000, 2008), four principles of open-ended questions (careful listening to the language the participant uses, avoidance of why questions and follow-up with questions or clarifications using language or phrases from the participant). Hollway and Jefferson (2008, 2000) highlighted narratives oscillate between and within the interactions, creating multiple meanings and perspectives from the speaker. Therefore, using narrative analysis creates a more concrete decolonial foundation for methodology and data generation, as Ellis, Adams, and Bochner's (2011) understanding of the approach crucially recognised the narrator, and the listener. This methodology facilitated transparency in telling the narrative, strengthening the connection between the participant and researcher, and allowing the data generation to be an active site that

encourages the listener to understand the multiple perspectives that can be shared (Ellis et al, 2011).

It was necessary to ensure that the methodology was appropriate for the research questions, aims of the project, and the time of which the data generation would be carried out. A considerable factor that influenced this was the covid-19 pandemic, as it had reduced face-to-face interaction, which created unclarity as well as uncertainty in relation to individual safety and boundaries. I needed a safe data generation process that reflected the social changes that had occurred. An online reciprocal interview conducted in a conversational style, allowed for these considerations, which was then followed by a second data generation that was guided by the participants. This method also reflected the educational shifts made in teaching and learning during the pandemic. This approach balanced good participant involvement and practicality with carrying out the data generation process. Having an online data generation method is beneficial as it aligns well with the aims of the project of understanding learning experiences and community through a method that reflected the changes to learning from the pandemic.

I combined the more traditional practices of narrative inquiry, and analysis with contemporary outlooks and methods such as decoloniality, exploratory practice and narrative reciprocal interviewing. This project enabled the possibility for the use of explicit detail and language through the sharing of narratives, to claim experiences, which provide a sense of freedom through language. This, in turn, helped the process of colonial healing for both the researcher and the participants involved, through layered accounts which pertained to both the author's experience, the participant's data, and the researcher's interpretation of data.

5.7 Piloting the Study

The purpose of the pilot study was to specifically test the proficiency of the research method tools of the topics table and becoming more familiar and comfortable with reciprocal interviews to help inform the main study. The topics table was a document that was shared between the researcher and the participant to note down topics of interest to help direct the reciprocal interviewing. For this pilot study one Indian female

student labelled international studying in the North of England had agreed to be a part of the pilot study. The university's ethics committee had approved the pilot research. (Please refer to the Appendix 1**: Participant Information Letter** for the information letter, Appendix 2 for the consent form, for a copy of ethical clearing Appendix 3**: Ethical Approval confirmation** , Appendix 4 for participant engagement email and Appendix 5 for the participant engagement poster).

5.7.1 Piloting the Topics Table

The topics table (see Appendix 6) was a simple Word document that included a numbered table with a column for questions and general thoughts. The document also included an example question and general thought to show the participant how to fill out the table. The use of the topics table was to help encourage a rebalancing of the researcher-researched dynamic by creating a collaborative task for the participant and researcher to engage with pre-data generation. I emailed the topics table to the participant a week before the scheduled interview and asked them to return the document a day before the interview was to take place.

The participant completed the task accordingly and returned the document in time before their interview. When reviewing the document, I was pleased that the participant had added the topic of loneliness/ togetherness, writing a general thought on how the topic of loneliness/togetherness can impact mental health. Sharing the document worked well, and topics were added before the online interview took place, allowing for readiness and engagement with the project. However, I recognised that this may be different for some participants and would still require encouragement of a collaborative study through verbal reminders.

5.7.2 Piloting the Reciprocal Interviews

As will be discussed later in the chapter in further detail, Creswell (2013) points out that through piloting studies, the trustworthiness of the data generation method can be built, providing greater confidence in the data.

Piloting the reciprocal interview allowed me to consider and amend issues around the practicality of the study and the participant engagement process whilst improving on

techniques of reciprocal interviewing. I decided to design the data generation around two phases: phase one of data generation was online via Microsoft Teams and phase two of the data generation was guided by the participants whilst being mindful of the covid-19 social distancing ruling. The pilot study focused on phase one of the collection by engaging with one participant who matched the participant criteria (identifying as female, from India, and labelled as an international student). It was agreed that the interview would last an hour, but depending on the conversation and time, the interview could be slightly longer or shorter.

Due to the social restrictions during the pilot study, the interview had to be conducted online to protect the participant and me. This solidified my decision to maintain phase one's data generation online, as there was significant uncertainty about when social restrictions would be lifted. I had conducted one-to-one interviews in previous research projects; however, these were semi-structured with a more traditional researcher-interviewee dynamic. I wanted to ensure a balanced interview, and piloted questions focussed on 'what' experiences, exploring events and narratives fluidly, reiterating the importance of the participant's voices. Therefore, I encouraged the participant to ask me questions and treat the interview as a conversation, setting the dynamics of the discussion as back and forth, including opinions, interjections, and moments for clarification. The procedure (section 5.8) utilised Hollway and Jefferson's (2008, 2000) 4 principles: open-ended questions, careful listening to the participant's language, avoidance of 'why' questions, and follow-up with questions or clarifications using language or phrases from the participant.

The online reciprocal interview was fluid, comfortable, and natural; the reciprocal interview worked well, and we could reflect on what was discussed. This also helped break down the researcher-participant power structure, aligning with the decolonial principle of an ethos of power-sharing (4.4). However, I was mindful that not all participants may feel as comfortable asking questions or developing points without prompts. Piloting the reciprocal interview helped me greatly with my expectations and what to expect from this style of interview moving forward.

5.7.3 Implications for the Main Study

Several implications were applied to the larger scale study, as learned from the piloting of the data generation method and topics table tool.

1.   Participant engagement Process:

It was important to consider the colonial connotations of the participation engagement process. Therefore, it was necessary to highlight the collaborative nature of this project. This was carried out by acknowledging the participants in the project as vital collaborators who would work with the researcher to exchange knowledge. Despite this recognition, one of the most significant challenges I faced was access to the female Indian student community. I used participant engagement methods of emails, which were sent to appropriate societies and faculties, and posters in social media channels and virtual group spaces. The challenges of no participant engagement with emails, posters, and messages have resulted in worthwhile reflective experiences and have built up my resilience to the process. However, because of the difficulty with participant engagement, designing a contingency plan was necessary. This involved having more data generation periods with fewer participants to create rich, in-depth qualitative data. I also decided to immerse myself in appropriate social societies to help talk about my research and garner interest in the collaborative project.

I also extend participant engagement process to the carrying out of the reciprocal interviews. I would have also asked questions in the interviews slightly differently. I would have reflected more within the interviews so I could delve deeper into the stories that were being shared by the women in that moment. This would have perhaps encouraged the women to also ask me more questions in return. Not being afraid to sit in the silence or take the time to reflect would have been in addition to the member checking and summaries of data that was passed through to the participants would have further strengthened the telling of the stories.

2.   Utilising the Topics Table Document for Reciprocal Interviewing:

The use of the topics table tool worked well in the pilot study. The document helped facilitate the interviews, often used as a conversation starter, which helped the participant and myself share our experiences. However, I knew this was also extra time for the participants to give up and would vary by participant. I, therefore, adopted the use of the topics table document as a reminder of the collaborative role of the participants, encouraging them to think about the interview they wanted to have. If this was not filled out, it would be used as a pre-interview starter task to help us direct our conversation. This supported the decolonial principles of the project, reducing the power imbalance and creating a transaction of knowledge and information (Brown and Coles, 2018). The decolonial principles were upheld by Zavala's (2016) decolonial strategies (counter/storytelling, healing, and reclaiming) through sharing my experiences, allowing me to present my story, and exposing my vulnerability. My immersion in the interviews made the discussions more thoughtful and the participant more comfortable sharing their experiences. Essentially working toward an exchange of knowledge.

The pilot study also helped me to understand how I would balance a variety of interview topics between the ones around the research question and the ones suggested by the participants. I would include topics around learning culture and exploring our community pre-pandemic in both India and England.

3.   Building a Collaborative Decolonial Methodology:

Building a collaborative methodology was central to the project aims, but this had to be conducted safely. As the first data generation occurred within social restrictions, an online interview was an appropriate way to begin the data generation. To continue the collaborative process, the participant directed the second data generation phase. This was discussed at the end of the first data generation and confirmed closer to their follow-up interview.

The pilot study helped me to better understand the application of decolonial principles. To implement a decolonial approach I had to work on decolonising the research practice of the self (Zavala, 2016). This led back to a reflection on my identity and how it affected processes such as the participant engagement process. My name is from

the ancient language of Sanskrit and created assumptions about my identity, ethnicity, and faith. This had led to questions, rejections, and usually some form of exclusion. It was emotionally and physically tiring to explain, repeatedly, why I believe and advocate for an equal society. Understanding my relationship with my identity was something that I hoped I would be able to learn more about during this research project. However, as I was going through this phase of my research it was teaching me that it was okay to be uncomfortable with not knowing.

Building a collaborative decolonial method extended to data analysis. I felt the analysis of the pilot study lacked collaboration with the participant. However, for the main study, I took care to continue the narrative and decolonial principles by negotiating the texts at each stage of the data generation. Member checking is detailed in the Data Analysis (section 5.11.1) Conducting the pilot study overall was a positive, helpful learning experience that helped consolidate my methodological choices by reviewing research questions and checking interview topics for the main study. This process also helped me with executing reciprocal interviewing in a conversational style and reassured me with the main study data generation.

5.8   Data Generation Process for the Main Study

As a reminder, this research project aimed to explore the experiences of three Indian women's short time in England whilst studying their first or second degree at a university in North England. Particular areas of interest were their experiences of being labelled as international students, and communities linked to their study-related activities and free time. Please see the timeline below for an overview of the data generation process:

5.8.1   Participant Engagement, Selection and Access

The participation criteria were as follows: to have been born in India, categorised as an international student, and identified as female. The identification as an Indian was important to the research, as, within the history of India, immigration and movement of peoples have been a way for the Indian culture to expand and continue beyond its borders. The participant engagement process for this project relied on emails to the university departments, word of mouth, posters in international housing

accommodation, and access to appropriate social groups. I was also introduced to some participants through a gatekeeper. Informal voluntary chats were had to discuss the research and what their role would be within it. The most success in participant engagement was earned through joining and getting to know Indian students through a society group where I could discuss the project and its requirements for participation transparently. The members were aware of why I was a part of their society meeting for two sessions. Through this, I could get to know the students and have collaborative participants engaged with the project. I also offered my time to chat with potential participants, providing an opportunity to answer any questions or concerns they had. The participant engagement process lasted eight weeks, with emails being re-sent after a two-week waiting period. After the eight-week participant engagement period, three participants were interested in the project. All participants identified as female were from India and labelled as international students by the university where they studied in North England. For the participant engagement materials, please see the Appendices.

5.8.1.1 Participant Profiles

In order to set the context for the narratives in the later chapters, this section presents a small biography of the participants. The names used in this research project are aliases that the women chose to represent their opinions, experiences and overall narrative. Each name was chosen at the beginning of the data generation process. The participants names are Bunny, Maneet, and Alexis. They were made aware of the research project through word of mouth and my accessing of student societies.

5.8.1.2 Bunny

Bunny is from the South of India and came to England to study a postgraduate degree in a finance, as part of the School of Business. Bunny was in her mid 20's at the time of data generation and came to England in 2020. Further information is shared by Bunny in her narrative in section 6.1.

5.8.1.3 Maneet

Maneet is from the North of India and came to study her first degree within the subject areas of English and Journalism in England in 2019, as part of the School of English. Further information is shared by Maneet in her narrative in section 6.2.

5.8.1.4 Alexis

Alexis is from the West Coast of India and came to England to study her first degree within mass communication and social sciences, as part of the School of Media and Communication. She came to England in 2019, during the pandemic. Further information is shared by Alexis in her narrative in section 6.3.

5.9 Preparation for First and Second Data generation

The data generation process was split into two collections. The first data generation, using the topics table, was a reciprocal interview that allowed for myself and the participant to gage areas of interest (see Appendix 6: Topics Table). The first interview then became an opportunity to follow up on these interests for further detail and clarification. The first data generation phase was an online reciprocal interview conducted via Microsoft Teams, as at the time, the covid-19 pandemic resulted in restrictions for meeting face-to-face.

It is important to note that for both Alexis and Bunny, as they joined the research earlier in the timeline, they had one online and one in-person interview, whereas Maneet, she had two face-to-face interviews (1-1 and paired), as she became interested later in the project when social restriction were lifted.

The use of online reciprocal interviews was a fair depiction of the changes to traditional higher education during the covid-19 pandemic, where lectures were transferred online. For the second data generation social restrictions became relaxed, enabling a wider variety of options for the participant's follow-up interview. This resulted in a collaborative discussion between myself and each participant. The participants directed the second data generation to take place either over coffee in a café, or in a quiet and available space for recording such as an empty seminar room.

It was important for the first data generation that the correct tools were prepared to aid the participants in their interviews. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the first data generation was an online interview via Microsoft Teams. The use of Microsoft Teams helped forge a collaborative environment for the reciprocal interview, as it allowed for the parties involved to have access to facial cues. The topics table Word document supported this. As a reminder, this document included a table that had space for topics of interest and questions to be placed within to help guide the interview around areas that were important for all parties involved. This document, along with the information sheet and consent form, was sent to the participants one week before the online interview.

Preparation for the second data generation varied slightly from the first, as this data generation was to be carried out face-to-face and was centred around continuing the discussions that was started previously, developing ideas, and expanding experiences that were shared in the first data generation. As this project was collaborative, with an ethos of power sharing and challenging of colonial/ Western power positions as guides, the participants were to take control of the stories and experiences they wanted to share. We discussed after the first interview how we wanted to do this. It was agreed with each participant that the interview would be a face-to-face interaction over coffee. This was a follow-up interview that also practiced exploratory research principles mentioned in section 5.5.2, that ensured a collaborative data generation through having a member checking process. To prepare for this, I transcribed the interviews and wrote a summary for the participants to review and amend. This was shared with them a week before their second scheduled interview, providing an opportunity to reengage with the topics discussed.

5.10 Carrying out of the Data Generation

Although the preparation for the data generation had slightly varied due to the interviews being online and then in person, this did not alter the procedure for carrying out the data generation. The following is a detailed guide for how both phases of the data generations were carried out, including the paired interview.

1. I prepared for the reciprocal interviews by writing out open ended questions (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000;2008) on broad topics such as where are the participants from, their educational history, and experiences of living in England. I avoided 'why' questions and used their language for follow-up questions and clarifications. I also reviewed the topics table (see appendix 6) for support on areas the participants wanted to discuss. Examples of some questions I used are below:

    Can you tell me a little about yourself?

    Could you elaborate a little more please?

    How did your family feel with you moving abroad?

2. The online interviews took place using Microsoft Teams because it allowed for video and audio to be recorded easily, as well as software to transcribe the interviews. The in-person interviews took place in an empty room on the university campus. Bunny and Alexis had online interviews as they had joined the research earlier, followed by in-person interviews. Maneet joined the research later through Alexis who had a paired interview with Alexis, and a one-to-one interview. Please see the table below for a visual summary of their interviews.

| Name | Type of Data generation | | |
	1-1 online	1-1 face-to-face	Paired
Bunny	X	X	
Alexis	X		X
Maneet		X	X

Table 1 Showing which data generation method was used for each participant

3. I summarised the reciprocal interviews and provided the participants with this information that they could adapt. I gave the participants a timeframe of four weeks for when they were to receive the document. (Please see Appendix 9: Example of Member Checking Process).

4. I would then write-up a reflection of the interview, to help me improve my interview skills for the next participant's interview. (Please see

6.   Appendix 10: Reflection **of Interview**). Please see Appendix 11: Overview of Data Generation Information)

5.11 Data Analysis

In the following section I explore the theoretical support for my data analysis as well as, how I conducted the analysis of the narratives. This section includes discussion on narrative analysis, the development of in-betweenness through a methodological lens, and member checking.

5.11.1 Theoretical Support for Data Analysis: Narrative Analysis

Narrative analysis is a way to analyse forms of narratives. As Squire, Andrews and Tamboukou (2008) point out in their assessment of narrative analysis, there is a recognition of detail which highlights social conditions (economic status, education, employment, class, etc.) and power relations that contribute to shaping narratives. The recognition of social conditions and power relations work in tandem with the decolonial methodology this research has applied. In addition, the recognition of narratives as a series of details and events, again, works to decolonise the methodology through the recognition that narratives need not have a traditional Western imagining of a beginning, middle, and end, as originally understood by Connelly and Clandinin (1990). Therefore, recognising narratives as a series of events is instead stitched together collaboratively between the researcher and the participant.

There are many methods to practice narrative analysis. For this research project, I combined Reissman's (2008) thematic analysis and narrative analysis models, informed by Nasheeda, Abdullah, Krauss, and Ahmed (2019). Beginning with the Reissman's (2008) thematic model it is a top-down approach that does not look at the structure of the narratives and instead builds a set of themes through similarities and differences, through patterns and meanings produced through labelling and categorisation of the data. The analysis looks to questions of 'what' rather than 'how.' The analysis looking at 'what' rather than 'how' aligns well with exploratory research principles (Allwright, 2005; Allwright and Hanks, 2009) and Hollway and Jeffersons (2008, 2000) narrative questions (see section 5.5.2.1). However, because data is categorised into large themes it is not always possible to know if all participants mean the same thing. To counter this, it is important to recognise the different contextual details of the narratives. This means that, as pointed out by Reissman (2008), the narrative requires close readings of the context, including the influence of the

researcher, and the setting of the social circumstances. This analysis understands narratives as a performance by the researcher and participant as individuals with a history that is showcased through language.

Narrative analysis focuses on creating an understanding of the data between the researcher and the participant collaboratively through recognition of each other's language to acknowledge shared interaction. There is no one way for narrative analysis to be carried out. As Nasheeda et al (2019) point out in their review, they split the analysis into four phases:

1. Phase 1: interviews and transcription, which includes choosing the participants, transcribing the interviews, and familiarising with the scripts.
2. Phase 2: storying which is chronologically plotting the story.
3. Phase 3: co-creating, which uses a follow-up interview to help understand further details.
4. Phase 4: developing meaning, through development of the narrative.

Although Nasheeda et al (2019) provide a good structure for conducting narrative analysis, some of the phases can be understood as problematic in this decolonial project. For example, in this project there was no need for me to choose the participants. The women who partook in this project were seen as collaborators, and all participants who met the criteria were able to participate. In addition, phase two, which is chronologically plotting the story, feeds into a traditional Western understanding of narratives (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990). Therefore, I adapted this to mean creating an understanding to include key moments of their stories, for example significant events, or recognising historical or cultural details that help to contextualise what the women were saying in their overall narratives. Phase three worked in tandem with the decolonial principles of the project as a follow-up interview, was used to help further explore the topics from the first data generation. This was strengthened with using a member checking process which is detailed in section 5.11.4. Again, phase four was also utilised with there being a collaboration to understand the narratives that were expressed through the interviews with the women.

Through a combination of Reissman's (2008) thematic model and Nasheeda et al's (2019) understanding of narrative analysis the following guidance was created to help inform the process:

1. Familiarisation of the transcripts, through multiple readings. Research questions to be used to help narrow down sections of the transcript and create areas of focus.

2. Definition of thematic categories- can be done via words, sentences, or groups of sentences.

3. Sorting the material into categories- separate sentences and utterance across the narrative texts, assigned to specific categories.

4. Writing up an overview of the transcript to give to the participant to check for interpretation. This also includes key areas of discussion, and areas that need clarification. If participants did not agree with wording or understanding they were able to adapt or change what was written to help provide a clearer narrative.

5. Drawing conclusions with the support of the previous guideline, narrative content was collected under each thematic category that was then used to describe the meanings in the content of the narrative text.

Both Reissman's (2008) thematic model and Nasheeda et al's (2019) understanding of narrative analysis worked in conjunction with the decolonial principles and methodological intentions of this project as it provided a constant reminder of the history that has influenced each individual's narrative. An acknowledgement of the difficulty to decolonise where colonial legacies remain, helps to create a space to reclaim identity and culture through the development of narratives. To combine these principles, it was necessary to negotiate the texts via summaries of the texts, including questions and emails, as the project centred around collaboration between the researcher and the participants through member checking. The member-checking process will be described further in the data analysis procedure section 5.11.4. This

provided an essential layer to the data analysis when developing the narratives. The data generated helped formulate topics for discussion in the first and the second data generation points, it provided an opportunity to check data, crucially expanding interesting concepts and categories, and building trust between myself and the participant. This also helped establish the voice of the participant which helped to create a balanced researcher-researched relationship.

5.11.2 The Development of In-betweenness as a Methodological Tool for Decolonial Analysis

5.11.2.1   Traversing in-betweenness through Self-reflective Prompts

Reading through the women's narratives, it became apparent through their counter/stories that they shared in-betweenness. I interpreted the women to desire a fluidity of belonging to multiple places, communities, and geographies, but remained in-between. During my multiple readings and re-writing of how I understood the women's narratives, I also experienced a sense of in-betweenness. Although these feelings emerged through counter/storytelling, there was space for these feelings to be explored more deeply through an additional strategy. It is here that I applied my strategy of 'traversing,' a strategy that can be applied in the moment as well as retrospectively through direct self-reflective prompts. The aim is to understand past (colonial influence) and present experiences of in-betweenness to aid future encounters or possibilities of self-decolonisation.

I began by asking myself reflective prompts when reading the three women's narratives, asking how their experiences made me feel. What made the women and myself feel in-betweenness? What patterns existed during their stories that made the women show in-betweenness and insecurity physically and emotionally? We can ask ourselves what makes us feel in-betweenness through pausing and reflecting. Self-reflecting on these feelings and experiences in this initial way was a helpful activity to encourage the development of being able to traverse in-betweenness, helping to mobilise our self-decolonisation.

5.11.2.1.1 How were the Self-reflecting Prompts Developed?

The self-reflecting prompts used to analyse the narratives emerged through a combination of self-reflection during the reading of the three women's narratives as well as being informed by decolonial authors such as Zavala (2016), De Sousa Santos (2016), Tlostanova and Mignolo (2009), and Maldonado- Torres (2004).

When developing these self-reflecting prompts, I was thinking about how, through our purposeful counter/storytelling (Zavala, 2016), we are creating a language of critique but felt in order to traverse experiences and feelings of in-betweenness, there needed to be direct reflection on the colonial elements experienced in order to aid our present and future self-decolonisation. For example, Tlostanova and Mignolo (2009), as previously addressed in section 4.2 described the following mechanisms as ways to maintain colonialism: creating a struggle for control of authority (as a battle for power) and the control of knowledge through education, and the colonising of existing knowledge, these mechanisms could be used as ways to reflect and recognise colonial influence to help traverse in-betweenness. These mechanisms for control became apparent during my reading of the participants' narratives (chapter 7), where I was asking myself about the environmental (systems and structures) and personal (power relations) factors that the women were in when they were describing their experiences of in-betweenness.

Although the points of the past (colonialism) and the present (experiences of in-betweenness) were connected through self-reflective prompts, the reflection also needed to encourage actions to work and move through it. Maldonado-Torres (2004) described progress and development as becoming dependent on coloniality for its existence, which can be linked to De Sousa Santos' (2016) recognition of the injustice of knowledge from the Global South to be ignored. Connecting progress and development to the erasure of knowledge from the Global South meant thinking about how our narratives can be continued through the spaces we forcibly create for ourselves, highlighting other knowledge, culture, and history.

The following self-reflective prompts were used as a guide to help me build and develop the additional strategy of traversing in-betweenness through self-reflective prompts:

- What pattern(s) (race, class, gender etc.) or tools (labelling) are being used that are making me feel in-betweenness?
- What power relations exist within these feelings of in-betweenness?
- How are our moments of in-betweenness worked through?
- How have I or can I create a space for my story, knowledge, culture and history to contribute to self-decolonisation through my response to in-betweenness?

5.11.2.1.2   Traversing In-betweenness through Self-reflective Prompts in Analysis

The application of traversing in-betweenness through self-reflective prompts were conducted alongside narrative analysis, predominately during steps three to six as explored later in the section (5.11.3). I will present how self-reflective prompts can be used retrospectively as a tool to analyse feelings and experiences of in-betweenness:

1. Understanding the Experience of In-betweenness
   In the experience described by the participant in their narrative, what words were being used that informed the reader of in-betweenness?

2. What Expression of in-betweenness was Experienced?
   a. How was this in-betweenness experienced? For example, through internal feelings and emotions, or physical movements?

3. Reflection of Colonial Influences- making the connections
Applying relevant questions such as: what pattern(s) (race, class, gender etc.) or tools (labelling) are being used that are informing the experience of feeling of in-betweenness? Think about the connections of the structures or power relations that the experience was had within to create a language of critique to connect the past and the present.

4. Traversing In-betweenness through Self-reflective Prompts: Creating Future Actions
   a. What response was made during the experience of in-betweenness?
   b. If there was a response, was it through language, or was it a physical action such as walking away?
   c. If there was no action, what could this mean? How could this experience be approached again if it were to be repeated?
   d. What does the response to the experience of in-betweenness reveal?
   e. How have I or can I create a space for my story, knowledge, culture and history to contribute to self-decolonisation through my response to in-betweenness?

5.11.3 Carrying out Narrative Analysis

As mentioned above, a combination of analysis guidelines and principles was used to understand the narratives shared in this project. To be flexible with analysis, I utilised Riessman's (2008) thematic model alongside adapting Nasheeda et al.'s (2019) narrative analysis phases. This enabled a progressive analysis that categorised the participant's similarities and differences between their stories, alongside sharing fragments of my narrative, including social, cultural, political, and any other relevant areas, creating a more authentic exchange between myself and the participants. The following are guidelines for the narrative analysis procedure. Please see Appendix 7: Narrative Analysis Procedure Example.

1. Transcription of the text:

   As aforementioned through Nasheeda et al's (2019) understanding, transcription is a significant part of narrative analysis, which is based on the assumptions of the researcher. The transcript was taken from the transcription tool on Microsoft Teams however, this required many rounds of listening to the audio to correct computed language errors. Making the corrections gave me time to refamiliarize myself with the data and preparing myself for the data analysis.

2. Familiarisation of the text:

The first stage of the analysis involved having multiple encounters with the transcription. I sought to extract as much meaning as possible from the participant's experiences of community and life whilst studying in the North of England. Therefore, I needed to become familiar with the text, grasp the initial narratives, developing an understanding of the multiple voices and the tensions within the language, as well as think about the social, cultural, and political influences. This involved several readings and re-readings of the transcript and listening to the audio.

3. Coding:

   a. The coding of the text involved reading the transcript and highlighting words to categorise sentences and groups of sentences, noting down bourgeoning patterns of similarities or differences of the narratives. This included noting and highlighting what was being asked and who was asking questions. For example, the participants' feelings when describing what a community was to them or words and sentences that described their experiences of prejudice. Each narrative reading would focus on differing emerging patterns, i.e. power, perceived world orders, and Empire.

   b. The highlighted words were then re-examined and categorised into recognisable patterns and shared narratives.

4. Summarising Patterns:

   a. I then took a step back to have a look at the narratives that were being produced and wrote a summary for each transcript, surmising an interpretation of the participants' experiences. Although this part of the analysis was predominately a thematic approach, I looked at building the narratives collaboratively with each participant by using Nasheeda et al's (2019) phase three and four by creating summaries

under broad themes such as 'community.' When this was complete it was shared, via email, with the participants for review and amendments. The participants were asked to return their thoughts in different coloured ink to show the difference or agreeance with the summary.

b. When this was returned, I added their additional details, for example clarifications on feelings or descriptions of terms, to my preliminary categories. During this time, whilst reviewing the data, if I had questions or was unsure of meanings, I would email the participant to ask for clarification or development of the narrative. (See Appendix 7: Narrative Analysis Procedure Example).

c. This was repeated for both the first and second data generation.

5. Developing of Themes:

I then looked at stitching together three key narratives between the participants. However, this produced a number of interconnecting details, for example exploring the women's experiences of being labelled as an international student, had shown to impact their experiences of their learning and social communities. There were also smaller connecting narratives that illustrated similarities and differences of the women's experiences of shared topics. It was also important to be mindful that through each new reading of the narrative's interpretations may evolve. It required me to be an active participant when listening, reading, and writing, leaving narrative analysis open ended. (See Appendix 8)

6. Write-up:

When writing up the narratives the presentation of data was important, as it needed to reflect the decolonial lens of this project. Therefore, each participant had a clearly defined section for their narrative to be explored. This meant that I chose to organise the

narratives separately under each woman's alias, allowing for the reader to engage with each narrative before moving onto the next one. The narratives were then compared at the end of the section to highlight the key messages, the similarities, and the differences (see Life and Educational Journeys chapter).

5.11.4 Member Checking Process

Creswell and Poth (2016) described member checking as the process where the researcher checks the accuracy of the interview account. This includes checking whether the description is complete, realistic, fair, and representative. Creswell and Poth (2016) also highlight the use of member checking, helping to increase the validity of interpretations with the participants. Doyle's (2007) research with older women created a framework for negotiating meaning and used member-checking techniques such as returning transcripts, interpretive summaries, and questions via email. She also highlighted being mindful of member checking, as although helpful, it could provide little to no engagement, and this was a concern for my project. To ensure the transparency of the participant role, I included a table within the information sheet detailing the two phases of data generation and the negotiation of text. I explained that the first text negotiation was used to confirm, amend, or develop their experiences. Member checking was used at the end of the first data generation to help develop questions and areas of interest for the second data generation phase. Member checking via negotiation of the text was repeated to check for understanding and development of narratives between the first and second data generation.

I utilise Harvey's (2015) experiences of using member checking in her research, which looked at the motivation of international students to learn English. Harvey (2015) offers a concrete guideline for carrying out member-checking:

1. To start the member checking process, it was required for me to have proficient knowledge of each participant's interview via transcription leading to a summary of each participant's interview. This first step also works in alignment with Nasheeda et al's (2019) narrative analysis.

2. I explained to the participants that within 4 weeks of their first interview they would receive a summary of my interpretation of their experiences.

3. I wrote up a document via Microsoft Word organising my summary into broad themes such as 'community,' or 'politics and society,' explaining what I felt they were trying to describe through their stories.

4. I asked them to read the summaries and use this document as a way to collaborate through their development of my interpretation, via amendments, or commentary. They were encouraged to use a different colour or font to highlight any additional information or changes. I asked the participants to complete this within 4 weeks to adhere to the interview schedule, allowing sufficient time for preparation for the second data generation process.

5. Once this was returned, I would read the participants adaptations or comments, taking them into consideration, and would add these additional details to the analysis. This was repeated for the second data generation process.

6. Member checking was also facilitated throughout the data generation process through questions sent via email for clarification or development. Please see Appendix 9: Example of Member Checking Process.

5.12 Decolonial Ethical Intentions and Practical Steps

Research ethics committees typically set the research ethics parameters in Global North universities. In the Global South, research ethics are typically built into national and regional processes where permission is granted for research (Dados and Connell, 2012). Research ethics should be included, thoroughly thought of, and enacted to protect the researcher and participants from dehumanising and mishandling their interests (Nortje et al., 2019). As my research project took part in the Global North within a Western university, I followed the university's ethical research guidelines. With

this in mind, I sought to carefully include and uphold the decolonial principles for this project.

5.12.1 Trustworthiness in Qualitative Data generation and Analysis

The methodology of the project was fully described using detailed descriptions to help outline the processes used. It was important to do this, as Stahl and King (2020) point out in their assessment of qualitative research and trustworthiness, as detailed methodologies help to create transparency and trustworthiness.

Trustworthiness, as described by Holloway and Wheeler (2002), is defined as having methodological accuracy checking for the suitability of research questions. Using this understanding, I apply Lincoln and Guba's (1989) understanding of trustworthiness based on four key principles: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility asks how realistic the findings are within the society and culture in which the findings were found. To increase credibility for this project, I employed theoretical triangulation, which used a combination of theories to cover the variety of perspectives shared through the narratives. I applied several theories, including narrative inquiry, narrative analysis, and decolonial theory. I also included member checking as part of the data generation and analysis process for the project, which is explained in detail in section 5.11.4 to enhance the credibility of the findings. Transferability in trustworthiness refers to the design of qualitative research. Although qualitative research does not aim for replicability, guidelines should be created through a methodology that allows the reader to understand the steps that created the research findings and discussion (Stahl and King, 2020; Guba, 1985).

5.12.2 Implementing Research Ethics

Research ethics can often be portrayed as progressive, but this can be misleading, as research ethics are usually posited from a Western position wanting a form of improvement (Mishra, 2017). Perceived progression is hidden through language and the reworking of language. I have therefore been mindful of this through the language I use, and with the support of my decolonial intentions.

Sheehan, Dunn, and Sahan (2017) explore the defence of the governance of ethical procedures for research conducted in the UK. Their paper highlighted the fundamental requirements for conducting social research and the importance of informed consent, confidentiality, and avoidance of harm. As with all research projects, it is fundamental that there are ethical considerations and practical steps to protect the researcher, and all participants involved. I attempted to do this in a way that recognised how research ethics can hold colonial values. This research project follows the requirements (informed consent, confidentiality, avoidance of harm) at the point of approval, as did this study, alongside the pilot study mentioned earlier in this section. For this project, I implemented the following:

Informed consent:
When discussing the project with the participants, I highlighted the collaborative aims of the research, which asked the participants to partake in two data generation phases and share their experiences as international students, as well as discuss experiences of communities linked to study-related activities and free time. Informed consent was essential to foster a positive collaboration, which required transparency of the participant role. I carried out this essential stage through a consent form, a written document highlighting the participant's rights. This was repeated through every stage of data generation to demonstrate the importance of their rights.

Anonymity and Confidentiality:
The narratives shared during the project involved explicit, complex, and emotional language that had the potential to be identifying material. This was carefully assessed and was in the foreground when conducting the data analysis with member checking. To aid anonymity, the participants chose their pseudonyms. Allen and Wiles (2016) demonstrate the psychological value that can be created with the participants choosing their pseudonyms, as they found with their qualitative study on concerns of ageing with 38 participants, through having a choice of a name, the participants were more likely to feel as though their voice was represented. In addition, any key biographical data was substituted in the write-up of findings, and the name of the university the students attended was left anonymised.

Avoidance of harm:

It was necessary to be mindful of creating, upholding, and maintaining a trustful and sensitive relationship with the participants, as the interview topics could be sensitive. This danger escalated as the nature of narratives leaned toward openness and vulnerability. I was mindful that decolonial projects carried out in the West often focussed on the difficult and painful experiences of minorities (Tuck and Yang, 2014). This research aimed to use collaboration and knowledge exchange to avoid harm. Therefore, as the nature of narrative inquiry can include differing levels of vulnerability to share stories/experiences, it was essential to build trust between myself and the participants during the process. This was achieved through regular communication via email and initial conversations to help answer questions before agreeing to participate.

Research ethics within narrative inquiry moved beyond institutional requirements (privacy, confidentiality, and informed consent) from start to finish, with a focus on in ethics research (Connelly et al 2006). The online interview took place via Microsoft Teams. The follow-up interview took place face-to-face in an available and empty classroom. For the online interview, I asked the participant to blur their backgrounds to hide any identifiable information from being recorded as the recording would be both visual and audio. Storing of collected data was kept on my university M drive for increased protection of participant data and confidentiality.

It was paramount when conducting these interviews that the participants were aware of potentially sensitive topics such as death, anxiety, stress, and depression. This was somewhat alleviated with the collaborative aspect of the data generation process, as the participants collaborated on topics through the shared topics document. However, by the design of the data generation, the interviews had a level of unpredictability because of the reciprocal interviewing element. I was aided by both data generation methods, which allowed for visuals. I could see the participant's faces and behaviour, sensing the tone of their experiences. Therefore, careful consideration was given if any disclosures required safeguarding intervention or mental health support. In this case, the students were advised to contact relevant services such as the student counselling and wellbeing office to seek support, guidance, or advice on any issues that may arise during the interviews (https://students.leeds.ac.uk/#Support-and-wellbeing). The participants were reminded throughout the process that if such topics

arose then they were not obliged to discuss them and if they wished to do so could withdraw their data from the research up until two months after the interview date.

5.13 Summary of Bringing the Research to Life

This chapter took a detailed look at the processes and procedures for data generation and analysis, including specific details on theories and frameworks that have helped me to formulate thorough guidelines of the methods I have deployed. Extensive details in this chapter have aided the credibility of this research project.

6 Life and Educational Journeys

In order to understand the women's roles and experiences of the international label and who they are amongst and within communities, it was necessary to explore who they are as individuals. Bunny, Alexis, and Maneet's narratives are shared in the following section.

As a reminder, the research project has been guided by the following questions:

1. What does it mean for Indian women at a university in the North of England to be labelled as international students?
2. How do the women in this research project understand and experience communities linked to study-related activities and their free time?
3. What are the connections between the women's international student experiences and their study-related and free time communities whilst studying in England?

The three women's narratives are presented in three sections: Background, Studying Abroad, and Experiences of Community before and after the covid-19 pandemic. The background section of the women's narrative introduces the women, providing an insight into where they came from and their educational history before they decided to study abroad. The focus shifts to the women's decisions to study abroad in England. It explores their reasons for choosing this path and their personal experiences while living and studying in England. The third section delves into women's interactions within communities linked to study-related activities and free time.

6.1 Bunny

6.1.1 Part 1: Background

6.1.1.1 Connections to India

Bunny is from a city in the South of India and came to England to study for a postgraduate degree in finance. She came from a very traditional family:

> So, I come from a very closed society right there... Everyone has been to [city] knows that there are two parts. There's the fun, party bit, and then there's the not so fun, quite radical bit, right? And I just, I feel like I've been in both of those places. My family is very, very traditional. Very conventional, very, you know, conservative even.

Bunny's experiences in Chennai, including her traditional upbringing are reflected in her connection to Indian history. This is illustrated in the following between Bunny and me. Bunny discusses her friend not knowing the date of India's Independence Day:

> [B] Yep. Right. So, it just it feels like there's some knowledge that that's just detrimental. I mean, looking back at the person or the friend, sadly who didn't know when Independence Day was, she's probably part of a family whose three or four generations ago fought for that independence and suffered the oppression.
>
> [S] So you said that the importance of knowing our ancestry. Is it significant to who we are as a person, is that what you are saying?"
>
> [B] It's like the human version. It's the knowledge version of DNA.

Through my clarifications of Bunny's experience, we see in the quote above, Bunny comparing knowledge of Indian history to DNA. The comparison demonstrates the importance of knowing India's history and the struggle for independence. This contributed to how Bunny presented the importance and value of being an Indian. She remarked that:

> You won't exist without those people, so it is important to remember by who they are [Indian Freedom Fighters].

Bunny builds a narrative around recognising India's colonial past, reemphasising her earlier point by highlighting the fight for India's freedom. Again, this reiterates her understanding of being Indian as being closely linked to the history of the land. This is

illustrated by history being *"the human version,"* as well as a contributing factor to her development of Indian identity.

6.1.1.2 Educational History

Bunny's schooling history was also a topic that influenced Bunny's Indian identity.

> [S] The people that you hung around with, your friends, do they have a similar situation towards their sense of self and beings as individuals?

> [B] I went to a very conventional, a very, very old school convent type of [school], there was discipline and then there was a pecking order, or hierarchy however you decide to call it. And if you respected that they respected you.

Bunny went into detail on how she attended a private school with a significantly British Colonial influence. She attended this school for the entirety of her compulsory age education. She draws attention to her schooling having a rigid structure, which she implied to be from the strict structure and hierarchy it imposed. Therefore, creating the understanding of educational institutions to be places of hierarchy, positioning the teacher at the top, with students below to conform to the rules of the given institution. She adds:

> Whereas, if you didn't respect that, you stuck out like a sore nail that did [get] hammered in eventually. So, I think it's mostly because of where I was educated and because the place of study has such a strong British influence, because my Principle worked with missionaries, and she was the principal of a school under the British rule. So, I think because I was taught under such conventional principles and values that I carry a lot of that with me.

By listening to Bunny's language, *"hammered in eventually"* demonstrates the power imposed over students by teaching staff. She attributes a strong student conformity to British influence because of the missionary experience of the teaching staff. She continues to emphasise the British colonial link with the use of the English language:

> Another very conventional aspect of my education was the close link it had to British education. We weren't allowed to speak any language but English in our school at all. When we had to speak to our teachers or ask for anything, we have to ask for it in English, otherwise they wouldn't give us anything.

Her reflection of the use of the English language demonstrates the strong colonial influence that continues the dominance of the British Empire through showing that no other language has the same value, hierarchising English language to become the language of officiality from a young age.

6.1.2 Part 2: Studying Abroad

As the exchange between myself and Bunny will show, she decided to continue her formal education with wanting to study abroad:

> [S] What I'm gathering, is that you come from quite a conservative family? You went to a fairly good school and then from that, that gave you the opportunity to then come and study abroad?
>
> [B] I was going to study abroad for my undergraduate. But that kind of blew over because of some bureaucratic crap. For the lack of a better term.

However, despite remaining in India for her first degree she was keen to highlight the opportunities that remained for her in India:

> So, then I decided to study in India, which was an amazing opportunity for me because I got to do a lot of other things. I worked for a bunch of companies I interned. I wrote. I was a writer for a brief while. And I explored versions of my life that I normally wouldn't have if I came abroad for anything.

Bunny continued to want to study abroad, applying for a postgraduate degree in the UK. She made a point about the offers she received in the UK for her studies:

> I had a bunch of offers actually, to study political science at the King's College London. I think, I had a scholarship or something from Newcastle. And I got into, Dublin and Trinity College. So, it was more of a judgment call really.

However, when making the decision to study abroad, she explained how it was a difficult decision which she discussed with her mother and father:

> Um, my mom was terrified… and that I think that made it really hard for her. They [mum and dad] sent me. But she also knew that if she didn't, then I'd never be able to experience the world. So, she did it anyway.

The language that Bunny used to describe the feelings of her moving away from home is powerful. Bunny remarked in the above quote *"then I'd never be able to experience the world."* This sentence demonstrates the opportunities that Bunny's parents perceived her to receive as an international student in England. This language implies a smallness of India, with the "world" being within a Western country. Bunny also established the role of the family when making this decision, with approval and acceptance being sought from her parents to take this next educational step. Bunny's decision, and the inclusion of her parents in making the decision to study abroad can be linked to Bunny's understanding of what it means to be a student:

> Yeah, I mean, obviously, I made a lot of mistakes. I made a lot of decisions that in retrospect seems stupid, but it is also a learning curve. I mean, I did all my stupid stuff. I'm ready to be an adult.

Again, Bunny points to learning new experiences, she draws attention to the value of education as a step to becoming an adult, suggesting a level of responsibility that comes with being a student and living abroad.

6.1.2.1 The International Label as a Form of Motivation

The way Bunny presents the value she has for higher education and what it has done for her personally, i.e., a step toward adulthood, can be linked to her understanding of the use of the international label to categorise students. I asked Bunny to explore the label in our second interview:

> [S] I know we don't have much time left, but just something that I wanted to touch upon with you is here [at university] you're labelled administratively as an international student. Could you tell me how you understand this label and tell me what you think of the label?

Bunny's response to my questioning was as follows:

> I'm not gonna say exploit, but I'll use it [the label] to the best of my abilities because it gives me a competitive edge over other people. Happily, take it as zero prior [additional academic support]. It's that simple. So as an international student, I think it's important that at least professors are, you know… aware that everyone has a certain level of knowledge, know that because there's some concepts that are fundamentally different. I'm not gonna say wrong, but different than what is expected here.

Bunny presents a confused exploration of the international label. Her initial entry into her thoughts on the label suggest the term international to be of some controversy. This is illustrated with the label being identified as *"exploitative."* However, within the same sentence she shares that the labelling fuels her with motivation but would be okay with not being labelled as such. Bunny, then goes to acknowledge the additional support that there is available to her to excel over "*other*" people. Her use of *"I"* when describing her conflicting views on the label as a motivating factor anticipates opposition from 'others,' in this case, other international students, to her view of the international label being used as an advantage for those labelled with it.

Unpacking Bunny's understanding on being labelled as an international student further, the label could be used to help professors to be aware of varying academic and educational systems:

> Some people might take offence with the whole international thing saying that, you know, I'm just as good. I'm not just as good, I'm better because my courses were harder back home. This place is easy for me, so it's not about how smart you are or how well you think you should be perceived, but it's about them [academic staff] acknowledging that each system of education is different globally, and that there can be some gaps in expectation or understanding because of that, it's less about being insulting and more about being inclusive.

Although Bunny recognises that some students may take *"offence"* with the term, she highlights the value and performance of her student qualities to be better than others'. She creates a thread of thought related to her individual ability, *"I'm not just as good, I'm better"* to highlight that she is more than what is expected of for an international student. She ends the comment illustrating an alternative purpose for the international label to be a tool for academic staff to recognise that "*system of education is different globally,"* removing the potential of the label being insulting but inclusive.

Unravelling Bunny's understanding on being labelled as an international student further, her positioning on the use of the label becomes difficult to follow with her implying that international students should be doing more than their non-international counterpart if they are *"offended."*

And if people choose to be offended just because you're being called an international student, then you should just work twice as hard to prove that they're wrong. It is for underestimating your rights and your relationship with your professors, completely depends on how you carry yourself in front of them.

Bunny's multiple voices, of the labelling to be exploitative to students labelled with the descriptor, but also helpful to academic staff, suggests a confusion for how the label is understood and experienced. Despite recognising that international students may be "offended," she justifies the use of the term through applying its benefit to academic staff to recognise different education systems and backgrounds students can be from.

Her statement shifted the responsibility and impetus of academic outcomes onto the learner rather than the system she finds herself within. Again, bunny's use of *"I"* and *"people"* separates her experiences from other international students, further shaping her cultural positioning by speaking of herself as an individual, excluding herself from the international group categorisation. This interpretation contributed to Bunny's experience of the international label to be multifaceted, and one that perhaps weighed more toward reiterating the Western/Eastern knowledge divide where the international student would be considered the recipient of knowledge and not the provider.

6.1.2.2 Being Misrepresented in England

The narrative surrounding the international label provided an opening for discussions on feeling misrepresented. Bunny opened up about her feelings and experiences of being misrepresented and misunderstood as an Indian.

Bunny shared her frustration and anger toward India's misrepresentation in the Western media:

> [S] …You said that you were annoyed about the misrepresentation of India. Where do you think this comes from?"
>
> [B] I saw kids drinking out of a puddle in the UK more than in India. Parents here give much less of a fuck about their kids and you know my parents back home, my mum wouldn't let me in or let me eat food without sanitising my hands. Whereas kids here lick the floors in malls. OK, so don't fucking tell me about. Don't fucking talk to me about hygiene. You tell me, which is more fucked up, right, think a lot of the misrepresentation is just media

messing up. It's so funny when you see the root cause would be racism. Honestly, just good old-fashioned racism... You're a racist. It's that simple. I think I don't know if it could be related back to the colonialism or the empire or the general idea British people have that they are somehow better than everybody else…

She explicitly referred to the misrepresentation in the media and how it shaped her non-international peer's perception of her. Bunny expands her frustration through sharing her perceptions of a racist discourse of the UK of Indians drinking out of puddles and licking floors. I infer the depictions she made to reflect the stereotypical imagery seen in charity adverts presented in Western countries, which often depict children in India and Africa as impoverished, unhygienic and destitute.

Bunny considered the lack of knowledge and failure to explore other cultures and ways of living by British students ignorant, she attributed significant blame to media influence and historical and systemic racism. Bunny's repeated use of *"fucked"* demonstrates her anger about why she was being valued below the British people. There was the sense that British society was beneath her because she chose to study in England and had the means to, and through her experiences, the British societal reputation did not live up to her expectations.

Bunny's views on media misrepresentation can be linked to her comments made in her second conversation on how India and Africa were perceived by the British:

It's like for these people [British people], India and Africa, our countries where like the entire place is a slum and like no one has water and everyone walks to villages and here I am sitting having a bougier life than most of these people might have honestly. And I'm like, yeah, no, I grew up with a maid. I don't know what you're talking about right.

Bunny creates contrasting images to the media's *"poor and slum-like"* India, and her experiences of India. Her reference to influencers helping poor children can be linked to the 'White saviour complex,' where in which the White majority was seen as helping the ethnic minority, creating further distance between her understanding of what the media presented and her experiences of growing up in India affecting her positioning of what is understood as being an Indian. Bunny switches between her perceptions of

Westerner's views of India and her self-described *"bougier"* life experiences are further suggestion of wanting to create a distinction between media narratives and her own.

Bunny continues to develop her narrative surrounding her perception of Indians and who is considered an Indian. We exchanged a conversation on Indian and British identity:

> [B] Yeah, you're very British, by the way… very British… Yeah… super British.
>
> [S] I see. I consider myself as Indian.
>
> [B] Yeah, but the way you carry yourself, your ideas on education, your ideas on society, your obsession with colonialism and the way you talk about the Parties and in the UK and your understanding of British people, I think makes you very British. I'm sorry, but any of that offended you, I didn't mean to. And when I say you, I mean British people because I obviously know you're educated and don't think India as the country full of beggars. So that's a good thing. I would consider you more British than Indian. Not that you're not Indian, obviously. That's how you identify then. But from my perception, you feel more British than Indian.
>
> [S] …So having these conversations are surface level? By talking about politics and having a conversation about whatever's happening in society is perhaps shallower than what happens in India? Am I right? No.
>
> [B] Ohh no I don't mean it as shallow. I mean at the level in which you discuss [politics] it is with no personal involvement. It's not shallow, more like its general knowledge. It comes along the lines of who won the Nobel Prize in literature. Whereas the Indian people politics is. Who tried to kill me, or who took food away from my baby's mouth?

In the exchange above, Bunny addressed the concept of Britishness. Through this exchange, it was important to clarify what Bunny explained and to follow up with summaries and clarification questions during the interview. Therefore, I summarised Bunny's exploration of what being British implied. Bunny's tone to describe her thoughts suggested that Britishness carried a reputation of given superiority. This is reflected in Bunny's quote above of British people perceiving India as a "*country full of beggars.*" This is reiterated by her understanding of British people discussing politics as "general knowledge," rather than real-life experiences she suggests Indians endure to feel connected to being Indian.

Bunny's presents a very binary view of culture and difference. There is a strong sense from her statements above and through her narrative so far, that she feels under attack, perhaps for being Indian, and not being *seen* in the way that she would like during her time studying and living in England. In this exchange, she turns the attack on to me and questions my Indianness. Perhaps this is a deflection of her feelings toward being Indian and how Indians are *seen* and understood by White Westerners. In addition, there is an intersection of power and identity presented in her dialogue for example with the repeated use of *"you"* and *"your"* to direct her assessment. I am the facilitator of the interview, and although I encouraged the interviews to be reciprocal, to create an ethos of power sharing, there was still a difference in positioning. This is supported by her taking control of the exchange, assessing me, critiquing me, giving an evaluation of how I came across to her as an Indian. Perhaps Bunny is reclaiming her power through the attack on my Indianness, however, by doing this she reinforces colonial legacies by asserting who can claim an identity.

The exchange also presents an intersection between class and nationality. She described her perception of British people understanding history as inconsequential to their everyday lives. Whereas, for Indian people, the experiences of history are experienced in a much more personal way, perhaps representing the working class. This can be linked to the broad assumptions made about British people not being educated in non-Western countries, feeding into her previous position on India and Indians being misrepresented as a people from a *"country full of beggars."* In addition, the contrast in status that Bunny presents suggests a hierarchy that can be linked back to the superiority of the British Empire, despite India's subjugation under England ending in 1948.

This part followed on from Bunny's understanding as an international student, which has influenced her feelings of being misrepresented and understood in England as an Indian. She ascribes this to the British media and how this filters to British people holding negative narratives around Indians.

6.1.3 Part 3: Experiences of Communities

This part of the narrative follows Bunny's identity and experiences as an international student, which connects to her conceptualisation of community and community experiences. Through our conversation, she brings attention to her positive and negative experiences of community and how she experienced community before and after the pandemic.

In different moments of our conversations, Bunny enacted different tensions within her understanding of community, creating a complex and layered conceptualisation. She understood communities to be "*Tribes", "places to belong,"* and *"relating to people"* to satisfy a *"primal need of survival."* She adds that her personal experiences of communities have been mixed:

> So, I grew up in these very, very constrictive circles. So, you were either in or you're out and if you weren't in, you were ostracized. Like you had to fit in. So, when I got the freedom to do whatever I wanted, I made sure that I wasn't part of any group. That you couldn't club me with people. I got my validation elsewhere; I didn't need to be validated by people among my peers. I mean, anyone in my community

Bunny's use of the pronoun *"I"* is repeated in the quote above, representing her choice to be singular by definition and not affiliated to any specific community, creating a delicate balance between stability and change. Bunny sharing her insecurity of choosing to be alone rather than in a community was a choice that recognised the values of these groups but not beyond her need for self-development. Bunny's exploration of the difficulty that sometimes comes with managing communities she had been involved within provided a reminder of the varying experiences that communities could bring.

Her encounters with these *"circles"* had created a distance from communities in England. She stated that these communities could be understood as *"constrictive."* Therefore, she decided to break away from large groups and focus on her self-development when in England. She highlighted personal development by being able to not rely on the validation she once sought from her communities.

Bunny's openness about the communities she distanced herself from is suggestive of Bunny's growth and healing from *"constrictive circles."* She stated:

> Initially I used to be part of communities, I wasn't proud of. I was part of the clubbing community… [they] weren't the most positive influence in my life… I used them in a negative way

She reminds us of the healing with the quote below, which reminds us of her mindfulness about her role and positioning within communities:

> I still think I'm a part of a lot of communities [student community, LGBTQ, and mental health communities]. But I don't let any, one, community define who I am. So, I think I really appreciate like kind of openness and honesty about that.

She recognises that she is still a part of many communities, but she has reworked how they fit into her everyday life. She presents a balanced approach to how to manage the communities she aligned with in England. Bunny acknowledged the value of being a part of multiple communities to help form her sense of self and identity, but not at the cost of her independence.

6.1.3.1 Experiences of Communities Before and After Covid-19

Bunny was living in England during the covid-19 pandemic. Therefore, it was important for us to discuss her experiences of communities during this time.

Despite the social restrictions enforced due to the pandemic, a running theme of Bunny's community experiences was to highlight her growth and sense of security. She stated:

> I am fine, as psychopathic as that sounds.

Bunny's saying, "as psychopathic as that sounds," presented in the quote above, implied that it was not typical for an individual to be without a community. I infer Bunny's statement to allude to be "fine" without physical communities, as it can be understood from her narrative so far, that Bunny identifies strongly as a member of an imagined Indian community. Her statement showed that she was going against what she believed was expected of her, suggesting that being alone is unusual. I clarified

what I understood from her comments and followed up with a question, asking about the impact of the pandemic:

> [S] Would you say that the pandemic has affected [experiences of] community for you?

Bunny continued with:

> [B] I think the pandemic has disrupted communities. But what it did to me was that it made me realise that I'm just fine. I don't have to belong anywhere, at least for right now.

She acknowledged the disruption caused to communities, but her quote above suggests that she used this time to build her self-confidence. She realised that belonging to a community was not essential for her sense of self. Bunny implied that by distancing herself from community involvement, she was able to develop a stronger sense of independence. She followed up with:

> I like a safe distance from things [communities]

However, during our interview, there were moments where Bunny questioned her confidence in her choice to not belong. This was illustrated with multiple repetitions and variations of being *"just fine,"* perhaps showing a struggle and tension with her decision not to belong to communities.

She counters her iterations of *"being just fine"* with recalling negative experiences of being within a community and how that led to conformity:

> I've wasted a lot of time doing something because I thought others were doing it. I felt like the monkey next in line to jump.

Her transparent depiction of her past experiences pointed to the negative constrictions that communities have the potential to create. She once again, circles back to the pandemic and its positive effect on her personal sense of development. Bunny summarises below:

> I went from being this quite mouthy person into this very outspoken, very angry person and that kind of didn't pan well for me because all that frustration and all those things that I wasn't saying, and I was holding in

for so long had affected me that I went into alternative ways of expressing myself which weren't very useful, helpful, or legal. Then I cleaned up my life. And you know covid self-actualisation helped me do that. I looked back on things, and I saw that, you know, messing up constantly isn't going to change anything. So, that was when I realised that I didn't need community to define what or who I am. And that was a good thing for me.

Bunny openly recalls her difficult times, from discussing her conservative upbringing and inability to speak her mind to the progression she has made as an individual who feels confident to express her feelings without a community to define her. She powerfully discusses her individual growth to remove herself from communities that did not serve her, whilst highlighting the difficulties of balancing societal views on choosing to be alone.

6.1.4 Summary of Bunny's Life and Educational Journey

Our conversations were semi-structured and guided by broad topics of interest (general upbringing, early education, life experiences in India). Bunny's narrative begins with her upbringing in Chennai. She described her upbringing as *"traditional"* and attended a British colonial school. During our conversation, she discussed Chennai's *"conservative" and "party"* scenes. It was a combination of her upbringing in the Indian city, alongside her education and upbringing, that informed her decision to study abroad to "experience the world."

Our discussions progressed to discussing her experiences as an international student and what being labelled as an international student meant. At times, Bunny presented conflicting statements, illustrating confusion about how the international label was received. For example, she mentioned that the label allowed access to additional learning support but could also be experienced as exploitative.

It was informative to explore Bunny's upbringing in India, as it was clear to see her value and love for India, which formed the basis for comparing what it was like to be an Indian in England. During this part of our discussion, she presented a vulnerability when sharing what it meant to lose the Indian culture and heritage, demonstrating her strong connection to her Indian identity. Her belief in a strong Indian identity stemmed from her understanding between Britian and India's colonial history creating a strong

national identity. However, again, her experiences were mixed, and although her Indian identity was presented with certainty, she felt she was misrepresented and misunderstood in England. She drew particular attention to the rhetoric around the perceptions of the Global South in the Global North.

Bunny's narrative then discussed her understanding and experiences of communities. Bunny connected her experiences in India to how she experienced communities in England. She described her communities back in India as *"constrictive,"* and places to seek *"validation."* However, the covid-19 pandemic created a time for Bunny to develop her understanding of community, resetting her expectations of what she wanted to gain from it. This gave her time to explore her individuality and, despite moments of in-betweenness, to develop the confidence to be alone while maintaining a connection to different communities (student, LGBTQ, and mental health) without one defining her.

Overall, our interview discussions were challenging and insightful. As a researcher, I felt that Bunny struggled during some moments to convey her thoughts. Within statements, she would exchange opposing and aligning views; for example, with her experiences of the international student label, she had multiple perspectives on how the international label could be perceived by international students and academic staff, which contrasted with her positive experiences of being an international student. However, through our interviews, our discussions became opportunities to voice internal conflicts and contradictions in a space where they were heard.

6.2 Maneet

6.2.1 Part 1: Background

6.2.1.1 Connections to India

Maneet grew up in Pune, Western India, her family were originally from Kashmir Northern India, but had to move due to the violent partition between India and Pakistan in 1947:

> My family is from Kashmir, so the partition affected us massively. It's that sort of generational trauma that kind of goes through like it just doesn't wear off to the person It's happening to, [it] kind of filters through generations. So that's, I guess, the emotion, biological one, but socially as well…

Maneet's quote above on how her family were affected by the Empire, links to her understanding of what it means to be an Indian:

> Broadly, I'd say individuals from India or those whose ancestors were from India. I don't think there's a certain characteristic or experience that can help categorise a person as Indian *enough*. I do however think that people from India and belonging to the Indian diaspora need to re-evaluate their definition of *Indian* and understand the country for what it is now and the history it holds.

Maneet shared a broad understanding and acceptance to what it means to be Indian. The main quality was to have a strong connection to the country. Her understanding of what it means to be Indian is affected by the perception of the effects of colonisation and the lack of response to the Empire. This was specifically highlighted in our interview when we discussed the effect of Empire on other colonised countries:

> Obviously so many countries have experienced colonialism, but just not in the way that India has. And I think it also goes back to what I was saying earlier, where it's like, I think, other countries are angry. We aren't angry enough. Yeah, we've lost. I think that is a big part of it because when I talk to my friends who are Black or from other [colonised] countries. They are angry. They do have these talks back home... But I don't think India has the same sort of response to it, which is really sad because a lot was lost.

Maneet's quote above presents frustration and *"anger"* toward how more Indians do not share her view on the effect of the British Empire on Indian society and culture. Her anger was directed at the blasé attitudes and conversations around colonial India, leading Maneet to take a personal journey to understand the complex exploitative relationship between Britain and India.

In the opening of Maneet's narrative, the effect of the British Empire is evident in how she connected to India and understands being Indian. Her views are further informed by her educational history.

6.2.1.2 Educational History

Maneet attended one school seeing her through from the age of 4 to 18:

> I was in the same school since nursery, so I spent all my years 14 years in one in the same four buildings I grew up in with my best friends. I've been seeing them since I was four.

She emphasised a close-knit environment that centred around familiarity of close friends, that saw her through her early schooling years.

Maneet attended a school that was considered a part of the state system, but was privately owned:

> I went to a semi -public private school. Most students were Indian. I think we just had two people who are not from India. But it was a very, it was like a public school but privately owned.

At her school, the majority of students were Indian, reflecting the population of India. In Indian middle-class this can be read as her having a humble upbringing.

Maneet learnt her schooling subjects in English and emphasised that her parents encouraged her to learn English. I was interested in understanding how she studied in England:

> [S] So when you learn here what language do you learn in? See, now I've had conversations with other people and they're like if we spoke in our home language [in our Indian language] we would get in trouble. So, when

they're learning here, they learn in English as well, whereas my friend, I asked her this question and she said no. She learns in Italian.

She remarked:

> [M] Yeah, that's on colonialism and culture itself. There is a sense of class when it comes to language in India. If you know English, it's considered that you belong to a better class. You're better. You have stronger prospects because that's the way language is looked at.

> [M] So most like, even if parents don't know English, they'll try and send their kids to an English-speaking school in the hopes that they have a better life, because job opportunities are better.

In the exchange above, Maneet explicitly highlights the value of the English language. She recognises the lasting influence of British colonial rule over India to affect the class system significantly. This is illustrated by Maneet's acknowledgement of the importance of the English language in career and social progression, with encouragement from parents even if they do not know the language themselves. The use of the English language as an identifier for class is further reiterated with her school subjects being taught in English. Maneet's schooling highlights the value placed on the English language as a language for progression, whilst maintaining Hindi as her language of communication:

> So, with my school friends, I'll speak in Hindi, at home I'll speak Kashmiri.
> I speak Hindi and English, [English] is usually whoever I'm speaking to who speaks to me in English.

Maneet demonstrates the dominance of the English language as a formal language. This is reflected with its use in educational and professional settings.

6.2.2 Part 2: Studying Abroad

Maneet continued her formal education and decided to study internationally. Her decision to study abroad was based on the opportunity to take the English language test to study or migrate in another country, she states:

> I never saw the UK as an option, I just applied as I needed to give the IELTS for a US college and thought might as well. I got into a couple colleges in the states but without financial aid, so the UK turned out to be a handy backup

Maneet's decision to study internationally, within the Global North, was based on finance. The UK was within her financial remit compared to the US. From her statement, the UK was not her first option, but she took the chance to study internationally in the UK. Again, financial reasoning held significant weight when choosing the university in England:

> [The city of the university] was the most affordable option at the time. I got into [university] as well, which would have been better in terms of opportunity, but I couldn't afford to live in [city of the university] then. So, it was the perfect option in terms of affordability and opportunity.

6.2.2.1 Identity as an International Student

It became apparent through our conversation that the effects of the British Empire impacted how Maneet experienced her social and academic life. I had asked Maneet to go into further about any colonial influences that affected her.

> [S] Can you tell me from your own experiences any colonial effects that you see that remained today?"

> Maneet stated:

> [M] [The student] Goes abroad to study they are suddenly put on a pedestal compared to the ones that are back home. Everyone's desiring to leave because there is this general notion that the West is better because that's what we sort of see in our culture through colonialism.

She presents a conflict between having individual progression and the cost of becoming a part of a cultural system that did not support India's growth as a country of power. The explicit tension is from studying in England, receiving a British education, and then returning to India with a promoted status and reputation because of a British education. She acknowledged the profound influence of British higher education in India. This is illustrated through Maneet's quote of students studying abroad being "*put on pedestals"* compared to those who remain in India to study. She suggests a cultural acceptance of the West being better through colonialism.

Although Maneet recognised a tension between how students studying abroad or at home were perceived, she went on to describe her experiences as an international student in the North of England:

I feel like as international students especially, to make friends with home students, because they… there is, I feel a gap in culture and not to shame anybody. But I feel like people who are from the UK are generally not uh, not interested, I'd say, in other cultures, umm, so there is a tendency to sort of... I guess that's also another way where like obviously Indian students gravitate towards [Indians] and instead it's because there is a sense of belonging or there's a sense of similarity or there's an immediate point of commonality.

Maneet's quote above describes the difficulty of making friends with non-international students. She felt a lack of interest from home students in getting involved with international students. She states that home students lack interest in cultures that are not British; she therefore found it easier to find a sense of belonging with people who were Indian or shared similar cultures. Maneet struggled to connect with home students, perhaps because the international label had been used to perpetuate differences rather than similarities. Maneet perceived the function of the international label as a way to preserve stereotypes, with the bureaucratic purposes being outweighed by the duration of time undergraduate students are at university. Through the quote above, Maneet brings attention to the difficulty international students have to make friends with home students, recognising an immediate sense of belonging with students who share cultural similarities.

6.2.2.2 Experiences of Being an International Student

Maneet expands her understanding of the label by sharing her experiences as an international student. She continued to experience difficulty when interacting with the home students because of the stereotypes that were made apparent. Maneet stated:

Like a lot of people complimented me when I got here on how good my English was, I'm like I did learn ABC as I learned CGD [home language alphabet]. I should be half decent. But there's there is a lot, like, we're 'pretty' for an Indian and you smell nice for an Indian. The 'for an Indian' is a very nice suffix that's added to a lot from the like is the *ohh the good for an Indian* [emphasised]

She repeated the impact of language and accent through her experiences of being told about having "*good English*" by British peers. The phrase "*good for an Indian*" established the racist societal hierarchy that can be experienced by minorities and peoples of colour.

Maneet's experience of racism, as highlighted with the suffix *"good for an Indian,"* can be linked back to India's history as the colonised, which created a hierarchy between the two countries, establishing the dominance of the English language for progression:

> To be fair, the fact that most international students can speak multiple languages fluently, yeah, should be a point of admiration, not to be looked down upon… it's interesting the languages that are valued for being spoken, because if I spoke French suddenly that's nice. But if I spoke Hindi, that's just, well, OK.

Maneet perceived her cultural position as an Indian within a non-Indian majority as complex, creating an exposed tension between the value of languages from particular Western European geographical locations and Indian languages. Maneet reflected on how speaking multiple Indian languages was not received the same way as European peers. Her experiences of Indian languages being valued less than European languages demonstrate the power and hierarchy that remains in the world order of the Global North and the Global South.

6.2.2.3 Being Mispresented in England

Maneet's experiences of being stereotyped as an international student also extended to her day-to-day life experiences.

In the exchange below, we share our experiences of being people of colour and the assumptions of the English language:

> [S] I got *aw your English is so good*. I'm like, yeah. Thank you. It should be.

Maneet's response to my experience made her reflect on how she has been belittled:

> [M] …it's a lot of like if you're making an intelligent point at times people would be surprised that it's coming from your mouth. It's made like blatantly obvious by their expression they're just shocked that you have a brain, and the worst part is when they come out, [and say] like your food smells, and [then] go to restaurants here, [and] they're filled with White people.

As highlighted in the quotes above, we were discussing how passive racism can manifest casually through comments about our being Indian. These comments made

us feel *Othered* because our appearance didn't align with the typical image of who is considered to belong in England.

Maneet's personal frustrations turned into commentary on the Whitewashing of the Indian culture she experienced in England. She drew attention to the acceptability of certain Indian practices in the Western world. She stated:

> You can't measure an entire country just based on the problems it has or how backward it is considered like everyone's fucking doing yoga now. Yeah, it's the same thing, White people doing yoga is fine, but Brown people doing yoga is not. Yeah, it's when Brown people come to White countries it's considered immigration but when White people go to other countries it's the experience they like.

Maneet angrily rejected the stereotypes that she encountered about India. Countries should not be judged solely on their problems or the Westernised perception of how *backward* they are considered by the West. She stated the hypocrisy of cultural appropriation, with some practices, such as yoga, deemed acceptable and fashionable to the White Western world. She extended this to how Westerners exploit India for cultural experiences, but the same affordances did not apply to minorities. Maneet gave examples of times that she encountered cultural ignorance from her peers.

> … Like someone asked me are women allowed to vote in India. And I'm like, right after you White sisters left.

Maneet's response to her peer questioning Indian women's rights highlights her awareness of the colonial implications on India's position and value as a non-Western country during her time in England. The stereotyping of former colonies continued, as demonstrated by the example below:

> Someone told me this, it is actually hilarious. Asians make good employees, not good leaders

Again, the quote above positioned India as a backward country. This reflected the colonial rhetoric of the *good* and *bad* immigrant, with Indians commonly categorised as subservient and rule-abiding. The term Asian was used to describe Maneet, highlighting the lack of awareness of the different ethnicities within this categorisation.

Through our conversation, Maneet was aware of how she could be perceived as an Indian in England. She was advised by her father to be prepared for this:

> My dad sent me here, saying you have to be twice as better as a White person to even be looked at. Yeah. And if that's not the truth, I don't know what it is, and then still there is this entire sort of stigma in the White community, if you will, that causes everyone's suddenly hiring people of colour. There's no room for us, whereas there's still everything is the same. The conversation is so superficial, but that's just an excuse. Now, that's the me. It's like even if I get hired for my skills, I'm still always gonna be a diversity hire.

The quote above is indicative of Maneet's conscious awareness of the racist hierarchy that exists between the *White person* and *people of colour*. Maneet openly discussed her reality of being a person of colour in a working environment in England and the challenges this brought. She touched upon the perceived superficiality of diversity hires by the *White community,* and how this creates a perceived lack of value in the workforce. She eventually reflects on the doubt this created of her own skill and ability in the role. There is a level of acceptance from Maneet to fulfil the available opportunities dutifully, fearful of not receiving another one.

The quote above can be connected to Maneet's self-reflection below on the difficulty of it to be an Indian in Western society with such a high value placed on being perceived as Western. This was perhaps because of the deep colonial history that remains:

> Brown people are ashamed of their culture because... of how strongly, the White superiority complex runs in the country.

Maneet's mentioning of Brown people being ashamed of their culture highlights the difficulty of her position as an Indian trying to represent her culture in a place that may not be very receptive to difference.

So far in Maneet's narrative, she has presented her connections to India and her Indian culture and demonstrated through her experiences how she feels she has been misrepresented in England both as an Indian and an international student. The

following part of Maneet's narrative connects her experiences of living in England as an Indian student to her understanding and experiences of communities.

6.2.3   Part 3: Experiences of Communities

6.2.3.1 Expectations of Study-related Communities

Maneet has consistently demonstrated an awareness of the colonial impact on India and self-reflected on how it has shaped her experiences throughout our interviews. This includes her understanding of what it means to be Indian, the role of English in education and professional advancement in India, and how colonialism has influenced her experiences as an international student in England. This part of her narrative moves on to discuss experiences of study-related communities. My questions have led Maneet to connect her interpretation of community and community experiences to her identities as an Indian and a student in India and England:

> [S] …could you tell me what your understanding is of a community?
>
> [M] …It's more about having a sense of belonging and having accountability towards other people but also having someone to rely on or have your back and not feel like an isolated person. I think we as humans usually are … we have a desire to have social interaction or a sense of belonging.
>
> [S] You describe that sense of belonging…what's your sense of it? Has your sense of community changed during this academic year or during the time you've been here in England?
>
> [M] I think especially the UK education system doesn't… it's not very conducive of friendships. You see you go to a lecture [in England] for an hour, you barely talk to the person sitting next to you. But back home [India], there's an encouragement to foster friendships and be a part of a community, like your fellow classmates. But I don't think that's the case here. That's the answer.

Keywords from the exchange were "*sense of belonging*", "*isolated*", "*desire for social interaction*", and "*encouragement to foster a relationship."* These key moments in the exchange highlight Maneet's community expectations from her experiences in India. She links her absence of community and feeling a lack of interest from other students in her course back to the British higher education system's encouragement of individualism.

Maneet connects how communities are encouraged and fostered to higher education systems. From the quote below, there is the sense that something was missing from the communities Maneet cultivated in England. When she reflected on her communities in India, she realised that membership of these communities was not consciously considered because she felt a sense of belonging.

> I feel like back home, I didn't sort of take into account the importance of it [community] because it was so readily available. Yeah, there was a sense of belonging in school, for instance I saw people, the same people every single day. So, we just kind of grew up together. So, it never occurred to me that this was something that was like… it was more like a background thing rather than sort of at the forefront.

There is a sense of ease when Maneet discusses and reflects on her communities in India. Maneet openly reflected during our conversation that she did not expect a desire to have a sense of belonging or to want to be a part of a community because of the difficulty to access them. However, she realised she wanted some kinship created from her study-related activities to have a sense of security.

Maneet, through her reflection, becomes a practitioner, assessing what she feels she needs to create a community. The connection Maneet makes between lack of communities to British HE is reiterated with the quote below:

> I feel like rules foster community, going back to our first point, where having that common set of rules encourages you to have that sense of brotherhood. I think [this] because [British] higher education is so individualistic, it fosters isolation.

Maneet expressed the importance of rules to help foster kinship and points of shared interest. Without the encouragement to have shared interests, Maneet's communities fail to compare to the ones she formed in India. Again, the isolation she mentioned in her earlier quotes are repeated, establishing this as part of her study-related community experiences in England.

6.2.3.2 Experiences of Communities Before and After Covid-19

Due to the social restrictions imposed by covid-19, I wanted to explore how and to what extent were communities affected. Maneet naturally explored how she viewed

communities before and after the pandemic. The quote below refers to how she saw social racial grouping, creating a visual divide that can be inferred to have shaped certain levels of discomfort for Maneet, making it difficult to enter pre-existing groups:

> [S] So how do you feel then about the reputation of British education, now that you've been here?
>
> [M] The Asians are sitting with the Asians, the Brown people are sitting with Brown people, White people are sitting with White people, and Black people are sitting with Black people. There's no sort of mingling… there's rarely any sort of connection within the races

Maneet's quote above is indicative of the difficulty she had to be a part of community's pre- pandemic. The difficulty to interact with other groups links to previous experiences of Maneet feeling a lack of interest from other students. She breaks down the rigidity of the situation through her desire to *"mingle" and "connect"* with different races and cultures. She reiterated her disappointment by stating the separate ethnic groups and the distance between them. It could be inferred that Maneet wanted to explore and be a part of an active, inclusive, and diverse community. However, in Maneet's perception the environments in which these communities existed did not encourage *"mingling"* or the coming together of different individuals through shared activities, resulting in social groups based on ethnicity.

I had asked Maneet via email if she had gained a sense of belonging during her time in England. Her response to my question:

> I haven't gained a sense of belonging/ attachment to a group or collective, I rather have a few people I cherish and with whom I can share different aspects of life with on a one-to-one basis.

Maneet's response highlights the lack of change in her community experiences over her time in England. She drew attention to her cultivation of smaller, more intimate groups rather than the larger collective with which to share meaningful experiences— a group of people with whom she could share different parts of her identity and interests.

6.2.4 Summary of Maneet's Life and Educational Journey

Maneet's narrative opens by describing the impact of the partition between India and Pakistan on her family, which resulted in their family moving to India. She sets the tone of her narrative with direct explorations and descriptions of how the British Empire had personally affected her family. The opening part of the narrative is rounded off with an insight into her early education and the use of the English language as a language for progression.

The narrative then moves on to explore Maneet's decision to study abroad. In this part she highlights the value of studying abroad compared to staying at home in India, as colonial culture suggests education in the Global North is better than in the Global South. Through her narrative, she demonstrates the international label to be a complex term that impacted how she was perceived as an Other, an Indian in England, creating feelings of misrepresentation through media and culture.

The final part of Maneet's narrative closes on our discussion of community, where she describes her conceptualisation of community through her study-related activities. She compared her study-related communities in India to the one she curated in the North of England. However, the value of community was not fully acknowledged until she moved to England to study, where she found significant differences in how learning was approached. Her community experiences were impacted by the informal self-segregation of students by race in common areas, which created a level of distance from engaging in a globalised and international university.

Overall, Maneet's interviews with me were very fluid, she was actively engaged in our discussions. She was particularly involved in the conversation topic of the British Empire, as her family was heavily impacted by the British-created partition in 1947 between India and Pakistan. Through our interviews, she expressed strong opinions on the role of the British Empire and its subsequent impact on her Indian identity, her experiences in England as a student, and the communities she was a part of.

6.3 Alexis

6.3.1 Part 1: Background

6.3.1.1 Connections to India

Alexis grew up in Bombay, the West Coast of India:

> I'm from Bombay, India. A very metropolitan city.

When discussing more about our background, Alexis had asked me about being British Indian, where she goes on to discuss the connection her family had to the partition enforced by the British Empire. She asked the following:

> [A] What does it mean to be a British Indian for you then?
>
> [S] My Nanni ji and Papa ji have done everything to preserve their culture. They preserved their culture through teaching their kids what it means to be Indian and that's very much instilled in me. I think I have a nice blend of traditions and cultural understandings of what it means to be an Indian, whilst being born here and living in the Westernised Global North.
>
> [S] …By discovering more about empire and colonialism and the effect that it's had on us; I think it's affected us greatly. Did you learn anything about colonialism or empire or?
>
> [A] I have vague memories of my grandfather telling stories about the partition. They were in India only, but … they're all the riots and the movements happening have affected them economically... I know they moved from Punjab to another city because Punjab at that point was quite bad because of the riots.

Through Alexis' questioning there is a mutual development in understanding each other's colonial experiences. Alex's in the quotes above opens up by describing the impact of the partition. She discusses her connection to the India and Pakistan partition. This illustrates the implications of the Empire on Alexis' family, moving from Punjab to Bombay to escape the violent partition. She reflects more broadly on the role of the British Empire in the effect on Indian culture. She states:

> …It's very upsetting about how people had to struggle for their own freedom for so many years. It's their land, it's their country and then suddenly you have an invader ruling. You know, you just lose your sense

of freedom and then building it again after years starting in building the entire nation again.

The tone Alexis took was thoughtful, considerate, and reflective of India's historical invasion. She situates herself in a position that draws on India's past and presents to recognise the difficulty of recreating a nation's identity independent of its coloniser. This can be linked to Alexis' understanding of Indian identity to be a bright and vibrant mix of Indian traditions that connect one another:

> I think Indian culture is all about having fun come together. We have the... So, it's very connected even in India itself, there are different cultures in every state. But at the end it's also connected. It just feels that they feel what it is, I think what it's like to be Indian, the culture, the unity, at least when it's festivals like I'll put it like that, not in general. But yeah, I think that's what makes all of us love India.

The above quote is an example given by Alexis that demonstrates how Indian culture creates a connection to Indian identity. Through these festivals, Alexis' connection to India and the Indian identity connects her to others, through this they bond through their similarities and remain united through their *"love for India."* She continued to emphasise a connection to Indian culture regardless of location. She remarks:

> It's about finding a balance, of also, respecting your culture, embracing it, and trying to develop individually with the society, and what's the word? Acceptance?"

In the quote above, Alexis refers to finding a balance of cultures. This was something Alexis had to do as she was and Indian living in England. She illustrated the importance of balance to adapt to different locations, whilst remaining close to culture and traditions to help develop within a society.

6.3.1.2 Educational History

Alexis went to a school that saw her through her compulsory education. She discusses the diversity population of her schooling:

> I've done all my schooling there and everything, I've always been exposed to people from different cultures within India like Gujrati People, Marathi people, Punjabi, so it's been very diverse in terms of that.

The cultural and linguistic diversity within her schooling reflected her perceptions of Indians in Bombay, exposing her to different languages and ways of life. This demonstrates her awareness of the diversity that existed around her.

Despite the linguistic diversity in Alexis' school, the language of instruction was English:

> English is my first language [use in school]. My second language was Marathi because Maharashtrian even have to know Marathi and my third language was Hindi.

Her statement above demonstrates the normalisation of the use of the English language in Education and despite Alexis' exposure to three Indian languages, which is indicative of the richness of culture that exists in India, there remains a heavy influence of the British Empire in Indian education through English being the language of instruction.

This aligns with Alexis' understanding of the use of the English language to be normal, she stated:

> That's the way … how the entire world is trying to be.

She presents the perspective that the English language is a globally dominant language, normalising the use of the English language in India. Dominance of the language can be linked to the quote below where although Alexis perceives the English language to be dominant, this does not devalue the learning of Hindi as a way to continue Indian tradition and culture:

> English has become such a global first language. It's become such a, 'you have to know English' that people don't know Hindi. I do know people personally who don't know Hindi properly, living in India when it is sort of the national language

She highlights that the English language, although one of two official languages, the other being Hindi, dominates within Indian culture and society as it is perceived as the language of progression. Her statement suggests the importance of learning the English language precedes the importance of learning Hindi. This is exampled with Alexis stating Indian's "*don't know Hindi properly.*" Although Alexis does not elaborate,

I infer that the level of Hindi (verbal and non-verbal) does not match the standard of English that is desired.

6.3.2 Part 2: Studying Abroad

Alexis' formal education continued abroad. This part of her narrative explored her decision to study abroad, expectations of the international label, and feelings of being misunderstood. I had asked Alexis about her decision to study abroad:

> [*S*] What was the decision process to come to the UK?
>
> [A] It was all honestly, opportunity based rather than exposure based. It was primarily the opportunities I would get in UK or the pay it would just be more compared to India, or the degree would be more valuable rather than doing it from India, at least in the industry I would want to be in.

The above statement draws attention to the economic and professional hierarchy between the West and South. For Alexis, the decision to study abroad was based on the perceived opportunities she would receive in the creative media industry.

I clarified what Alexis had shared with me about her opportunities in the UK. From this, she discussed further what studying abroad had meant for her on a personal level. She states:

> I think just become more independent when you're away. It's also about becoming independent, and of course exposure, you just get to know what life is.

Her statement above illustrates being a student away from home instigated independence for Alexis. It was an opportunity to become exposed to cultures and ways of life that are different from her own, perhaps experiences of living away from home amongst a variety of cultures that would not have been experienced if Alexis remained in India.

6.3.2.1 Expectations of the International Label

It was important for Alexis to study abroad to gain independence, she discussed how she felt she was Othered for being categorised as an international student:

I don't know, does it fall under othering? You're then directly Othered while enrolling because they emphasise so much on…international students...

Alexis was uncertain on whether or not the label fell under othering, suggesting the international label was an identifier to create a difference between students. She implies that the category of international, or being recognised as an international university, had created inflated reputations for the British higher education system. This was because she felt the international label implied inclusivity and, to a degree, effective globalisation, but she felt her experiences did not match her expectations of internationalisation. The *"emphasis"* on international students alludes to the capitalisation of having students be from various parts of the world.

In addition, Alexis draws attention to her expectations of the international label. She highlights explicitly the commodification of the label and the consumerism that is involved in international education. She remarked:

You take so much money for what? [Since the pandemic?] it is absolutely for nothing. At least if we see… the last two years absolutely nothing. Yeah, you're studying on a screen paying the same amount of money, getting even less of what we were in the first year, because we were still going to a class, and this is too much money for nothing. I mean, education is supposed to be this expensive?

Through her status as a paying international student, she emphasises her expectation of a return on her educational investment, which leads her to critically question her university experiences, such as the value of in-person teaching. In the quote above, she highlights how higher education can be viewed as a business enterprise, where the relationship between student and university is transactional.

The international student experience is also discussed in our follow-up interview. I wanted to understand what being labelled with international meant. Alexis responded to my questioning with the following:

And the fact you make it sound like our accommodations are so diverse and there's this and that diverse environment. You know you can see everything! How am I supposed to interact with them? Like it doesn't go

beyond that comfortability in a group. Why would you want to go out and make more friends?

She highlights the failure of the university accommodation when arranging room allocation to students, with Alexis finding that the students she was assigned rooms with were from India. Her statement above suggests that a chance to interact with other nationalities was reduced because it was comfortable having people from the same country making it more unlikely to seek friendships with others.

Despite the international label creating friction between expectation and reality, the label was used by Alexis as a reminder of her responsibility as an Indian international student:

> There are a lot of things which I am learning in my course, which my friends who do sort of communications in India don't have. So, there is, I don't see an upper hand, but more understanding of the subject. So, I think everybody in the workspace is open to more or new knowledge or new ideas and techniques.

She shared that the benefits of being an international student were learning new techniques and knowledge in her field that she could take back to India to develop. She does not perceive the difference in knowledge as an advantage but as an opportunity for improvement; however, this acknowledgement positions Indian knowledge and education as lower than the British.

6.3.2.2 Being Mispresented in England and India

The international label helped to open discussions on feelings of being misunderstood. Alexis added to her narrative by sharing her experiences from a conversation with a peer from her course, a conversation about India's diverse geographical landscape that India has to offer:

> [S] …In another conversation, this person thought that India was misrepresented in this country"

> [A] We have everything in this country [India]. She was so shocked. Like can you give me the name of the places? Because I didn't know they exist. You're not exposed to even Indian cinema? You know, it's not everyone's cup of tea but you know, like you have Hollywood cinema, and we get to

learn about the rest. You can't pull out [and Indian] movie from 25 years ago and just think that that's what [India] would feel like.

Alexis was irritated discussing the ease of access to information through media. She gave the example of interest in film and media via Bollywood. Alexis highlighted the little interest in Bollywood or non-Western cinema and media in her course. She demonstrated her peers lack of interest in her culture. The quote above creates a clear sense of her position as an Indian in a Western environment, being questioned about what she thinks is common knowledge. By doing this, she highlights the space within the *West and the rest.* She reflected on the double standards of Indians learning about Western culture through Indian education and Hollywood, but it not being reciprocated by her British peers. She also illustrates the issue with old Hollywood and its depiction of India informing people's views of India negatively, filtering down to outdated stereotypes and references that have remained. Alexis' experience above reiterates a hierarchy where non-Western culture was marginalised.

Although Alexis shared experiences that highlighted frustration of Western perceptions of non-Westerners, she had also experienced this when in India from Indians. This is highlighted through my questioning on colonial structures that we recognise in our day-to day lives:

> [S] Can you tell me from your own experiences any colonial legacies that you see that remained today?"

Alexis' response:

> [A] If you go to the South part, it's basically built by the British. So, it's considered one of the very beautiful parts of the city because it was built in this imagery of British architecture. So, it is something you have to see when you come from another country, but they [Indians] want to be like you have to go see that which is so beautiful but built by them [British].

The exchange above shows Alexis describing her experience of Indians suggesting the *"beautiful parts"* built by the British as a tourist excursion. Alexis presents a sad reflection of how there is an inferiority complex, where Indian culture and heritage is often perceived by Indians as less than their previous colonisers.

6.3.3 Part 3: Experiences of Communities

6.3.3.1 Expectations of Community as an International student

Alexis' narrative thus far explored her educational background, the decisions to study abroad, and her expectations as an international student. Connections can be made between being an international student and Alexis' community conceptualisation and experiences.

I asked Alexis about the term community.

> [S] Do you like the word community?"
>
> [A] I don't know, not really. I just don't hear it very often in my everyday life. [My community] it's a group or something. It's very informal. And community just sounds very heavy. I think it's just like it has to be this… it already [has] preconceived definitions… for everyone because you've been taught that since school or something… community has to be this, but I think even if you're using the word, we can have an extended definition/ understanding that will fit.

Alexis was uncertain with how to answer my question, with her taking a couple of moments to construct her answer. She gave a comparison to what community was in her everyday life, and how she felt she needed to explain what it was. A key descriptor she used was "*heavy*". Heavy implied unnecessary weight, and perhaps a burdened and unwanted formality. She also emphasised the term community having many *"preconceived definitions"* which reaffirmed the difficulty to explain what it meant to her.

When discussing what a community was, Alexis discussed it in relation to location, and the positive experiences that could be gained:

> It is actually so good back in our country and we're talking about racism and everything, you know, even though there are problems in our country, every country has them. But the sense of community in our country keeps you sane.

The community she refers to in the statement above alludes to a community based on patriotism and nationality. She understands community to be a space to discuss both positive and difficult topics that creates a sense of unity, a unity that kept her closely tied to India.

Alexis, toward the end of our first conversation, had asked what I thought a community was. My response to Alexis' questions emphasised a network of support and a choice to be a part of something larger than myself. I shared similarities of the explorations of communities to be a way to provide a significant sense of belonging that does not require a physical place or meeting points. In addition, my understanding of community requires some sort of continual participation that can help preserve a sense of belonging.

> [A] I didn't ask you. What does community mean to you? Then I'll get your point of view.

> [S] A community to me is a huge word that I think changes depending on…
> I think community is a sense of belonging, and an understanding of shared principles that can then become different things or thoughts and ideas and experiences. I think it's a starting point…. but not necessarily a physical thing. I don't think you need to go somewhere to be a part of a community, but I do think the act of contribution and the act of participation is really important to preserve a togetherness that comes along with community.

I had asked Alexis about how her communities had changed during her time in England. Her response spoke of communities linked to study-related activities such as lectures and seminars. She draws on the difficulty to be a part of these communities, the isolation and feelings of disinterest from other students:

> When you went to lectures there are already groups. So, they're already sitting together. And if you're [sitting] besides them, [it's] really hard to be [in] the conversation because there aren't any connections. So, it's very difficult to have conversations with people who are already in groups because they don't seem welcoming to talk to you.

In the quote below Alexis continued to share her experiences of student disinterest in study related activities:

> It is not the same as the culture there [India]. So that's one thing and I don't know what the students are, but some of them do seem interested at times, but is just a seminar so you have to listen to everyone.

Through Alexis' reflection, she highlighted the differences between the British and Indian education systems and how each system cultivated individuality or

collectiveness, friendships, and belonging. She predicates that interest in a collective group or community was limited to the confines of the classroom in England; listening to others was done out of duty for the lesson rather than building a community that ventured beyond the necessary and formal conversations within the study-related activity.

Although creating a community for Alexis was difficult, coming to England to study helped broaden Alexis' conceptualisation of community:

> When you step out of your bubble or a place, you're very comfortable in I think that's when you realise that it is more than just a group of people with the same culture or the same colour or anything.

Her interpretation of community was previously limited to nationality and culture, whereas when living in England, and despite the mixed experiences, Alexis' quote above on community grew beyond her initial understanding of communities being made up of only of people from the same culture or race, emphasising a personal development.

6.3.3.2 Experiences of Communities Before and After Covid-19

Communities in a physical setting such as meeting with other people, was interrupted by the pandemic. Alexis presented her understanding of community to be closely tied to being a student, this was particularly affected by the pandemic restrictions, she remarked:

> Like for the pandemic, [I was] always home for one and half years after starting uni. So, I spent most of my time at home instead of being at uni.

Alexis' university experiences were significantly impacted by the pandemic, with much of her opportunity for independence, and learning about other cultures and 'living life' disrupted. Alexis returned home so she could be with her family during social distancing. This meant that Alexis had a limited and altered university experience, with many of her expectations of what to expect being "taken away."

She continued with how the pandemic had affected the interactions with other peers from changing from physical to virtual:

> [There is a] major disconnection from the world, no proper conversation on social media.

The effect of the pandemic created an altered experience of communities. She discussed the use of social media as a way to have a community to connect too but considered online communities to have a superficiality with a lack of real conversation.

Alexis' quote below discusses the struggle of not having a larger community of friends to socialise with after she returned to England:

> After coming back from India, it's actually not bad having few friends, but at some point, you do need more friends in order to go out and have fun if I'm not wrong and it's also that a lot of people, a lot of friends have different ideas of hanging out and their way of fun is different than mine. There's always a divide as to what to do, what not to do. Social media it's just gotten more awkward after the pandemic because you don't have a lot of social interaction, so it just got … anxious.

Although it can be inferred from Alexis's quote that she was comfortable with her small group of friends, after social distancing rules became more relaxed, it became apparent that the absence of being able to extend and build social circles meant a difficulty in expanding communities. The pandemic and social distancing rules also reshaped ideas of *"fun,"* and how this may have changed because of the pandemic creating divides among small friendship circles. This was not helped by social media and seeing large gatherings, creating increased social anxiety for going out and being among larger groups.

6.4   Summary of Alexis' Life and Educational Journey

Alexis' narrative discussed her city upbringing and her family moving to Bombay because of the partition. Within this, her narrative demonstrates an understanding of the struggle for Indian independence, leading her to share her interpretation of what it means to be an Indian. Her understanding was based on a sense of togetherness and shared culture. Within this part, Alexis also shared her educational background.

Alexis' decision to continue her formal education was maintained with her decision to study abroad based on the opportunities she felt she would receive in England. This led to Alexis expressing her expectations as an international student to be within a diverse environment and for the university to help curate a globalised setting that encouraged connections between different cultures. Despite Alexis' views of the international label implying it is a service paid for, she felt she had responsibilities as an international student to learn knowledge that would improve the industry and workspace in India.

Alexis' identity as a student subsequently influenced her construction and experiences of community. She began by sharing her thoughts on community being a formal concept that perhaps lacked meaning because of its *"preconceived definitions."* However, when she thought about her community experiences, this was strongly linked to her student identity. Alexis viewed her community through *"fostering rules"* that created a sense of *"unity."* She did not fully recognise her reliance on her study-related communities until she came to study abroad. The pandemic significantly affected her experiences, with half of her degree being spent back at home in India. This created further differences between the communities she was already a part of because social distancing rules influenced how people wanted to interact, causing social anxiety for Alexis.

Overall, the interviews between myself and Alexis felt as though they flowed well, she was inquisitive and keen to discuss her experiences and thoughts, for example her awareness of Bombay as a large metropolitan city that involved various versions of Indian culture and heritage. This worked well with my role as an Indian researcher, as the interest from Alexis to ask about my experiences, for example growing up in England was helpful in developing understanding of one another's experiences, whilst also making a pathway to engage in complex topics. As each conversation developed, she became more open about her opinions, positive and negative experiences of the topics shared above on the British Empire, language, and community.

6.5 Key Similarities and Differences Between Bunny, Maneet, and Alexis' Life and Educational Journeys

Bunny, Alexis, and Maneet's experiences were organised into three headings which described their connection to India, their educational history including decisions to study abroad, and their understanding of communities linked to study-related activities and their free time. The following is a brief summary of shared and dissimilar experiences between the three women.

Part 1 of the women's narrative highlighted the strong emotional connection they each had to India and their Indian identities. All women recognised the colonial history to have shaped their use of the English language for progression, creating a difference in perceived opportunities between the Global South and Global North.

Part 2 of Bunny, Maneet, and Alexis' narrative explored their study-related activities and free time linked to their Indian identity and as international students in England. They each demonstrated how education in a Western country is perceived by elders and people in their Indian communities as opportunities to improve professional standing. Again, similarities were shared through their joint frustration at how they were individually misunderstood as Indians in England by their peers, colleagues, and Western Media. This highlights the lingering British cultural stereotyping embedded within the women's communities in India.

Part 3 of the women's narrative connected their identities as Indians in England, and as international students, to how they perceived and experienced their communities linked to study-related activities and free time before and after the covid-19 pandemic. Bunny's narrative continued her reflective tone and journey of self-discovery as an individual confident without the validation she felt communities provide. In comparison, Alexis and Maneet discussed communities strongly in relation to their identities as international students in England and having a shared sense of belonging through study-related activities. It became apparent through their stories that the influence of the British and Indian education systems played significant roles in how they developed their individual or collective attitudes towards communities.

7 Reading In-between the Lines of the Narratives

7.1 Continuing the Conversations

As discussed in the chapter Starting the Conversation, this study aimed to explore, through the lens of decolonisation, the experiences of three Indian women labelled international students in higher education in a city in the North of England through narrative analysis. This study explored the descriptor *international* and its links to colonial legacies such as internationalisation and globalisation. It also looked at the women's experiences in their communities linked to study-related activities and free time when living in England.

To help guide my interpretation of the narratives in this project, I used Zavala's (2016) decolonial strategies. The original strategy includes counter/storytelling, healing, and reclaiming (chapter 4). This chapter of my reading and writing of the women's narratives looks to broaden Zavala's (2016) decolonial strategies by exploring the women's experiences of in-betweenness across studying in England and their communities linked to study-related activities and free time.

The additional strategy of traversing in-betweenness through self-reflective prompts is applied to the women's narratives to show recognition of colonial legacies and moments of self-decolonisation (see 5.11.2.1.2). This strategy connected the women's narratives by recognising the shared colonial ties to their experiences whilst living in the North of England, with some of their experiences highlighting their effort to traverse their experiences of in-betweenness and, in other experiences, traversing in-betweenness was retrospectively applied. The discussion will link wider literature to the critical parts of the women's narratives, which engaged with the women's in-betweenness of Indian identity in England, their sense of belonging, in-betweenness of being labelled an international student and [not] belonging to communities. Throughout this reading and writing, I incorporate my understanding of the different roles I held in this research as an Indian and student researcher.

7.2   In-betweenness of Indian Identity in England

As a reminder, the opening of Bunny, Maneet, and Alexis' narratives explored where the women were from and their educational history. This section grounded their narratives with key biographical information that allowed insight into who they are as women, setting the foundation for their narratives. Significantly, Bunny, Maneet, and Alexis all present a certainty of who they are, linked to their Indian heritage and time living in India. Such findings align with previous literature, highlighted in my conceptual themes of the women's narratives: Connecting the Spaces through Language and Identity and The Development of In-betweenness as a Methodological Tool for Decolonial Analysis.

I link the women's strong connections to India to Connelly et al.'s (2006) commonplaces. I draw upon the use of temporality, in this case, the women's backgrounds, they demonstrate the importance of place, and how where they came from played a constant role in the development of their narratives. Drawing from Bunny, Alexis, and Maneet's experiences, they illustrated the importance of recognising the history between India and the British Empire. They present a strong awareness of the role of the British Empire in India but in different ways. Bunny was openly patriotic and demonstrated a strong national pride in India's pursuit of independence. For example, she expressed frustration toward a friend who was not aware of India's Independence Day. This reaction reflected Bunny's deep-seated connection to Indian nationalism, which can be traced back to events like the Indian Uprising of 1857 (Indian Mutiny, 2021), resonating strongly with contemporary sentiments of Indian nationalism (Sanghera, 2023). The importance of India as a *place* is the basis for how she perceives her own and other's Indian identity in England, which is discussed further in section 7.2.1.3.

As Vucetic (2019) states, India's national identity course aimed to reposition India through land reform, investment in education, and rebuilding the agricultural sector. This was enacted through national newspapers, policies, educational texts/curriculum, and film and media, often presenting the hypocrisy of British law. Despite this, I perceived Maneet's experience of frustration at Indians not expressing "*enough anger*" about the colonial legacies, to reflect a patriotism that includes severing ties with

colonial legacies she felt were still present in Indian society, culture and education. For Maneet, India as a *place,* represents a reminder of the ongoing process of decolonisation in her developing narrative.

Whereas Alexis' recognition of India was through highlighting its vibrancy, the "*unity*" and "*culture*" of India. Alexis presented a defined understanding of what made India and Indian culture and was comfortable in expressing this. This created India as a *place* that was remembered positively by Alexis, providing a marker for comparison for her experiences in England. I use these examples by the women to highlight their shared awareness of recognising India's history and identity as a country. The stronghold of India as a *place* reflects the importance of it in constantly transitioning narratives, as well as developing their sense of belonging to India and their experiences in England.

In addition, the certainty the women presented of their Indian identity contradicts Hall's (1996) early classical understanding of globalisation in higher education, which suggested social mobility erodes national identities through cultural homogenisation. This means that national identity can remain strong despite social mobility and a homogenising culture within HE. In addition, the narratives surrounding the certainty of the women's Indian identity further tells how internationalisation has morphed into the consolidation of the university as an enterprise. For example, the recruitment of international students and growing an international university through increased competition (Haigh, 2014; Tiechler, 2004), creates an assumption the university setting is a place that allows for an expansion of knowledge.

The participants' understanding of Indian and what it means to be an Indian can be summarised as the following: being Indian is related to having a national Indian identity, as described by Bunny, and diasporic Indian identity, described by Maneet and Alexis, which includes having a connection to culture and Indian practices through heritage. Their presented understanding of Indian identity informs their experiences of colonial legacies. Moments of in-betweenness were illustrated through their narratives, which did not concern their Indian identity but with experiencing colonial legacies and traversing in-betweenness, which will be explored in the following sections of the chapter.

7.2.1.1 Establishing What it Means to be an Indian Woman in England

Through counter/storytelling, informed by Zavala (2016), the women were able to name, remember and share their experiences of their lives in India and England. I interpreted a certainty and confidence in how the women identified as Indians in India and England, expressing the importance of cultural preservation. The certainty of their Indian identity brought attention to the awareness of colonial legacies with language such as *"exist," "Westernisation," "colonisation*," "*upsetting*," and "*balance"* (see chapter 6 for further context). These terms created a language of critique demonstrating the legacy of the British Empire and its effect on their understanding and experiences of Indian culture and traditions which led to a deeper understanding of themselves. The determination of the women to maintain their *Indianness* in England contributed to their journeys of traversing their in-betweenness through recognition of their fluidity of belonging in England, despite the challenges they faced in academic and non-academic settings.

Cultural perseverance was evident from the women's critical language. For example, Bunny's referral to remembering Indian history as the "*knowledge version* of *DNA,"* Alexis highlighting the importance of Indian "*culture"* and "*unity,"* and Maneet understood colonial history and trauma to have been filtered "*through the generations."* These powerful descriptions can be linked to Badwan's (2021) understanding of identity as being shaped by *place*, and Connelly et al.'s (2006) concept of temporality. This highlights how history, marked by significant events such as colonial subjugation, has influenced the women's narratives and the Indian identities they presented in England. So, although their connection to India was formed from their closeness to the country and culture through their place of birth, there is the strong demonstration of identity being steadfast despite the supposed cultural differences between England and India.

However, this leads to a larger problematic question which asks who does and does not belong to a nation? (Shizha, 2023, Miller, 2003). Crucially, this line of questioning reiterates the colonial legacies which remain within society and the consequent in-betweenness or certainty it could create. Again, the idea of national belonging goes

back to the denial of entry to a place based on an identity deemed acceptable by the people of that location, as illustrated by commentators such as Shizha (2023), Badwan (2021, 2020) and Miller (2003). For example, drawing from Maneet's experiences of racism and stereotyping, being told by a White male that Indians make good employees and not leaders, is an example of how colonial imaginings of a White Western hierarchy remains a prominent feature of being accepted or denied societal belonging.

The women's experiences in England can be linked to the concept of globalisation. For example, globalisation presented by Tight (2021) crucially links the national narratives on knowledge production to being reproduced internationally, consolidating Western knowledge and power agendas to non-Western countries. This means that globalisation of higher education is built on Western principles, as presented by Castles and Davidson (2020) of free trade, investment, and the free movement of people. This benefits colonial and Western imperialism through higher education as a mechanism to reproduce Western knowledge (Morris, 2022). For example, Bunny, Alexis, and Maneet's Indian identities intensified in England despite racist encounters they experienced. This is exemplified with Maneet's academic and personal traits being labelled "*good for an Indian.*"

I linked Maneet's experience to the findings of Tran and Vu's (2018) study which showed when identity was challenged, the students became reactive and resisted negative stereotypes. Resulting in the students feeling more passionate and nationalistic even if they did not identify as so before being challenged. The women's comprehensive grasp and comfortability of Indian and British culture lends itself to the wider decolonial discussion. The women's certainty of Indian identities in England are reflective of their resistance to colonial legacies. This aligns with Hall's (1997) second point of globalisation, previously mentioned in section 3.1, that international students could also be resistive to change to preserve their cultural heritage.

Through establishing the women's connections to India, they have illustrated the role of temporality (Connelly et al, 2006) in their narratives, telling the reader/ listener the importance of who they are as women, the places they come from matter, and how these places have had a continual effect on the development of their stories and

experiences in life. Although I could not relate with their decision to study abroad, I had a similar experience when I relocated to the North of England to study, where I, too, felt the need to defend my *Indianness*. The women's experiences created a clear connection between their Indian identity and other areas of their life, including their educational journeys in India and England, which is presented in the following section. To summarise this opening part has demonstrated what it means to be an Indian, and how it was an essential part of developing the women's narratives, providing an understanding of the importance of national identity despite difficult political national histories. Through the reading so far, the women named and shared their experiences, informed by Zavala's (2016) decolonial strategies, have helped establish a language that illustrates the emotion, and critical awareness of colonial legacies connecting to their understanding of Indian heritage. The women's language communicated their certainty of Indian identity, reclaiming their *Indianness* in England as a way to resist colonial and Western stereotypes working toward self-decolonisation through maintenance of this identity.

7.2.1.2 Linking Indian Identity to Indian Education

Building on the previous section, where the women shared their connections to India, this section focuses on the educational histories of Bunny, Alexis, and Maneet, specifically their experiences learning about British Indian colonial history.

An interesting similarity between the women's narratives was their shared learning of colonial history through their early Indian education. My questioning on the British Empire and India post 1948 independence led to the naming and sharing of colonial legacies that had impacted the women's narratives. These included the importance of Indian independence and the prominent use of the English language in India. Their recognition and criticality of these colonial legacies fits into the wider picture of re-establishing the importance and equal value to non-Western knowledge, culture, and politics in Western higher education (Mignolo. 2002). Which contributes to the correction of history that minimises historical events (Bhambra, 2017). Crucially, building toward De Sousa Santos (2018, 2016) reimagining of the Global South in the Global North.

The imagining of the Global South in the Global North can be linked to the dominance of reproduction of Western knowledge in three main Western destinations of the UK, US, and Australia to study a higher education degree (Tucker, 2023). This means that, in these places of international study, English is the dominant language and the only language HE is taught. The dominance of the English language in education is also reflected in the three women's Indian educational histories, where their learning was conducted in English, preparing them for future engagement with the English language. Badwan (2021) posits that language is used to mould individuals to their environment, where particular identities of an environment can become dominant, reproducing and normalising national narratives, the three women demonstrate a stronghold to their respective Indian languages and an in-betweenness for how they are valued in India and England whilst studying. Therefore, the English language can be understood as a key component that creates in-betweenness within higher education, creating a sense of entrapment, conflict, and confusion of identity (Baxter, 2020). This is despite the women in this project illustrating the importance and continuance of using their Indian language. Again, demonstrating how language can connect place and identity regardless of geographical location.

Therefore, by default the English language becomes a dominant vehicle of knowledge creation and distribution, continuing the positioning of the English language as a Western colonial mechanism to maintain Western knowledge. Badwan's (2021) critical review of language and identity found that having an emphasis on an English-only policy in British education dismisses migrant children's learning in other languages. Although the level of education significantly varies between the two projects, the principles remain that the English language can be perceived by the West and non-West educational institutions as the most important mode to transport knowledge. Again, this can be connected back to the women's experiences of learning in English in India demonstrating the strength of the English language as a tool for Western knowledge production and reproduction.

The inclusion of the women's educational histories, the learning of the English language, and curriculum (see section 6.1, 6.2 6.3), illustrate the differing national identity paths Britain and India had taken. This was demonstrated by Vucetic's (2019) discourse analysis, which recognised India to appear within British media and film as

having a lower status in both categories of economy and culture. This is in addition to the critical viewing of the British Empire not being a part of any compulsory curriculum. The recognition of the women's educational influence on their understanding of the relationship between Britain and India can be related back to Connelly et al's (2006) commonplace of sociality. Sociality is relevant, as sociality concerns both social and personal conditions: social conditions bring attention to environmental factors that help form the individual's context; personal conditions refer to the hopes, feelings, and desires of the person. The women's social conditions were the action of moving to England. Bunny's personal conditions were linked to "*experiencing the world*" through higher education in a Western country, Maneet and Alexis were to improve their social and professional capital. However, the women's reasonings for studying abroad can be linked back to King and Sondhi's (2018) research with Indian international students in the UK. They found their Indian students rated social capital very highly alongside studying abroad for transformative experiences demonstrating the internationalisation of higher education maintains Western universities as places of opportunity.

As an Indian, listening to Bunny, Alexis, and Maneet's experiences of how they had learned about the British Empire and its effect on Indian history, culture, and tradition, it made me reflect on my pathway to learning about the British Indian colonial history. I did not learn about the controversial British Empire during my schooling years. It was not something I actively searched for until I became more aware of the hidden history of the Empire through in-depth conversations with family. This was then accelerated with previous thesis projects, and specifically this PhD. I quickly realised the importance of knowing this part of myself. Therefore, this research project, through counter/storytelling, informed by Zavala (2016), has helped me on my pathway to self-decolonise, recognising moments of healing and reclaiming of my Indian identity. In addition, by speaking to the women about their experiences of learning of the relations between the countries, it was easier to understand their experiences of learning of the history between Britain and India which encouraged the sharing of opinions, thoughts, and experiences in an easier, more conversational way.

The conversational tone of our reciprocal interviews encouraged Alexis asking me questions about any significant differences that I experienced within the Indian culture here in England. Again, I share from my positioning as an Indian, I come from a

traditional Punjabi family that has prided themselves on preserving the Punjabi culture (see section 1.4). I felt that the strong continuation of Punjabi culture was continued because of colonialism and the impact this had in India when culture and traditions were being adapted to fit a Western viewership. The views I have on my culture are because my Nanni ji (Punjabi word for nan) and Papa ji (Punjabi word for grandad) held dearly what they were taught and passed their knowledge through to my mum and subsequently to me. Knowing about my Indian Punjabi heritage was just as important as learning about British culture, if not more important because my connection to India exists through my grandparents and the traditions they have upheld in England and the oral history they have remembered.

This reflection and analysis of the women's experiences of their Indian identity in England, through my own identity as an Indian woman and researcher, leads on to the following section, which demonstrates how experiences of in-betweenness can be traversed through self-reflective prompts.

7.2.1.3   Traversing In-betweenness of the Indian Identity in England

In-betweenness of the women's identity, and my own, manifested through our experiences of being misrepresented in England. I apply my additional strategy of traversing in-betweenness through self-reflective prompts to the women's experiences. As a reminder, some of the prompts used to encourage traversing in-betweenness were the following: what patterns(s) (race, class, gender etc.) or tools (labelling) are being used that are making me or the women feel in-betweenness? How have I or can I create a space for our stories, knowledge, culture and history to contribute to self-decolonisation through our response to in-betweenness?   The following section will detail experiences of in-betweenness experienced during the reciprocal interviews, and through the women's experiences in higher-education and their free time.

In the introduction of this thesis, I questioned if I would become more aware of my *Indianness*, and whether this identity would become more prominent during our interviews.

The country of birth becomes significant in our understanding of what it is to be Indian and how that comes across in understanding the other's experiences. For example, Bunny did not consider me to be Indian because I am not an Indian national, and therefore, I did not understand her Indian national experiences. This is reiterated within the exchange and her reference to her seeing me as 'just British.' I see myself as a diasporic Indian, connected to India through my family. My *Indianness* felt scrutinised and was brought to attention by Bunny's during our interviews. Bunny did not perceive me as Indian; she took control of the interview by assessing and critiquing my Indianness (see section 6.1). In this exchange, she reinforced colonial legacies through evaluating whether or not I am an Indian because I was not born in India, illustrating the colonial questioning of who has the authority to assert who does and does not belong to a country (Shizha, 2020, Miller, 2003). This highlights the internal colonialism that exists, and the strength of national identity which has been reinforced from the collapse of colonial empires (Vucetic, 2019). This created an internal tension that I did not address during the interview. Reflecting on that exchange, I am reminded of the value of narrative analysis, and self-reflective prompts of traversing in-betweenness. This aligns with the idea that the narratives we are part of and share, are never static or finished, but continuously evolving (Clandinin et al, 2006).

With hindsight, sitting here and reflecting on the exchange with Bunny, I felt I was restricted to say how I felt about her opinion of me because of the *researcher and researched* dynamic that I have tried to reduce in this project. I was in a state of in-betweenness, unsure on how to navigate my identity as an Indian woman, and role as a researcher and facilitator of the interview. In reaction to Bunny's perception of me, the most appropriate response I had in those moments were to encourage a further exploration of her comments. I felt it was necessary as a researcher, and interviewer for me to engage with questions and views presented to reflect a natural discussion.

This leads to her comment on me being 'obsessed with colonialism.' Her comment could be interpreted as a way to demonstrate the difference in our identities further. Her language positioned me as the 'Other,' the coloniser, the one taking. This comment, perhaps flippant in our exchange, remains impactful as it repositioned the discussions on our colonial legacies to be from the perspective of the coloniser and colonised instead of two people sharing their experiences of colonial legacies.

Alternatively, when reflecting on this exchange through the lens of a researcher, I was able to think about how the narrative became a space to freely discuss different points of view, regardless of whether each party agreed with the thoughts and opinions shared. From a researcher's perspective this was a good outcome as it pushed the interviews, giving further insight into who we were and how this affected our experiences, adding detail to our discussions (Brown and Coles, 2018). However, this perspective shifted when I analysed the exchange as a diasporic Indian. Bunny's commentary on my identity felt more personal. The exchange between myself and Bunny felt dichotomising because she did not see me how I saw myself. I was positioned as the 'Other.' This was reiterated with the overuse of the word *Britishness*; Bunny's tone implied a difference in how we understood what Indian meant and how it should be experienced.

I was able to traverse my in-betweenness retrospectively, through taking the time to deeply reflect on what was causing it and reflecting on how I could approach similar situations in the future. Upon reflection, it was being labelled as British and only British, which created a discomfort, and erasure of my identity as Indian. Hyphenated identities are not equal to one another, as explored by Raghunandan, (2012), with one identity often being rooted geographically, and the other through lineage giving an unevenness to how those identities are experienced. I acknowledge this, however, my *Indianness* is lived through my cultural traditions informed by the oral history shared to me by my grandparents and are bound to my choosing to practice them or not.

My response in the interview was linked to my training as a researcher, to ask further questions to gather detailed rich experiences. The act of traversing my in-betweenness through these self-reflective prompts came through the process of writing and reflecting on the experience. For example, if I were to revisit that moment or encounter a similar situation in the future, I would emphasise that racism makes no distinction between being British- Indian and Indian, as evidenced by the 2024 racist riots across the UK. My experience as a person of colour means being perceived as an Other, regardless of place of birth, language and accent. My skin colour, therefore, marked and hierarchised me as an Other. This can be linked back to how we

communicated our positionalities and understood our own identities, consolidating the importance of reflection and fluidity of belonging in multiple places at once.

The women's experiences indicate that despite having certainty of their Indian identity, they recognised that they were a part of a system that strengthened a Western knowledge hierarchy through higher education. This is demonstrated by the international university ranking systems and international campuses for recruitment of Western universities. An example of the in-betweenness experienced by Maneet is when she referred to students studying internationally being put on *"pedestals"* in Indian society. The word pedestals suggest the ranking of students based on where they received their higher education, increasing their social and financial capital that could be gained with a Western international education. Maneet's experience also allows for reflection on how countries in the Global South can internalise and reproduce colonial legacies through the adoption of Western academic frameworks and knowledge systems (Temple et al, 2016). The assumption of a Western education being inherently better must be critically analysed, where instead educational systems and knowledge production that reflect diverse epistemologies, histories, local knowledge and intellectual traditions should be empowered.

Maneet's in-betweenness was formed through the colonial legacies that were created by the British Empire. This was reflected through the Indian education system being rooted in British colonial principles. As explained by Krishnamoorthy (2019) in their assessment of the Indian education system, the overhaul of the Indian education system is accredited to the colonialist Thomas Babington Macauley. Retrospectively, traversing in-betweenness to Maneet's experience can be applied. She established her recognition of the British colonial legacy through acknowledging how Indian students who study in the West are treated differently when returning. In this case, the educational institutions being rooted in British coloniality created her in-betweenness. Her response to this was to discuss the difference in treatment of students in Indian society. She traverses in-betweenness through creating a space for her knowledge of India, Indian culture and history through our reciprocal interviews and discussions with her peers, highlighting the contradictions of British and Indian society.

The incentive of professional and financial capital, in the Global South through a higher education in the Global North, can be connected to De Sousa Santos' (2018, 2016) understanding of politicised knowledge. This understanding recognises the maintenance of colonial dominance of Western knowledge in theory, methodologies and ways of living. Maneet's dilemma with recognising the privilege of an international education is that it continues the Western dominance of knowledge production and reproduction in non-Western countries. She remedies this by drawing attention to it, building awareness of the issue through her recognition of how she will be perceived back in India. De Sousa Santos' (2018, 2016) commentary aligns with Marginson's (2014) recommendation to move away from reproducing a culture within higher education that continues the established cultural norms by carrying through a strong identity of which the three Indian women presented during our reciprocal interviews.

The women's experiences of benefitting from a Western education resonates with Bhopal's (2011) study, which understood international education to significantly increase social capital and agency when returning home. The students in Bhopal's study (2011) and this research shared similar motivations, however, the difference between Bhopal's (2011) study and this project is that social capital was linked strongly to spousal choices. Whereas Bunny, Maneet, and Alexis' social capitals were linked to better social standing and increased job opportunity. The difference in results between Bhopal's (2011) and my research is indicative of the change of priorities, and direction of Western ideals and Indian cultural norms. Badwan's (2021,2020) passport identity is also applicable here; the understanding that having a recognised and favoured (Western) citizenship or association levies social power and precedence. Crucially, the addition of traversing in-betweenness through self-reflective prompts as a decolonial strategy, identifies the women's dilemma of being a part of a system that perpetuates colonialism and the depths of colonialism that remains in both the Global South and Global North.

In Bunny's narrative, she created an interaction between the historical and political past and present highlighting the role of colonialism and how others perceived her Indian identity. This is exampled with her frustrations toward the Western media presenting India as slums, which contrasted her experience of a middle-class upbringing. This aligns with Bates' (2006) historical review of Indians being perceived

by the West as the victim due to colonial legacies. The victimhood, and lower status that Bunny discussed presented by the Western media was countered by Bunny, Alexis, and Maneet through their pride of being Indian. Again, Zavala's (2016) decolonial strategies of healing and reclaiming are identified in their experiences. The women reclaimed Indian practices, upholding and asserting their Indian identity, for example, the women participated in Bollywood nights, Indian dancing, cooking and eating Indian food. This created healing from reclaiming what was stolen, appropriated and Westernised by the British Empire. Therefore, the shared strength and persistence presented by the women to showcase their Indian identity in England is an action toward self-decoloniality.

Another example of the women reframing their Indian identity in England and India is evident through their recognition of cultural appropriation. For example, Maneet used the emotive words of *"they are angry, we aren't angry enough"* (see section 6.2.2.3). The "*they*" she referred to in her quote were other former colonised people. Maneet's language demonstrated the internal tensions between wanting to decolonise her experiences and perhaps feeling alone in her pursuit of this. She continued her frustration with how Indian practices such as yoga have been culturally appropriated by the West. Arya (2021) critically reviewed how cultural appropriation can be viewed to destroy existing cultures and already marginalised peoples through continuing colonial attributes by maintaining a hierarchy of what is excepted and by whom. She asserts that colonial exploitation continues through cultural appropriation, where the originators lose ownership of their culture and traditions to the West, which often sees significantly unequal exchanges of culture. The expression of anger from Maneet forms a crucial part of her narrative, contributing to the development of her self-decolonisation through the intersectionality of counter/storytelling, healing and reclaiming (Zavala, 2016) when sharing her experiences of being Indian and studying at a university in the North of England.

I identify with the strong connections to India that the women expressed. Through the women's narratives (part 1), they all shared how they had learned about the colonial history between India and Britain and emphasised the importance of remembering this history as it helped shape who they are. Therefore, the exploration of Indian identity through the women's narratives provided an insight into the connection and value of

having a national identity, and despite previous research suggesting the erosion of national identity when moving to study abroad (Hall, 1996), this was not apparent in this project. This does not imply that the women found navigating their Indian identity in England easy; rather, it highlights the importance of national identities and the ongoing relevance of the historical relationship between England and India, both of which contributed to their experiences and the development of their narratives. The vocalisation of the women's Indian identities in India and England suggests significant importance within broader discussions on colonialism and decolonisation in higher education. The Indian identity the three women presented reiterated the value for higher education to recognise the diverse student cultures and population.

7.2.2 Summary of In-betweenness of Indian Identity in England

The first section of this chapter, In-betweenness of Indian Identity in England addressed the first parts of the women's narratives, which discussed their background, connections to India, and educational histories. This first section of this discussion chapter was split into three interconnecting parts which explored how the women understood their Indian national identity, then this was connected to their educations in India, and to how they traversed experiences of in-betweenness through self-reflective prompts. The women sharing their background, through counter/storytelling, informed by Zavala (2016), established key details and factors that would help my understanding of their later stories. Within the women's narration of their experiences there were moments of [re]claiming, healing, and traversing their in-betweenness contributing to their journey of self-decolonisation. Significantly, [re]claiming of the self was shown through defiance to reframe and maintain Indian identity despite difficult moments of racism, whilst healing was displayed through expressions of anger for the colonial history between Britain and India and perhaps the frustration at trying to decolonise the self.

Through establishing what it meant to be Indian in this section the importance of Indian identity was a key factor which connected their experiences in India and England. This coincides with Vucetic's (2019) research that demonstrated India's rebuilding of its national identity to remember and address the problematic colonial history endured. Although the research questions do not directly ask about the women's national

identity, discussing the women's backgrounds contributed to the development of their overall narratives. This provided a significant component in helping build an understanding of their experiences in England.

7.3 Multifaceted Experiences of being Labelled as an International Student

As a reminder, in Part 2 of the narratives, Studying Abroad, Bunny, Alexis, and Maneet's experiences revealed the international label to create multifaceted study-related expectations. These included reviewing quality of learning, the label being explored as a tool for motivation, and it being a mechanism for financial exploitation. The following section of the discussion chapter will look to understand the women's experiences further through narrative analysis and traversing in-betweenness through self-reflective prompts.

7.3.1 The Influence of the English Language in the Women's Academic Careers

As highlighted in Life and Educational Journeys of Bunny, Alexis, and Maneet's narratives, they all studied and learned in English during their Indian educations; an education that reflected an appreciation and value for the British education and culture. In our interviews they expressed their confidence of communicating in the English language. This was illustrated in Maneet's narrative when she explained her experiences of Indians in India correlating efficient English language skills to improved earnings and rank within the workplace. This was found similarly in studies conducted in Pakistan by Haidar and Manan (2021), Rahman (2020) and Mansoor (2003), who showed that English was structurally understood as a personal investment in self-improvement and a leading factor to career success.

The women learning English as part of their Indian education is not uncommon as the English language is often introduced through formal education (Badwan, 2020). The English language being formally used in education subscribed to a correlation between language and nation. I draw on the Kachruvian Inner Circles (Kachru, 2009, 1985, 1965), as mentioned previously, particularly the outer circle which refers to countries who adopt English as a common language or for official business. The

Kachruvian circles (Kachru, 2009, 1985, 1965) demonstrates the globality of the English language despite countries within those circles being political and economic powers in their own right. This is further exampled with India's economic status being the 7th largest in the world, just behind the United Kingdom in 5th (World Population Review, 2023). Again, the Kachruvian circles demonstrate the categorisation of countries which reflect longstanding colonial principles of devaluing knowledge through the dismissal of non-English languages.

The discussion of the English language's influence on the women's international student experience can be connected to Badwan's (2021, 2020) research on social identity. Badwan demonstrated that a dominant language within an environment contributes to how an individual is moulded socially. For example, Alexis presented herself as a confident student with proficient English language skills and explained that using the English language was a normalised process because of the dominance of the English language in India. She did not expect the use of the English language to be a barrier to academic advancement in England as mentioned previously by Krishnamoorthy (2019) and Mohanty (2006) the Indian education system was heavily influenced by the British.

Despite Alexis' commentary on the use of the English language in India, sadness was expressed about India's language, Hindi, being predominately replaced as the language of instruction. Here, the decolonial strategy of traversing in-betweenness through self-reflective prompts can be applied. The in-betweenness Alexis displayed was of the recognition of her language Hindi being replaced by English in academia, business, and Indian society, however, the use of the English language contributed to improved social capital. Again, this can be linked to Hall's (1997) classical understanding of globalisation through language; language provides access to a range of meanings embedded in language locality, therefore eroding local languages. Alexis' in-betweenness was explored in our interviews through her reflection on the popularity of the English language which indicates an awareness of how Indian languages are valued in Indian society. She counters this narrative with her speaking Hindi and other Indian languages in her local communities.

As an Indian who has been raised in a Western country and speaks the English language, it is important to be transparent that as a British citizen I also receive privileges. The in-betweenness, however, remains of how someone like me, a British citizen with Indian heritage and visually non-White, can grapple with working on decolonising powerful structures when the country that I live in, has not recognised its role in colonisation. How can I help disrupt narratives when the discussions had inside and outside of academia reflect a volatile, anti-immigration, and *us* versus *them* rhetoric? For example, as an academic I struggle with feeling as though I have to write using a particular English language style for my work to be accepted, and despite this feeling, it is difficult to move away from it. Critical self-reflection could help towards dismantling and the reimagining of the Global North and South in a way that does not ignite competition or hierarchy. Disruption and resistance of colonialism and colonial legacies must come from both privileged and non-privileged by the system.

7.3.2 In-betweenness of being Labelled as International Students

Notably the international label created experiences of in-betweenness for Bunny, Alexis, and Maneet. This is contextualised as an area of confusion between their identity as international students, the benefits they receive as international students, and how international education, in this capacity, continues Western dominance of knowledge production and reproduction.

Bunny, Alexis and Maneet demonstrated their experiences of being labelled as international students to be multifaceted. From our discussions, the descriptor international was understood in multiple positive and negative ways. It was explored as a form of motivation, a tool for university administration and organisation, as well as a mechanism for financial and cultural exploitation. With these multifaceted explorations of the label, the labelling of students as international went beyond Jones' (2017) presentation of the label as a tool for administration purposes which included the recognition of different education systems. By having this simplistic understanding, it opened up a space to soften the colonial and Western imperialism that can affect international student experiences. Therefore, it is important to apply an outlook to the international label as something that may cause difficult experiences for international students. When the women discussed their experiences of being labelled as

international students, they highlighted the confusion of the term, displaying an uncertainty in how to explain their experiences and what it meant in relation to colonial legacies within higher education. This leads to the women's awareness of their in-betweenness as international students.

The labelling of students as international can be typically associated with students who have moved from a non-Western country to a Western country to study. This aligns with previous commentary by Liu (2020), who presented the internationalisation of higher education to reinforce colonial legacies through the movement of Western knowledge to non-Western countries, unilaterally demonstrating the dominance of Western hierarchy. This was particularly highlighted with Alexis, who wanted to "*take the knowledge back to India*" to advance knowledge in her television, communication, and journalism field. Her understanding of being able to take back knowledge rather than contribute to the knowledge system she was entering illustrates Western knowledge systems' dominance in higher education.

Whereas Bunny's commentary on the labelling, highlighted in section 6.1, exposed the assumptions of international students as academically inferior to the British education standard. Bunny's response to the international label as a tool reaffirming Western knowledge hierarchies was to use the labelling as motivation to disprove the assumptions. Her recognition of the label in this way contributed to the existing understanding of international students being deficit learners, often seen as problematic or needing to adapt significantly to a new culture (Leask, 2015). Once again, this can be linked back to the existing embedded colonial legacies, suggesting Western knowledge outweighs other forms of knowledge production and systems. Therefore, reiterating the importance of acknowledging the experiences of colonialism through narratives and broader discussions in higher education.

The women shared experiences of wanting to receive the best from their investment in their Western higher education. For example, Alexis questioned what she was getting for "*all her money,*" this was in reference to paying international student fees whilst being taught online during the covid-19 pandemic. Similarly, Bunny drew attention to the additional academic support available as an international student. Despite feeling she did not need additional learning support; she utilised the support

to gain an advantage over other students. The offering of additional support for international students can be seen as a tool to improve international students' academic experiences. However, Leask (2015) presented additional learning measures for international students as a response to the over-characterisation of international students adjusting academically and culturally to their 'new' Western country. Alexis and Bunny's experiences of wanting a return on their investment are not uncommon; as mentioned previously, universities deploy powerful marketing campaigns which pitch the student as the consumer (Temple et al., 2016). Alexis and Bunny's consumer experiences fit into the wider context of Western higher education to reflect Western consumerism, with knowledge being a purchased good associated with quality (Morris, 2022).

Whereas, in Maneet's interviews, she discussed her frustrations on how knowledge, and cultural experiences from the Global South are valued in the West. For example, she illustrated the variety of languages that are brought to universities by international students, and how it should be recognised as a *"point of admiration."* Maneet's commentary can be connected to the internationalisation and globalisation element of international student experiences, where students are supposedly meant to feel a sense of diversity through co-creation (Dollinger et al, 2018). However, she felt international students' language capabilities were often devalued in comparison to their European peers. Maneet's experiences of feeling undervalued corroborates with Jones' (2017) findings which highlighted, being labelled as an international student included but was not limited to the perception of adapting to a new educational structure and system, but may already speak the local language, know about the culture, and have studied already in that country at another level. However, for Bunny, Alexis and Maneet, they were confident in their English language ability and were well versed with the British curriculum through their early educational in India. In Maneet's experience, the international label contributed to the simplification of her student experiences, reducing her knowledge and cultural experiences to be undervalued.

As international students, it is commonly assumed that their study-related experiences were linked to improving their English language skills (Wang, 2022; Tran & Vu, 2018; Leask, 2015). However, Bunny, Alexis and Maneet, when coming to the UK to study, as mentioned previously, were confident with their English language ability. The

women's university experiences were not based on improving their English language skills but rather on experiencing international living and improving their social capital in India. The common association between international students and language improvement is another example of how students labelled as international are seen as different within higher education. The women's experiences of learning English and normalising it can be linked to educational institutions being places that entrap particular identities through the domination of one language (Tsolidis and Kostogriz, 2008). Again, the use of the international label in these examples demonstrates the homogenising effect it has on students who may have different academic and personal goals when studying abroad.

7.3.2.1 Traversing In-betweenness of the International Label

As explored in the section above Bunny, Alexis, and Maneet experienced in-betweenness, in this section, I apply my decolonial strategy of traversing in-betweenness through self-reflective prompts. I will demonstrate how self-reflective prompts can be used to help traverse in-betweenness contributing to the process of self-decolonisation.

In Bunny's narrative, in-betweenness was not related to being physically in-between different social groups or geographical locations. Instead, she presented her in-betweenness in navigating the term concerning her experiences. I apply my additional decolonial strategy of traversing in-betweenness through self-reflective prompts. For example, Bunny struggled with organising her experiences of the label as being beneficial or a hindrance, using multiple examples to compare its value in her life. As mentioned before, she explains the label as a helpful tool to identify students with different educational histories and understanding of the British curriculum while also providing an opportunity to gain additional learning support. Bunny's description of the label builds toward experiences of in-betweenness through her creating a language to review its purpose.

Bunny continued her exploration of the label, describing it as a way to make her "*work twice as hard*," suggested pre-conceived attitudes toward being labelled an international student. This can also be linked back to the wider conversation of the

individual versus collective societal responsibility as highlighted by Natarajan (2021) with individuality commonly associated to Western principles and values. Through colonialism, there is a sense that achievement and progression is achieved only if the individual works hard enough, or long enough, or has the drive to do so, to standards set by White Western power, maintaining class boundaries without question of the structures and people in power.

Through her experiences, I understood the international label to personify her in-betweenness as someone who felt they belonged to the home culture because of similarities shared with language, culture, and educational background but was not seen or felt to belong to the Western majority. This is supported by Bunny bringing attention to a Western attitude of independent student responsibility to determine success, reducing institutional responsibility, which reflects an individualist capitalist culture. Bunny's conflicting and sometimes contradictory understanding of the international label emphasises the tensions that exist when the label is used and can be understood to continue to encourage a deficit discourse for the labelling of students as international (Straker, 2016). Although Bunny did not resolve her in-betweenness on the international label, her language to review the label created a space for her experiences to guide her in future situations becoming more mindful of the colonial legacies institutional structures can be built on.

As a reminder, the strong reification of categories of students can blur the many varied circumstances for home students. For instance, Jones (2017) remarks that home students may be recent migrants, speak another language as their primary language and be unfamiliar with the academic tradition and education system. The British higher education systems perception of Home students perceived curriculum, language and cultural awareness, reflects the reduction of students by simplistic labelling.

Alexis' in-betweenness emerged from her reflection of the services she has received from the university as a paying student. She remarked frustratingly, "*I'm getting even less than I was in the first year,*" in reference to the lack of sufficient adaptation from the university to maintain value for service over the covid-19 pandemic. Alexis' language of critique can be linked to the globalisation and internationalisation of higher education. For example, student satisfaction and student consumerism are closely tied

to the ratings of universities (Morris, 2022) and the marketisation of students into categories of home and international (Tiechler, 2004). The maintenance of the internationalisation and globalisation of BHE in this format is supported with past and present British governments investing significant amounts of money into the recruitment of international students because of the inflated tuition fees (Noxolo, 2016). This is further reiterated by universities creating specific programmes and campuses in non-Western countries demonstrating the value of the international student (Temple et al, 2016). However, Western higher education campuses in the Global South risks re-colonisation as often profits are sent back to the main campus in the Western country (Clarke, 2021).

The business of the international student market in British higher education was estimated to have boosted the British economy by £41.9 billion in the academic year 2021/2022, increasing from £31.3 billion in 2018/2019 (Universities UK, 2022). The financial value highlighted here validates Alexis' questions surrounding value for money and quality of educational service reaffirming the narrative of the student as a consumer. This is evidenced with Alexis deliberating the cost and reward of being labelled as an international student. There was no resolution to Alexis' in-betweenness discussed during our reciprocal interviews.

From my positioning as a student who has been and is labelled as a home student, I can understand the separation that the home and international label creates between students, as often different study-related pathways are presented to achieve the same outcome of passing the degree. For example, certain privileges, such as lower entry points or pass grades, are enabled for students labelled as international, which stokes tension between the home and international students on a cultural and educational level.

In contrast, Maneet's experiences of in-betweenness differs from Bunny's and Alexis's. Bunny and Alexis' in-betweenness manifested through using language that showed uncertainty and frustration at being international students. Maneet's language, however, was openly reflective on the privilege she believed she had to be studying in the West. She recognised the precedence it gave to her over others in India making her uncomfortable with this power she perceived to gain (see section 6.2.3.1 for

quotes). In our conversation, she highlighted the hierarchy that exists starkly between the Global North and Global South, and its amplification through the recognition of a Western British higher education in Indian society. Their decolonial thinking makes visible the cultural logic of colonialism (Zavala, 2016). The implications of the participants' in-betweenness demonstrates the collective awareness of colonial legacies and a space that is held for in-betweenness in relation to knowledge production and reproduction. This creates a more fluid hierarchy, which leads to the potential for a shift in power dynamics through recognition of in-betweenness through recovery of knowledge. This encourages an adaptation to traditional knowledge production and reproduction through conscious awareness of privilege.

Maneet also experienced a physical in-betweenness within university communal spaces opposed to Bunny's and Alexis' emotional response to the labelling. Maneet's in-betweenness stemmed from seeing clear student grouping based on shared ethnicity. This can be linked to Kim and Taylor's (2008) presentation of understanding racial categorisation to be socially constructed, where hierarchy is based on national origin and skin colour; therefore, the origin of place affects how individuals are identified and ordered. Maneet traverses her in-betweenness through creating a language that identifies her discomfort of seeing and experiencing a lack of togetherness between different group ethnicities. She illustrates an acknowledgement to structures such as race that can have a profound impact on one's day-to-day experiences, and subsequently she found it difficult to connect with different groups because she felt a perceived lack of interest from home students.

The lack of interest from other students was found similarly in Tran and Vu's (2018) study, where Chinese students felt students were unmotivated to interact. Maneet's in-betweenness perhaps comes from her own understanding and expectations of the British culture and English language and this not being a pathway to a more integrated study-related and free time experience. It should be noted Maneet's experiences of groups to be formed based on ethnicity or similar culture are not uncommon. Maneet traverses in-betweenness through reflection on the patterns that were making her feel her in-betweenness. She created a language to review her privileges as an international student contributing to her self-decolonisation aiding the development of a decolonial higher education.

Maneet's expectations of an integrated student cohort can be connected to Juvonen et al.'s (2019) suggestion of a diversified university to be achieved through co-creating a collaborative and informed curriculum beyond Western knowledge systems. Although this is not a new suggestion, it is important to note the continuing calls for broader curricula that envisions knowledge systems that have been silenced will contribute to the efficacy of decolonisation in BHE. In addition, having a wider non-Western curricula incorporated across disciplines beyond the Social Sciences and Humanities could work toward reducing feelings of in-betweenness within the shared physical spaces of university environments.

It is important to note here that financial support played a role in Maneet's decision-making to study abroad, this was similar to Alexis but was not a factor for Bunny. Alexis and Maneet both discussed in their interviews the financial cost of being an international student, and the social capital that it would give them when returning to India. This was not the case for Bunny, who wanted to study abroad to explore "*the world.*" Maneet and Alexis discussing the financial and social capital of their status as international students was found similarly in King and Sondhi's (2018) research where the students in that study, identified family wealth and the desire to have the reputation to study in the UK as key factors to studying abroad.

In this exploration of the women traversing In-betweenness of the international label, it was evident that not all the women approached their discomfort in the same way. In Bunny and Alexis's examples traversing in-betweenness was retrospectively applied, whereas Maneet was aware of her in-betweenness and reflected on this in our interviews. The international label demonstrably impacted the women's study-related experiences whilst in England. For example, the international label was exposed as a tool for motivation, exploitation, and commodification. Overall, from Bunny, Alexis, and Maneet's experiences the label contributed to creating isolating study-related environments. The strategy of traversing in-betweenness has been helpful to assess and reflect on the higher education structures and power dynamics that have contributed to these difficult experiences. The strategy of traversing in-betweenness was additionally applied and enacted through a post interview illustrating the colonial and Western imperialism that remains in higher education through the tool of labelling.

7.3.2.2 Homogenising the Global South Experience through the International Label

Continuing on from the previous section, Bunny, Alexis, and Maneet's experiences of being labelled as international students highlight how their diversity as women from the Global South become homogenised.

Maneet was questioned by her peer on whether or not Indian women could vote (see section 6.2.2.3), the question was an inquiry about women's rights and gender equality in a country in the Global South. Maneet's response was sarcastic, demonstrating a frustration at the question because of the perceived lack of freedoms for Indian women. Maneet challenged this perception of female Indians, reclaiming her identity and strengthening her connection to her Indian community through resistance of the stereotype of India and people from the Global South as *backward* (Tomlinson, 2019). I connect this to Tlostanova and Mignolo's (2009) understanding of coloniality to be continued through knowledge that is reproduced and valued through the use of labelling. Therefore, the *us* versus *them* narrative becomes relevant due to the broader discussion of the perception, knowledge production and reproduction in the Global South and the Global North. Maneet's experience illustrates the seismic space that exists between the perception of the Global North as a sphere containing countries that are leading in global economics, politics, and culture, and the Global South as a sphere that is in development (Levander and Mignolo, 2011).

Bunny, like Maneet, was faced with presentations of India they did not agree with. Bunny exampled Western media representation of India as *"slums"* and gave distinct descriptions of her life to contrast what was presented in the West (see section 6.1.2.2). This feeds into the broader picture painted by Calvo et al. (2022) of categorising non-Western countries as reliant on aid from larger political and economic powers, and the continuation of the Global South as reliant on the Global North. Both the women corrected the stereotypes that were put to them, aligning with Tran and Vu's (2018) findings that, students became more nationalistic and defensive of their country when faced with negativity. Therefore, the naming and remembering of the women's experience of India contributed to the resistance of colonial narratives surrounding India. This is tied to the reclamation of their Indian identity from Western

presentations in difficult moments. Maneet and Bunny's correction of the stereotypes of India therefore creates a resistance to the Global South being perceived as a group of dangerous Others from marginalised, unemployed, and *lesser* political and economic lands. The women's resistance aligns with De Sousa Santos's (2016) reimagining of the Global South which emphasises empowerment and self-decolonisation. Through the women's reframing of their experiences, they were enhancing the understanding of the Indian identity in British higher education.

An alternate reading of their experiences is through another of Zavala's (2016) decolonising strategies of healing. Their resistance emerged from their lived experiences of peoples of a former colonised country, resulting in the healing from historical trauma that manifested in cultural perceptions of Indians in the West. As an Indian raised in Britain, I shared the Otherness felt by the women, especially in relation to the Indian stereotypes that required constant correction. I feel this is another example of Badwan's (2021,2020) passport identity being a significant component in how others perceive you and the privileges that are received with it. However, with recent 2024 racist riots in the UK, a British passport for me became irrelevant in discussions on race, because in my experience belonging was reduced to colour of skin, making me feel Othered from a society I have been raised in.

As Foucault and Miskowiec (1986) highlight, the production of space can be related to discourse through which people construct, imagine, and articulate their understanding of spaces and places, making sense of their belonging and situated identities. The international label, therefore, lends to creating spaces of separation between home and international students reiterating an *us* versus *them* dichotomy. Ultimately, continuing to reiterate the Global North and South divide through these labels. The *us* versus *them* narrative can be related back to Hall's (1997) classic understanding of the consequences of globalisation, where there is resistance from both sides to adapt, fortifying national identity. Therefore, in-betweenness is magnified through the globalised environment that exists through educational internationalisation but was not experienced within the university environment.

Although Zavala (2016) has been useful here through explicit strategies such as the use of counter/storytelling to help with naming and sharing events from their day-to-

day life, as well as heal and reclaim parts of their identity, it was crucial to consider my additional decolonial strategy of traversing in-betweenness through self-reflective prompts. This is particularly highlighted by the women not knowing how to decolonise legacies that benefited their circumstances, i.e., being awarded an international degree from a Western country that elevates social capital when returning to their home country. Instead, their self-decolonisation comes from their reflection of the contradictions they experienced. Therefore, the additional strategy of traversing in-betweenness works toward recognising the multifaceted colonial structures that have hierarchised countries for centuries, allowing for an analysis on how our national identities and relationship with colonialism effects the production and reproduction of knowledge in higher education in Western countries. Through the narratives presented in this project, there is an acknowledgement of the significant influence of international competition, Western principles of learning, and how through involvement of a broader and diverse student demographic, universities can become balanced and more reflective of an internationalised environment that focuses on an equal exchange and recognition of knowledge.

7.3.3 Summary of Multifaceted Experiences of being Labelled an International Student

As a reminder, the first research question asked the women about their understanding of and experiences with being labelled as international students. To answer this question, it was important to build upon the previous section of the women establishing what it meant to be an Indian in England. This naturally led to their understanding and experiences of being labelled as international students. The questioning on the use of the labelling encouraged free-flowing conversations that evoked strong emotions, particularly around the in-betweenness the labelling created. As a reminder, the labelling was experienced as exploitative, whilst it also being recognised for allowing for extra academic support but equally interpreted as a tool for social separation. As Jones (2017) pointed out, the labelling can be too simply understood, linked to administration and the logistical process of moving from one country to another to study. However, as highlighted by the women in this project, the descriptor creates complications, as commented on by Jones (2017), Leask (2015) and Ippolito (2007), through its associations with deficit thinking, poor language skills, and lack of

knowledge of the Western education system and culture. The women addressed multiple areas of concern by being labelled as international students, with the key messages from their narratives illustrating that the labelling creates tensions between them and home students as well as demonstrating that the labelling can be linked to Western and colonial positions of power that categorise students based on assumptions from their passport identity.

Through navigating the women's experiences of being labelled as international students, it became clear that this impacted their experiences of communities linked to study-related activities and free time which answered the second research question. Being labelled as an international student illustrated the associated stereotypes to the descriptor international, creating a further dilemma in knowing how to navigate the assigned groups of international and home students. Often, this left the women in this project perplexed as to how home students understood them. As it is to be recognised that the women partaking in the research, expressed their confidence in their use of the English language within academia and social situations, demonstrating the link between perceived language skills and cultural assimilation as commented on by Wang (2022) and Badwan (2021, 2020).

However, many a time, the women had to educate peers and correct the stereotypes around being an international student and Indian. This can be linked to the importance of having a strong national identity established in the first section of this chapter, which made self-decolonisation more difficult because they were categorised as an *Other* from the start of their enrolment via the labelling. This led to the women feeling in-betweenness as studying in a Western country benefitted their social and educational capital. However, through reflection of these feelings the tool of labelling students as international can perpetuate and maintain the power hierarchies of the Global North and South within higher education.

7.4   In-betweenness of [not] Belonging to Communities

In-betweenness of [not] belonging to communities connected to the women's multifaceted experiences of being labelled as international students. It was evident

from the women's narratives that being students influenced how they navigated their student-related and free time communities that they chose or did not choose to be a part of. In my role as an academic and facilitator of these interviews, I felt that it was necessary to understand what a community was to the women in the project. This is because, as a former student in higher education, the term community felt overwhelmingly used in BHE, creating an obscurity for what it meant and the value it holds. Therefore, these conversations with Bunny, Maneet, and Alexis felt even more significant, as they allowed for a deeper understanding of what study-related and free time communities meant.

7.4.1 Navigating the Meaning of a Community: Creating a Sense of Belonging

When discussing *community*, I partitioned it into what the women felt a community was and into their experiences of being amongst and within communities. This was illustrated in Part 3 of the women's narratives. A key message from the women's narratives was their interpretation of a community to be closely connected to their identity roles as Indian and international students in England. In this part of my reading of the women's narratives I highlight the difficulty of expressing their answers which brought attention to their expectations of communities in England through comparisons to the communities they experienced in India.

The departure point for understanding what a community was provided by a number of commentators. As a reminder, community is being entwined with a sense of belonging (Sakata et al, 2023) that includes having a political belonging that asserts the importance of geographical boundaries, social and temporal spaces, factors prompted by migration, mobility, and displacement of people across national and international crossings (Laʾhdesmaʾki et al, 2016). This understanding emphasises the importance of the three Indian women in this project migrating from India to England to study. Whilst, recognising the potential of communities as a colonial tool that can typically be linked to history in the way that groups imagine, produce, and reproduce knowledge about the future (Goodyear-Ka'opua, 2013). The women's understanding, and experiences of communities navigated conflicting and aligning attitudes toward communities based on the identity that helped form the communities they were a part

of. For example, all the women searched for familiar communities, i.e., people they could learn with or shared similar interests or cultures.

However, an issue with the term community, as illustrated in the section Community and [Not] Belonging, there was much ambiguity in the way the term was used and understood because of its prominence in academia and use as a lay term (Laˈhdesmaˈki et al., 2016). Despite this difficulty, when the women were asked to describe their understanding of the term, community was classically described by the women in our conversations. By this I mean, their answers linked to geographical location. For instance, as highlighted in section 6.1.3, Bunny's terms associated to community were *"tribes," "places to belong,"* and *"relating to people."* The descriptors used by the women further reiterate Laˈhdesmaˈki et al's (2016) political belonging within a community which reflects their journeys of migrating from India to England to study. As well as the women's explorations of the term being strongly tied to having a sense of belonging, which was found similarly in Sakata et al's (2023) study, a sense of belonging was vital to being a part of a community.

A definition to understand what a community was to the women in this project within the context of higher education in England, provided a beneficial outlook to helping provide a foundation to improve the communities that are wanted to be created, especially within a globalised and internationalised higher education. As a reminder the collectively agreed upon definition of the term community by the women was the following: a community was about *"creating a sense of belonging with like-minded people who shared interests."* The collaborative definition highlighted how many of the classical connotations of community such as having a sense of community (Mannerini and Fedi, 2009) through belonging (Probyn, 2015) continue to remain as important factors in understanding the functions of a community.

As the narratives developed it became apparent that belonging, particularly, political belonging (Lähdesmäki et al., 2016; Probyn, 2015) was a contributing component in how the women understood their communities. Again, this can be connected to Zavala's (2016) decolonial strategy of counter/storytelling. The women through naming, remembering, and sharing their stories led to recognition of colonial legacies, and hierarchies that existed in the study-related communities they were within.

Counter/storytelling illustrated its importance to help us engage with methods to reclaim our narratives and acknowledge our diverse experiences, contributing to reframing knowledge systems and the Global South in the Global North (De Sousa Santos, 2016). Essentially, these counter stories become a part of a larger decolonial narrative that worked toward reclaiming identities through sharing them.

The women including a sense of belonging in their definition of community can be linked to Miller's research (2003), which found having a sense of belonging to a group of people with similar interests could help an individual to become more involved in the group. It is important to be mindful here, that although having a sense of belonging can be understood as a positive, they can elicit negative experiences. As explained by Dutta (2018) communities can inherently continue power relations and hierarchy through reification of groups of who and who are not allowed into communities. They highlighted a strong desire for attachment to people through shared similarity (Probyn, 2015) which may have not been fully fulfilled as reflected with the women's difficulty to explore what a community was to them. Although these descriptions appear broad and perhaps an expected part of a globalised higher education experience, it is telling that all the women expected study-related and free time communities when they came to study in England. This demonstrated the importance of creating relationships and connecting with others as international students.

Having this open discussion with the women on what a community was enabled exploration and development of how their community was influenced by their lived experiences. In particular, the women's stories in their communities were linked to their university experiences. Many communities exist within universities, as Dollinger, Lodge, and Coates (2018) stated, universities should be places that provide pathways for collaboration and effective co-creation. The following section outlines a more detailed exploration of the women's community experiences linked to study-related activities and free time.

7.4.2 Pre and Post Pandemic Experiences of Communities through Choosing to Belong or Not Belong

7.4.2.1 Pre-pandemic Study-related Communities

Bunny, Alexis, and Maneet participated in this research during an unprecedented social time during the covid-19 pandemic, which altered how we socialised and carried out our daily routines. It was therefore important to gather the women's experiences of communities linked to study-related activities and free time. I continue the interpretation of the women's narratives with exploring their sense of belonging to their communities. As a reminder, universities are often expected to be diverse, but this is not always present or delivered (Wang, 2022). During these experiences of not feeling a sense of belonging to their study-related communities, the women shared their in-betweenness. The in-betweenness discussed by the women was a conceptual in-betweenness through a comparison of how they navigated their study-related communities in India. Their in-betweenness was also experienced in communities linked to their free time in England.

The women's in-betweenness lends itself to the emotional feelings created by managing their expectations. The women shared their expectations of study-related communities in England to be made of people from a variety of countries and cultures sharing a common bond through their respective degrees, including meeting to discuss their common work. I interpreted their desire for their study-related experiences of communities to be a shared endeavour. For Maneet and Alexis, this created the desire to form bonds through study-related activities such as working toward class assignments. However, their expectations of these study-related communities were not met. Alexis and Maneet stressed their isolation and the lack of interest from classmates in working together or discussing lecture material. Similar feelings of student isolation were evident in Smith et al. (2021). Their study examined communal spaces in Aotearoa New Zealand universities, universities understood as inclusive for Pacific and Māori peoples. However, it was found through ethnographic data generation that although communal spaces were perceived as neutral spaces, they met the needs of the dominant language and culture through logics of settler colonialism, in this case White New Zealanders, which ultimately benefitted the university and reiterated higher education as a business.

The discussion on study-related community experiences led Alexis to draw upon her learning experiences in India and how she perceived the learning in India to create a togetherness which kept her *"sane,"* demonstrating the necessity of study-related

community relationships. This was in contrast to Bunny, who expressed her value for an independent style of higher educational learning, a style that she was familiar with from her education in India. The difference in expectations for higher education in England demonstrates the variety that exists within the women's Indian education.

Alexis and Maneet's expectations of study-related communities reflect a collectivist style of learning influenced by their early education in India, whereas Bunny's expectation of higher education in England was focused on the individual, again influenced by her schooling in India. As explained by Natarajan (2021) the West is linked to enlightenment, freedom, and self-confidence, factors closely tied to colonialism and individual freedom and success. Alexis and Maneet sharing their failure to find a study-related community can be connected to higher education as an industry that focuses on student satisfaction, moving away from higher education and universities being sites of knowledge and culture transference (Tight, 2021).

Maneet recognised a comfort of being within communities that reflected cultural similarities in her study-related communities. This was not uncommon as presented in Tran and Vu's (2018) findings of Chinese students studying in the UK to activate a sense of community through their national identity when completing study-related tasks. This is not unusual; as Wenger (2006) proposed finding communities that reflected cultural or national similarities was an expected practice, and a part of learning which created an opportunity for collaborative study-related communities. However, as discussed by Maneet, she felt a lack of interest from home students which made it difficult for her to engage in different study-related communities. The lack of interest by home students remains a long-standing issue, as highlighted with similar experiences found in Tran and Vu's (2018) and Ryan and Viete's (2009) studies. For example, Chinese students felt that the home students did not want to socialise (Tran and Vu, 2018). The feeling of being socially distanced from their home peers was mutual in Ryan and Viete's (2009) research in Australia. Their project looked at international student experiences of integration within the academic culture of an English- speaking university. They found that international students recognised the groupings of home students, leaving international students to form multi-cultural and multi- ethnic communities.

Alexis and Maneet' study-related isolation can be connected to my experiences within higher education. I pause here and reflect on my study-related communities, and I can relate with the women's experiences of isolation which was reinforced through the labelling of students as home or international. I shared Alexis and Maneet's expectation of a collectivist style of learning in higher education and not receiving this made forming study-related communities difficult. Having a sense of belonging in study-related communities can be connected to having a security in their political belonging. I draw on Laˈhdesmaˈki et al (2016) political belonging being linked to geographical boundaries, social, and temporal spaces. For example, geographical boundaries are enforced through the labelling of students as international which prompts feelings of increased isolation because of the established identification of students as home or Other. Social factors such as the women's previous experiences of study-related communities had directed their expectation of belonging to this community in England. Temporality affected the women's political belonging through their journeys of migration in a time when non-White migration is highly politicised as dangerous.

Marginson (2014) suggested universities should allow for continuous joint involvement from students and staff to help encourage intercultural academic experiences. From my perspective as both a student and researcher, I agree with Adnan and Anwar (2020) understanding of universities as sites of belonging through membership of communities. However, I also shared the women's experiences of loneliness in their lectures and seminars, not feeling a part of my study-related communities. Again, this is not uncommon, as research presented by Mansfield (2022) explored diversifying secondary education history in the English curriculum by including the teaching of the British Empire. Their study found diversifying the curriculum was the responsibility of the teachers, who were often left unsupported, with the additional pressure of exam results, which meant diversifying the curriculum was often side-lined. Although this study was conducted within secondary school education, the message remains, better support and structure are needed to help create a diversified curriculum to encourage collaborative study-related communities through curriculum improvements.

As the discussions delved deeper into community belonging, an in-betweenness was expressed to whether or not the women wanted to belong because of the difficulty to

share a sense of belonging to study-related communities. For example, as can be interpreted with Alexis and Maneet's experiences previously, they wanted to be a part of their study-related communities but struggled to create or access them. Whereas Bunny expressed a journey of self-actualisation in which there were moments of in-betweenness in her decision to move away from belonging to particular communities. However, at times this waned, highlighting indecision with choosing to want to belong or not (see section 6.2.3.1).

Arguably, choosing not to belong reduced Bunny's belonging to multiple and simultaneous study-related and free time communities that could have felt overwhelming and contradictory. For example, Bunny discussed her action of moving away from clubbing. This can be linked back to the earlier exploration of not- belonging to communities through Harris and Gandolfo (2014), which explained an explicit comfort in not having to be defined by prescribed group rules, as typically belonging and not-belonging created structures that reflect hierarchies of power. Here, I connect to Said's (1978) understanding of being in the in-between, with Bunny's associated feelings reflecting alienation to what she had known to understand communities to be, eliciting a sense of strangeness and out of place-ness. This contributes to the difficulty of traversing in-betweenness and self-decolonisation when not having a firm sense of belonging, especially in temporary places.

The pre-pandemic understanding of community explained in this section highlighted the women's experiences of their communities linked to study-related activities and free time to be complicated through their previous experiences of community in India, which battled against their expectations of study-related communities when they came to England. From my reading of their experiences, there were strong moments of isolation, and a lack of belonging, in both a cultural and political way. During these experiences of in-betweenness they illustrated a battle between what they expected to receive when studying in England in relation to their study-related communities, with having a sense of belonging politically through their national identity and shared similarities of culture and language. This section also demonstrated the work that remains on these long-standing issues of the social divide felt by international students with home students during their time in England. This leads on to the sharing of community experiences in post-pandemic conditions.

7.4.2.2 Post-pandemic Experiences of Communities Linked to Study-related activities and Free Time

During our conversations on community, it was also necessary to factor in the impact of the covid-19 pandemic. In some sense, the pandemic can be considered to have helped and even, in different ways, benefitted the women with their experiences of communities linked to free time in England.

Recent research by Mbous, Mohamed, and Rudisill (2022) found that their small-scale qualitative study exploring international student challenges during the pandemic showed that their participants were lonely because of the discontinuation of social gatherings. However, their research also found that when restrictions were lifted, more invitations were being rescinded. Their research demonstrates the shifting positioning of communities in peoples' everyday lives. For example, for Alexis and Maneet it was an opportunity to reflect on the communities or lack of communities they were a part of. The social lockdown highlighted a lack of belonging to any community before the pandemic. Alexis shared her anxiety about the study-related and free time communities she would be coming back to after the pandemic, as the first year and a half of her university experience was spent in India. This meant that when she returned to England to complete her studies on campus, her expectations of study-related and free time communities had changed. I interpreted a disconnection between herself and her peers, making it more challenging to decide on what to do to socialise with friends because socialising had gone from in-person to online and back to in-person, making it difficult to facilitate community gatherings. Maneet also shared that her sense of belonging in England was not fully realised and she found herself a part of smaller one-to-one friendships. Alexis and Maneet's experiences align with Sharma's (2022) findings which pointed out in her assessment of communities during the pandemic, the impetus for seeking these groups, or feelings of belonging, had to be facilitated by the individual, creating additional pressure during an already difficult time.

The anxiety, confusion, and physical in-betweenness that was experienced by Alexis, reflected a shift in student culture within universities. For example, Alexis perceived she required more from her university in creating quality study-related experiences for the tuition fees she paid in a post-pandemic setting. It is here I apply the additional

decolonial strategy of traversing in-betweenness through self-reflective prompts. Alexis, through the social lockdown, had time to reflect on the value she was receiving for the tuition money she was paying, and because of this the service provider, in this case the university, was scrutinised, where increased responsibility was placed on the university to satisfy consumer expectations. This demonstrates the commodified dynamic that exists between the international student and universities. A way to challenge the consumer relationship to help with self-decolonisation is to challenge the university of their role in decolonising higher education, refocusing the role of the university as a system that encourages knowledge transfer.

Whereas the in-betweenness Bunny shared on post-pandemic communities, were related to her internal struggles as an individual. She battled with deciding to maintain her connection to communities post social lockdown and struggled to stay an individual without losing her identity in either categorisation. This internal battle elicited feelings of being between individualism and collectivism, which is highlighted by her voice of initial confidence, and then an anxiousness with a repeated assertion of being "*fine"* to not belonging to any community and having a *"safe distance"* from them. Bunny's battle between individualism and collectivism can be connected to class structure. Akala (2021) notes in his auto-biographical commentary on racism and the British Empire, that when people of colour defy difficult circumstances such as poverty and institutional racism, it is used as an example of exceptional individualism, evidence that there is as a way to *beat the system*. Highlighting, that if one person of colour can achieve then everyone can. The intersection of race and class is ever present, and Bunny's experiences of deciding which she aligns to demonstrates the complexity that class adds to being a person of colour.

During the interviews I was given the space to also self-decolonise, through counter/storytelling (Zavala, 2016). During this part of our interviews, I was able to share my experiences of post-pandemic communities, acknowledging the colonial hierarchies and power relations through counter/storytelling reminding myself of my self-decolonial pathway. I had realised that through recalling my experiences in an unfamiliar way, it helped me to reconnect to my local communities and value them in ways that I perhaps did not before the pandemic.

Therefore, through my own reflection, I understand Bunny's in-betweenness of belonging to a group with a prescribed identity, as it was only until I had these conversations about the pandemic that I reflected on my sense of community during this time and the communities I wanted to belong to. Similarly to Alexis, I felt social anxiety, because I built up a routine that meant I relied on myself rather than a network of people because I did not initially know how to approach communities linked to study-related activities online as well as the increased motivation this required. The reflection I was able to take during and after the interviews with the women, was that having a study-related community at a similar stage helped strengthen my academic life during that time, which helped to create culturally situated habits, for example online learning support groups, that moved me out of an individualist mindset when writing. However, maintaining online communities was difficult for me (Sharma and Sharma, 2020). I was confident in the learning habits I had already established, however, through post-pandemic learning groups, there was an opportunity for new learning networks to be realised.

To summarise, Zavala's (2016) decolonial strategy of counter/storytelling, healing and reclaiming, as well as the acknowledgement of in-betweenness, enabled an active recognition of colonial legacies, and power relations of communities. It is necessary in this summary to connect all parts of the women's understanding and experiences of community, where it quickly became apparent in my reading of the importance that being labelled as an international student had when exploring their notions and experiences of community. In this case, the difficulty to traverse in-betweenness highlights the work that remains within universities to create more opportunities for universities to become sites of belonging for all students.

7.4.3 Summary of In-betweenness of [not] Belonging to Communities

While the theme of in-betweenness underpins many of the narrative experiences shared by the women, it is important to note that not all participants explicitly discussed how they traversed their in-betweenness. When I asked questions about the women's community experiences the women shared their feelings toward belonging or choosing not to belong. The experience of belonging or not belonging was not fixed, with the women often deliberating their choices to belong to their communities. Their

sense of belonging was pertinent to their understanding of communities whilst at university and although did not express a process to traverse in-betweenness, their experiences suggest that race, language, and academic expectations profoundly influenced their belonging to different communities. In this final part of my reading, the understanding of a community was discussed and despite the women finding it difficult to explain exactly what the term meant to them, their in-betweenness was in line with previous literature which demonstrated a vagueness that can be attached to community (section 3.4).

As a reminder the departure point for understanding what a community is, was to include having a sense of belonging (Sakata et al's (2023) across geographical, social, and temporal spaces (Laʾhdesmaʾki et al, 2016), whilst recognising the coloniality that community can carry (Goodyear-Ka'opua, 2013). Through a collaborative effort, the women formed a definition of community to include key ideas such as sense of belonging, not being tied down to one specific community, and sharing strong similarities with others in their communities. The two definitions had similarities with both iterations of the term to include a strong sense of belonging and being able to share interests with like-minded people. Although the definition was broad it still provided an interesting platform that can be developed within higher education. A concrete definition for community for each higher educational institution could facilitate appropriate policy and support systems that could work on creating positive study related and free time communities.

The women's exploration of their study-related and free time community experiences followed on from the connections established earlier in their narratives. A link was made between the women's Indian identity and experiences of being labelled as international students highlighting the importance of having a sense of belonging to their communities. This section of the narrative answered the question on any connections between the labelling of students as international and their respective communities. For the women, they re-established the differences between their study-related communities in India and England sharing that they hoped to form similar study-related communities to those they were familiar with back in India. I inferred from our discussions on communities that there was an expectation of being a part of study-related communities that would expand into additional free-time communities.

Although their expectations of their respective communities were not met, it was evident from their experiences that being labelled as international students affected how they connected to home students in England. This was similarly mentioned by Tran and Vu (2018) and Ryan and Viete's (2009) studies highlighting this as a long-standing issue that remain.

The experiences of communities were further complicated by the impact of the covid-19 pandemic. The social lockdown conditions enforced by the pandemic resulted in differing journeys for each woman. Bunny's community experiences were heavily influenced by her communities in India. In contrast, the difficulty for Alexis and Maneet was presented in managing their expectations for the communities they thought they would be involved within. However, what was telling from all women was their desire to be a part of communities they could belong to whilst acknowledging a sense of in-betweenness and uncertainty they felt in approaching different communities because of their Indian identity and international student status.

7.5 Answering the Research Questions through the Narratives

This part of the chapter will combine my interpretation of the women's narratives and wider literature to answer the research questions of this project. I begin this section by reviewing how I utilised Zavala's (2016) decolonial strategies and identified the gap of the missing strategy of navigating in-betweenness through self-reflective prompts. As a reminder, the research questions for this project were:

1. What does it mean for Indian women at a university in the North of England to be labelled as international students?
2. How do the women understand and experience communities linked to study-related activities and free time?
3. What are the connections between the women's international student experiences and their study-related and free time communities whilst studying in England?

Zavala's (2016) interlinked strategies of decolonisation consisted of counter/storytelling, healing, and reclaiming. As a reminder, in this research project, I used counter/storytelling, as a tool to name, remember and share experiences from the three women's everyday lives, this meant being able to situate yourself within and to recognise the environmental and contextual factors of their surroundings. Healing was referred to as social/collective and psychological/spiritual practices and processes to recover from trauma that may have been experienced. Reclaiming was the strategy that allowed for a reconnection to be forged to themselves or to their community.

Counter/storytelling, through our reciprocal interviews, has been an effective outlet that has facilitated reflection and enabled the articulation of the women's social and academic experiences. For example, the women were able to discuss their experiences of being Indian international students in India and England, as well as addressing complex topics such as racism, colonial hierarchy, and the English language. They also reflected on their community experiences in India and England pre- and post-pandemic, which brought attention to moments of healing.

Moments of healing could be found through their reflection for example, with Bunny recognising her *"constrictive circles"* during the pandemic and choosing to move away from the communities that were not serving her to allow her to be more confident as an individual navigating her independence away from multiple communities.

Similarly, moments of reclaiming were also found within the women's narratives. For example, all the women strongly identified with their Indian identity in India, and this remained steadfast when they came to England to study. An example of this is when Maneet and Alexis questioned and confronted stereotypes of India and Indians. Through their defence and correction of the stereotypes presented, they showed a reclamation of their Indian identities in England despite being within challenging situations.

As a reminder, my understanding of in-betweenness was inspired by commentators Wang (2022), Badwan (2021, 2020) and Tsolidis and Kostogriz (2008). Wang (2022) referred to an in-between space that international students faced concerning their

national and adopted culture. Badwan (2021,2020) discussed negotiating identities through emotional discourse and dealing with conflicting identities. Tsolidis and Kostogriz (2008) commented on how belonging and national identity are privileges that reflect acceptance. The women's narratives were connected by in-betweenness of belonging and culture, and although Zavala's (2016) strategies were useful in helping to reveal this, there was a gap in the strategies in how to navigate this. It is here that I contribute to the existing theory, where I developed the strategy of traversing in-betweenness through self-reflective prompts to encourage the critical review of colonial legacies (see 5.11.2.1.1). This strategy encourages a deep reflection through looking at the past (colonial implications), introspection, (own responses, thoughts, feelings and motivations) to help forge a pathway to traverse in-betweenness, prompting to help prepare ourselves for future encounters that could lead to self-decolonisation.

The figures Figure 3, Figure 4 A Venn diagram showing Zavala's (2016) decolonial strategies and the recognition of in- betweenness and Figure 5 A Venn diagram illustrating the inclusion of traversing in-betweenness in combination with the Zavala's (2016) decolonial strategies to help navigate self-decolonisation below illustrate the evolution of the decolonial strategies through the project.

Zavala's (2016) Initial framework used as a way to understand the women's narratives. This was particularly helpful with the initial readings of the women's experiences.
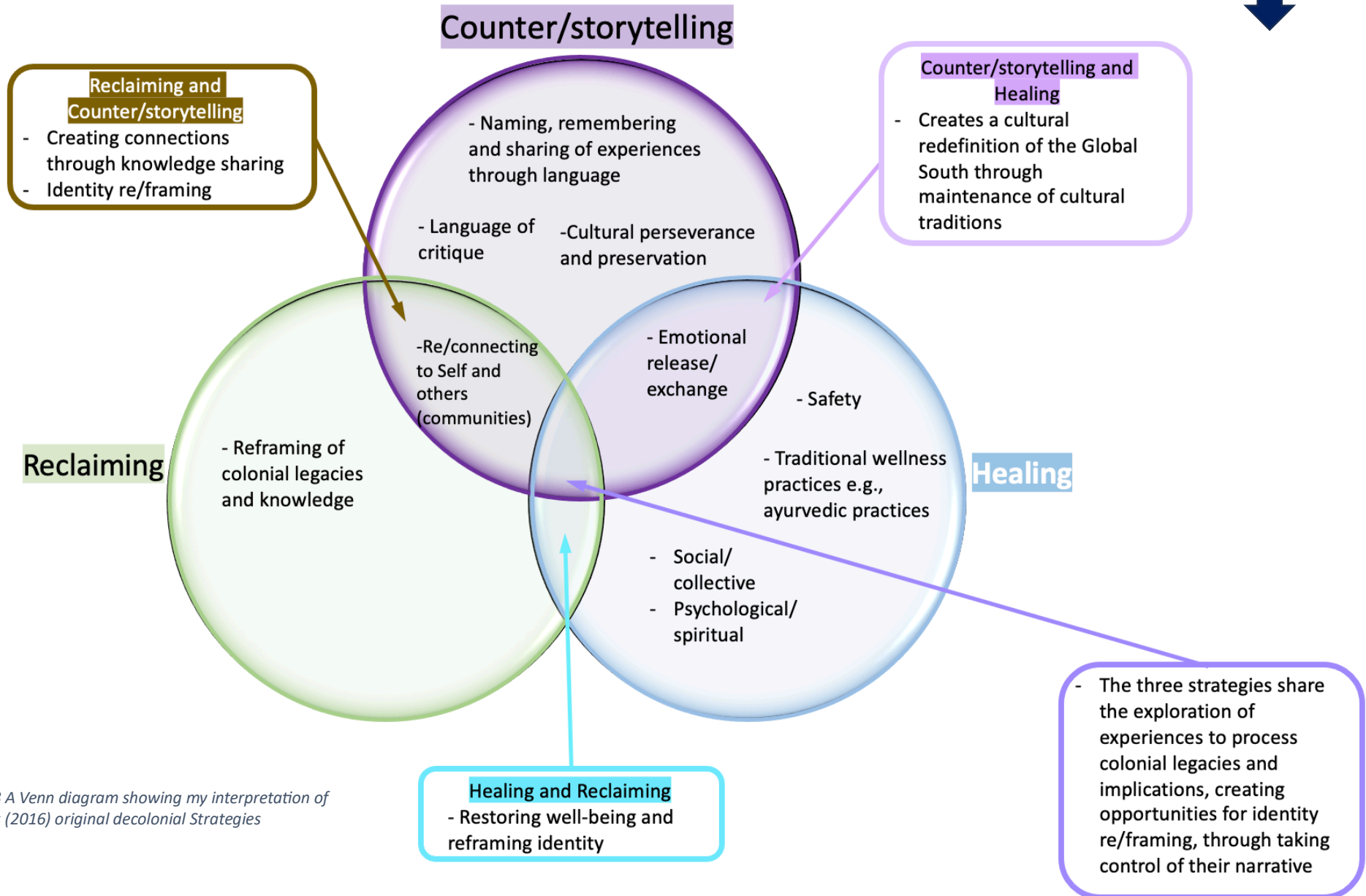
Counter/storytelling

Reclaiming and Counter/storytelling
- Creating connections through knowledge sharing
- Identity re/framing

- Naming, remembering and sharing of experiences through language

- Language of critique

-Cultural perseverance and preservation

Counter/storytelling and Healing
- Creates a cultural redefinition of the Global South through maintenance of cultural traditions

-Re/connecting to Self and others (communities)

- Emotional release/exchange

- Safety

Reclaiming

- Reframing of colonial legacies and knowledge

- Traditional wellness practices e.g., ayurvedic practices

Healing

- Social/ collective
- Psychological/ spiritual

Healing and Reclaiming
- Restoring well-being and reframing identity

- The three strategies share the exploration of experiences to process colonial legacies and implications, creating opportunities for identity re/framing, through taking control of their narrative

Figure 3 A Venn diagram showing my interpretation of Zavala's (2016) original decolonial Strategies

The experience of in-betweenness in the women's narratives connected the decolonial strategies.
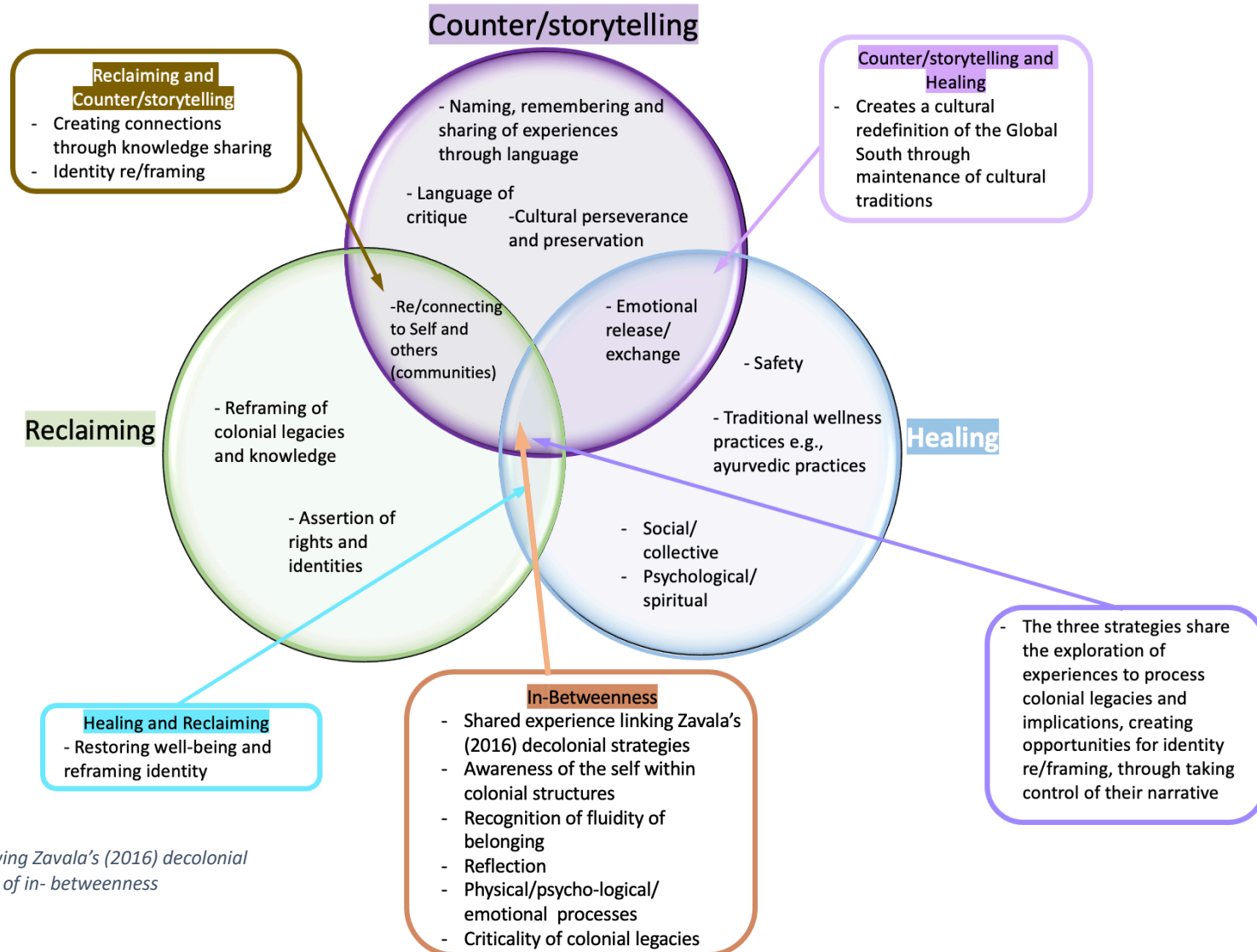

Counter/storytelling

- Naming, remembering and sharing of experiences through language
- Language of critique
- Cultural perseverance and preservation
- Re/connecting to Self and others (communities)
- Emotional release/exchange

Reclaiming and Counter/storytelling
- Creating connections through knowledge sharing
- Identity re/framing

Counter/storytelling and Healing
- Creates a cultural redefinition of the Global South through maintenance of cultural traditions

Reclaiming
- Reframing of colonial legacies and knowledge
- Assertion of rights and identities

Healing
- Safety
- Traditional wellness practices e.g., ayurvedic practices
- Social/collective
- Psychological/spiritual

Healing and Reclaiming
- Restoring well-being and reframing identity

In-Betweenness
- Shared experience linking Zavala's (2016) decolonial strategies
- Awareness of the self within colonial structures
- Recognition of fluidity of belonging
- Reflection
- Physical/psycho-logical/emotional processes
- Criticality of colonial legacies

- The three strategies share the exploration of experiences to process colonial legacies and implications, creating opportunities for identity re/framing, through taking control of their narrative

Figure 4 A Venn diagram showing Zavala's (2016) decolonial strategies and the recognition of in- betweenness

200

Recognising in-betweenness developed into traversing in-betweenness. A strategy that looks at in-betweenness through a methodological lens. Traversing in-betweenness through self-reflective prompts are used to help calling out legacies of colonialism within the experienced the women found themselves in. It allowed for a sense of confusion which recognised the complexity of self-decolonisation.
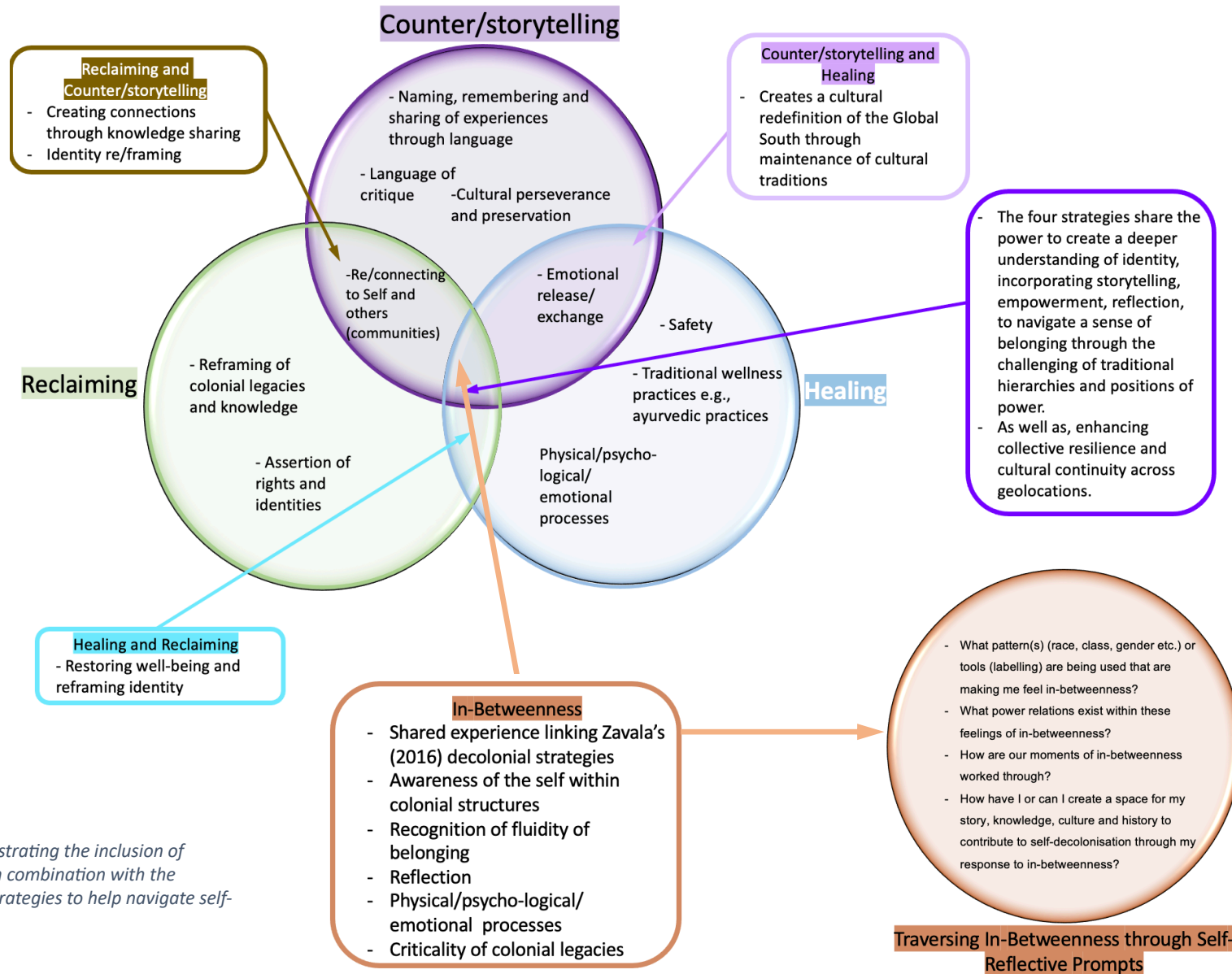

Counter/storytelling

- Naming, remembering and sharing of experiences through language
- Language of critique
- Cultural perseverance and preservation
- Re/connecting to Self and others (communities)
- Emotional release/exchange
- Safety
- Traditional wellness practices e.g., ayurvedic practices
- Physical/psycho-logical/emotional processes

Reclaiming

- Reframing of colonial legacies and knowledge
- Assertion of rights and identities

Healing

Reclaiming and Counter/storytelling
- Creating connections through knowledge sharing
- Identity re/framing

Counter/storytelling and Healing
- Creates a cultural redefinition of the Global South through maintenance of cultural traditions

- The four strategies share the power to create a deeper understanding of identity, incorporating storytelling, empowerment, reflection, to navigate a sense of belonging through the challenging of traditional hierarchies and positions of power.
- As well as, enhancing collective resilience and cultural continuity across geolocations.

Healing and Reclaiming
- Restoring well-being and reframing identity

In-Betweenness
- Shared experience linking Zavala's (2016) decolonial strategies
- Awareness of the self within colonial structures
- Recognition of fluidity of belonging
- Reflection
- Physical/psycho-logical/emotional processes
- Criticality of colonial legacies

- What pattern(s) (race, class, gender etc.) or tools (labelling) are being used that are making me feel in-betweenness?
- What power relations exist within these feelings of in-betweenness?
- How are our moments of in-betweenness worked through?
- How have I or can I create a space for my story, knowledge, culture and history to contribute to self-decolonisation through my response to in-betweenness?

Traversing In-Betweenness through Self-Reflective Prompts

Figure 5 A Venn diagram illustrating the inclusion of traversing in-betweenness in combination with the Zavala's (2016) decolonial strategies to help navigate self-decolonisation

201

Following how decolonial strategies evolved through the research project, the next part of this section will address how the research questions were answered with a combination of literature and theory:

7.5.1 What does it mean for Indian women at a university in the North of England to be labelled as international students?

The first research question asked the women for their experiences of being labelled as international students. This research question was answered through their exploration in Part 2: Studying Abroad of the women's narratives and was developed with my interpretation of their experiences in the section Multifaceted Experiences of being Labelled as an International Student.

The women named and shared many experiences in relation to the international label. The common areas they explored were how they understood the label, their expected experiences, and their actual experiences. Through their narratives, I identified their in-betweenness when they shared experiences as international students. For example, Bunny suggested that being labelled as an international student created an assumption of being in a deficit of the English language, curriculum in British higher education, and Western academic writing style to Western educational standards. To accommodate for this, additional learning support was offered to Bunny, and although she felt she did not need it, she chose to receive the support to provide her with a competitive edge. This demonstrates Bunny's awareness of herself within a structure that maintains colonial legacies. Bunny's analysis of the label and subsequent unclarity of the overriding impact is consequential of her in-betweenness from her experiences. I interpreted her in-betweenness to reflect a reluctance to recognise the hierarchy that is created between home, international students and academic standards.

The women's experiences of the international label evidence that the label is being used as a tool which continues knowledge production and reproduction from the Global North to South. For example, in both Maneet and Alexis' reciprocal interviews, they highlighted how Indian students in India gain increased social capital if they have obtained a British or widely Western international education. Additionally, Alexis drew

upon how she intended to "*take" British*/ Western knowledge to India as she perceived this was unobtainable from a degree in India. Maneet and Alexis' experiences connect to Montgomery and Trahar's (2023) research which explored the international label as a tool for internationalisation that perpetuated colonialism through the commodification of students by upholding the value of Western knowledge. Maneet and Alexis' understanding and experience of being labelled as international students demonstrated the deeply ingrained colonial legacies of Western knowledge being valued greater than non-Western knowledge. This can also be related back to Santos' (2016) epsitemicide, the destruction of non-Western knowledge, signifying the injustice of knowledge originating from the Global South being ignored, unrecognised, or dismissed completely as knowledge in the Global North.

Through the women's counter/storytelling of being labelled as international students, it drew attention to the colonial legacies that remain through the reification of students based on the country that they are from. This has created connotations of being deficit in language, culture, and academia in comparison to home students, which emphasised a lack of belonging. However, despite the women being able to speak English, and having an experience of an education in India based on the British system and curriculum, they experienced the desire for a fluidity of belonging. This created an in-betweenness because of how they felt they were perceived by other students and categorised within British higher education. The experiences of the women as international students demonstrated Western, and non-Western tropes on knowledge value, production and maintenance. Therefore, the label became an extension of colonial and Western imperialism, capitalising on the reputation of a British higher education, reinforcing British higher education as a system that commodifies the international student experience.

7.5.2 How do the women understand and experience communities linked to study-related activities and free time?

The second research question asked women about how they understood and experienced their study-related and free time communities. This question was answered through their exploration in Part 3: Experiences of Communities, and was developed with my interpretation of their experiences in the section In-betweenness

of [not] Belonging to Communities which addressed areas such as navigating the meaning of a community, and experiences of communities pre- and post-pandemic.

The women initially found defining a community challenging, however, through the women naming and sharing stories of their communities they were able to develop a definition that embodied their experiences. Their struggle was perhaps because of the multitude of ways in which it can be used in everyday language, educational policy, and academia. However, despite the difficulty of being able to explain the term, a collaborative definition through member checking was formed based on the women's expectations (see section 7.4.1). Their definition included having a *"sense of belonging,"* with *"like-minded people"* who shared *"similar interests,"* which encompassed their positive and negative study-related and free time experiences. The breadth of their definition was reflective of the women's experiences of communities being tied to their identities as Indians and students. When discussing their communities, there was no differentiation to study-related and free-time communities, but I interpreted from our interviews there was an aspiration to form study-related communities in the hope that these would expand into free time communities.

This definition aligned with the project's understanding of community, which was informed by Sakata et al, (2023); Laʾhdesmaʾki et al, (2016) and Goodyear-Kaʾopua, (2013). Key terms for community were having a sense of belonging, including having a political sense of belonging which highlighted the importance of geographical boundaries such as West and non-West, whilst recognising the potentiality of community being linked to history in the way that groups imagine, produce, and reproduce knowledge about the future.

This second research question also asked about the women's experiences of community. The responses and experiences shared by the women were not what I expected. Alexis and Maneet's experiences of their communities were focused on the difficulty to access communities linked to study-related activities. They had given examples of being in lecture halls and seminars where groups were already formed, or the setting of the activity was not conducive to discussion beyond the work. This meant that the women found entry into study-related or free time communities beyond the set activity difficult. Alexis, and Maneet's expectations to have formed study-related

communities can be related back to Goodyear-Ka'opua (2013) research and understanding of communities needing to value non-Western, or mainstream education and ways of being equal. Communities within higher education need to be reframed as a system that encourages the production and reproduction of knowledge from the Global South.

Additionally, Alexis and Maneet reflected on how they felt other students in the class were uninterested and disengaged with them to form study-related or free time communities. Their experiences highlighting their desire to be a part of collective groups whilst studying in England despite the difficulty to access them. A reason shared by the women was their perceived identification of groups to be formed based on ethnicity, finding it challenging to assert their identities in these groups. The women's experiences align with the experiences of the students in Smith et al's (2021) study which illustrated common areas were not neutral and to be dominated by one language and culture. Feelings of disinterest and disengagement felt by international students was not uncommon with research by Wang (2022) also demonstrating international students experiencing a lack of interest by home students affecting international students' sense of belonging.

The covid-19 pandemic also served as a topic for profound reflection, prompting Alexis and Maneet to think about what they were missing from their study-related and free time communities. They acknowledged the social lockdown to have increased the challenge of accessing communities without being physically in these groups. For example, they both vocalised the importance of community for its sense of belonging with like- minded people particularly for study-related communities. The pandemic had also meant different challenges for Alexis and Maneet, such as recognising personal shifts in interest, and the increased anxiety to be physically around other people because of covid-19. Maneet and Alexis's experiences of their social lockdown demonstrate the intersection of traversing of in-betweenness, healing, and reclaiming through reflection of their shifting identities and the assertion of what these identities were within their communities.

In contrast, Bunny's experiences reflected not on the access, or being a part of any singular community, but the process of choosing to belong or not to communities both

pre- and post-pandemic. Her challenge was working on her acceptance to be independent. This can be related back to how communities can inherently reproduce problematic relationships, and hierarchical relationships that reflect wider Global South and North 'norms,' which again reproduce some peoples as subservient to the community needs. The social lockdown provided an opportunity to break from this cycle, she reframed how she understood herself within communities, enabling her to develop her assertion of her identity with and without them.

Bunny, Alexis, and Maneet's experiences of communities linked to study-related activities and free time demonstrate the multi-faceted layers to community experiences. Their definition of the term aligned with what they were seeking from their communities, primarily having a sense of belonging without losing their identity. They also addressed the challenges to their community experiences. For example, the challenges to access communities, and navigating shifting interests which affect the types of communities wanting to be joined. It is also important to highlight the environmental and contextual factors, including events such as the covid-19 pandemic and social lockdown, which affected all of the participants, encouraging reflection on what they wanted to gain from their communities and themselves.

7.5.3   What are the connections between the women's international student experiences and their study-related and free time communities whilst studying in England?

The third and final research question explored the connections between the women's international student's experiences and their study-related and free time community experiences in England. This question was answered similarly through Part 3: Experiences of Communities and was developed with my interpretation of their experiences through all parts of their narratives. Particular focus was on areas such as the influence of the English language, in-betweenness, and expectations of the women's study-related and free time communities.

A factor that connected the women's international student labels to their community experiences in England was the exploration of their early education styles in India. Alexis and Maneet's emphasised their Indian educations to focus on collectivism,

"*fostering togetherness*" which kept them "*sane."* The remembrance of their communities was a collective release that demonstrated their connection to India and a contrast to their experiences in England.

In addition, there was an expectation by Alexis and Maneet to be involved in study-related activities that encouraged discussion of shared interests. There was a desire for these study-related interests to develop into communities in the women's free time. This expectation was not unusual for international students with studies such as Tran and Vu (2018) and Ryan and Viete (2009) demonstrating the international students in their research also wanting to form communities mainly through learning.

Whereas Bunny's attendance to a British colonial school focussed on individual success and independence of learning. These experiences informed their expectations of study-related and free time communities in England. The women's experiences of study-related communities in India also highlight the broader influence of differing education systems on the expectations of communities formed in British higher education.

The experiences Bunny, Alexis, and Maneet shared came from lenses of being Indian and labelled as international students. Their experiences were also informed by their early Indian education, awareness of the colonial history between Britain and India, and understanding of British and Indian culture. The women's defined cultural explorations of British and Indian culture demonstrate the separate yet connected colonial histories of the countries and how it shaped its current national identity (Vucetic, 2019). For example, the English language, the education system, and British culture were not discussed as challenges when sharing their study-related or free time community experiences. Their challenges were creating a sense of belonging, and feeling engaged with home students. Their experiences of communities although connected to their experiences as students in India, went beyond their ethnic identity and labelling as international students, demonstrating an issue with the wider university experience of community building.

7.5.3.1 Further Conversations…

In this section of the chapter, I addressed how the research questions have been answered. However, there were some areas that need further conversations.

The research questions address the women's experiences of being labelled as international students, and their study-related and free time communities whilst living in England. Interestingly from the stories they shared they did not address any specificities related to their gendered experiences of studying as international students, as Indian women, or their communities linked to study-related activities and free time. However, we know from the literature by King and Sondhi (2018) and Khan and Shaheen (2017) gendered perspectives are important in understanding Indian women's experiences of higher education and studying in a Western country. There is space for further exploration of understanding gendered perspectives of international students' experiences from a decolonial lens.

The discussion of religion and caste was not an area of discussion that was present in our interviews. We did not discuss each other's caste, religious backgrounds or levels of faith. This was perhaps because the scope of the research focused on international student experiences and communities. This is not to say that the role of religion or caste did not influence or inform the women's narratives, but through the design of data generation and the research interests this area was not addressed or felt like a 'loud silence'. Although, it should be recognised that some of the women's experiences engaged with racialisation of their international student experiences, the obvious inclusion of religion and caste were absent. This leaves room for future conversations to be had on the intersection of religion, caste, Indian identity and communities in post-colonial settings (Khanal, Pokhrel and Dewy, 2025).

My identity as an Indian, researcher, and student has helped me to read in-between the lines of the narratives, providing different perspectives to help build connections between the women's multiple identity roles, namely as Indians and as students to their experiences of learning and living in England, which illustrates the importance to

share our narratives, as it provides perspective to how and what experiences are connected beyond the labels we are given and give ourselves.

7.6   Summary of Reading In-Between the Lines of the Narratives

The chapter Reading In-between the Lines of the Narratives has shared my understanding of the women's narratives through a decolonial lens informed by Zavala (2016). The women's counter/storytelling helped to create a critical language that reflected their experiences, moments of healing and reclaiming of their identities as Indians, as well as illustrate experiences of traversing in-betweenness through self-awareness of their positions within structures, fluidity of belonging, and criticality of colonial legacies. It is important to note that these are my views from my lens as a British Indian, researcher, and student, who found myself sharing some of these women's experiences of feeling physically, and emotionally in-between. Through the application of my additional decolonial strategy it has demonstrated the depth of colonial legacies and the difficulty there is to self-decolonise. For example, labelling of the women as international students. This labelling, although in appearance simple, has garnered a variety of multi-layered experiences that has shown to have influential connections to other aspects of the women's lives in relation to their identity as Indian's studying in England and to how they experienced their communities linked to study-related activities and free time. The women's narratives demonstrate the significance of the connection between being labelled as international students and how this identifier contributed to the expectations and experiences of communities linked to study-related activities and free time during their studies in England.

8 Finalising the Conversation, For Now

8.1 Introduction

This chapter opens with a concise summary of the thesis, followed by an overview of its theoretical, empirical, methodological and pedagogical contributions. It will also include recommendations and practical implications and closes with my personal reflections.

8.2 Thesis Review

This study has followed the narratives of three Indian women's experiences, Bunny, Alexis and Maneet, as international students in British higher education in the North of England. The study provides an enhanced understanding of how the international label contributed to the women's in-betweenness as students, and how it informed their study-related and free time community experiences. The key messages that emerged from their narratives form the basis for suggestions that include removal of the international and home labels, recognition of colonial legacies, and improved collaboration between staff and students to create collaborative and purposeful curricula which recognises knowledge from the Global South.

8.3 Contributions
8.3.1.1 Introduction

As illustrated in chapters 3, 4 and 5, it was essential for this project design to focus on developing a decolonial theory that brought to attention the following decolonial principles, an ethos of power sharing and the challenging Western/imperial power relations. These sought to highlight lost identities, encourage self-empowerment and determination whilst drawing attention to the colonial legacies (power imbalances, lack of non-Western voices on boards, the ignoring of non-Western knowledge and production systems) that can make this difficult. It is important to highlight the significance of having a decolonial outlook and intentions which were grounded through the projects decolonial principles of an ethos of power sharing and challenging Western/imperial power relations. In the following section, I highlight the study's theoretical, empirical, methodological and pedagogical contributions.

8.3.2 Theoretical Contributions

This study contributes to the research body at a theoretical level by providing an additional decolonial strategy via traversing in-betweenness through self-reflective prompts. Although Zavala's (2016) original strategies- counter/storytelling, reclaiming and healing (see 4.4)- have been useful in opening multiple discussions with the participants and myself on recognising colonialism, addressing micro-aggressions and crucially highlighting the shared experiences of in-betweenness, another strategy was needed to help work through the participants' in-betweenness.

This strategy shifted the focus from present acknowledgements of colonial legacies to future actions that encourage self-decolonisation. For example, the women in the project, found themselves in moments of in-betweenness when discussing the labelling and experiences as international students. Their voices explored multiple layers of the term *international*, highlighting the *in-betweenness* that was attached to it. Within these conversations, it became apparent that the reification of students through identity determined by nationality, demonstrates the value of Western knowledge and identity via the treatment of international students. The use of the international label further mirrors the colonial hierarchy that continues to exist within higher education and is supported, in its current form by a *globalised* education, where focus remains on the recruitment and commodification of international students. The developed strategy has contributed theoretical development of in-betweenness, through recognition of in-betweenness in higher education and through traversing it via self-reflective prompts. The additional strategy of traversing in-betweenness through self-reflective prompts lends itself to provide another entry for the possibility of resituating knowledge and knowledge systems from the Global South through greater awareness of colonial legacies and acceptance of fluidity of belonging.

An additional theoretical contribution was achieved through the projects use of decolonial principles (an ethos of power sharing and challenging of colonial and Western positions of power) which encouraged the participants self-empowerment through the sharing of their narratives. It highlights the importance of narratives as a tool for colonial resistance via the continuation of traditional knowledge. The most impactful discussions emerged when the women shared their counter stories of

colonial legacies. Acknowledging these legacies facilitated conversations about self-decolonisation, even though at times these conversations were challenging. This highlights the importance of understanding colonial histories in fostering self-empowerment and informs broader theoretical discussions on identity and power dynamics for future experiences of in-betweenness.

8.3.3 Empirical Contributions

This study makes an original contribution through the presentation of three Indian women's narratives as it directly explored their experiences as international students and their in-betweenness in study-related and free time communities. Similar studies exist (King and Sondhi, 2019; Bhopal,2011) but focussed on both male and female gendered experiences and their motivations to study abroad. By focusing exclusively on female narratives, my study removed the comparison between genders and focused solely on the experiences the participants wanted to name, remember and share. This study has helped to create space to acknowledge the issues and barriers that affected their student and living experience in England.

In addition, this study approached international student experiences intentionally through a decolonial lens. This research project facilitated high-quality narratives that revealed the significance of the *international* label through recognition of colonial legacies and in-betweenness on the women's experiences during their time spent in the North of England. As a result, this presents a contribution for British higher education through reassessment of its use of labelling and its ties to colonial legacies which can impact the students who become a part of their study-related and free time communities.

In addition, this research emphasises the necessity of reframing the concepts of academic progress and success for a learner, understood by management, academics and staff, as a positive institutional profile, access to wider audiences or income for British universities (Fakunle et al, 2022). These concepts are subsequently rooted in colonial principles, equating to individual economic success (Maldonado- Torres, 2004). Instead, this research recognises a decolonised understanding based on the creation and exchange of knowledge. My research advocates for the learner not to be

characterised in economic terms but as a contributor to a learning community across the Global North and Global South.

Furthermore, the proportion of students, outside of the EU, who are choosing to study internationally is continually growing (House of Commons Library, 2024). This study highlights the importance for British higher education and British universities to continue research that explores student experiences in relation to sense of belonging, in-betweenness and knowledge exchange with the Global South, in partnership with students who chose international study. This contributes to the literature in the perception of the Global South in the Global North which recognises the necessity of reframing the Global South in the Global North (De Sousa Santos 2018, 2016; Levander and Mignolo, 2011). As well as acknowledging the importance for students from the Global South to have and hold space in British higher education for their knowledge. This demonstrates that the study is an important contribution since the women's narratives highlight the importance to create meaningful knowledge including knowledge partnerships that can be created with students from the Global South.

8.3.4 Methodological Contributions

Methodological contributions from this research project include the development and implementation of Decolonial Methodological Intentions, these served as both ethical guidelines and methodological frameworks. To develop this decolonial methodology, I combined narrative inquiry with exploratory research, guided by principles of an ethos of power sharing and the challenge to Western and colonial power dynamics. This projects decolonial methodological intentions, inspired by commentators such as Allwright (2005), Connelly et al. (2006), and Hanks (2017, 2015), illustrate how these ethical intentions directly contributed to a more ethical and decolonial data generation process:

1. **Discussing quality of life regardless of length of stay in the country**

The women's sharing their detailed experiences and perspectives during their time as students in England, despite the brevity of their stay, was significant in demonstrating how their experiences of living and learning were impacted by colonial legacies. Through discussing this period of their life, the women were able to reclaim and

reframe existing colonial narratives by sharing their insights from the Global South and addressing the stereotypes they encountered. This active engagement not only challenged dominant Western and colonial narratives but also reinforced the importance of non-Western knowledge, highlighting a crucial contribution to the discourse on decolonisation and cultural equity contributing to better community collaboration between students in British higher education.

2. Involving everyone as practitioners of knowledge creation

Zavala's (2016) theory helped form the methodological contribution, his theory of counter/storytelling, reclaiming, and healing, was a practical choice, in that it allowed for development of decolonisation to be recognised through the actions of the strategies. The deployment of Zavala's (2016) strategies facilitated a decolonial data generation process with its flexibility to combine with traditional research methods, informed by Connelly et al's (2006) three commonplaces. These commonplaces- temporality, sociality, and space- acknowledged narratives to be in constant transition through being influenced by people, place, hopes, and feelings. Crucially, this created a space for the role of history and culture which recognised the importance of the interaction between the narrator and the listener (Shell-Weiss, 2019). This demonstrated that the power imbalances between the researcher and participants can be reworked to be a more mutual beneficial sharing of knowledge. This research project's methodology contributes to the development of data generation methods that can reframe traditional methodologies within decoloniality.

This research illustrates how participants can become practitioners of knowledge creation by emphasising their critical role in the research process. By utilising data generation methods, such as reciprocal interviews, it enhances a collaborative environment where both participants and the researcher can engage in the exchange of knowledge. By prioritising the participants as practitioners of knowledge creation the research embodies an ethos of power sharing that aligns with decolonial methodologies empowering the participants. This methodological contribution not only challenges traditional power dynamics of the *researcher and the researched,* but also enhances the narrative landscape, making it more inclusive and representative of the participants' lived experiences.

3. Mutual development

This research presents a methodological contribution that emphasises mutual development, fostering reflexivity and critical awareness while creating spaces for healing and identity reclamation in British higher education. From the outset, the project prioritised informal pre-interview discussions, both in-person and online, allowing participants to express their interests and concerns regarding the research. This foundational step ensured that the project was participant driven.

Subsequent member checking of participants' narratives further enhanced this process. By inviting participants to review and refine their stories, we engaged in critical exchanges that deepened our understanding of our lived experiences in England, with particular focus on learning, British and Indian cultural dynamics, and the lasting impact of colonial legacies in British higher education.

These methodologies not only cultivate reflexivity and critical awareness among both the researcher and participants but also provide an opportunity for healing. For example, my insider-outsider researcher role created multiple discussions through different perspectives, adding interesting layers and depth to the reading of the narratives. By acknowledging and validating the women's experiences, participants reclaimed their Indian identities and narratives within a research context often dominated by Western perspectives. Acknowledging these efforts to communicate, alongside the different roles I had, provided a reminder to myself, and the reader of the many ways one narrative can be understood. This approach not only enriches the data but also encourages a collaborative environment where healing and empowerment are integral to the research process, emphasising a decolonial approach to engage with participants.

8.3.5 Pedagogical Contributions

Traversing in-betweenness through self-reflective prompts is an adaptable methodological approach that offers pedagogical contributions in the following ways:

8.3.5.1 Social Science Research

The concept of traversing in-betweenness through self-reflective prompts serves as a valuable pedagogical tool in social science research within higher education contexts. For example, through the women's narratives, and the traversing of their in-betweenness they were able to highlight areas of improvement for communication between educators and students. By utilising self-reflective prompts, educators can work to empower students to articulate their journeys through challenges, navigate their identities, and reflect on their connections to new communities. This approach promotes self-awareness but also facilitates a process of self-decolonisation, encouraging an ethos of power-sharing through the collaborative exchange of knowledge.

8.3.5.2 Educators in British Higher Education

Traversing in-betweenness through self-reflective prompts has emerged as a transformative training technique that enhances educator practice. For example, this approach has enabled me to navigate my in-betweenness within the context of higher education, encouraging a deeper understanding of my identity and experiences in an academic environment. By engaging with self-reflective prompts, I have cultivated critical self-awareness, which informs my teaching practices. This reflective process allows me to better understand the complexities of my students' experiences, particularly those who may also feel a sense of in-betweenness due to their diverse backgrounds. As a result, educators become equipped to create an inclusive learning environment that acknowledges and values the varied identities and perspectives of their students.

8.3.5.3 Policy Makers in British Higher education

For British universities to continue to be sites of belonging the inclusion of decolonial principles and guidelines are needed as mainstay features of curricula. Influenced by the movement Why is My Curriculum White? (UCL, 2015), some British universities have decolonial statements, these statements are often met with institutional resistance and marginalised (Shain, Yiildiz, and Gokay, 2021). As illustrated with the women's time in England, colonial legacies impacted both their studies and living experiences demonstrating the continued need for a more robust commitment to

decolonial policies in higher education. This would be enacted through various facets of higher education such as through the curriculum, extracurricular activities organised via the student union, and the production and reproduction of knowledge from the Global South through conferences and journal articles.

8.4 Issues Identified by the Participants and Literature in British Higher Education

This research project looked at exploring Indian women's experiences of being labelled as international students, as well as their experiences of study-related and free time communities. The following section will present issues which emerged from the women's narratives alongside relevant literature. Problems include:

1. Separation of groups via the categorisation of students into home and international in both learning and non-learning spaces. As highlighted through the literature (Jones, 2017; Leask, 2015; Wang, 2022) the use of these terms is common, and have reinforced differences rather than similarities between the students, reflecting how Western and non-Western knowledge and knowledge systems are accepted. In addition, it emerged from the interviews that the labelling of the women as international created complications to how they understood themselves as Indian women and students in England.

2. There was a shared sense of in-betweenness through the women's narratives. Particularly, a strong sense of in-betweenness was revealed in how they experienced being labelled as international students. This left them questioning and reflecting on those feelings, what it meant in relation to colonialism, and how they could manage similar situations in the future.

3. The women in this research project perceived their labelling as international students to give home students and lecturers the impression that they were at a deficit because they may not know the 'new' Western educational system, language, or culture. This created further distance and tension between the home and international students to interact.

4. Experiencing stereotypical perspectives as non-Westerners, was an experience shared by the women. The women showed that through their personal experiences of racism and being stereotyped as the Other reflected how the people, knowledge, and culture from the Global South was imagined, in a positioning that puts them beneath the Global North. They challenged these notions reclaiming their Indian identity from the Western understanding of *Indian*.

5. Experiencing a lack of interest from home students to engage with international students stemmed from the women's in-betweenness of the labelling. They questioned these feelings as they were confused by the disinterest by home students because of their understanding of British culture, language and higher education. A considerable issue that effected how the students all interacted during study-related activities. This was also identified in a study by Wang (2022) with Chinese students who experienced a lack of interest from home students, highlighting this to be an area of concern.

6. This research highlighted how dominant the English language was in the women's academic careers, demonstrating the deep colonial effects within non-Western education. However, despite having an education based on the British this did not remove the struggles the women had when trying to create their study-related and free time communities in England. There was a continued sense of in-betweenness that stemmed from their identity as international students.

7. The women's narratives highlighted the Westernisation of the women's Indian identity. This was experienced by all the women in different ways, where they defended India against stereotypes and misinformation. Similar fear of loss of identity and culture was found in Tran and Vu's (2018) study with Chinese students.

8.4.1 Recommendations for British Higher Education

The following solutions are recommended for universities with reference to the Indian women who partook in this study, and how their experiences can influence British higher education:

Removal of the International and Home Labels

Removing international and home student labels for all students will help reduce the many already existing binaries. This would be a significant initial solution offering a pathway to help reduce the initial assumptions made by home students and educators based on the labelling, such as perceived barriers in language, culture, and academic ability.

In addition, the removal of the label could contribute toward improving students' sense of belonging. I recommend the removal of international campaigns that discuss what international students bring to the university environment, instead creating events that highlight what cross-cultural communication can add to the university learning and living experience.

However, it is important to recognise the funding system and the role of global capitalism. As mentioned in section 3.1, the globalisation and internationalisation of higher education lends itself to a business model that appropriates academic and cognitive capitalism (Muñoz, 2022). There are benefits for the removal of the label as mentioned above, however students will remain differentiated by fee status. The fee model represents the hierarchising and value of knowledge to certain groups and must be critically reassessed to eliminate lingering colonial legacies.

Purposeful and Collaborative Definition of Community

Create a collaborative, and purposeful definition of community that is applicable to producing a university that benefits all students mutually. Through having a definition of such a widely used term, it can be used to help build better learning and non-learning spaces in higher education, as well as hold university study-related and social practices to account. This would work in alignment with Snaza and Singh's (2021) and Bhambra et al's (2020) commentary, on how the university should be a place of constant transition, where reassessment of focal concepts, such as community, should be reviewed to understand who is being included and excluded.

A purposeful definition could contribute to building a better community environment from the beginning of the student's time studying in England. For example, it was highlighted by Alexis, that students from the same nationality were placed predominately all in the same university housing accommodation. By creating more diverse living arrangements, decoloniality can begin with the students through their living spaces, which can be carried through to their study-related communities.

Recognising Colonial Legacies that remain within the University

To put out a statement of intent recognising the colonial legacies and power hierarchies that exist, to help empower non-Western knowledge and knowledge systems through university policy statements and actions. This would work alongside Bhambra's (2020) understanding of a decolonised university situates it as an environment that encourages reflection and refinement to improve conditions for all people involved in the institution (see section 2.5).

Creating Collaborative and Purposeful Curricula which Recognises Knowledge from the Global South

Creating a purposeful university campus that would encourage cross cultural connections through curriculums that would show an acknowledgement of non-Western knowledge, and the importance of non-Western knowledge systems across all schools and departments. Through having curriculums that champion non-Western knowledges and knowledge production it helps us to empower the non-Western narrative (Santos, 2016).

A practical suggestion to carry this through would be to have a more informed and collaborative process of curricula building. This would involve a wider variety of staff members from different ethnic and knowledge backgrounds to construct curricula that reflects a variety of non-Western knowledge perspectives. However, it is important that the work to restructure curriculums does not fall on the minority groups, but instead to have their voices heard and put forward in a way that respects the knowledge that is shared. This should not be conflated with diversity schemes which reduces visual 'Whiteness' because meaningful and impactful change occurs with policy changes that effect all levels of structure.

It would be useful to encourage curricula to include assessments that focus on non-Western cultures, ways of life and perspectives on questions that bring in non-Western approaches in Western British higher education. This could be achieved through a paid steering committee that includes students, educators, and policy makers to negotiate a curriculum that is equitable, including knowledge, learning and assessment practices from the Global South.

In addition, broadening curriculum assessment styles to include mixed group work, mixed group oral presentations and more seminar style lectures, would help create an integrated student cohort. This would broaden perspectives of all students and create space for non-British perspectives to be shared. As well as help with improving integration and communities across different cultures.

These suggestions are a starting point to build on the many continued problems faced by the participants in this project and other participants before and after them. However, crucial to changing the existing culture is the essential recognition of the current colonial legacies and how they have been perpetuated to help maintain Western knowledge as superior. Although these discussions must take place and are used as a beginning point for development, these discussions within higher education must turn into concrete cultural changes to reflect the culturally diverse world that we live within. However, it is unfair to put the burden of cultural improvement and the removal of colonial legacies onto the minoritised and therefore will require significant backing of university boards to address the university collective experiences that the current structures are maintaining. Therefore, this is more than just a task left only for students but requires a collaboration of policymakers, educators, and students to help create a better, stronger, and considerate culture that reflects the diverse student population that exists.

8.5 Personal Reflections: A Reminder to Myself

I take a moment here to reflect on this project, the time it was written and completed in and how it has helped shape me as a human being, Indian, and researcher.

In 2025, at the completion of writing-up this project, I reflect on the differences in the BHE and the political landscape that this research sits within. This research project began in 2020; the BHE and political contexts were fuelled particularly by social movements that fought for free speech and justice by critically questioning how authorities were policing different groups of people. These movements garnered enough attention to be brought into the mainstream narratives, albeit being shared from a Western-Eurocentric perspective, highlighting the colonial legacies in the systems we experience (see section 1.3). The 'need' for decolonial projects fit the Western-Eurocentric narratives of the time, assessing and reflecting on the British university as a site for knowledge re/production and community building. Again, this demonstrating the quick commercialisation and commodification of knowledge for BHE, as discussed by Bhambra et al (2020). Despite this, in the five years this project has been developing, the 'need' for decolonial projects remains with the continued questioning of who does and does not belong in academia, local and international communities and countries (see Ullah, 2024). Therefore, the importance of critically reflecting on the systems that dictate and influence our sense of belonging extends beyond the walls of the universities to the communities in our local cities, towns, and villages. The drive for such projects remains with Eurocentric and Western-imposed boundaries that influence the 'international' university.

I reflect now on my sense of belonging and how this thesis encompasses my in-betweenness. My in-betweenness as a British Indian, as a student, as someone who is working toward being a professional in academia, and as a human being in a very politically charged society. It is not the easiest time for a person of colour, I do not think there ever has been really, but now more than ever, I feel a sense of dread, a nervousness, and anxiety to what to expect from society in the coming years, but not just for me, for my family, and the communities I am a part of. Am I seen as an immigrant? What's wrong with being seen as an immigrant? Will my verbal and written English ever be good enough? Will I make it in academia? Am I the diversity hire? These questions are a constant buzz and serve as a reminder of the in-betweenness I feel in particular situations which is fuelled by right-wing politics in this country and around the world. Therefore, I have never felt more aware of the lasting destruction of colonialism and its legacy in my work, education, and politics. For example, the

imbalance of power structures in businesses and educational institutions are supposedly improved by diversity schemes, which gives the appearance of diversity to combat deeply embedded colonial legacies, all whilst failing to recognise the role of colonialism. This is a system centuries old that has capitalised and continues to benefit from ownership of land or peoples in the name of enlightenment, and modernisation.

Colonialism has a very personal effect on how I see myself and this translated through my interviews with Bunny, Alexis, and Maneet. I feel we were connected by our heritage, despite our passports being of different colours. Yet, I still question if I belong?

How do I overcome these feelings?

So, I go back to the questions I asked myself a couple of paragraphs ago, and I think about what connects all of them. They are all connected to my understanding of who I am as a human being. My understanding of who I am is that I am an individual who was born in England to a wonderful culturally aware and strong family, who remains connected to the Punjabi culture and traditions. However, in-betweenness still lingers, so, I hope this comes with time, but I hope to have a sense of belonging to the communities that come within my local area, the communities shared online, the communities that come from being British Indian, and the communities that should come within academia. It is about finding my sense of belonging and building supportive networks that reflect this.

I now reflect on my academic path and how I have got to this point. I do not think I could have quite prepared myself for this academic path because you can never be sure of what to expect; despite researching the process and asking other students in similar positions, each process and subsequent PhD pathway is different. I feel it is important to remember the *entire* path and not just the final stretch, so I take a moment to pause and be grateful for the younger me and the many hours of studying, sleepless nights, exam and essay anxiety, multiple degrees, and funding applications, to be able to get to this point and write about it. When I reflect on the dedication and hard work, I can see more clearly the influence of colonialism. I can see how lessons such as *hard work pays off*, and the feeling that it is always on the individual, *alone*, to *succeed*

and *progress* are legacies of colonialism, through the notion of individuality and competition. This all makes failure even harder, as society says it is *your fault* without reflection of the structures and support in place that should also be held accountable. This made me feel, that in order to succeed and progress, struggling was necessary.

This leads me to this project's topic, the recognition of colonial legacies, the power to self-decolonise, and attempt to create a discussion around the spaces that we engage within in higher education has somewhat been a natural progression, from my previous dissertation topics on integration of minoritised students, and the use of labelling to categorise students as home and international. However, this thesis project is the most important because it combines them with a strong decolonial outlook seeking justice, fairness, and equal opportunities. What also sets this research apart from my previous endeavours is combining my Indian heritage and role as a student and researcher, which provided multiple dimensions to listen and interpret my own and other's narratives. I have achieved this and worked hard to incorporate these principles within the entirety of the process. Although this has not been the easiest, a decolonial outlook and practice often demand self-reflection and introspection, learning and re-learning how I fit or do not fit, perpetuate, or do not perpetuate the colonial and power-focused structures around me.

Questions obviously remain about how I can evoke a more decolonial practice in day-to-day life. However, I believe that sharing our narratives is a start, as we can direct our narratives to heal and reclaim whilst, most importantly, revelling in and questioning the in-betweenness that inevitably exists because, I feel, that is the proof that we are seeking something better.

8.6 Final Remarks

The challenge for current students labelled with the descriptor *international* is the associated stereotypes and critical viewpoints (language, education systems, culture etc.) that can have detrimental effects on their living and learning experiences. It is essential to understand the significant personal sacrifices made to study abroad within a Western culture as often the non-West is perceived as submissive to the West. Taking the step and recognising the colonial legacies that are maintained within British

higher education can help all individuals work on their self-decolonisation which recognises the value of all knowledge but particularly non-Western ways of being. Therefore, through our questioning of these feelings we begin to raise a collective voice against the occupation of the colonised being, knowledge, and land.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Participant Information Letter

Dear Student,

My name is Sangeeta Rani, and I am a second year PhD student at the university of Leeds. I am British Indian and a second generation Indian. Much of my previous research has been around the themes of community, identity, belonging and integration.

This current project, 'Exploring community and online learning with Indian female students labelled international at a university in North England,' is looking at gathering an understanding of community and online learning experiences from Indian female students labelled international by the university. We will be using decolonial frameworks.

It is very important that this project practices decolonialism and carries it through with data generation. This project understands decolonialism as a lens that will examine knowledge production and practices concerning, how knowledge gets produced and reproduced through complex and dynamic relationships of pre-colonial-colonial-post-colonial, west-within-non-west, and non-west-within-west and ideas of superiority within and between societies (Arus and DeJaeghere, 2019).[4]

Therefore, I would like to collaborate with you on this project beginning to explore topics of interest in relation to the project title, negotiate meaning of those experiences and continue to a follow up discussion at the end of the academic year to rediscuss and expand on the experiences that will be discussed. Negotiation of the text will be done through email communication and potentially further audio calls. Please see the attached table to explain the process of collaboration.

The interview conversation that we will be having will be based upon topics that we have collaboratively agreed upon but may not be limited to these topics. This will be accomplished through the online shared topics table on Microsoft Word that we can add the topics and questions of interest. Please find the topics table document attached to the email.

The first online interview will last between 30-60 minutes. As this research project is collaborative the interview encourages questions from the collaborator with the researcher. If you wish to not discuss any topics or questions during the interview, please ask for the interview to move on. If you later decide to not want to include particular experiences or have that data, not be included in any final write ups of the research.

Your interview will be recorded for the process of transcription and to help negotiate understanding of the text. No audio clippings will be used or archived for any

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[4] The definition of decolonialism used in this participant information letter was later developed. An adapted definition is used for this thesis, please see page 32.

publication. However, your experiences may be used in an anonymised form as part of my doctoral thesis.

Taking part in the research is entirely optional and voluntary. If you choose not to partake it will involve no penalty or judgement. If you choose to take part, you will have this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. You will be able to withdraw **your data up to two months after participation.** You do not have to give any reason. All data will be destroyed after the thesis has been submitted.

There are no possible disadvantages by taking part in this research. However, the interview may bring up sensitive topics that can cause emotional distress. If this were to happen you have the right to pause, discontinue or withdraw from the research.

'Whilst there are no immediate benefits for those people participating in the project, it is hoped that this work will allow for an opportunity to discuss the many experiences had during Covid-19.

Your personal information will be kept confidential on the researchers personal UoL drive. The data will be anonymised, and true identities will be known by the researcher only. However, if the researchers, or participants safety is at risk, relevant data will be shared with the appropriate parties. You may seek further support, guidance or advice at the following webpage: https://students.leeds.ac.uk/#Support-and-wellbeing

All the contact information that we collect about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential and will stored separately from the research data. We will take steps wherever possible to anonymise the research data so that you will not be identified in any reports or publications.

The information that will be sought from you would be your experiences on the topics that would be discussed in the interview for example learning experiences, covid-19, and community experiences during this time.
Who is organising/ funding the research?
ESRC will be funding this pilot study.

Please contact the following if you have any further questions or concerns:
Sangeeta Rani
Edsr@leeds.ac.uk
Professor Michalis Kontopodis
m.kontopodis@leeds.ac.uk

Dr Lou Harvey
l.t.harvey@leeds.ac.uk

Finally
Thank you for taking the time to read this document. This will be your copy for reference.

Phase?	When?	What is your role?
Phase 1: one-to-one online interview on Microsoft Teams	February/ March 2022	a. To fill in the shared topics table with topics and questions that are of interest to you. You will have this document 2 weeks in advance from the interview date. b. Participate and collaboratively interview the researcher, sharing your experiences as well as asking questions that have relevance to you for the researcher.
Phase 2: 1st negotiation of the text	March/ April 2022	a. The researcher would have transcribed the interview and will share with you initial thoughts and themes. This is an opportunity to collaboratively work with the researcher to ensure that your voice is being accurately expressed.
Phase 3: second discussion	May/June 2022	a. Leading on from the negotiation of the text, we will have another discussion based on the initial findings and to elaborate any similarities or differences during the time between the first and second data generation. This may be a group or individual discussion depending on the initial findings.
Phase 4: final negotiation of the text	July/ August	a. The researcher will have transcribed the final discussion and will share their understanding of the text with you. This is a collaborative opportunity to ensure that your voice is shared in the way that you want it to.

Appendix 2: Participant Consent Form

Exploring community and online learning with Indian female students labelled international at a university in North England	Add your initials next to the statement if you agree
I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated [ ] explaining the above research project and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the project.	
I understand that my **participation is voluntary** and that I am **free to withdraw before, or during the interview** without giving any reason and without there being any negative consequences. In addition, should I not wish to answer any particular question or questions, I am free to decline. Please email edsr@leeds.ac.uk to withdraw from the research. **Withdrawal of data can be had up until 2 months after interview date.**	
I understand that members of the research team may have access to my anonymised responses. I understand that my name will not be linked with the research materials, and I will not be identified or identifiable in the report or reports that result from the research.	
I understand that the data collected from me may be stored and used in relevant future research in an anonymised form.	
I understand that relevant sections of the data collected during the study, may be looked at by individuals from the University of Leeds or from regulatory authorities where it is relevant to my taking part in this research.	
I am participating in a follow-up interview/focus group/discussion to discuss my experiences and responses further.	
I agree to take part in the above research project and will inform the lead researcher should my contact details change.	

Name of participant	
Participant's signature	
Date	
Name of lead researcher [Sangeeta Rani]	
Signature	
Date*	

Appendix 3: Ethical Approval confirmation

AREA 21-071 – Study Approval January 2022

Rachel Prinn <R.Prinn@leeds.ac.uk>
Wed 26/01/2022 11:09
To: Sangeeta Rani <edsr@leeds.ac.uk>
Cc: ResearchEthics <researchethics@leeds.ac.uk>

Dear Sangeeta

AREA 21-071 – Exploring community and online learning with Indian female students labelled international at a university in North England

NB: All approvals/comments are subject to compliance with current University of Leeds and UK Government advice regarding the Covid-19 pandemic.

I am pleased to inform you that the above research ethics application has been reviewed by the School of Business, Environment and Social Services (AREA) Committee and on behalf of the Chair, I can confirm a favourable ethical opinion based on the documentation received at date of this email.

Please retain this email as evidence of approval in your study file.

Please notify the committee if you intend to make any amendments to the original research as submitted and approved to date. This includes recruitment methodology; all changes must receive ethical approval prior to implementation. Please see https://ris.leeds.ac.uk/research-ethics-and-integrity/applying-for-an-amendment/ or contact the Research Ethics Administrator for further information researchthics@leeds.ac.uk if required.

Ethics approval does not infer you have the right of access to any member of staff or student or documents and the premises of the University of Leeds. Nor does it imply any right of access to the premises of any other organisation, including clinical areas. The committee takes no responsibility for you gaining access to staff, students and/or premises prior to, during or following your research activities.

Please note: You are expected to keep a record of all your approved documentation, as well as documents such as sample consent forms, risk assessments and other documents relating to the study. This should be kept in your study file, which should be readily available for audit purposes. You will be given a two week notice period if your project is to be audited.

It is our policy to remind everyone that it is your responsibility to comply with Health and Safety, Data Protection and any other legal and/or professional guidelines there may be.

I hope the study goes well.

Best wishes

Rachel P
On behalf of Dr. Matthew Davis, CHAIR, AREA

~~~~~~

Rachel Prinn, Research Ethics Administrator, The Secretariat, University of Leeds, LS2 9NL,
r.prinn@leeds.ac.uk

Please note my current working days are Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday am.

Appendix 4: Participant Engagement Email

Exploring community and online learning with Indian female students labelled international at a university in North England

Exciting collaborative opportunity to participate in research on community experiences and online learning.

I am a second year PhD student at the University of Leeds who is looking to collaborate with 6 female Indian students labelled international by the university, to discuss topics in relation to the research title. I am looking to work with you, highlighting your voices and your stories. Please see the information sheet attached for further information.

For further information please email edsr@leeds.ac.uk to discuss this exciting opportunity further.

Appendix 5: Participant Engagement Poster

Ethics Approval Ref: AREA-21-071

CONVERSATIONS WITH….

INDIAN FEMALE STUDENTS, LABELLED INTERNATIONAL -ANY COURSE – ANY YEAR

WANT TO BE A CO-PARTICIPATORY RESEARCHER IN A PhD PROJECT?

CREATE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS TO INTERVIEW THE RESEARCHER? BE INTERVIEWED ON YOUR EXPERIENCES OF "COMMUNITY" AND ONLINE EXPERIENCES? HELP DEVELOP DATA COLLECTION METHOD!

GET INTO CONTACT WITH SANGEETA RANI FOR FURTHER INFORMATION AT

EDSR@LEEDS.AC.UK

Appendix 6: Topics Table

Topics Table

Please find below a table where you can put your topics or questions down for discussion for the interview. There is also a column for general thoughts in relation to your ideas to help with reflection on how you have chosen your questions and topics. Not all categories need to be filled in

Please share topics, ideas, and questions. One row per new idea.

Exploring community and online learning with Indian female students labelled international at a university in North England,'

	Topic	Questions	General thoughts
1	e.g community	What is community to you?	- Would be interesting to see the different understandings of community.
2			
3			
4			
5			
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19			
20			

Appendix 7: Narrative Analysis Procedure Example

[handwritten top right] Community / colonialism
Education
Relationships

1 Sangeeta Rani
2 Um.
3 Not a problem. So just as a as a kind of thing to start off of, you described community as like   *[handwritten: continue on from previous conversation.]*
4 finding your tribe belonging and has that changed in the last time that we spoke or do you have
5 any further development on?
6
7 Bunny   *[handwritten: Sharing commonalities.]*
8 Uh, no, I still believe community is a place of belonging and you know generally as it doesn't
9 have to be a physical space, or a bunch of people can be... just a place where you think you
10 belong and a place where like -minded people can be together.
11
12 Sangeeta Rani
13 ... definition.. community and what it is, and that's something that I picked out was like a little
14 bit of tension. So that I found within what you were saying was that I did a whether correct me
15 if I'm wrong or whatever that the pandemic kind of gave you a chance to. Be accepting of you
16 as an individual alone, not alone in the sense of lonely, but alone is in I'm content with who I
17 am as a being. And how do you? Think this kind of relates to your conceptualization of
18 community?   *[handwritten: easy conversational style, quite receptive to my conversation.]*
19   *[handwritten: Is there a connection to Collectivism?]*
20 Bunny   *[handwritten: Relationship with self - healing - focus on]*
21 Yeah. So I'm glad you brought that up because I feel like this is fitting in is is a huge part of, you   *[handwritten: personal well-being.]*
22 know who you think you are? And I feel like everybody wants to fit in, even if it's like in an
23 extreme group, like, even if you're one of the Flat Earth people you want to fit in with other Flat
24 Earth people. Right? And but I think what the pandemic did to me, at least personally, was help
25 me focus on individualism more than, you know, fitting in. Then it it felt like taking a break
26 from, you know, you have those puzzle pieces like the jigsaw puzzle. And it felt like taking a
27 break from pushing the wrong puzzle piece into the wrong world. And it felt like just, you know,
28 realizing what my age isn't gonna's were and learning how to be OK with it. That it is OK to be
29 with whatever you are and and accepting people for whatever they might be and not trying to
30 fit them in boxes either. So, I I think it taught me a lot of tolerance.   *[handwritten: Naming her social experiences]*
31   *[handwritten: Decolonial theory. (Zavalla 2016)]*
32 Sangeeta Rani
33 Yeah, I think it's really important that you you've got to kind of go through. We will say, well, we
34 should go through periods of self- reflection and learn about who we are. I think the pandemic
35 actually gave all of us a chance to think, wow, this is the time that we have for us. Um, without
36 being pressured to be something when not within the community that already exist. So where
37 do you see communities as a value or as as a as a concept in today's society?
38
39 Bunny
40 We will, strictly speaking, community is like a way to stay alive. You know, it was pretty basic,
41 but now I feel community has a more nuanced effect. Right, because. So a very small example
42 would be if I was a flat Earther, the probability that I would need someone who's a flat earther
43 who's in my immediate circle is very small. But now I can just go online on discord *[handwritten: google]* and then go
44 to flatearthers.com and then find 500 other people who think the world is flat. Or or the water

1

614 STEM subjects is incredible and they all wanted the leading economic powers when it comes to
615 masks, specifically in engineering. Um, so kind of moving the conversation a little bit on.
616

617 I wanted to talk about academic language and writing style. I know we don't have much time
618 left, but just something that I wanted to touch upon with you is you're kind of understood here
619 or you're labeled as administratively as an international student. Could you tell me how you
620 understand this label and any sort of? Yeah, tell me what you think of the label as as a general.
621

use the label for an advantage?

622 Bunny
623 I think the labels necessarily I think. I'm. I'm not gonna say exploit, but I'll use it to the best of
624 my abilities because it gives me a competitive edge over other people. Happily take it as zero
625 prior. It's that simple. So. As an international student, I think it's important that at least
626 professors are, you know, people who don't. Who was young, that everyone has a certain level
627 of knowledge, know that because there's some concepts that I'm fundamentally different
628 about. I'm not gonna say wrong, but different than than what is expected here. And I think that
629 I'd like people to know that and some people might take offense with the whole international
630 thing saying that, you know, I'm just as good. I'm not just as good and better because my my
631 courses were harder back home. This place is easy for me, so it's it's not about how smart you
632 are or how well you think you should be perceived, but it's about them acknowledging that
633 each system of education is different globally, and that there can be some gaps in in
634 expectation or understanding. Because of that. And it's less about being insulting and more
635 about being inclusive.

How does this fit into the wider framework

Thinks it is an inclusive term · or used to highlight the different educational systems

636
637 Sangeeta Rani
638 So that's really interesting that you that you are saying. So again I'll summarize and I'll and ask
639 the question follow up to you that so you think the label of international is necessary to show
640 that you come from a different education system. But you might even come from a better
641 education system. So what you find here is coherent, easier. Do you think, though, that this is
642 the general that when you are labeled an international student? That you are expected to find
643 the course easier or like how do you think your perceived by? Teaching stuff here and students
644 that are that like from an A British education system. I think how you're perceived is how you
645 present yourself. So if I think you just have to prove yourself, I mean, I think as a woman you
646 always had to have always had to prove myself because, you know, even.
647

Past experiences have effected the way she sees the

648 Bunny
649 If my parents don't say anything like you're a girl, it's nothing I haven't heard in my life.
650 And being underestimated is a huge part of excuse me not only being a woman, but being any
651 anybody. And. Uh, I'm not saying that it's necessarily easier for me because I'm an international
652 student. It's just easier for me because I'm used to a more advanced education.
653 But even if it's not easier, even if it's more difficult, you're just helping people. I don't think we
654 should take offence to anything that can help people. It might not necessarily be helping me,
655 but it doesn't mean it's not helping somebody else. International students have access to
656 transcripts. Which can be very helpful when if you're not. If English is not your primary
657 language, and I think that's a good thing. Right. And if people choose to be offended just

Labels because she has experienced worse.

There is the benefit of additional support given to international students.

Gender not specifically spoken about. → Good to follow up. 15

Appendix 8: Developing Themes

"It just makes it even worse:" Communities in Practice? and India(n) Misrepresentation

THEME TITLE	KEY POINTS
Communities in practice?	- All given their definition of the term community. However, the functioning of community through their experiences are different. Individual v group? - They all infer friendship as a big part of community.
India(n) Misrepresentation: "The White saviour complex"	- All very frustrated at the portrayal of India in the UK, and the knowledge of India that British people they have met have. - Surprised that the British Empire is not a part of the curriculum (negative connotations not taught).
"They speak broken English it's fine… but that's not the same for us:" The international student label and English Language communication	- The term international is complex, some conflict in how that is understood. - They all express the importance of learning English, and how this was imposed on them. They currently learn in English. - English language is linked to class, and status in India. Speaking English at university is linked to stereotypes and level of education. - Not very proud of culture because of colonialism.

COPARTICIPANT[1]	INTERVIEW 1-1	FOLLOW- UP 1-1	FOCUS GROUP
BUNNY	✅	✅	
ALEXIS	✅		✅
MANEET	✅		✅

Table showing the types of methods used for data generation with the coparticipants

Communities in practice?

- One of the research questions for this project is to understand the conceptualisation of community. Ideally, I wanted the participants to give me a definition of community. In many ways this was achieved, I received rich data that explored the concept of communities and then what it is in its actuality.

- Key words for community from the coparticipants were tribe, belonging, like-minded, shared interests, friendships, and consuming.

- Unsaid inference is the link to friendship.

- However, the way each coparticipant experienced their communities were different.

Bunny

Bunny used communities as a way to gain validation. They felt they were not attached to any one community and associated identity. This was in part because of their previous experiences of losing her sense of self within the community group.

"Everyone seeks validation and I think being part of communities can help you get that validation. (Line 49-50)

The formation of her community groups she felt were also impacted by the pandemic. But, there was the sense that something greater was achieved, and this an evolved self. She felt that the pandemic gave her an opportunity to work on herself and develop her identity without the need to rely on others. It was a deep period of reflection. Internal conflict between her being a part of communities to feel a part of something larger, versus her being comfortable alone. There was the sense that others did not accept her front of being comfortable by herself. Could be to do with gender stereotypes?

"So I I grew up in this very, very constrictive circles. So you were either in or you're out and and if you weren't in, you were ostracized. Like you had to fit in. I um so when when I got the freedom to do whatever I wanted, I I made sure that I wasn't part of any group. That you couldn't club me with people….And and. I I got my validation elsewhere, I didn't need to be validated by people among my peers, at least in my peers. I mean, anyone in my community" Lines 563- 573 (coparticipant B)

ALEXIS

Alexis was actively looking for communities. She realised quickly that the communities she had in India she took for granted. She felt that the education system in India was supportive of creative friendships and communities through learning. The HE system here, she expressed, did not support that here.

"Is not the same as the culture here. So that's one thing and I don't know what the students, but some of them do seem interested at times, but is just seminar so you have to listen to everyone." (Lines 220-222)

Felt that people she met on her course here (home students), were again unwelcoming, and unbothered to explore different cultures. Naturally, 'international' students were more inclined to mix.

Felt that it has always been difficult to join communities of learning, the pandemic exacerbated it.

"What. Yeah, I think that is not limited interaction, which anyways doesn't exist too much because in class sometimes it'll happen this if you're doing something in the lectures, they ask you what you're doing, so you'll get back to. Being attention what in an online thing? They wouldn't. They don't. They don't know who's doing what. Yeah, so it just makes it even worse." (lines 315-319)

There is a strong desire to want to form new communities. Communities from different ethnic backgrounds. She feels her being placed in a house with people from the same country limits the initial meeting of people from different countries and backgrounds.

"…And the fact you make it sound like, ohh are accommodations are so diverse and this that diverse environment. Yeah.You know you can see everything, you know." (Lines 565-566)

"But the sense of community in our country keeps you sane." (Line 1273-1274)

MANEET

In contrast to Bunny, Maneet, craved a sense of community. She found that communities have people with shared endeavours which create connections.

"I've actively desired it in many ways where there is this sort of desire to find people you can have around you" (Lines 25-26)

There was clearly a desire to have communities of practice (course learning), however she felt that groups were already formed or were unwelcoming to people from different backgrounds. There was not much mixing, unless forced by specific course work – group work/projects. – didn't know anything beyond their names.

"I think especially the UK education system doesn't…UM, it's not very conducive of friendships as…as I I think Indian education systems are goes every once in doing different modules. You see you go to a lecture for an hour, you barely talk to the person sitting next to you. But but back home, there's like first the there's an encouragement to actually foster friendships, and be a part of, like community. Yeah, off. Like your fellow classmates. But I don't think that's the case case here. I don't. That's the answer." (Lines 26-32).

Made her crave her working groups that she had in India. She felt that by the work being so hard gave her and her classmates something to bond over and work through

forming strong communities of learning. She looked for this here but didn't find it over the course of 3 years.

"I feel like rules foster community that makes sense going back to our first point, where having that common set of rules encourages you to kind of, you know, have like, that sense of brotherhood in a way. Yeah. I think this because it's so individualistic, it fosters isolation in a way." (Lines 337-340)

When asked if Maneet if she got the sense of community she was after she replied with:

"I would say no. I haven't gained a sense of belonging/ attachment to a group or collective rather have a few people I cherish and with whom I can share different aspects of life with on a one-to-one basis."

"The Asians are sitting with Asian, Brown people are sitting with Brown people, White people are sitting with White people, and Black people are sitting with Black people. There's no sort of mingling. There's rarely, ever any sort of connect within within races that post it under that. Yeah. So. And then there is there is there is stark difference in the way they advertise that diversity in the way exists" (Lines 988-992)

India(n) Misrepresentation: "The White saviour complex"

All coparticipants expressed, at some point, their frustrations of how India is presented in the UK, and how they felt that filtered to the stereotypes that were shared by some students. The Empire, its imperialism, classism, and self-imposed superiority remains through the experiences shared.

India's misrepresentation again brought out different tensions for each coparticipant.

All were surprised about how the British Empire is not taught here. All feel very strongly about being Indian means knowing your history and culture.

BUNNY

Bunny was very frustrated at the misrepresentation of India, and the people of India. She compares her 'bougie' life with a maid to contrast the slums, and destitute orphans that are often advertised. Links back to racism:

"It's like for these people, India and Africa, our countries where like the entire place is a slum and and like no one has water and everyone walks to villages and and here I am sitting having a bougier life than most of these people might have honestly. And I'm like, yeah, no, I grew up with a maid. I don't know what you're talking about Right. So I think the misrepresentation annoys me more than the politics" (Lines 749-753)

"You tell me which is more f****d up. Right. And and I think like a lot of the misrepresentation is just media messing up. It's it's so funny when when you see. Um and and the root cause would be racism. Honestly, just good old-fashioned racism. The IT it racisms not from anywhere, it's just who you are. You're a racist. It's that simple. I think I don't know if it could be related back to the colonialism or the empire or the general idea British people have that there's somehow better than everybody else. Which I think is again a very White person thing, less British because you know, no one has more. I'm a snowflake feeling than Americans." (Lines 843-849)

ALEXIS

Similarly, Alexis, was shocked about the absence of knowledge on India, she gave the example about peers being unaware of India's geographical features- mountains- desserts- rain forests etc.

"We were talking about this India and you know, the countryside really pretty. It has mountains. Yeah, I think. You brought up something about how does India have all this? Like we have the best. So they tell them what you need. We have the best. We have a look. What? We have mountains. We have everything in this country. She was so short. Like can you give me the name of the places? Because I didn't know they exist. You're not exposed to even Indian cinema. You know, it's not everyone's cup of tea cup of tea. But you know, like you can't. Hollywood cinema and we get to learn about the rest. You can't pull out the movie from 25 years ago and just think that that's what that would feel like. Like it's gonna watch Mother India and things". (Lines 611-619)

MANEET

Maneet, felt similarly, the stereotypes of the country make it difficult to make friends and be seen as a person.

"It's still there's still a lot of sort of stereotyped understanding of the country. Yeah. So it can be frustrating sometimes to break that and like actually establish yourself as a person and not just any of that makes sense. Yeah. But I think only through sort of encouraging conversations among students, can they understand each other, cause stereotypes kind of just take over otherwise?" (Lines 176-180)

There was a sense that she had the burden to correct stereotypes about Indian women and India constantly throughout her first year especially. This is where education about country comes into play, in that knowing the history of the country could eliminate some of the stereotypes that are perceived.

"… Like someone asked me how women allowed to vote in India. And I'm like, right after you White sisters left." (Lines 489-490)

"Someone told me this, is actually hilarious. Asians make good employees, not good leaders" (Line 808)

"They speak broken English it's fine… but that's not the same for us:" The international student label and English Language communication

We discussed the use of the term international as an adjective to describe students who were not from Britain and Europe, and the use of English language as a marker for status.

When it came to exploring the international label, again, it was split between some coparticipants believing it is a form Othering, creating a barrier from the very beginning, and one feeling that the term motivates her to prove her value to herself and to others.

English language: marker for status, broken accents = stereotypes (uneducated/not smart enough), speaking English alongside Indian languages not respected by peers.

BUNNY

Complex expression of the term international. Contradictions in what she says. Understands it can be Othering, but uses it to prove her capabilities, whilst saying that it is also a way to recognise the different education systems and to be more inclusive. The label creates a deficit thinking in that being called international means not being up to British HE standard.

" I'm. I'm not gonna say exploit, but I'll use it to the best of my abilities because it gives me a competitive edge over other people. Happily take it as zero prior. It's that simple.

So. As an international student, I think it's important that at least professors are, you know… aware that everyone has a certain level of knowledge, know that because there's some concepts that are fundamentally different about. I'm not gonna say wrong, but different than than what is expected here. And I think that I'd like people to know that and some people might take offense with the whole international thing saying that, you know, I'm just as good. I'm not just as good and better because my my courses were harder back home. This place is easy for me, so it's it's not about how smart you are or how well you think you should be perceived, but it's about them acknowledging that each system of education is different globally, and that there can be some gaps in in expectation or understanding. Because of that. And it's less about being insulting and more about being inclusive." (Lines 623-635)

"I'm an international student. It's just easier for me because I'm used to a more advanced education.But even if it's not easier, even if it's more difficult, you're just helping people. I don't think we should take offence to anything that can help people. It might not necessarily be helping me, but it doesn't mean it's not helping somebody else. International students have access to transcripts. Which can be very helpful when if you're not. If English is not your primary language, and I think that's a good thing. Right. And if people choose to be offended just because you're being called an international student, then you should just work twice as hard to prove that they're wrong. It for underestimating you right and your relationship with your professors completely depends on how you carry yourself in front of them." (Lines 651-660)

English Language

In India learnt and studied in English too. It was actively encouraged to speak English.

"I went to a school where if you didn't ask for things in English, they weren't given to you.So I think I've always learned in English, like from the beginning. All my textbooks were in English or all of the stuff I had to write for exams, and I find were in English.So. I think English is just the language I studied in. So I don't sense it's any different for me right now. It just seems normal." (Lines 708-712)

ALEXIS

Found the term 'international' to create Othering and as an opportunity to inflate British higher education status with a diver student population.

"You you take so much money for what? Since the ? I is absolutely for nothing. At least if we see the last two years absolutely nothing. Yeah, you're stunning on on a screen paying the same amount of money. Getting even less of what we were in the first year because it's still quite going to a class and like this is too much money for nothing. Umm, I mean, education is supposed to be this expensive. Umm." (Lines 918-922)

English Language

English also language she learns in and was taught in. Said dishearteningly the quote below- I understood it as, there's nothing else that can unfortunately change it.

"That's the way … how the entire world is trying to be" (Line 385)

MANEET

International term seen as an Othering.

"I don't know does it fall under Othering? You are. You're the directly Othered, while enrolling because they emphasize so much on. Yeah, something international students…" (Lines 115-116)

English language

Learnt in English too. However, the conversation turned toward how English is spoken. Despite her being able to speak multiple Indian languages, she is not respected the same as someone who can speak European languages and English.

"So most like, even if parents don't know English, they'll try and send their kids to an English speaking school in the hopes that they have a better life because job opportunities are better. When you know English. So so I get what you're saying Italian and French because they're they're very proud of their language and it's it's also like they speak broken English it's fine. Yeah, but that's not the same for us. Yeah. So there's there's a lot of, like, racism." (Lines 388-392)

Felt that speaking broken English as an Indian led to stereotypes of being an immigrant, and not highly educated.

"Like a lot of people complimented me when I got here on how good my English was because they're in. And I'm like, well, I did learn ABC as I learned acd. I learned better, be half decent. But but there's there is a lot like, I've got. I've gotten, like, we're pretty for in India and you smell nice for an Indian like the 'for an Indian' is a very nice suffix that's added to a lot from the like is the ohh the for an Indian, for an Indian" (Lines 490-495)

Indians aren't proud of being Indian because of colonisation.

"Brown people are ashamed of their culture because because of how strongly, The White superior superiority complex runs in the country." (Lines 403-405)

What is it to be an Indian? - Needs to be added?

Maneet:

"Broadly, I'd say individuals from India or those whose ancestors were from India. I don't think there's a certain characteristic or experience that can help categorize a person as Indian "enough". I do however think that people from India and belonging to the Indian diaspora need to re-evaluate their definition of "Indian" and understand the country for what it is now and the history it holds."

Appendix 9: Example of Member Checking Process

Initial thoughts and findings:

Community:
- When reading through the transcript and going through the audio again, I felt that your communication of what community is to you, can be stripped back to a space, not necessarily physical, that allows you to belong with like-minded others. Satisfying our needs to be a part of a tribe[5].
- Despite this, you feel there is a severe overuse of the term, and this has resulted in the loss of meaning of the word in some cases.
- We have communities, but what are their real purpose, when we don't really know what they mean?
- Downside to communities are their potential conservatism and restrictiveness, as experienced back in India. They can lead to conformation bias which is a huge problem in today's digital space
- Too often communities are 'places' where people seek validation, losing their sense of self. Internal struggle, perhaps, of finding your tribe and being happy to be alone, as society somewhat dictates that people who choose to be alone can't be happy?

Online learning experiences
- Your experiences of online learning have not been enjoyable. You have not enjoyed it because you feel a learning environment cannot be recreated at home. Too many distractions to focus.
- Learning efficiently requires a teacher that is engaged in the teaching, as well as interaction with the learner. Don't necessarily need the students in the class.
- This way of teaching/learning can be interpreted as power/learning only coming one way (teacher   learner) with no passage/ two way learning to enhance all participant knowledge. Power is filtered from the teacher out. I feel something is lost among teachers and students between teachers and students and students and students outside of classroom learning.

Politics and society
- Really strong sense of history and knowing the country's history in order to know oneself.
- Was taught about colonialism/imperialism and power struggle from the empire.
- Really deep connection to history that implies that the current political situation is somewhat connected to the leave of the Empire because the country is rebuilding its national image to compete on a global scale.
- In an age of false news trying to get accurate political information isn't easy so you need to keep yourself updated because these are changes that affect your daily life and history and knowing your roots are a huge part of that for me.

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[5] Text in red font signals changes made by the participant to the document.

Appendix 10: Reflection of Interview

First researcher - participant experience:

- Overall, I feel like the methodology for having the co/researcher participant interview me worked. It worked in the sense that we could summarise, check for understanding, question and go deeper throughout the conversation to help build a better understanding.
- However, it being the first reciprocal interview (conducting in a conversational style) there are aspects of it that can be improved upon. One of the first things that I would do better for the remaining data generations would be to remind them that they have the space to ask me questions too, dig deeper, or disagree openly about comments, questions, or opinions etc. To rectify this in the very first data generation with this participant I reminded the participant that this is a two-way interview, and if they wanted to ask me anything, I was happy to answer. This improved the interview, as it meant that we could go more to and frow with answers and created more of a real conversation. Two people talking about topics including community, family, belonging, identity, and learning, rather than a researcher asking the participant questions for answers.

Topics table:

- The topics table was great for me, as it reminded me of the areas of conversation to go through if I forgot throughout the time.
- This wasn't so much utilised by the P but they still managed to think of and ask some great questions, maybe did it in a different way.

Carrying out of the interview:

- Had a nice flow to it, but with some pauses that felt long. Some of the questions asked were quite heavy, so they did require some time to think about the response.
- Need to be more comfortable with accepting the pauses, as this will help with building a better response.
- Maybe need to be more like "tell me your story!"

Appendix 11: Overview of Data Generation Information

Empirical Data Generation Information	
Number of Reciprocal Interviews	6
Average Time of reciprocal Interviews	83 minutes
Total Interview Time	498.38 minutes/ 8.20 hours
Number of Face-to-Face Reciprocal Interviews	4
Number of Online Reciprocal Interviews (audio and visual)	2
Place where Interview Data is Kept	University M Drive
Date of Data to be Deleted:	Completion of PhD

Table 2 Empirical Information from Data Generation

Appendix 12: Raw Data Transcript

BUNNY:
Fine with that I'm doing this over the phone then.

Sangeeta Rani
Absolutely. Fine. Yeah, it's whatever way that you can come.

Sangeeta Rani
Would you call it? As long as you've got a device that kind of work through, that's not a problem. Um.

BUNNY:
Yeah. Oh, it started transcribing. Just saw it.

Sangeeta Rani
Yes, I didn't even know I did that!
OK. There we go. Oh yeah.
Awesome. Um.
Yeah. Great. Well.

BUNNY:
This has been a rollercoaster.

Sangeeta Rani
Yeah, this is this is OK well, we're learning new things. I didn't know that this was possible, so that always fun. But basically, thank you so much for joining um (pause) … This research projects and kind of coming on board. Um you been really awesome in you know your interest in it. So that's that's really great. Um, so if you can for me just we kind of go straight in um just tell me a little bit about yourself.

BUNNY: Um, OK, so I'm an economics student with the University of Leeds. I've been here a few months now, but it feels like it's a lot longer than that because I grew up in a big family, and I mean, like eight people at least.

Sangeeta Rani
Wow.

BUNNY:
So living alone then… (pause) is different and I said different, not difficult because it's been fun.

Sangeeta Rani
Yeah.

BUNNY: Obviously I I miss everybody and and all that, but you know. Um, it's it's it's, it's interesting, it's it's uh, the process.

Sangeeta Rani
The process. Um, what? What do you mean by the process?

BUNNY: Uh, so I I saw people go through all kinds of different things here, right. So I saw people have breakdowns because they miss home. I saw people miss their family. I saw people miss out on their lives back home and how that affected them.

Sangeeta Rani
Uh-huh.

BUNNY: Um, I I also. I also met a lot of people who got homesick who didn't see it coming. I mean, I knew I was going to get home safe because my mom and I have a very close relationship. So um, but, but others underestimated.

Sangeeta Rani
Yeah.

BUNNY:
How you know how much they miss? That that environment.

Sangeeta Rani
Do you would you say that?

BUNNY: And that's it's interesting.

Sangeeta Rani
Yeah.

BUNNY: Um.

BUNNY: I think you're frozen. I can't see you. No.

Sangeeta Rani
I'm. Can you hear me?

BUNNY: Yeah.

Sangeeta Rani
OK, great. Um, I'm still there. So if I'm frozen, ignore it. It'll … like backup. Um, could you tell me where you're from in India, please?

BUNNY: Uh, I'm from South India. Will place called, can I? It's really nice. I I like it a lot. Yeah, it's, it's, it's, it's. I grew up in a rather conventional space. And the transition was very obvious when I moved here.

Sangeeta Rani
When me and conventional space, could you elaborate a little bit for me please?

BUNNY: Uh, so I I come from a very close to our society right there. Everyone knows. Everyone has been to Chennai knows that there are two parts tonight. There's the fun. Party bit, and then there's the. Um, the not so fun. Quite radical. Bit right? And I I just. I feel like I've I've been in both of those places. Because my family is very, very traditional. Very um. Very conventional, very, you know, conservative sorts even. But you know, when I studied and and I I went to a elite Christian School and and they had their own form of conformity. But it was it's it was different from what my family.
And so, uh. (long pause- 1-2 seconds)

I don't know how to put this delicately, but I went to school with like insanely rich people who had nothing better to do with their lives. And so in in that in mind me, I I got this whole new sense of being a person. And I I learned some good and bad habits from there.

Sangeeta Rani
OK.

BUNNY: And so this is where I am right now is somewhere between those two places. Because it is, it is substantially, uh, still quite conservative. Compared to like a group of people I I used to be with. But at the same time, it is also quite freeing.

Sangeeta Rani
OK, so so. Well, what I'm. Gathering some. What. is that? You come from quite conservative family. You went to a fairly good school and then from that, did that give you the opportunity to then come and study abroad?

BUNNY:
Yeah. Uh. Yeah, I was going to study abroad for my undergraduate. But it's, uh. That was that was the the that that kind of blew over because of some bureaucratic crap. For the lack of a better term.

Sangeeta Rani
OK.

BUNNY:
So and then and then I decided to study in India, which was an amazing opportunity for me because I I got to do a lot of other things. I mean, I wasn't as academically challenge as I would have been if I lived here. If I came abroad to study anywhere, actually.

Sangeeta Rani
OK.

BUNNY:
But I was and and so I I did. I did work. I I work for a bunch of companies I intern. I wrote. I was a writer for, for, for a brief while. I'm there. And I explored versions of my life that I normally wouldn't have if I came abroad for anything.

Sangeeta Rani
Wow, that's really interesting. Um.

BUNNY: I feel like it's it's one of the most interesting experiences of my life, because if I just gone abroad and studied and some hyper powered academic oriented college then all they would have known is what I learned from my books.

Sangeeta Rani
So.

BUNNY:
And and not what I learned living my life up there.

Sangeeta Rani
That life experience is really important.

BUNNY: Yeah, I mean, obviously, I made a lot of mistakes. I I, I I made a lot of decisions that in retrospect seems stupid, but it it is also a learning curve. I mean, I did all my stupid stuff. Then I'm ready to be an adult.

Sangeeta Rani
Yeah. Yeah, like The funny thing, isn't it? Um. I think you reflecting is really interesting and the fact that you're talking about versions of your life that you wouldn't have experienced. If you didn't, if you didn't stay in India in ur at home, um is really interesting for me because. I think there's a culture where we kind of believe that you should go away and you should go and find yourself really independently of everything. Um, so it's quite nice to hear something like that. Um. So. Yeah. No, that that's pretty cool. So you from Chennai and you're studying economics here, right, aren't you?

Sangeeta Rani and BUNNY:
Yes.

Sangeeta Rani
Um, and why? What made you choose Leeds?

BUNNY: So I had a bunch of office actually, uh, I got an offer. This study, political science at the King's College London. I got nothing to do finance in work. And I I think I had a

scholarship or something from Newcastle. And I got into Berlin, Dublin, Dublin. And and Trinity College. So it was it was more of a judgment call really. So uh Island was not really very fascinating to me because um, it just didn't focus on the course I wanted. And then when I came to the UK, work just felt very distant because it was, it was somewhere in the middle of nowhere and and. When I looked up the place, all I could find was police reports of stabbings. And I was mortified. Mortified. I was like, what is up with this place?

Sangeeta Rani
OK. Yeah.

BUNNY:
Feel like the the university there really needs like a good PR team to clean up some of the mess that tapping. So um. As I was saying, it just and then and then with kings college of the tuition was extremely high. And on top of that we're living in London was something that I I felt I wasn't keen on doing right away of sorts. So it it it just felt a bit um. A bit a bit off for me.

Sangeeta Rani
Yeah.

BUNNY: And. So Leeds was more of an elimination kind of grow.

Sangeeta Rani
OK.

BUNNY: It felt like it was the best option at that time and I didn't regret my decision later on because I do like it here, I mean. Uh. At one point, my mom just told me you don't pick one and stick to it. And and I feel like that's what I did.

Sangeeta Rani
Yeah. How? Yeah, sorry. Carry on.

BUNNY: And. And I've I've grown to like, really enjoy my decision.

Sangeeta Rani
That's amazing. I think it's obviously really important to know, and feel comfortable where you are. I think choosing university, regardless of where you're from or um it, it's just really important because you need to feel kind of at home now. Um so.

Sangeeta Rani
Yeah. No, that that's that's quite interesting. Like how did your family feel with you gonna traveling aboard abroad?

BUNNY:
Um, my mom was terrified.

Sangeeta Rani
Yeah.

BUNNY: So she's always been afraid that one day I just leave and not come back.

Sangeeta Rani
Soft laughter

BUNNY:
Because I I have been that kind of person a few times, like, um, I I'm I'm known not to have attachments sorts. She she knew that obviously miss her, but but when it came to, you know, coming back home or something like that, she knew that I always had my reservations.

Sangeeta Rani
Yeah.

BUNNY:
And and that I think that made it really hard for her. They sent me. But she also knew that if she didn't, then I'd never be able to experience the world. So she did it anyway.

Sangeeta Rani
Yeah.

BUNNY: My father was just happy that, you know, unlike other people my age, I wasn't obsessed with something dumb. Then I was taking constructive steps towards making my life better. And those are his words, though it goes with.

Sangeeta Rani
Ah fair enough! Also, um also during this um conversation feel free to ask me anything or you know in yeah.

BUNNY: Yeah. Oh, so um, have you ever been back home?

Sangeeta Rani
To India?

BUNNY: Yeah.

Sangeeta Rani
It's so… I actually haven't. Um, my none has a place in India and she goes like every six months. Um, but I've actually not, yeah. Why? Um.

BUNNY: Why?

Sangeeta Rani

I'm not sure to be honest with you, I've always. Maybe it's because I'm quite scared of flying. I Think…

Sangeeta Rani
Uh.

BUNNY: You're scared of flying.

Sangeeta Rani
Not scared. Yeah, like I have really bad motion sickness.

Sangeeta Rani
So.

BUNNY: Me too!

Sangeeta Rani
Yeah, so every, like flight I'm on, I tend to either, like, physically be sick or be sick for the first three days.

BUNNY: Oh no, I I just. I I'm sick for, like, the entire duration of the flight 'cause. I had altitude sickness. So he joins in my neck pains. I get I I get sciatica. I get nausha.

Sangeeta Rani
Ooh No.

BUNNY: And and so all my flights have just been me tranquilizing myself.

Sangeeta Rani
Yeah, it. Yeah, I think, yeah.

BUNNY:
So.

Sangeeta Rani
I think it's also a lot reacclimatizing.

BUNNY: Like I just look at that. I don't know why 'cause. I knew that. Like, listen, I'm dragging myself. Wake me up when it's time to get off.

Sangeeta Rani
Yeah, you got to be careful. You really do it. Yeah, flying isn't like the easiest um of things. But yeah, no, I I've never been, to be honest with you. And I think, yeah, mine on. Would love to take me. I think it's just getting over the initial like sickness of of traveling to be honest with you.

BUNNY: No.

Sangeeta Rani
Yeah.

BUNNY:
Do you want to go?

Sangeeta Rani
Do I.. do want to go? I think. The political situation in India is quite interesting, I think. Um.

BUNNY:
So it's more than interesting.

Sangeeta Rani
Yeah.

BUNNY:
We basically over so sorry my camera.

Sangeeta Rani
No, no, don't worry.

Sangeeta Rani
Um, I I think that's very contentious.

BUNNY:
Yep. We basically have the equivalent of the Nazi party with [inaudible]. Right now the the Prime Minister has been accused of genocide at some point in his life.

BUNNY: And and I think that's not fun. So.You should go up despite despite all the political stuff, it doesn't. It won't really interfere with your trip anyway, honestly.
Because you know, and if people in India do love their politics, I'm not even gonna lie to you about that. But they're also like, there's so much else to do then. Then the other with those people.

Sangeeta Rani
Yeah… That's true. I I just. I just feel like.

Sangeeta Rani
Wherever you go, there's going to be a politics that you you may not agree with.

BUNNY:
Yeah.

Sangeeta Rani
I think there's also the matter of feeling safe.

Sangeeta Rani
As well, um.

BUNNY:
Oh God. This is such a huge misconception that I could deal with for a lot of my life.
Everyone just assumes it's not safe because of all the reports and and stuff like that. But
what? Where people refuse to understand it's a is that it's not that bad.

Sangeeta Rani
Yeah.

BUNNY:
Unless you go to like a particularly bad place or or you're doing something or being
somewhere where you shouldn't be. And as long as you stick to people you know and and
you're always with someone, it's pretty safe. I mean, it's it's no.

Sangeeta Rani
See, that's really interesting that you say that because when we're talking bout universities,
who knows you had Warwick and you searched it? You're like, I ain't going to Warwick. I
think it's that perception and and the media player really be part of it. I'm not. I'm not saying
safe as in I think anything Bad's gonna happen.

Sangeeta Rani
I think. It's.. I don't know. I can't quite describe it. I just think I've heard horror stories from
my own family. So.

BUNNY:
OK. Yeah, yeah, I I have horror stories of my own, but I'm not gonna take it out of the
country. I'm just gonna take it out and individuals or direct relationship.

Sangeeta Rani
Yeah, that's true. Yeah. No, absolutely. Um. But I think the main the main thing for me is just.
Making sure that I feel. As in, I can safely get there like I can not feel sick and then having to
acclimatize will be a really big thing for me. Um, the food won't be an issue. Love the food.
Um, but I think it will just.

BUNNY:
Food is never the issue!

Sangeeta Rani
He's never. Yeah. Oh yeah.

Sangeeta Rani

I I I consider myself to be Indian, to be Punjabi, so I obviously love the food. Um, so yeah, that's not a problem at all. But when it comes to traveling, yeah, I'm always a little bit contentious about it. Um. Yeah. And I somewhat also do one necessarily feel like an outsider, feel like I'd be an outside of that or I'd be people consider me an outsider. Do you know what I mean?

BUNNY:

Yeah. And and those speculations are true to an extent. I'm not gonna lie to you.

BUNNY: But it's just. See I I look at India and I see home, right. And I've had. I've had horrible experiences like um, I I've I've been. Assaulted and cat called. Um public transportation groping. Uh, it's it's it was. It was bad. Like, I'm not gonna lie to you. It's not the greatest place, but. Or in all those instances, there were certain commonality. Is that made me feel mainly understand that, you know, it's not the place that's at fault, it's the people.

Sangeeta Rani

Yeah, if you wanna pause. If you wanna stop 'cause, obviously that's that's quite heavy stuff.

BUNNY:

Oh no, I'm fine. I'm I. I used to work for UM, women's mental health organisations, so I'm used to talking about it.

Sangeeta Rani
OK.

BUNNY:

I can be completely I can. I've compartmentalized. I can be completely professional about it. It's not a problem.

Sangeeta Rani

And well, there is um, I will send I think there there is a link in the information and the ethics on for counseling and well being at Leeds unique as well so.

BUNNY:

Yes, I know.

Sangeeta Rani

Yeah, please refer to that if we…

BUNNY: Yeah, absolutely.

Sangeeta Rani

But no, but goodness I I think it goes back to the idea of safety, isn't it? And the limits that we can put on two things to make us feel safe. And I think that Leeds quite nicely into UM community and. Like, what would you say community is to you?

BUNNY:
So one thing that I've really come to like, um, respect about the Leeds community is how much the women here look out for each other.Like other women here, look out for you. And and I I don't know, it sounds cliched. I don't know to call it if I if they call it Sister Hood or or just. Girl power or whatever. It's just that I've had really good experiences with Dad because even at work even, uh, you know, social places, clubs. I had women come up to me and seriously help me out.

Sangeeta Rani
Yeah. So good!

BUNNY:
Yeah, like once I I was at this club and I was waiting for my friend. And this was like pressure was weak, so I barely knew anybody. Yeah, I was there all alone. And it it was just one of those scary times. Sorry. I like clutching your phone, waiting for someone to show up.

Sangeeta Rani
Yeah.

BUNNY:
And and this this man walks up to me and and he started speaking to me. And then. I'm I'm fine because you know, I'm and I conversational set. So I am and anyone can come up to me and speak to me and I want mine.

Sangeeta Rani
Yeah.

BUNNY:
Right. But he starts to get kind of close and and I'm not. I'm not feeling it. And this, this woman just walks up to me and I've never seen her in my life. And she's like, Oh yeah, you are come. Everyone else is waiting for you. I'm just drags me away.

Sangeeta Rani
Oh my God, that's so good.

BUNNY:
And she's like, are you OK? And I'm like, yes, you saw that. You understood. Oh my God. This is so cool.

Sangeeta Rani
Last year at.

Sangeeta Rani
Yeah, I so, so community in for you right now is is a sister heard. Um, would you be able to tell me kind of the other if he could, if he had to write a definition for community for the dictionary, what would you put?

BUNNY:
(Pause to think about the question and the answer) Yeah. A place to belong.

Sangeeta Rani
A place to belong. Nice and… What would what? What does that mean? A place to belong.

BUNNY:
A place to belong, and it doesn't even its end by place. I don't mean physical place. It's just a space. Of sorts. It's somewhere where you can relate to people. So in in, in psychology, when when we're learning behavioural economics, we have these tribes, we call them tribes, right? And. And you tend to favour your tribe.

Sangeeta Rani
Yep.

BUNNY:
It comes from a very primal need, a survival. Right. So you, you want to belong to these groups, you want to be in, in these definitions. Right, people spend so much time identifying themselves without getting no themselves. Right. So.

Sangeeta Rani
Yep.

BUNNY:
A community is a place where you feel that you're with your tribe.

Sangeeta Rani
Yeah.

BUNNY:
It can be on, but it can be online. It can be a random stranger in about trying to get you from getting away from them comfortable conversation. It can be your family, it can be your religion, just a place where you feel OK. I have something in common with these people. They will accept.

Sangeeta Rani
So except didn't commonality unbelonging or the the the main kind of wasn't getting from from that.

BUNNY:
Yes, yes… Yes, yes, precisely.

Sangeeta Rani:
Yeah, OK. Um. And how would you describe your community?

BUNNY:
(Quick pause for thought) I. Don't particularly have one.

Sangeeta Rani
OK.

BUNNY:
I think I think that's a very distinct. Thing for me to say because I it took me a long time to accept it. I don't want to belong?

Sangeeta Rani
OK.

BUNNY:
So I I grew up in this very, very constrictive circles. So you were either in or you're out and and if you weren't in, you were ostracized. Like you had to fit in.

Sangeeta Rani
OK.

BUNNY:
I um so when when I got the freedom to do whatever I wanted, I I made sure that I wasn't part of any group. That you couldn't club me with people.
And and. I I got my validation elsewhere, I didn't need to be validated by people among my peers, at least in my peers. I mean, anyone in my community.

Sangeeta Rani
So. Linking that to your idea of community, it's. Kind of a bit more nomadic… then I suppose?... It's more like. Well, I I'm.

BUNNY:
Yes, 'cause, I, I I I'm a part of something, but I'm not a big deal.

Sangeeta Rani
Yeah. Yes. So you know kind of confined to that one, the community.

BUNNY:
Yes!! [emphasis]

Sangeeta Rani
Because you believe that. You know, we're part of kind of many Existences ?

BUNNY:
No, we're all a part of many communities. It's just some people identify more strongly with a certain community than others. So for example, I'll give you an example of the building and not right. So here we have a huge group of people who are in to European football.

Sangeeta Rani
It's.

BUNNY:
And they they watch games downstairs.

Sangeeta Rani
Yep.Yeah.

BUNNY:
I like watching games. I just don't go every day.

Sangeeta Rani
Yeah.

BUNNY:
I talk about it once in a while, but that's not the only thing I talked about.

Sangeeta Rani
Yeah.

BUNNY:
Right. And I feel like that is the difference.

Sangeeta Rani
So it's not. Kind of putting all your eggs in one basket. It's just?

BUNNY:
Yeah, it's.

Sangeeta Rani
You you're kind of a part of many communities, which means that you're not necessarily penned in.

BUNNY:
Part of any one of them.

Sangeeta Rani
Yes. Yeah. OK. No, that's that's really cool. Um, do you have any questions for me about community?

BUNNY:
Why do you think people want to belong to communities?

Sangeeta Rani
What? Wow. Why do I why do I fit? No. See, that can for me, please.

BUNNY:
Why do you think people want to be a part of communities?

Sangeeta Rani
Why do I think people want to be apart communities? I think it goes back to your idea, your conceptualisation, your your definition of community as a as a belonging and communities provide uh belonging for, for people that have. They may not have found in other places, so we join things to maybe, you know, feel part of something larger than ourselves. Um to relate with with other people, with other similarities. Um. So I think that's why people.

Sangeeta Rani
Do it. I think we're all a part of communities, even if we don't necessarily physically feel we're or part of a community because I think the way that we label and identify ourselves categorises us into certain groups. And then not formulate some sort of community in in whatever way that you you define the term because the term I think is. It's very overused. Um, it's.

BUNNY:
Yeah, I think this goes back to something we discussed when we met for the first time where if you keep over using something, it loses meaning.

Sangeeta Rani
Yes. Yeah, and yeah.

BUNNY:
Yeah, and.

Sangeeta Rani
Yeah. Go on, carry on.

BUNNY:
Do you think friendships are distant from communities, or do you think they're the same?

Sangeeta Rani
Who do I think friendships are distinct? So like separate to communities or?

BUNNY:
Yeah. Or do you think that they're different parts of your psyche? So you, you, you and your best friend watch a game together, but. You're both part of the community, but your friendship is different from the community. So even if you remove the community aspect from, the friendship will still be friends.

Sangeeta Rani
Yes. Yeah.

BUNNY:

Or do you think they have such a large number of communities together with that, if you removed all of them that we know someone into a friendship?

Sangeeta Rani
I think communities are like a base for getting to know multiple humans and.

Sangeeta Rani
They they provide a foundation, um that then if that felt that if that is removed, I think it's OK for that friendship to continue. Um, I think it would survive because.

Sangeeta Rani
You found someone with similarities, I say maybe be beyond the labelling of that community, if that makes sense. Um. So.

BUNNY:
So you like your relationship with them depends on your interaction with them and not whether or not you belong to the same community.

Sangeeta Rani
Yeah, I think interaction. Yes, I do. I I a big part of friendships and Getting to know people is about. Kind of continuing a conversation. Um, and that's the way you kind of get to know people better and work on building a stronger identity and and community. Um, but the the label community provides that that kind of metaphorical physical, whatever space, um to do so if you.

BUNNY:
What one one question because he said the last thing you did, I I can't fire for a separate right now. But I know what you mean.

BUNNY:
Um, what do you think about people who exploit other peoples needs for community anyways? So I'm talking about cults and and places like that and and lifestyle coaches will tell you that you have to live a certain way and be a certain way.

BUNNY:
So don't you think that that is exploitation of the need to belong?

Sangeeta Rani:
The idea of the community is positive, but as you've just given an example can be the opposite.
Even cults to a level regardless of. The level of commitment to that idea provides a sense of belonging, a sense of home to those people.

BUNNY:
Don't you think that most people in that kind of an organization are there because of the belonging and not because they completely believe, just like the the the philosophy that's being spouted?

Sangeeta Rani

Yeah, I think you you, you hit the nail on the head when I asked you to describe what community is. And you said well, it's a belonging, it's not necessarily a physical place or um, you know, anywhere that you need to go every week. It's the idea that you fit in somewhere. So cults provide that fitting in.

Sangeeta Rani

In staying um, it's it. And then those relationships between like. Oh, you know, this is my community. These are my people. These are my family. And that's when. You know the community can can be exploited or, you know, used to really great benefits like the opposite of that is like, um, you can have. You can have like alcohol, anonymous groups or narcotics anonymous.

Sangeeta Rani

You know, you you'd consider those people partly group apart your community pile apart level of your identity and then you would come relyant on them. And that's your… Well, hopefully you know those people aren't being exploited, but um, you know that that's the opposite level of of family and friendship compared to the the cult idea that you were talking about.

Sangeeta Rani

Would you say that you're the the the… idea of community that you have?

Sangeeta Rani

Oh, actually, it's the idea of community. Do you think it's? Do you think your idea community would be different if you stayed in India?

BUNNY:

I've had this idea of communities and it's. I I don't. I was 16, I think.

Sangeeta Rani

OK.

BUNNY:

Because, um, I just I I just saw people desperate to belong. All the time. Let's say they had to be a part of something. And and those who weren't lead miserable lights.
Even by my standards. So. I I just. I I kept seeing that again again. But with my family, with, with friends, with colleagues. And and I think that just really. Nailed that that. Idea into my head. That it is a biological urge to want to belong. And and it can be exploited. And. And people often don't even realize it. Realize how deep their need is still there till there gone too far.

Sangeeta Rani

So. So do you think communities unnecessary then?
BUNNY:
I don't mean to say it's unnecessary, I just think that it's under- estimated. So, people don't

realize how necessary it really is, which makes them see when you know something when, let's say you, you you, you go to a restaurant and and you know that you want this particular- dish. You're just gonna order it, eat it and leaked. Press if you don't know, you're just gonna order more it because you don't know what dish you want, so you're not gonna be psychologically satisfied till you've eaten something that really fills you up.

Sangeeta Rani
Yeah.

BUNNY:
So it it's like it's like trying to belong. It's like going to a restaurant without knowing what you really want.

Sangeeta Rani
So do you think… So yeah, I think that's a really great.

BUNNY:
I've given this some thought.

Sangeeta Rani
Yeah, I can definitely tell. It's it's really great, I think.

Sangeeta Rani
With me, I community, as you say, doesn't necessarily need to. You don't need to physically be there everyday or whatever, but the the sense.That you can belong to a group that similar than similar to you is comforting. It provides, I suppose, some level of hope. Um, you know and. It it takes out some of the the the difference is that I think. Politics and society kind of throw out this one. We can say that, OK, we, we we can't be.

BUNNY:
No, no, I actually find agree with that because I think politics and society are also communities. If you look at polar legs, there's rice community to market central, the left and whatnot, and and society. You have conservate if people you have liberal people, you have moderates, you have, you have people who believe in in the Flat Earth and and and you know.

Sangeeta Rani
Yep. I think I'm speaking more in the sense that. There are certain groups, so certain characteristics that aren't favoured by. The by… Popular political groups and then this is filled out into society and it's a social media and general media, which then makes certain groups feel different or alienate alienated or alone. So.

BUNNY:
Speaking of social media, I have another unique question for you.

Sangeeta Rani
OK.

BUNNY:

So. Social media has given people the power that no, they've never had before. Just giving people the power to validate their opinion by finding their own communities. Finding whatever instinct community event they're gonna be a part of. There, there's subreddits on on pedophilia and and being a pedophile. Right. And and their their read, it's about murderers and and confessions and everything. Do you think that this warped? Um confirmation bias providing social media? Will do any good at any point in time. Or do you think it'll destroy our fundamental idea?

Sangeeta Rani
(overwhelmed by the question) (how do I answer this? Do I even need to?)
There's, you know, really dark groups and communities where people find a sense of belonging for dark material. I I'll, I'll say I don't, I don't. They optimist in me says I I don't believe it would destroy the notion of community because it because they are so large. Um, and so vast. So you have, like, communities that university, you know, for learning for your your. Kind of socials. Your hobby is things like these are these are all community. Is that somewhat overpower the minority. So I do think like the idea of a community is somewhat everlasting. I just think in the terms that we want in the way that we want to identify with. We just wanna kind of trying and.

How you said before community in May have lost its meaning 'cause it's used so march. If they're not finding a way to describe it, um. Yeah, it's funny waited to describe it in a in a in a more kind of careful way. You know what I mean?

BUNNY: You know, I'll just talking with community as well. You can binding me of this one song that I used to listen to. Um, I I just heard it somewhere and it was like a year where my couldn't get rid of. I'll send it to you when this when the interview is over, I think I think you.

Sangeeta Rani
OK, cool. No, that's great. Would you?

BUNNY:
It's a bit dark, so it's. I'm giving you your warning!

Sangeeta Rani
OK. Thanks.

Sangeeta Rani
Would you say that the pandemic has affected? Any notions of of community for you?

BUNNY:
I think the pandemic has disrupted communities. So um, but what it did to me was that it made me realize that I'm just fine. I I don't have to do long anywhere, at least for at least right now.

Sangeeta Rani
So it's strengthened your sense of self?

BUNNY:
He's a...Yeah, it's it's like it made me realize that. Even when all these people were were completely missing it over, you know, not having anyone to be with or do something with or, you know, just anything.

Sangeeta Rani
Yeah.

BUNNY:
I was fine. As as psychopathic is that sound?

Sangeeta Rani
Why would you say it's like a psychopathic?

BUNNY:
'cause that's how it was described to me.

Sangeeta Rani
Oh, OK.

BUNNY:
Well, you can read this OK with it. I'm like I am.

Sangeeta Rani
Yeah.

BUNNY:
Well, like you said today I'm like watch me.

Sangeeta Rani
They didn't ask more personality dependent there whether you want to belong into communities or not?

BUNNY:
Um. I think that. Anything that is against natural order is something that is wrong with you. And the ability to fight that instinct. And the ability to not do something that you are biologically programmed to do. Is something that you should. Keep in check.

Sangeeta Rani
OK.

BUNNY:

So I I won't be as radical as to say that, you know I've never be apart. If anything, I love being like this. I just… I just like to put it in the sense that I like a safe distance from things.

Sangeeta Rani
OK, that makes sense.

BUNNY:
I I yeah, I I like. I have my zones like it circles around me and I'm very happy letting people into the zone that I see they will fit into.

Sangeeta Rani
Yeah. So you are somewhat forming your own communities, but with your own boundaries, you're you're creating the rules and you've got control over it essentially.

BUNNY:
Yes. Yes, mostly because I don't. I have issues with the authority today. I don't like being told what to do.

Sangeeta Rani
Uh-huh.

BUNNY:
So.

Sangeeta Rani
Yeah, yeah.

BUNNY:
It just, it just feels like. I it I, I've, I've, I've, I've, I wasted a lot of time doing something. Because I thought others are doing it, I just. I felt like the monkey next in line to jump. So many times and I didn't do anything about it. I'm like, this is what everyone else is doing. I should do it too. Without realizing, that's not what I actually working.

Sangeeta Rani
Yeah. OK. That, that, that that's really interesting and I think.

BUNNY:
And so after that I just realized that you know. I'm going to die at some point. Might as well live my life.

Sangeeta Rani
(awkward) factually correct, I do think it's about… Um, I do think that it's about living your life and and I think it's a good approach that you. Yeah. It's nice…

BUNNY:
One one thing that really changed the way I look is um, so initially I was going to go study finance was gonna numbers the whole country and stuff. I wanted money. I wanted a

superficial life, and then I started working to this organization where I met people. And I mean people who were been through what can only be described as hell.

Sangeeta Rani
Gosh.

BUNNY:
I spoke to Uighar Muslim who told me how this woman told me how she was going. She was afraid she was going to be murdered by a monk. Imagine having to tell that to somebody. Imagine walking up to someone and saying a monk tried to kill me today.

Sangeeta Rani
Yeah.

BUNNY:
That is not something people are going to believe. Just think about it. Like if someone walked up to you and said that a very normal looking monk is he's trying to kill me. Whose side are you gonna take?

Sangeeta Rani
Yeah.

BUNNY:
Right. And and I I met Kashmiri Pandits, uh from Kashmir who had migrated back into India and and this woman she told me how she felt unsafe. Looking at her own countries military. 'cause like because I knew every time they came, they brought back the death with them.

Sangeeta Rani
Hmm.

BUNNY:
And I can't even imagine feeling that unsafe. Right. And and then I spoke to people who were refugees from Xinjiang. They were Uighar Muslims from China.

Sangeeta Rani
Yeah.

BUNNY:
I don't know if you know these communities and these people, I'm just you can look up like later tonight.

Sangeeta Rani
Yeah, there's no, I. I'm. Yeah, I do know about about these things, yeah.

BUNNY: And and when I spoke to them, they said that. We will re educated. On what it meant to be a human being.

Sangeeta Rani
Wow.

BUNNY:
Like, imagine being told what you are, who you are and why you have to be that way. And when you don't listen, you get cattle prodding. Right, so after after doing after studying and researching and and speaking to all of these people, the one feeling I couldn't shake is that I can't go back to doing whatever the **** I was going to do.

BUNNY:
And so I switch from a finance based course to a policy based course. And I want to work and development. I want to work with poverty. I want to work with people.

Sangeeta Rani
Yeah.

Sangeeta Rani
Wow.

BUNNY:
And and I just that's like that's super cliche and that you know, are there a lot of people who are inspired after seeing people worse off for them? But, you know, it's just me. And that's what happened. So I, you know, it's fine if I'm a cliche, I don't mind.

Sangeeta Rani
I think what I can I can tell from speaking to you so far is that your life experiences have really impacted your life in the direction that you and the next steps that you take, um, you know, essentially whether you're left or right.

BUNNY:
No, not to be. To be very clear, more accurate from that, I'd say that. I chose the life expense experiences that I choose to attach meaning here. If if I picked everything in my life that happened to me, and if I let all of those things impact me, then I'd be in a very different place right now because I went through some very depressing stuff in the middle.

Sangeeta Rani
Yeah.

BUNNY:
So I I just I I feel like I cherry picked things that I've wanted. To be a part of my life. And and just. Really worked on those bits. Rather than, you know, like everything that happened to me, define who I am.

Sangeeta Rani
Absolutely....You're focusing on the on if... gaining, regaining that control and choosing what is important to you and what isn't.

BUNNY:
Yep.

Sangeeta Rani
Um. You know would so.

Sangeeta Rani
The element of control um.

BUNNY:
One of my problems, my flaws even.

Sangeeta Rani
You know everything is it can be seen as a strength or a weakness. It depends, you know which way you're looking at it. Um. You know, how would you say that the community is or the the groups of belonging, um, here in Leeds? Would you say that there's been groups or belongings here that you found?

BUNNY: Yeah, I mean, I found a lot of groups here just. No where that felt. Important. Nor that felt like this is more important to me than that.

Sangeeta Rani
OK so.

BUNNY:
Very much.

Sangeeta Rani
Sorry, carry on.

BUNNY:
It was just a group. It wasn't. You know, if it even now it's. I want to like, go have a coffee with someone I can. I can pull someone up and be like I can call you up and be like hey, do you wanna go grab a cup of tea and you're not gonna say no? I'm hoping.

Sangeeta Rani
Yeah.

Sangeeta Rani
Yeah.

BUNNY:
That would.

Sangeeta Rani
I'm always down for coffee.

BUNNY:
Or the other day I came back from a long day and just talking to [name] and, you know, we spoke for a good 30 minutes and that was fun. Great. So. I do have people that I connect with. But as far as communities are concerned, I can order them in any specific way. I can't tell you, you know what, I I am this and I go on to this.

Sangeeta Rani
Yeah.

Sangeeta Rani
Do you?

BUNNY:
The only the only description I have of myself and what I do with my life and that's economics.

Sangeeta Rani
So do you think that would change? Um in a couple of months, so we're in March now, let's say in. In May, June, would you? Do you think that, you know, as summer goes on? Um, deeper into your course. Do you think that would change?

BUNNY:
Um, I think at that point will change from my studies to my work.

Sangeeta Rani
To different so your communities would shift essentially.

BUNNY:
It wouldn't shifted, just expand because I do plan on working in economics so.

Sangeeta Rani
Interesting.

BUNNY:
It would just shift overtime. Yeah, I I feel like the circle just gets bigger overtime.

Sangeeta Rani
OK, that's that's really cool.

BUNNY:
Let me check. You're born. You essentially. No two people, your mom and your dad, and then they should be off to school and you find people. And he made any meat features and then you grow up. You need other people. And then you go to uni, make friends, you start work, you make better friends. I'm hoping.

Sangeeta Rani
Yeah.

BUNNY:
And and then you know, you you you make your own family and and you try and I identify it to be a part of. A different community. I'm not saying that that's how I I want my life to go. And I'm not saying that's how life should go. I'm just saying that's what happens on average.

Sangeeta Rani
Yeah. Yeah. Um. OK, that's really cool. 'cause, I think obviously I hopefully will have a second follow up. So I think it'll be really interesting to see how these ideas are developed and changed over a period of time. Um, well, I wanted to talk about was the relationship between India and the UK and. Did for example. For example, like um.In my great granddad came over to the UK I, I think it was like 52 or 54.

BUNNY:
Well, that's long ago.

Sangeeta Rani
Yeah, I know. Right. And so he came and he was one of the first Punjabi people to come over to do to the UK. Um, and it's meant that the relationship that my family has with England and how they they like, they love the monarchy, the, you know, um. You know things like that. But they're also like well. We wouldn't necessarily be here. If so, I think that would happen over there. Um, what are your thoughts and opinions between the relationship between the two countries?

BUNNY:
So um, I I used to work with diplomats, so I have very ready made answer for this. But that's not the one I feel like I should use right now. So I I'd say that the relationship with me and you know, Britain and in there right now is very different from what it was for the previous generation because what my parents saw was the enemy or the one that that made life harder for them. And what my grandparents or was even worse than that.

Sangeeta Rani
Yeah.

BUNNY:
So, basically oppressed people. And and and so. When I think about how perceptions have changed, I I just I I see the the ship. Right, because. There are people still with bitter feelings against um. You know the country and there are people here who still live down and Indian food stuff. I know I've met a few. Um, but I I feel like. At this point, if I were to meet someone. In the UK and become good friends with them. My nationality would be the least of my problems.

Sangeeta Rani
OK. Why do you think so?

BUNNY:
But that does not mean that I don't strongly identify with my nationality. I love my country. But it just means that. Time changes everything.

Sangeeta Rani
Yeah.

BUNNY:
So I have a tattoo like right here. [shows tattoo over video] I don't know if you can see it.

Sangeeta Rani
Oh, cool. Like a an Infinity sign thing.
BUNNY:
These are pause. These are for my dog.

Sangeeta Rani
No, it's cute.

BUNNY:
This is this is my tattoo.

Sangeeta Rani
Yeah, it's pretty nice. It's actually super cool.

BUNNY:
Yeah. Yeah, I designed it myself. So in in, in in, well, mathematical language of sorts and open delta like a delta is a triangle, small triangle and open delta means change. So when a particular number keeps changing.

Sangeeta Rani
Oh.

BUNNY:
We use the open delta. It's your signify that it's a variable.

Sangeeta Rani
Yeah.

BUNNY:
Right, um and the Infinity is that it's forever. Right, So what my tattoo means is that change is the only constant.

Sangeeta Rani
No. Wow, that is very profound.

BUNNY:
Yeah. And I've had this for. Six years now, five years now. And I still feel it's true.

Sangeeta Rani
Yeah.

BUNNY:
So the only thing that changed, the only thing that doesn't change is change itself.

Sangeeta Rani
Yeah, they'll. They'll always be nothing is the same.
BUNNY:
So. Yeah, nothing stays the same. Nothing is forever.

Sangeeta Rani
No.

BUNNY:
Despite what diamond markets tell you.

Sangeeta Rani
Yeah.

BUNNY:
So um. What I came to, I what I've come to understand them all of that. Was. Uh, there are people who still harbour negative feelings weren't working. There are people who were completely indifferent and don't even know where Indian independence themes. And I'm not kidding. There are people who don't know when. Independence Day is.

Sangeeta Rani
As in from like you're adding people from India or people from here.

BUNNY:
No, people from India.

Sangeeta Rani
No, OK.

BUNNY:
Like I, I've met people from India who do not know when they're Independence Day is.

Sangeeta Rani
Mmm. And how does that make you feel?

BUNNY: And and and that's it makes I feel like it's they're just ignorant. I I don't blame them for not being patriotic or something. I just think they're ignorant buffoons.

Sangeeta Rani
OK, so so you think it's important to know like?

Sangeeta Rani
What's going on? Or?

BUNNY:
I feel like if this is best characterized by an Orwell, George Orwell quote. Uh, he says the worst kind of illiterate is the political elected because he who do not, who does not know he's road bike, does not know himself.

Sangeeta Rani
Wow. Yes.

BUNNY:
Yeah, yeah. And so I I feel like there are some basics you should know. Right. And and I understand that what I'm I think is basic might be profound knowledge to some people. But you have to know these things. They concern your day to day life.

Sangeeta Rani
Yeah.

BUNNY:
Like if someone came up to you and said, you know, you and your husband or not equal. You are going to punch them in the face. But but if you look at the United States Constitution, there's no part of the Constitution that says a man and a woman are equal. And anyway.

Sangeeta Rani
Yeah.

BUNNY:
There's no presidents judgment or or ruling to to accommodate for the fact. And that causes a lot of problems for them.

Sangeeta Rani
Yeah.

BUNNY:
So if you don't know that you're going to be in trouble. Right. This affects you. You're a woman. It obviously affects you.

Sangeeta Rani
Yeah.

BUNNY:
Yep. Right. So it just it feels like there's some knowledge that that's just detrimental. I mean,

looking back at the at the person or the friend, sadly who didn't know when Independence Day was, she's probably part of a family whose three or four generations ago fought for that independence. Suffered the oppression.

Sangeeta Rani
Wow.

BUNNY:
I feel like you're just forgetting that part of yourself. And that is not OK.

Sangeeta Rani
So that history of all ancestry and where we come from is very important?

BUNNY:
Voices.

Sangeeta Rani
Pardon.

BUNNY:
I really can't hear your voice is breaking up.

Sangeeta Rani
Hello. Can you hear me now?

BUNNY: Oh yeah, it's a little better.

Sangeeta Rani
So I said that [TO CLARIFY BUNNYS POINT] the importance of knowing our ancestry. Is it significant to Kind of who we are as as a person, is that what you are kind of saying.

BUNNY:
Yes, yes, you need it. You are. You need to know where you're from.

Sangeeta Rani
Yeah, yeah.

BUNNY:
Those are things you need to know.

Sangeeta Rani
So.

BUNNY:
It's it's. It's like the human version. It's the knowledge version of DNA.

Sangeeta Rani
Ah.

BUNNY:
You won't exist without your journey.

Sangeeta Rani
Yeah.

BUNNY:
You won't exist without those people, so it's important to remember. By and who they are.

Sangeeta Rani
I think that's very, very true. I mean you said something because we were talking earlier at the start and I was like, oh, you know, I'd, I'd probably feel I'd probably be made to feel like an outsider if I were to go to India. What do you think are the characteristics that would do that?

BUNNY:
So, um, I I'd say I'd say it's just an Indian perception. They will look at you. They will look at your accent and they will just think that, you know, she's not from here.

Sangeeta Rani
Really.

BUNNY:
You might look at Indian but because. People the Indians may be very welcoming to other people, but they also have very strong sense of community. And if you are different, they will be nice to you, but you will not be one of them.

Sangeeta Rani
OK. So then again a strong sense of belonging full your own it is it, it's it's, yeah, so it's.

BUNNY:
Yes it is. For your blood! (laughing).

Sangeeta Rani
People. Your blood, yeah.

BUNNY:
Yeah.

Sangeeta Rani
Yeah. So it's, it's that kind of perception has interesting, um. So we've talked about kind of community about that, but the self, um kind of the final area of conversation with is online learning and obviously with the pandemic, it's meant a massive shift to, um, learning

through our technology, essentially. Um, would you be able to tell me a little bit about your experiences that you've had?

BUNNY:
So I feel like I'm a very biased person to answer this question because I am like the biggest possible advocate to offline learning.

Sangeeta Rani
Not… Yeah. OK. I can't. I can't handle this. I can't do this. No, I walk out. I can't handle zoom… and teams calls and and prerecorded ********.

Sangeeta Rani
What did not like about it? So what? What did you not like about it?

BUNNY:
Oh, it's very. Non personal.

Sangeeta Rani
Umm.

BUNNY:
I feel like transfer of knowledge has to be in person. It's it's not a Wi-Fi connection. You can just sit in the other room and use. Right, it's it's not that this is sociative and and I do understand a lot of learning comes from resources that have been written years ago and and that's fine.

Sangeeta Rani
It's.

BUNNY:
That's that's resources. That's where you get your information.

Sangeeta Rani
Yeah.

BUNNY:
And now analysis this has to happen in person. Right. Because there's this whole aspect to learning that gets completely glossed over when you're not there.

Sangeeta Rani
Yep.

BUNNY:
Right, you you don't get that feeling with you. It's harder to get into the psychology of learning when you're looking at a screen instead of a person.

Sangeeta Rani
Yeah.

BUNNY:
So if you're in a class, you have the decency of looking at your professor in the face. Right. Because you are in the physical space for learning and that puts you in a mental space for learning. Like, it's like Pavlov's dogs dog experiment. You know, you you bring the bell, you you feel the saliva.

Sangeeta Rani
Yeah.

BUNNY:
In this case, you enter the classroom, you think about it.

Sangeeta Rani
Right.

BUNNY:
Is to possible do that from your bedroom?

Sangeeta Rani
Yeah.

BUNNY:
In short.

Sangeeta Rani
Yeah.

BUNNY:
Yep

Sangeeta Rani
That becomes a community in practice through learning because you're an environment that encourages it.

BUNNY:
Let me.

Sangeeta Rani
Uh.

BUNNY:
Yes, it I feel like uh classroom is designed to instigate some form of intellectual questioning, that's just not possible online.

Sangeeta Rani
Yeah.

BUNNY:
It's there's so much more interaction you can tell if you know the person teaching you is interested in teaching you or not. You can tell if you're interested in learning or not. So for example, if you're in, excuse me if you're in an online class, you have no way of knowing whether you're not interested because you know you're surrounded by all laundry you haven't taken out the trash, and you. Forgot to eat breakfast or or you're just not interested in the subject. Like when you're sitting in the class and and you know you still forgot to eat breakfast and you and and there is laundry in your room. But if all you can think about is what the professor is saying, you know that you get.

Sangeeta Rani
Yeah.

BUNNY:
Right. And if you don't care, you're not gonna show up.

Sangeeta Rani
Yeah.

BUNNY:
So I feel like it weeds out the unnecessary. And and keeps in the good. It's like a natural filter system.I I'm huge. Fan is having classes and different buildings at different times in different spaces for different periods of time.With different people. Because I feel like if you had, if you're able to keep up with all those different schedules and function your brain to work with those different people. Then you're really putting the effort in.

Sangeeta Rani
Yeah.

BUNNY:
Because no one is going to walk 2 kilometers to go to a different building, climb up a bunch of stairs. Do not enjoy a class. Why else would you be there?

Sangeeta Rani
So it it is.

BUNNY:
Because if you think about school, it's you're confined. You have a classroom. The teacher walks in and out, and you're done, right? There's no effort for you to do anything other than just sit there?

Sangeeta Rani
Yeah.

BUNNY:
Right. Whereas in university you have to put in the effort. You have to get up, you have to grow that you have to speak to your professor, and if you're not interested, you're not gonna learn.

Sangeeta Rani
Yeah. So at this stage in in higher education, you're saying, if anything, it is about the commitment to want to be there in order to get anything out of it. But it's very important.

BUNNY:
Yes. I speak to people on the masters program who don't want to be here. But they are they ever do because of online education?

Sangeeta Rani
Yeah.

BUNNY:
And I don't appreciate it. Honestly, you're just asking me it. It devalues the respect I have for my subject.

Sangeeta Rani
Finish.

Sangeeta Rani
OK.

BUNNY:
What is the difference between me slogging through hours of research and another girl just watching lectures and zoom?

Sangeeta Rani
So you won't not actual physical interaction you want that may be sent for belonging to that course through the physical space.

BUNNY:
Yes. No, they don't want to. I don't want a Belonging to the course. I I want to learn. And I can't do that properly sitting in my room. Or is it like?

Sangeeta Rani
But, but would you say that's probably would you say?

Sangeeta Rani
How am I gonna phrase this um?

Sangeeta Rani

Obviously one of the one of the significant differences between learning online and learning in a in a like a lecture or something is the difference of people, the amount of people in there, so you have.

BUNNY:
Sitting with one professor for one hour or alone in a room and learning by myself, I actually prefer that 'cause I get along faster.

Sangeeta Rani
So the interaction isn't an issue for you or it's just more so the 5th member.

BUNNY:
The interaction with the professors and issue for me that is something I want it. Someone who's teaching me. That's a good thing.

Sangeeta Rani
Uh-huh.

BUNNY:
The interaction with the students is preferable, but not necessary.

Sangeeta Rani
OK. Interesting.

Sangeeta Rani
I personally would say that it's a balanced both because.

Sangeeta Rani
As you said about analysis, analysis is so important that you get different analysis from the different people that you are with because everyone has their own interpretations of stuff, so that naturally elevates. The level of knowledge that you'd be kind of Co creating with everyone because I'll be so many different things to talk about. Um. Yeah, that sounds great. Do you have any questions for me? Anything you wanted to ask me?

BUNNY:
As a PhD student. How do you feel it, Your sense of belonging in a class room has changed.

Sangeeta Rani
Oh wow. As a PhD student, how do I feel with my sense of belonging has changed in the classroom? I think I was a tad. Unlucky with the timing that my PhD started because for the 1st 2 1/2 year is it's it was in lockdown so I didn't have an office. I yeah, I I think I went too. My the first year...

BUNNY:
I think wants to jump out of the building. Listening to that it just.

Sangeeta Rani

Yeah, it. It was a very strange experience. Um. So it's nice to be back. In a in a classroom or in a room. But now?

BUNNY:

I wanted to ask you one thing, though. Before I got, I'm so sorry for interrupting.

Sangeeta Rani

Yeah, go.

BUNNY:

Why did you insist we have this meeting online?

Sangeeta Rani

Because I. Wanted. I think it'll be interesting to see the difference between doing it online and doing it in person. Um, and also because I think this is very, very representative of the learning that we have right now. And then.

BUNNY:

Oh yeah.

Sangeeta Rani

When we speak again, it's gonna be in person, which by then like, I don't know if you got the email, but April 1st is went all.

Sangeeta Rani

Site rules are uplifted at on campus, so there will be in, in, in class teaching again. So then what I really wanted to make sure my methodology is at the methods I'm using our reflective of the learning that's going on.

Sangeeta Rani

So that that's why.

BUNNY:

She quite interesting from a research perspective.

Sangeeta Rani

laughing. Yeah. Um.

BUNNY:

One psychology and education quite a bit before the interview. I mean, I don't need to enter data and worry, but I was just curious and I can't help it.

Sangeeta Rani

No, you said you come across like very um.

Sangeeta Rani
Knowledgeable about the social sciences and psychology in particular, which is which is great. It means there's a different.

BUNNY:
All normal, it's just um. So I have to confess, I was obsessed with abnormal psychology. At some point in in my life.

Sangeeta Rani
Yeah.

BUNNY:
So it it it it all started when I I started reading this book by Mark Manson called the psychopathic. Hey and it's about how. You know, the human psyche is so unique and different with each person that even when it's a diagnosable illness, there's nothing you can do to guests properly.

Sangeeta Rani
Yeah.

BUNNY:
Because at the end of the book, he writes that if we spent more time in boardrooms and less time in prisons, he'd meet more psychopaths.

Sangeeta Rani
Mmm.

BUNNY:
So. You know, after reading that I got extremely interested in in, in psychology and social sciences. So I I've read behavioral economics, I've read, um, heuristics and biases. Um, I, I've, I've. I've studied extensively on on human behavior and what it means.

Sangeeta Rani
Yeah.

BUNNY:
Uh. Facial tics, involuntary muscle responses. Um, deception sensors meaning of dreams.

Sangeeta Rani
So you very very interested in. That side of of psychology, which is.

BUNNY:
No, no. It's just pleasure meeting. Like I'm interested in all sides it psychology like.
Something as simple as trauma care can be very, very unique given each persons experience.

Sangeeta Rani
Absolutely. And I I.

BUNNY:
I read about this research where, um. Mothers were were subjected to this kind of music. Right. And and they were given food afterwards and something sweet always right. And at the end of the study, they found like when the children live on, whenever they declared that music, the children wanted something sweet.

Sangeeta Rani
No. Wow. Also a very cool I'm.

BUNNY:
So So everything is from.

Sangeeta Rani
Not great. It's good.

BUNNY:
Yeah, neonatal psychology to like anything, I was just. It it went to a point where it was You know, obsessive reading.

Sangeeta Rani
So what made you do? And what made you not do psychology then?

BUNNY:
I don't have a future as a psychologist or is this cycle as a researcher in psychology? It's just an interest, it's not something I'm good at.

Sangeeta Rani
Oh…

BUNNY:
I don't have. I don't have the personality to it's necessary 'cause. I'm good in observation. I'm not good at empathy.

Sangeeta Rani
You're very self reflective and I think that's. Actually really quite cool. Um, it's actually weird our interview now, like well, I interviewed in. It's very conversational, which is what I like, I think, um, I like. I want you to ask me questions. I want if you think. Oh, OK, but well, you know, why did you choose Leeds or whatever? I don't know. It it. That's what makes this really cool. Um.
So thank you very much for doing that. I've written across something like goodness um. But.

BUNNY:
Are you fine? It's it's starting to move right on one side.

Sangeeta Rani
Yeah, im okay

Sangeeta Rani
Pardon.

BUNNY:
It's starting to look a little red on one side.

Sangeeta Rani
Yeah, not great.

BUNNY:
Maybe it's just the camera.

Sangeeta Rani
It's fine, I work it out. Um, so it's been. Yeah. Really lovely to chat about all these different experiences with you. And I we really interested to see how. Kind of. The conversation developed in West March, now April, May so in May will try again and we'll see. Um, how these things that we've tried about have either progressed or grass stay the same. And then so yeah, I'm really interested to see you. Your notion of community especially at that time. Um. But is there any other questions you wanted to ask me? We've covered community.

BUNNY:
Got it.

BUNNY:
What do you want me to? Yeah. Do you want me to continue reading up on these things and continuing my? Let's call it pleasure reading. Or would you rather I give you…

Sangeeta Rani
Honestly, your honest opinion and reflections and opinion, honest opinions and reflections experiences are great. Um, obviously I'm not asked you to to read anything before this either, so it's just kind of just come up if you have any questions about the general. Any questions that you wanted to ask me like you like you have done really, really well. Um, they're always welcome 'cause. I think that's what makes this conversational. Is that true, Renfro? I want it to be like. You know how we how we chatted beforehand? Um, before this is super chill when it so it's similar to that, really. Um, but no, thank you.

BUNNY:
Oh yes.

Sangeeta Rani
Say again?

BUNNY:
Like I've been there once before. I really like the coffee place we've been to last time.

Sangeeta Rani
Oh yeah, it's so good.

BUNNY:
I mean, I used to like the football, but but then like after last time, I'm just like, I really like that place because I go to the same couch, sit there and read my book. And like, no one disturbs me and I love it.

Sangeeta Rani
Once you find that space, it's very, very special.

BUNNY:
Yeah.

Sangeeta Rani
It's incredible.

BUNNY:
Back home, it was the beach as its corner, the beach that no one could.

Sangeeta Rani
Oh, that is very nice to have a beach very close to her.

BUNNY:
It's like you have to walk pretty far into the beach like post this fishing area, which is very sketchy, but I I knew how to get through. So like I I wasn't in any sort of danger. I just go like this far corner, the beach that no one else could find because it was like past the Pier.

Sangeeta Rani
Yeah. Good. Uh.

BUNNY:
And Ernest?

Sangeeta Rani
Gosh, well, I wish we would have a place like that.

BUNNY:
And. Close.

Sangeeta Rani
It must be.

BUNNY:
Like I miss sleeping in the sun.

Sangeeta Rani
Oh goodness. Wow, I didn't think I'm quite ever been able to do that. There's not many warm beaches here.

BUNNY:
Yeah, I went to one of your beaches, by the way, I got hypothermia!

Sangeeta Rani
Yeah, and yeah, it's not great. It's like summer now…

BUNNY:
I couldn't even take my gloves off.

Sangeeta Rani
Yeah, I bet. I bet if if not.

BUNNY:
It was horrible. I was so sad.

Sangeeta Rani
Bless you. Well, in next week I'll be back in India and you can go to your beach then and, um, have a lovely day.

BUNNY:
Thanks. Oh yeah, I told my parents that. Um. My my parents are like, let's go somewhere. When you're here, you know, let's go on vacation. I'm like, I want a Beach, and Hotel.

Sangeeta Rani
Yes.

BUNNY:
Wherever that is, I don't care.

Sangeeta Rani
Yes, I think that's a very good idea.

Sangeeta Rani
Absolutely. My goodness. Um, but I won't take anymore of your time this evening. Just massive thank you.

BUNNY:
It was wonderful talking to you.

Sangeeta Rani
Yeah, it's been so lovely. I learned so much. Um and your ideas and everything. It's just really cool to, to hear your opinions on things.

BUNNY:
Oh my God. We've been speaking for an hour and 20 minutes. I didn't notice that.

Sangeeta Rani
Well, I'm. I'm glad that you've enjoyed yourself and I'm gonna get this.

BUNNY:
Actually, eat my food now.

Sangeeta Rani
Yeah, me too. Should be fine. Not even cooked anything. Um, I'm will get this written up and then write down to initial thoughts and we'll go through that. Um, under the time. Um.

BUNNY:
Yes.

Sangeeta Rani
And then we can think of.

BUNNY:
Oh, I'm going back home. Uh, end of this week, as you know, and will be completely available and coming back on the 10th of April. So if you have anything to discuss with me before that, you can just message me and I'll have my phone on me at all. Thanks.

Sangeeta Rani
Not a problem.

Sangeeta Rani
Beautiful. Thank you so much. Have a beautiful time in India and um, I'll see what and when you come back.

BUNNY:
Yeah. Yeah, there's something.

Sangeeta Rani
Take care.

BUNNY:
Yeah, too. Bye.