“C’est compliqué!”*: A Critical Exploration of how African international students in France negotiate aspects of power, identity and agency

Submitted by Nicole Laurie Guéraçague to the University of Exeter as thesis for the degree of Doctor of Education in TESOL, September 2020

I certify that all material in this thesis which is not my own work has been identified and that any material that has previously been submitted and approved for the award of a degree by this or any other university has been acknowledged.

Signature……

* “It’s complicated!”

Abstract

This thesis explored the experiences of two African international students in France during their first-year master's program, specifically highlighting aspects of identity, agency and power. African students are particularly drawn to France to pursue higher education degrees because of the future prospects for improved professional opportunities and also the desire to help improve the quality of life in their home countries. Despite common French language proficiency and similar education systems, these students face particular challenges due to socio-historic standing with regard to France's legacy of colonialism in Africa. This critical study aims to advance understanding of how these students negotiated identities and used agency in their encounters with power discourses in their new social environment.

By way of critical qualitative approach, I gathered data during one school year from two African students through semi-structured, in-depth, narrative interviews conducted in French. The participating students were chosen on the basis of their status as new international students from the African continent studying civil engineering in their first year at a university in France. They were interviewed for sixty to ninety minutes, five times over two semesters. This method allowed the participants to express and reflect upon the perceptions of their experiences in the new host context. After transcription, the data was coded inductively allowing themes to emerge under the constructs of identity, agency and power.

The major themes that dominated the students' narratives were related to belonging, discrimination and financial insecurity. Critical incidents were identified which uncovered the participants' flexibility as they negotiated identity options, agency as they resisted negative imposed identities and power as they retold experiences related to stereotyping and racial discrimination. The findings were analyzed within the

frameworks of Critical and Postcolonial, Decoloniality, Critical Race Theories as well as Bourdieu's Theory of Practice, namely, field, habitus and capital. Unexpected findings included experiences with discrimination and racism, the role of faith as capital and the influence of intrinsic motivation, national and imagined identities and the educated habitus influencing the participants' academic and social experiences as African international students in France.

This study was significant as it exposed the challenges and socially unjust experiences international students of color face while studying in France. Additionally, it provided a nuanced view of these students' personal experiences by spotlighting aspects of identity, agency and power as crucial components related to well-being. This information could be useful to university teachers and administrators in France who consider the successful adaptation and fair treatment of this student population to be important.

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I would like to extend special thanks to my research participants, without whom this study would not have been possible. I am honored that they were willing to openly share their feelings and confidences with me. I cherish our relationship and wish them well in all their future endeavors.

Finally, I would like to thank my husband for believing I would accomplish what I set out to do. He, along with my sisters and my six grown children, continue to be a source of encouragement, inspiration and strength.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

André (pseudonym) came to France from a country in Africa to study for a master's degree in civil engineering. I met with him one late afternoon at a café in a French college town. We were both embarking on something new: I was about to begin the data collection phase of my thesis, and he was about to be interviewed by his English teacher! Early into the conversation, he told me,

> I know it's a great thing to have the opportunity to come to France to study. You have to have ambition. You have to fight to succeed. We Africans have a fighting spirit. To do well, you have to depend on yourself. You have to fight. It's a battle.

Elise (pseudonym) and I met for our first interview at a small tearoom across from the university library, that had a private area where we could sip our tea and talk freely. She had been in France for a few weeks and explained that she felt disoriented and alone, while voicing her purpose for studying so far from home.

> France will be my new home for the next two years. I look out the window and say it's really different as far as climate and everything goes; I haven't adapted yet. I've lost my bearings and now I have to reconstruct new bearings because I'm all alone; there's no one but me. If I stay in this field of study, it's to return to my country and help in some way.

International study-abroad programs date back to the beginnings of higher education, as scholars chose to cross borders in search of new knowledge (UNESCO, 2009). Nyarko and Ephraim cite Project Atlas's definition of an international student

as “one who undertakes all or part of his/her higher education experience in a country other than the home country” (Project Atlas, cited in Nyarko and Ephraim, 2016:117). UNESCO also defines an internationally mobile student as, “one who crosses a border for the purpose of pursuing her studies and is enrolled in an educational program outside his or her country of origin” leading to a degree (UNESCO, 2020). These “degree-mobile students” are differentiated from “credit-mobile students” who are engaged in a short exchange or a study abroad trip (Migration Data Portal, 2020). In 2017, the number of students studying abroad was calculated at 222 million, 5.3 million of whom were enrolled in a degree program, a number that has increased by 71 percent over the last ten years and is expected to increase to 9 million by 2027 (Migration Data Portal, 2020). The European Union stands out as one of the leading hosts in international mobility, receiving more than 250,000 students in 2017 (Campusfrance, 2019).

African international student mobility represents seven percent of the world’s international student population, and France is the fourth most popular destination (Campusfrance, 2020). According to UNESCO, as of 2016 Africans accounted for 43 percent of international students at French universities (UNESCO cited in campusfrance.org, 2016). In 2018/2019, France was host to 358,000 inbound mobile students which represents a 21 percent increase as French institutions continue to attract growing number of students from French-speaking Africa, although it has shown a decline in enrollment from emerging countries, i.e. the Middle East, non-EU nations and English-speaking Africa (Campusfrance, 2019).

The international study experience is meant to be an enriching cultural, educational and personal growth experience, having the beneficial effect of expanding worldviews, understanding and perspectives. It stretches students to adjust,

question, be critical and make sense of their new situations. International students view their experience as an opportunity to learn about another culture firsthand, extend their personal horizons and, when applicable, improve their communication skills in another language (Bian, 2013; Mazzaral and Soutar, 2002; Sherry et al., 2010; Di Pietro and Page, 2008). This international study experience provides fertile ground for students to mature and gain confidence by successfully surmounting obstacles independent from their home support systems (Sherry et al., 2010). These students are especially goal-oriented, driven by the prospect of greater prestige, better employment opportunities and even the possibility of future leadership roles in government when they return to their home countries as a result of their degrees obtained abroad (Benesch, 2001:86; Bian, 2013; Lee and Rice, 2007).

The "push-pull model" is useful to explain international students' motivation to study abroad for the purposes of obtaining a degree from a country other than their own. This includes their choice of host countries (Bian, 2013; Bouoiyour et al., 2014; Cummins,1986; Kringelbach,2015; Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002). The principal *push* motivation is usually due to greater educational opportunities in their chosen field, poor economy and/or unstable political situation in their home countries. The *pull* factors include the quality of academic program, the reputation of the university, the attractiveness of the culture, the living conditions and tuition costs, language spoken, prospects for future employment opportunities and the potential for personal growth (Bian, 2013; Bouoiyour et al., 2014; Milstein, 2005). There are also benefits to the host country universities who are interested in increasing diversity in their student population so as to broaden cultural awareness and perspectives among their student body in order to "reduce prejudice, hostility and discriminatory behavior" (Lee and Rice; 2007; Sam, 2001:315).

Generally, students who choose to study abroad are highly motivated to succeed, and according to Russell et al., may possess "inner resources and a positive sense of self," as they must overcome formidable hurdles when they find themselves to be strangers living and studying in a strange land[1] (Russell et al., 2009:246). Upon arrival in their host countries, international students are suddenly confronted with a myriad of adaptation challenges, when all the familiar comforts of home, i.e. family, friends, culture/customs, environment and language, are removed, affecting their identities, sense of well-being and often their academic success (Sherry et al., 2010). Bian reiterates that "to study abroad is a difficult choice to make, as it involves a geographical move to an unknown world, together with emotional and psychological separation from familiar social networks" (Bian:2013:461). Whereas some of these students were perhaps at the top of their class scholastically and the life of the party socially in their home country, they may suddenly find themselves "intellectually, linguistically and interculturally challenged" in their new foreign land situation (Bian, 2013: 449). Differences in academic approaches and workload can be disturbing at the beginning and cause the student to have an unsteady first few weeks (Lee et al., 2004). In their personal lives, they may initially feel destabilized psychologically and socially as "homesickness, loneliness, financial problems, unrealistic self-expectations, lack of meaningful relations with host nationals," which can reinforce their sense of isolation and affect well-being (Brown & Brown, 2013; Robertson et al., 2000; Russell et al., 2009:236). According to Russell et al., international students "are considered to be a high–risk group and experience substantial levels of stress" (Russell et al., 2009:236). Some of these students may even become depressed and anxious due to "culture shock," defined by Brown and Brown "as anxiety that results

[1] *Stranger in a Strange Land* is a science fiction novel written by Robert A. Heinlein in 1961.

from losing the familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse" (Brown and Brown, 2013:396, Brown and Holloway, 2008; Oberg,1960; Sam,2001). Brown and Holloway assert that "the move to a new environment is one of the most traumatic events in a person's life" (Brown and Holloway, 2008:33).

International students may also become the recipients of the host country's negative prejudices, attitudes and actions towards them. Studies have revealed that international students of color (or certain ethnicities) often feel they are victims of discrimination and neo-racism or *new* racism because they are recognizable as different and/or their country or culture has a perceived negative reputation (Sam, 2001; Lee and Rice, 2007). International students from former European colonies, not only face the typical problems that international students face adjusting to their new culture and environment, but they also enter into a context which has an historical background of hostility, racism and oppression; such is the case with African international students in the land of their former colonizers, France.

The international study experience not only confronts the student with the questions *Who am I?* and *Who do others say that I am?* in this new environment, but also *Who do I want to be in the future?* Hall states that "imagination plays a crucial role in the process of creation of new identity options" (Hall, 1990 in Pavlenko and Blackledge, 2004:17). International students' have imagined their future professional identity and have chosen mobility as a means to achieve this end. Their imagined identities propel them into a realm of possibilities and help support other identities when in conflict.

Purposes of this study

". . . making explicit and visible those aspects of life that often remain invisible"

(Clough and Nutbrown, 2012: 54).

The purposes for this current study are threefold. First and foremost is the critical purpose which seeks to shine a light on a particular group of African international students in France, to make visible their successes and setbacks, so as to contribute to the existing scholarly information which could result in improving policies and practices at their host universities. In order to uncover and expose injustices that international students, specifically those from former French colonies, may encounter in France, it is important to attempt to obtain thick descriptions of what they are experiencing, so that their stories are read and their voices are heard (Geertz, 1973). This involves adherence to certain methods including narrative interviewing, borrowed from the narrative inquiry approach, as a means of capturing deeper insights that might not otherwise be heard. In this way, we not only learn about the perspectives of those in minority positions, from different cultures, ethnicities or races, but also through their personal stories, we can find common ground with the participants as fellow human beings in a complex world, bridging the gap between “us” and “them” (Trahar, 2013).

My second purpose is to provide an opportunity for these international students to reflect upon, develop and enact their own critical agency to confront and resist unequal social conditions and make a difference in positively transforming oppressive experiences as marginalized outsiders in a majority culture (Arnot and Reay, 2007; Luke, 2004; MacBeath, 2006; McLeod, 2011; Sherry et al., 2010). The act of reconstructing experiences and retelling them in a narrative form, affords the students the opportunity to clarify their plans and intentions. Through critical reflection of their experiences, they become more conscious of their own and others’

actions, leading to personal growth and transformation (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000).

Finally, my third purpose for this critical qualitative study reflects my position as teacher/researcher and my personal commitment to this particular marginalized group of students. This personal concern can be traced to my experiences as an English teacher at the French university located in a relatively small French city where the current study was conducted. This city is considered "small" due to its population of 76,114 inhabitants, 94.1% of whom are classified as French and 5.9 % as "Other" or Foreigners. A "foreigner" is a person who resides in France for work or as a student but is not a citizen (Campusfrance, 2017). "Immigrants" are considered to be people who were born overseas but live in France, often attaining French citizenship while living in France. The university is considered to be medium-sized according to enrollment, i.e. a small university has fewer than 5,000 students; a medium has 5,000 to15,000, and a large has 15,000 or more students (collegedata.com). The university in this study offers courses that lead to officially recognized higher education degrees, and according to the Center for World University Rankings, ranks 81 among French universities (CWUR.org). It is in a suburban location, with proximity to the sea and the city center. The enrollment range is between 8,000 and 8,999 students as of 2020, 12 percent of whom are considered international, with 92 nationalities represented coming from Pacific-Asia, Americas and Africa (Campusfrance, 2020). Most students are undergraduates, with 24 percent in master's programs and two percent studying for doctorate degrees. 66 percent of these students originate from surrounding areas in France, whereas international students represent over one hundred different countries. Within the civil

engineering major, there were 750 students enrolled in 2016 and about one international student out of two were African (Campusfrance, 2019).

Due to French governmental policy, statistics about race and ethnicity in France in general and in this university town in particular, are not easily accessible. French census forms do not include a designation for race and/or ethnicity, for a variety of historical reasons which are discussed in Chapter 2. However, researchers have been able to collect data through private studies and surveys that reveal the lived experiences of minorities in France (Bréant,2018; Druez, 2016; Garneau and Bouchard, 2013; Geisser, 2018). The following vignette, provides an example from one of my experiences with an international student from Africa studying at this particular university. Her story was an impetus for this present study.

A few years ago, while teaching English as a foreign language at the master's level, I received an email from one of my female international students from the Ivory Coast. She was writing to tell me that she would not be able to come to class, nor complete her English assignments. I wrote her back inquiring about her problem, taking the chance that I might be able to be of assistance. She proceeded to write a long email to me, explaining her difficulties that had mostly to do with accommodations, finances, health issues, and feelings that she was being discriminated against for being black and Muslim. We communicated back and forth for many days, and I helped her in every way I could to complete her English assignments. Nevertheless, this student stopped her studies, left the university, and I eventually lost contact with her. I regretted that she had reached a point of such isolation, stress and frustration that she felt she had to abandon her dream of studying in France. After this experience, I became very mindful of my international students at the beginning of the school year and frequently stirred up conversations with them after class. The majority, if not all

of my students were from French-speaking North and West Africa and appeared eager to talk about their situations. I primarily heard stories of struggles and problems, which they expressed in an almost humorous way, laughing and agreeing with each other about fairly serious issues. However, what impressed me the most was their willingness to open up to me, or perhaps to anyone who took the time to ask and listen. Was it because they viewed me as a fellow non-French "outsider" and therefore *safe* to talk to? Perhaps through our spontaneous conversations, we created an "insider" space where these particular students could express their feelings and experiences, including sensitive issues regarding discrimination and exclusion. These somewhat casual conversations that took place before and after English class led me to my decision to more formally research this population, whom I deemed unique in that they speak French fluently but are culturally, ethnically and racially different from their French peers. I became motivated to gain more insight into their personal experiences with the idea that this knowledge would help teachers and administrators understand why some students fall into despair and stop their studies, so as to make a change to reverse this. Therefore, my third purpose for this current study reflects a personal empathy and desire to be able to better serve this population of students by increasing awareness of their experiences through contributions to research in this area.

Rationale for the Study

Many studies have been done focusing on various aspects of how international students adjust to their new host country (Bian,2013; Bradley,2000; Brown and Holloway, 2008; Chirkov et al., 2008; Coulon and Paivandi, 2003; Milstein, 2005; Montgomery and McDowell, 2009; Rientes et al., 2012; Russell et al., 2009; Sam,

2000; Wang, 2009; Ward and Kennedy,1999; Yeh and Inose, 2003). This study expands on this existing research in English by adding a critical qualitative approach to exploring how Africans in France experience aspects of power, identity and agency in their new environment. It is designated as a small-scale, in-depth critical qualitative study because it seeks to describe and understand the hidden effects of power structures for the purposes of bringing consciousness of these problems to the participants and professionals who are in a position to facilitate and enact change, which is the aim of critical theory. The current study, directed by three research questions, explored through a critical lens, with data collected through lightly/semi-structured, in-depth narrative interviews, attempts to contribute to knowledge by giving voice to these international students from former French colonies who have been underrepresented in research.

Research Questions

The following questions represent the focus of my research and were designed to provide a critical perspective to aspects of power, identity and agency experienced by the student participants in this study.

1. What aspects of power, including effects of colonial legacy, are perceived by the participants and how are these resisted?
2. How are aspects of identity imposed, constructed and negotiated in the participants' new environment?
3. How are aspects of agency enacted in response to oppressive discourses and/or challenges reflected in the participants' narratives?

Guided by the above research questions, my theoretical framework, chosen methodologies and methods, I attempt to gain an understanding of how these

international students from Africa interpret and critique their experiences, as they navigate their way through their first year at a French university.

CHAPTER 2

Background

"Any researcher who wants to work in a marginalized community should carefully explore the historical background and be well-versed in the historical and cultural conflicts" (Creswell, 2007:78).

In this chapter, I provide contextual information regarding my background as the researcher and that of the study participants. It is important these international students' historical and cultural context as well as the political climate in France in order to better understand their perspectives.

French universities appeal to French-speaking African students because they offer a university curriculum that is adapted to students' needs, outstanding research and development opportunities and a world class economy (Campusfrance, 2019). France was ranked as the fourth most chosen country for international studies. In 2016, 6.3 percent of university students studying in France were from Africa, with 48.3 percent or one in two African students enrolled in the master's degree program primarily as either engineering or business school students (Marshall, 2016). Up until recently, low tuition rates were a major deciding factor when choosing to study in France. However, the tuition policy for international students has changed, allowing only European Union citizens the benefit of low tuition rates. In 2019, the French government unveiled a new plan called, "Welcome to France / Bienvenue en France, "a program meant to attract more international students. Under this plan measures were taken to simplify visa regulations, offer more English-language courses and improve accommodations, in an effort to increase the number of foreign students from roughly 300,000 in 2017 to 500,000 by 2027. However, this revamped "welcome" plan would

come at a cost for international students who had, up until then, enjoyed near-free higher education, just like other French or European Union nationals. The cost for a master's degree jumped from approximately 400 euros per year to 3,770 euros. French universities are still allowed to waive fees for up to ten percent of their international students and there is the possibility of obtaining scholarships from the French government.

The "Welcome to France / Bienvenue en France" label is awarded to French universities who adhere to the French government's educational reforms of 2018–2019. In order to be in compliance with this reform, institutions must also put into place international student support services, including accessibility of information specifically for international students, e.g. mentoring, orientation, integration, advising, housing, campus life and post-graduate follow-up. These are new programs and are still at various stages of implementation as of 2020 (Campusfrance, 2020).

Many university officials and academics have since decried the measure that they feel discriminates against foreign students, claiming it introduces a form of differentiation by social standing, i.e. those who can afford to study abroad are "welcome (Geisser, 2018). French academics believe that the consequences will mean a decrease in African students who currently represent almost half of France's international students, as they would no longer be able to afford tertiary studies in France (Bréant, 2018; Dodman, 2019). According to Bréant and Geisser, new restrictions have been placed on obtaining visas, and the acceptance rate of students from Sub-Saharan Africa is decreasing (Bréant, 2018; Geisser, 2018). Geisser explains that the current prime minister justifies raising tuition rates in order to bring French universities "up to standard" by limiting the number of foreign students (Geisser, 2018:3). Since African students comprise a large percentage of

international students in France, Geisser suggests that this new policy is a veiled attempt to “whiten” French universities and further stigmatize “foreign” students as “parasites on the French educational system” (Geisser, 2018:5).

African international students’ attraction to France is first motivated by the quality of education, with 68 percent expressing they are looking for higher quality training and education in their field of study, which leads to better employment and economic benefit (Marshall, 2016). This is connected to the recognition and prestige accorded to those who hold a French higher education diploma. Moreover, international students in France have the same access to social medicine, insurance and other benefits as native French students. The ability to speak French plays a vital role in the motivation to study in France as opposed to other Anglophone countries, with one out of two Africans being Francophone. Despite these luring advantages, 53 percent of Africans admit they are apprehensive about studying in France, and 66 percent are discouraged by the prospect of the difficulty obtaining visas, completing administrative dossiers and being able to afford their self-support during their studies due to the cost of living in France compared to Africa (Marshall, 2016; Campusfrance, 2017). There is also the cost of preparing all the paperwork to even apply for international study, including obtaining birth certificates, passports, visas, insurance, and airfare. All in all, the costs of studying abroad in France run from 3,000 for a short-term visa, that authorizes foreign nationals to stay up to three months in France, to 10,000 euros for a long-term visa, the duration of which depends on the purpose of your stay, i.e. personal reasons, professional activity, pursuing education, or joining family members. The costs for visas far exceeds the average monthly salaries in Sub-Saharan Africa, creating a financial obstacle for those students who want to study abroad in France.

(Bréant, 2018).

Before being accepted, prospective international students are interviewed through the Campus France organization. These interviews seek information about a candidate's family situation, academic background, personal motivation, and professional goals. According to Bréant, these interviews are meant to discern if students are at risk for overstaying their visas and becoming illegal immigrants, suspicions particularly directed at Africans. It is for this reason that Bréant contends this is a socially selective system that can be viewed as discriminatory and biased against Africans (Bréant, 2018).

International students in France may encounter numerous "outward" difficulties, namely filing paperwork with the French authorities, finding housing, and part-time employment to help with school costs and paying for living expenses due to insufficient financial help from family members (Dequiré, 2007). According to Vourc'h and Paivandi, 60.2 percent of non-European foreign students claim to have a difficult time finding accommodations compared to 49.1 percent of international students from other European countries, (Vourc'h and Paivandi, 2005). Records gathered from international student organizations reveal that these non-European students sometimes find themselves in financial difficulty because they are unable to obtain scholarships or part-time jobs, factors that may have an effect on their well-being and studies (Vourc'h and Paivandi,2005). In addition, these students may also experience the "inward" assaults on their identities because of their sudden change in social status and the difficulties they encounter when seeking assistance from those in authority. In addition, as new international students from former French colonies, they are vulnerable to becoming targets of stereotypes and discrimination for the first time

(Dequiré,2007). Frantz Fanon (1925-1961), a psychiatrist and political philosopher from the French colony of Martinique, remarked, “As long as the black child remains on his [*sic*]home ground his life follows more or less the same course as that of a white child. But if he [*sic*] goes to Europe he [*sic*]will have to rethink his [*sic*] life, for in France…he [*sic*] will feel different from the rest. The truth is that he [*sic*] is made to feel inferior” (Fanon, 1952:127).

The “Unef” (Union Nationale des Etudiants de France; National Student Union) is the main student organization in France. Although It was founded 110 years ago, its principle goal at present is the fight against discrimination at the university level. According to a Unef study conducted in 2020, one in five university students expressed feeling as if they were treated differently according to their country of origin. The study also revealed that students who believe they have been victims of discrimination feel they do not know how to report racist behavior towards them at their universities. (Kheniche, 2020). Despite anti-discrimination laws that were passed in 2008, e.g. law 2008-496 against racism and harassment, as well as the renewed global movements against discrimination, students report that they continue to experience discriminatory acts against them at French universities (Ministére de l’Enseignement Supérior de la Recherche et de l’Innovation, 2020). In one such incident in March 2019, it was reported that a student from the Ivory Coast who attended a large French university, was a victim of racist aggression from a teacher, who, in front of everyone in his class in a lecture hall, went as far as imitating his accent and physically threatening him. This teacher was never sanctioned and still holds his position. Another incident mentioned in the study happened in April 2019. In this incident, some students discovered a Facebook site where their fellow white students launched insults and racist comments specifically directed at them (Kheniche, 2020).

The study also pointed to the fact that, although some French universities have begun to put in place some anti-discrimination measures, as of 2020 only 17 percent of French universities have actually implemented these measures despite encouragement from France's minister of higher education and research to do so (Kheniche, 2020). The university in this study was not included in the list of those who had implemented anti-discriminatory measures.

According to Anne Roger, the co-secretary general of "Snesup", (Syndicat majoritaire chez les enseignants du supérieur, the higher education teachers' syndicate), certain French universities just do not take racism on their campuses seriously (Kheniche, 2020). Despite an anti-discrimination law passed in the French Parliament in 2012, it has only been since 2016 that universities' have shown a tendency to comply with this law, and that has only been on a voluntary basis. Therefore, owing to the lack of programs and policies in place, often these student-victims do not report incidents, principally because they do not know how.

As of 2020, the five largest universities in France, with between 56,000 to 67,000 students, have no anti-discrimination, pro-diversity policies in place at all. Five universities have appointed a vice president in charge of "equality" (vice-présidence égalité) or a person appointed in charge of implementing anti-discrimination policies and programs, which indicates an awareness and acknowledgement at those universities that racism and discrimination exists on their campuses (Abanda, 2020). However, only ten public universities out of approximately 80 in the entire country have any programs set up at all. 45.1 percent of these ten universities still do not have "CVE's" (cellule de veille et d'écoute; monitoring and listening units) due to insufficient finances. The "CVE" is essential to any anti-discrimination policy implementation because it is a place where students who feel they have been victims of discrimination and/or harassment

can openly and safely report their experiences at any time. The lack of these “CVE’s” means that incidents are not reported, leaving teachers, administrators and the public in the dark about how many cases of discrimination exist on their campuses. Because of these disappointing figures, Abanda states that “racism has been forgotten by French universities” (Abanda, 2020:6).

Historical Context

Although Chinese international students compose a large population of non-European students studying in France, the majority of international students come from Africa, primarily from Algeria and Morocco. Therefore, it is important to explain the historical context into which these African students enter the country. France was one of the European countries involved in the colonization of Africa (fourteen countries in all), as well as the current overseas departments, which has created an, albeit controversial, but nevertheless existing bond between the former colony and colonizer (Maringe and Carter, 2007). Though most Francophone African countries had gained their independence by 1960, this history of colonization has significantly impacted the region’s culture, schools, and language, influencing African ideas about higher education to this day. Consequently, this familiarity with French culture, coupled with the prestige associated with speaking French, are factors that continue to make France the preferred destination choice for African Francophone students.

Colonialization and Immigration

Block discusses the difference between the labels “migrant” and “expatriate” as “individuals who have chosen to live abroad for an extended period of time . . . with the expectation of returning to their country of origin“ (Block, 2007:32). He makes the distinction that expatriates are individuals who have chosen to live abroad and usually plan to return to their country of origin someday, contrasted with the

“immigrant,” who may have entered his destination country illegally, fleeing economic or political oppression in his home country (Block, 2007). This distinction is pertinent because studies have shown differences in attitudes towards international students depending upon “their country of origin” (Lee and Rice, 2007:385). In order to have a better understanding of the sociocultural situation of the international participants in this study, and the corresponding attitudes of some in the majority population in their host country, France, it is relevant to include France’s immigration history and colonial relationship with this region.

France was the third largest of the European slave trading nations after Portugal and England. From its ports up and down the Atlantic coast, 1.3 to 1.4 Africans were shipped to colonies in Guadeloupe, Haiti, Martinique, Louisiana, French Guiana and sold into slavery. France abolished the slave trade in 1794, but it was revoked and reestablished several times until finally, in 1848, slavery became unconditionally abolished in the French colonies (Resnick ,1972).

French colonization of Africa dates back to seventeenth century, but it intensified with the invasion of Algeria in 1830 and continued to create colonial possessions in twenty-nine African countries. Colonization has always been a controversial policy in France, but consciences were assuaged by the justification that the colonized countries were backward, inferior and needed help from Europeans to become civilized (Memmi, 1965). As de Gramont remarks, “the assumption of any colonizing power is that it is bringing a better way of life to a backward people” (de Gramont,1969:173). Jules Ferry, who was Prime Minister in 1884, became famous for creating the public school system in France which opened up education to the masses, and French schools, streets and public squares continue to bear his name throughout France today. What is less known about Ferry was his stance on

colonialism. According to de Gramont, he defended and justified the exploitation of others by claiming that ". . . superior races have rights in relations to inferior races" (de Gramont, 1969:180).

Another effect of colonization involves religion, specifically the spread of Catholicism in Africa and other French colonies by Catholic missionaries. The latter, motivated by creating African converts, were responsible for the development of educational systems, and the French language was used as a medium of instruction (Nunn, 2010). Although Catholicism was brought to Africa by the colonizers, it remains the religion of the elite in West Africa and is one of the three predominant religions in other French overseas departments. According to WorldAtlas, Christianity represents the religion of over fifty percent of the population in thirty-one African countries (worldatlas.com). Historically, the Catholic Church was considered to be the official religion in France until the 1905 separation of church and state was enacted. Nevertheless, the Catholic Church still retains its historic influence in France and its implantation is regarded by the Catholic church as a positive result of colonization (WorldAtlas, 2017).

Memmi posits that, "if the colonizer defends the colonial system so vigorously, it is because he benefits from it to some extent," adding his definition of a colony as "a place where one earns more and spends less" (Memmi, 1965:4,11). This attitude persisted into the twentieth century as generation after generation of colonized people were kept in poverty, malnutrition and ignorance, while the colonizer profited. Albert Memmi, a Tunisian who grew up under French colonization, explains in his book *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, that his fellow Tunisians lost a sense of the value of their own culture, became dependent on the colonizer, were denied basic

civil rights, and were treated as outcasts in their own country (Memmi,1965). Jean-Paul Sartre writes in the introduction to Memmi's book,

> Colonialism denies human rights to human beings whom it has subdued by violence and keeps them by force in a state of misery and ignorance . . . racism is ingrained in actions and institutions . . . and since the Native is sub-human, the Declaration of Human Rights does not apply to him. (Sartre in Memmi,1965: xxiv).

Not only did Africans become the underclass in their own countries, but Africans from French colonies were drafted into military service during World Wars I and II. When World War II was over, France was in desperate need of manpower to rebuild its infrastructure and low-wage laborers were recruited on a large-scale from the African colonies. This is also when the French colonization movement started to disintegrate, and by 1960 all African colonies had gained independence except Algeria. As it happened, during the post-war era, France was favorable to colonized people studying in their country, as the government felt obliged to reward Africans who assisted in the war effort with this goodwill gesture. Numbers of young Africans studying in France soared from 2,000 between 1949 to 1950 to 8,000 by 1959, one year before fourteen African countries still under French rule were declared independent. These Africans were eager to seize this opportunity as they believed that what was offered to them on their own continent could not be compared to what they felt they could achieve in France with the future prospect of becoming part of the elite in their respective countries. The connection between a French degree and social mobility had been established as another effect of colonization. As Kringelbach explains, "French colonialism imposed a model of success linked to mastery of the French language, a migration to acquire degrees . . ." (Kringelbach, 2015:12). To this

day, many consider an educated person in Africa to be one who has earned a degree from a university abroad (Kringelbach, 2015).

Because in general the first North and West African immigrants who came to France were laborers, and those who followed had been poorly educated and spoke little French, negative images of these immigrants have persisted even to the second and third generations (Alba, Silberman and Fournier, 2007). These ethnic groups continue to report incidents of prejudice in the workplace, and ethnically African students are often directed away from pursuing tertiary studies and encouraged to do manual labor (Phaneuf, 2012). These minorities now living in France, have had to live with slanderous stereotypes, portrayed as people who take advantage of the French social welfare system, who steal, burn cars and join radical Islamist terrorist groups (Osler and Starkey, 2005). Associations created by North and West Africans in France exist in an attempt to eliminate discrimination by providing forums for mutual dialogue among the French and people of African descent (Phaneuf, 2012). However, according to Phaneuf, widespread "distrust and misunderstanding" of African immigrants is still prevalent (Phaneuf, 2012: 676). Alba and Silberman confirm that immigrants from former colonies who are racially and ethnically distinguishable are negatively stereotyped and discriminated against (Alba and Silberman, 2002).

Today, the majority *white* discourse in France adhere to the view that French former colonies benefit financially from French tourism and the latter helps the economy of these otherwise impoverished countries (Phaneuf, 2012). Phaneuf cites a French law that was passed In February 2005 "officially recognizing the positive effects of colonialism" (Phaneuf, 2012: 676).

> In 2005, Chirac signed Law Number 2005-158, otherwise known as "Loi Mekachera," which was designed to provide national recognition for the

> contribution of French works in overseas departments and colonies of Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia and Indochina. (Phaneuf, 2012:73).

This law was amended in 2011, but it reveals a continuation by those in positions of power to justify their actions and policies during the colonial period. The effects of colonialism and subsequent social, ethnic and religious discrimination in French society are evidenced to this day, described by Phaneuf as a "deeply held misunderstanding and distrust within the national community surrounding Islam and individuals connected to North Africa" (Phaneuf, 2012:676).

Immigrant policies limiting the possibility for international students to acquire long-term residency caused massive protests during Sarkozy's presidential term. In May 2011, French governmental agencies were instructed to limit the number of visa renewals for non-European Union students and deprive them of the right to work after graduating (Kringelbach, 2015). Although these measures were abandoned by François Hollande's government who overturned these policies in 2012, nevertheless the actions taken during Sarkozy's term reflect the fragility of the international students' status and the veiled attitude toward immigrants (Kringelbach,2015).

The French Republican Model and the Current Political Climate

Phaneuf explains that "integration of the African minorities into French mainstream can be seen as a failure in many respects as evidenced by their exclusion from existing French institutions of socialization, upward mobility and economic growth" (Phaneuf, 2012: 675). Blommaert and Verschueren discuss the French Republican "dogma of homogenism," where difference is seen as unfavorable, even dangerous (Blommaert and Verschueren, 1998:194-195). Historically, France has supported policies meant to create a homogeneous society, denying its multiracial, ethnic and cultural diversity in order to maintain this common national image.

However, renowned French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu indicated that in order to maintain this idea, some populations who do not fit into the monocultural, linguistic and ethnic ideological mold, are marginalized in French society (Bourdieu, 1991). Garrett points out that the unrest provoked by the "headscarf controversy" and the frustration felt by the unemployed youth and working poor in Parisian suburbs, mirrored the failure of minority integration into French society, sparking new debates about the definition of the French Republican model (Garrett, 2007).

"Color-Blindness"

As I began gathering data about international students from Africa, I was surprised by the fact that I could not find statistics on race and ethnicity. In the United States and the United Kingdom, when filling out forms for governmental agencies, everyone is required to include this information. I remember discussing this with my French students who were appalled by the practice which they deemed racist. These two viewpoints highlight major legal and cultural differences between how race is perceived in the United States and the United Kingdom compared to France. Oppenheimer explains, "It is central to the French ideal of equality and citizenship that the state refrain from making distinction based on race and ethnicity" (Oppenheimer, 2008:736). The history behind this principle dates back to the French Revolution of 1789 and the resulting document, the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen and has been included in the French Constitution. Distinguishing people by race or ethnicity is viewed as contrary to secular republican principles. However, as Oppenheimer puts forth, "to bar state recognition of race is not to eliminate racism"; moreover, it makes discrimination and inequality based on race or ethnicity harder to measure (Oppenheimer, 2008:737).

The events in the United States in 2020 have reawakened the debate on systematic racism worldwide, including France. Sibeth Ndiaye, a native of Senegal and one of the few black representatives in the French parliament, put forth a measure in June 2020 that would include gathering racial data so that policymakers can look at ”how well people of color are represented…. measure and look at reality the way it is …and fight subtle racism” (Oltermann and Henley, 2020). This debate continues as the fear of how such data could be used against minorities looms large. Collecting data based on race is a sensitive topic among the French and conjures up the devastating practices of the Vichy government who sent 75,000 French Jews to death camps during World War II based upon data collected on racial identity. French president Emanuel Macron is agreeable to supporting actions that fight discrimination but is unwilling to change the current ban on collecting data on people of color living in France (Oltermann and Henley, 2020). The French Finance Minister echoes this position and the dangers of stereotyping: ”I remain unfavorable to ethnic statistics which do not correspond with French universalism” (Le Roux, 2020.) Therefore, as Oppenheimer and this whole section states, “France is officially color-blind…and colorblindness can mask a color-conscious society in which race and ethnicity are closely linked to discrimination and disadvantage” (Oppenheimer, 2008:742).

Context of the Study

It was into this context, that my two student participants from the African continent, whom I refer to by their pseudonyms, “André” and “Elise,” decided to study in the two-year master’s program at a French university. Both students had received their “license” degrees at their respective universities in their home countries. They had applied to study in a master’s program majoring in civil engineering anywhere in France. They were accepted by this particular university located in what is described

as a “college city” on the western coast of France. Fortunately, they were able to benefit from the previous tuition rates as they attended French university from 2015 to 2017.

The current International Relations Department at the university, is part of the aforementioned “Welcome to France / Bienvenue en France” initiative, set up in 2019 to receive international students with a support team and mentors. This department did not exist during the time André and Elise attended the university and reflects a newly implemented university policy toward international students in general. As of 2019, the university’s new international policy attests to a strong commitment to international study, with a focus on creating international agreements for exchanges with other European countries through the Erasmus program and credit mobile students, as well as partnerships throughout Pacific-Asia, Americas and Africa, with a particular focus on Asian culture and language studies.

The university featured in this study first opened in 1993 with 2,498 students. As of 2019, there were 8,862 enrolled students, compared to 8,178 in 2016. 12 percent of these students were international, with 24 percent in master’s programs and two percent studying in the doctoral program. As of 2019, 66 percent of these students originated from surrounding areas in France, whereas international students represented over 100 different countries. Within the civil engineering major, there were 750 enrolled students in 2016 and about one international student out of two were African (Campusfrance, 2019).

The cost of living without tuition is estimated at about 800 to 900 euros a month, which includes about 450 euros for student housing. Other private apartments around the university rent to students but at a higher rate. Some of these apartments may be situated farther from campus and students usually have their own cars or use

public transportation. André, for example, lived with some fellow countrymen for the first few months after his arrival, sleeping on their couch, because he had not been able to afford student housing. Elise, on the other hand, was able to rent a private apartment off-campus. There is a main train station not far from the universities that connects passengers to most major cities in France. All students, including international, have access to free and/or low-cost French medical services, including doctors, nurses, social assistants, dentists, psychologists, and psychiatrists (Campusfrance, 2018). There is a student restaurant where all registered students can buy lunch and/or dinner for three euros. “Le CROUS” (Centre national des oeuvres universitaires et scolaires) is a nationwide organization created in 1955. Its goal is to provide every student with the same opportunity for success, focusing on improving students’ daily life while attending a French university. “Les Crous” are responsible for services for all students including financial aid, accommodations, access to university restaurant, employment, and cultural adjustment.

The university has an open campus comprising three “faculties” and three “institutes.” My student participants were enrolled at the Faculty of Science and Technology which offers two civil engineering majors: TNCR or Techniques Nouvelles pour la Construction et la Réhabilitation, which stands in English for New Techniques for Construction and Renovation and GI3ER or Gestion et Integration de l’Efficacité d’Energies Renouvelables which is “Management and Integration of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energies”. All classes are taught in French and students also participate in a six-week internship during their second semester and a sixth month internship during the fourth semester as part of their two-year master’s study program. Among other course requirements are three semesters of English as a foreign language. Although my participants were in separate English classes, one

for TNCR and one for GI3ER, I taught both their English classes, which is how I came into contact with André and Elise and invited them to take part in this study. In my GI3ER English class, there were 15 students, 11 white and French and four of whom, including Elise were from the African continent, although Elise was the only first-year student. In my TNCR English class, there were 31 students, seven of whom were white and French and the remainder from North and Sub-Saharan Africa. Only two of these students from TNCR, including André, were studying in France for the first time.

In summary, these facts are meant to provide an overview of the university setting into which André and Elise are positioned. The historic roots of France's implication in the slave trade happened to directly involve the city in this study, due to its proximity to the Atlantic coast. In order to place this study in context, it is essential to understand the history of colonization and its effects on the current social and political climate in France. In the following chapter, I review my theoretical framework for this study as well as the literature pertaining to identity, agency and power.

CHAPTER 3

Literature Review

The purpose of this literature review is to investigate the scholarly literature related to the main concepts explored through my research questions, namely power, identity and agency. To begin, in Part 1, I present three bodies of literature that comprise the theoretical frameworks that I have chosen to undergird this study. First, I give an overview of Critical Theory, including Critical Applied Linguistics, Critical Pedagogy and Multiculturalism, Critical Race Theory, Postcolonial Theory, and Decoloniality, highlighting perspectives from Freire, Luke, Pennycook, Kumaravadivelu, Akbari, Kubota, Lee and Rice, Saïd, Bhabha, Mbembe, Mignolo, Fanon, and Diop among others. The second theoretical framework is derived from the French philosopher and sociologist Pierre Bourdieu and his Theories of Practice and Social Reproduction. I find that Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, field, capital and doxa add further understanding when analyzing aspects of identity construction and exploring how power discourses in the post-colonial context are recognized and/or resisted. In Part 2, I overview the literature pertaining to international students, I describe, summarize and critically evaluate this scholarly body of knowledge, focusing specifically on methodologies and aspects of identity, agency as they related to my research question.

Part 1: Critical Theories

"You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view . . . until you climb into his skin and walk around in it." (Lee, 1960:30).

My review of the literature about international students' experiences and adaptation to their new environment viewed through power, identity and agency, begins

with a broader view of Critical Theory. This theory embraces other related approaches and has a particular penchant for exposing and understanding inequality and social injustice as its research purpose. Moreover, this focus also includes the aspect of self-consciousness and transformation through exposure and dialogue for the purpose of changing a situation for the better in order to create a freer, more equitable society (Freire and Faundez, 1989). Through a critical qualitative approach, problematic power discourses are identified and practical recommendations for transformation are offered.

Paulo Freire, whose seminal book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, published in 1970, reflected his work with the disenfranchised poor in Brazil and coincided with the height of the civil rights movement in the United States, as well as post-colonial and international students' movements worldwide. Freire held that all humans hold the creative abilities and possibilities to transform their circumstances, by "awakening critical consciousness" (Freire, 1970:18). Luke emphasizes Freire's focus on bringing to light the plight of those who have been silenced due to poverty, symbolic violence, and other forms of oppression (Luke, 2004). This can be accomplished through critical work which is meant not only to bring consciousness of a situation to those in dominant power positions, it has the pragmatic purpose of causing individuals who are being directly affected by inequity, to use their imaginative agency to bring change in their social contexts. It involves taking direct action against injustice on the part of the oppressed. Diemer et al. have called Freire's critical consciousness "an antidote to oppression because it provides marginalized youth with awareness, motivation and agency to identify, navigate and challenge social and structural constraints" (Deimer et al., 2016:9). Coming from a privileged position, Luke defines being critically conscious as becoming aware of the plight of minority populations in

society: to place oneself in the *shoes* of a person subjected to power because of class, race, ethnicity, color, and gender, in an attempt to *live* and understand the discrimination, exclusion and oppression, as they act as allies to these groups (Luke, 2004).

Freire's "Philosophy of Hope" translated into a critical pedagogy that stressed historical self-determination of individuals and communities through problem posing and solution by way of discourse (Freire,1992). Freire viewed critical work as involving dialogue and action motivated by *hope*, contrary to *hopelessness,* which is "a form of silence and inaction" (Freire, 1970:72). Awareness of society's injustices should instill sufficient passion and compassion in learners and educators that transcend political affiliations and stir up ethical concern for violations of basic human dignity. This moral cognizance in turn would lay the groundwork and possibility for positive change, referred to as "transformation pedagogy" (Pennycook, 1999:335). Critical work has therefore the important responsibility of shedding light on hidden features of those in minority positions and questioning accepted assumptions held by the dominant power. Akbari reiterates, "the transformation of society will be impossible unless trouble spots are identified" for violations of basic human dignity (Akbari, 2008:282). Transformative pedagogy is a pedagogy of *hope* as it is this ingredient that motivates the critical teacher to recognize the need and strive for social change (Freire,1992). Freire is considered one of the pioneers in the field of critical work in the classroom who has influenced Critical Applied Linguistics in the field of education.

Pennycook asserts that Critical Applied Linguistics goes beyond "the study of a second or foreign language learning and teaching" and has more to do with seeing the role of language in exposing and rectifying social injustices (Pennycook, 2001:3).

It also challenges taken-for-granted assumptions and in so doing, attempts to bring awareness, or critical consciousness, and resolution to inequities within the educational context. According to Benesch, “education that ignores the condition of students’ lives and simply focuses on the transferring of knowledge denies students their humanity” (Benesch, 2001:51). Her background and experiences as a professor in New York prompted her to apply critical theories to her own practice, confronting the notion of teachers as merely trainers who ignore the complicated diversity of cultures and backgrounds in classrooms. Benesch, when referring to international and immigrant students studying in the United States, stresses the importance of the critical teacher in the multinational/cultural classroom who has the significant task of identifying common human characteristics that transcend national boundaries and shared academic goals while at the same time bringing to light social inequalities and injustices (Benesch,2001:90). In this way, not only do international (and immigrant) students benefit from this transparency but host students have an opportunity to clarify their own values, attitudes and practices (Benesch,2001:90,137). She emphasizes that for transformation to occur, which is the goal of critical work, the critical teacher must first identify and be responsive to the needs of the student populations (Benesch, 2001).

“Critical work,” as Pennycook explains, links classroom teaching practices, interactions and approaches with problematic societal issues, such as discrimination, inequality, and ideologies that dictate, either covertly or overtly, moral values of what is right and wrong (Pennycook, 1999:331). Critical Applied Linguistics, according to Kumaravadivelu, encourages learners to be “active participants in their language learning” (Kumaravadivelu, 2001:546). This exchange allows learners to express their problems, struggles and experiences; dialogues that could lead to change and

resolution of issues. Pennycook emphasizes the link between language and wider social issues, noting that English language teachers (TESOL) are in a position of influence and have the responsibility of promoting cultural understanding by directly confronting social issues through critical approaches in the classroom (Pennycook, 1999). He reiterates that they need to be aware of the myriad inequalities that exist in various societies, especially those represented in their classroom, and make a point to connect classrooms and conversations "with issues of gender, race, ethnicity, culture, identity and politics" (Pennycook, 2010:169).

Since the classroom is a unique place where cultures come together, it is the school's role to combat racism and social injustice by encouraging a respect for diversity through discussion (Keddie, 2011; Lee and Rice, 2006). Canagarajah refers to school as "a power-laden site where students are under peer pressure to conform to the dominant discourses and identities preferred in the classroom" (Canagarajah, 2004:120). Akbari confirms that "educational systems are reflections of societal systems . . . the same biases are reproduced in the classroom" (Akbari, 2008:246). This also aligns with Freire who writes about how classroom dynamics and interactions reflect the attitudes and beliefs of the society in power (Freire,1970). Cummins poses the question, "Should education automatically reinforce the societal status quo or should it challenge societal structures and discourse that are at variance with the articulated core values of the society: equality, social practice, and freedom?" (Cummins, 2001:654). Those who appear to value multiculturalism, according to Lee and Rice, may often be sending a double message: "we respect diversity but you're really not one of us," an attitude which only compounds feelings of "exclusion, inferiority and anger" among minority and/or international students (Lee and Rice, 2007: 396).

Research based on Critical Theory has been criticized for being too negative, dogmatic and excessively focused on highlighting problems in society. The claim is that critical theorists are not objective observers but come to the research with a political agenda in mind (Carspecken,1996). As Richardson explains, critical research is most often conducted among marginalized groups, the researcher is positioned as one who attempts to reveal and critique the power structures that are involved (Richardson, 2003). Pennycook reiterates, critical work attempts to expose and focus on issues of "power, inequality, discrimination, resistance, and struggle" (Pennycook, 1999:332).

Critical Race Theory

"*It is hard to think about something that has no name, and it is difficult to name something unless one's interpretive community has begun talking and thinking about it"* (Delgado and Stephancic, 2012:32).

From the above quote, it can be said that Critical Race Theory is about the existence of discourses which create spaces for social change. The basic tenets of Critical Race Theory are threefold: first, the acknowledgement that racism exists and permeates society. This is a basic assumption that must be recognized in order for the problem to be eradicated. The second tenet explains that racism benefits materially those in position of power resulting in a reluctance to change the status quo of racial inequity. Thirdly, is the idea that race as a concept is socially constructed, meaning that all races are equal from a genetic or biological stance. The way that society ascribes differences to minority groups through stereotypes is of particular concern to critical race theorists, in accordance with the anti-essentialist idea that

people possess multiple and sometimes conflicting identities that shift with time and experience (Smith-Maddox and Solorzano, 2002).

Critical Race Theory contends that although it would appear that racism is on the decline because of the infrequency of blatant or extreme demonstrations such as public lynchings that took place during the Jim Crow Era in the United States, Delgado and Stephancic state, “by every social indicator, racism continues to blight the lives of people of color” (Delgado and Stephancic, 2012:11).

Critical Race Theorists such as Annamma, Jackson and Morrison believe that taking a color-blind position impedes progress in combatting racism by denying its existence: “Color-blind racial ideology allows for a justification of inaction that propels the system of racial inequities forward” (Annamma et al., 2017:154). They contend that the opposite approach is necessary to weed out erroneous embedded thoughts about minorities that inevitably perpetuate their subordinate status. They advocate challenging these deeply entrenched preconceptions. Delgado and Stephancic recommend the method of narrative storytelling, as a way to capture these perspectives. The objective of these stories would be to enlighten the “dominant” population to the common humanity found in these accounts, bringing greater understanding of what it is like to be a minority in white society. Stories obtained through interviews and appearing in books, articles and/or research papers can also be used to deconstruct common myths and stereotypes as well as providing an opportunity for the marginalized and under-represented groups in society to express themselves, giving voice to their oppression.

Critical Race Theorists agree that it is a hefty task to change the racist mindset of people, especially when these notions are deeply engrained and even unconscious. They also acknowledge the historic role of colonialism, which has not

only directly affected European former colonies and those colonized but has had indirect negative economic effects on minorities in the United States as well (Degado and Stephancic, 2012).

Postcolonial Theory

"I am unconditionally opposed to all forms of oppression. For me, oppression is the greatest calamity of humanity." (Memmi,1965: xvii)

Postcolonial theory addresses the impact of the legacies of colonization and imperial domination that continue to affect not only social, political and economic structures but also identities and ideologies of the formerly colonized and colonizers to this day. It exposes the fundamental power discourses of Western superiority over other countries and the effects of the inculcation of imposed inferiority on the identity construction of migrants and immigrants (Rukundwa and Van Aarde, 2007).

Edward Saïd, Gayatri Spivak, Homi Bhabha, and Achille Mbembe are known to be the proponents of postcolonial studies, which confront issues of race, culture, ethnicity and nationalism as they relate to colonial and imperial historic legacy (Saïd, 1978; Spivak, 2014; Bhabha,1994). These studies expose ways in which people from former colonies are excluded from social groups and labeled as the "other." "Othering" is the process of a dominant power structure projecting identities onto the foreigner; a way in which negative stereotypes are reproduced, often "western" identities are imposed, and people remain subordinated to those in power (Jensen, 2011).

The subject of colonialism is pertinent to international students studying in France, especially for those from the former French colonies in West and North Africa. Postcolonial Theory posits that there continues to be a lingering superior mindset among the former colonists towards the formerly colonized that manifests itself in prejudicial attitudes and behavior (Pennycook, 1998). Even in a post-colonial age, these negative perceptions may be fixed in the consciousness of the host former colonizer (Lee and Rice, 2007; Kubota and Lin, 2006). Ibrahim argues that the critical pedagogue should be knowledgeable of colonial history as it pertains to his/her international and host students so as to understand the point of view and the power dynamics between former colonizer and the colonized, e.g., those of color from Africa (Ibrahim,1999).

In accordance with critical theory, postcolonial theory has as its primary purpose to uncover the residual effects of colonialism with the goal of transformation and change by highlighting ways in which people use agency to resist disempowering discourses and reconstruct positive identities. It focuses on stories of discrimination and racism from the viewpoint of people of color and exposes suppressive power discourses aimed at those in marginalized positions, specifically in postcolonial societies (Creswell, 2007; Cohen et al., 2011).

The postcolonial position of the twentieth century is not without its critics. Ndlovu-Gatsheni believes that efforts made to decolonize in the previous century, with the focus on universalism and cosmopolitanism, have “failed to deliver the expected post-colonial, post-racial world” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2019:13). As decolonization continues into the twenty-first century, so does the debate between post-colonialism and decoloniality (Ndlovu-Gatsheni,2019).

Decoloniality

Postcolonial theory should not be confused with decoloniality, although both are focused on the postcolonial experience. While post-colonialists are concerned with countering the meta-narratives of coloniality and favors universalism, decolonial theorists emphasize the need to recognize the different ways people understand their worlds or a plurality of ways of knowing and being (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2019). As opposed to the goal of universalism and cosmopolitanism of post-colonial theorists, decolonialists emphasize a more practice-based approach to decolonization, seeking "to make visible, open up, and advance radically distinct perspective and positionalities that displace Western rationality as the only framework and possibility of existence, analysis and thought" (Walsh, 2018:17).

Since the 1990's, decoloniality has become as a movement intended to liberate (ex)-colonized peoples from coloniality, through decolonial resistance and action (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2019). In order to better appreciate this movement, it is necessary to present descriptions of coloniality from the point of view of prominent scholars on the subject.

Coloniality, as defined by Nelson Maldonado-Torres,

"refers to long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, but that define culture, labour, intersubjectivity relations, and knowledge production. Thus, coloniality survives colonialism. It is maintained alive in books, in the criteria for academic performance, in cultural patterns, in common sense, in the self-image of peoples, in aspirations of self, and so many other aspects of our modern experience. In a way, as modern subjects, we breathe coloniality all the time every day" (Maldonado-Torres, 2007:243).

Cheikh Anta Diop, considered the father of African history and one of the greatest scholars to emerge in the African world in the 20th century, addressed the powerful effect colonialism has had on Africans:

“Imperialism, like the prehistoric hunter, first killed the being spiritually and culturally, before trying to eliminate it physically. The negation of the history and intellectual accomplishments of Black Africans was a cultural, mental murder, which preceded and paved the way for their genocide here and there in the world” (Diop,1991:1 & 2).

Ngugi wa Thiong’o describes colonization as:

“A ‘cultural bomb’, annihilating people’s belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves. It makes them see their past as one wasteland of underachievement and it makes them want to distance themselves from that wasteland. It makes them want to relate to other people’s languages other than their own “(Ngugi wa Thiong’o, 1987:17).

Decolonization

Decolonization is the process that follows after “colonies” have been liberated from their colonial oppressors. Walter D. Mignolo, describes the purpose of decoloniality as the next step in decolonization: “Decoloniality aims to delink from this colonial matrix of power” which involves detaching from these underlying Eurocentric power structures or de-westernization, not just geographically but, more importantly, from imposed programmed ways of thinking (Mignolo, 2018:125). Mignolo is critical of the twentieth century dream of decolonization which he believes has not achieved what it set out to do, which is not only to expose and *undo* coloniality, which he calls “the darker side of modernity” but also to *redo,* building “a praxis of living and communal organization…undoing and redoing” (Mignolo and Walsh, 2018:111,120).

Achille Joseph Mbembe is a South African university professor and historian from Cameroon, who received his degrees from the Sorbonne and has taught extensively in the United States and Africa. He is considered a scholar on the subject of

decolonization or “undoing” racist legacies of the past” and is committed to “deracialization” of culture, institutions, universities (Mbembe,2016:32). He writes from the point of view of formerly colonized Africans in their native countries, who are attempting to rediscover their own identity and roots after colonization. He evokes shaking off the effects of Western consciousness on African thought and to gain an African perspective on the world through pursuing knowledge about themselves, by themselves before moving outwards toward the rest of the world. He also advocates resisting the “Eurocentric epistemic canon” that “attributes truth only to the Western way of knowledge production”, a system he claims perpetuates the notion that colonialism is “normal rather than a system of exploitation and oppression” (Mbembe, 2016:32).

Decolonizing the university

As I referred to in Chapter 2, Frantz Fanon’s writings continue to be relevant and influential in the field of post-colonial studies and Critical Theory. In his book *Black Skin, White Masks* published in 1952, he graphically relates the lived experience of the Black man from a French colony living and attending university in France. He writes: “How can we explain, for example, that a black guy who has passed his baccalaureate and arrives at the Sorbonne to study for his degree in philosophy is already on his guard before there is even a sign of conflict…”, or “…the impression the young generation of students get when they arrive in Paris; it takes a few weeks for them to realize that their contact with Europe compels them to face a number of problems which up until then had never crossed their mind” (Fanon, 1952:132). Edourad Glissant, a poet and philosopher from Martinique and a contemporary of Fanon, explained that French Caribbean people only discovered they were “different”

when they arrived in France, where “they become aware of their Carribbeaness” (Glissant,1981:23).

Ngugi wa Thiong’o is a Nobel Prize-nominated Kenyan writer who is considered to be one of the most influential African novelists, dramatists and essayists as well as a social and political advocate today. As a postcolonial theorist, Ngugi advocates for the decolonization of Africa through education at the university level. According to him, the first step toward decolonization is to recognize the link between power and language: how language has been used by colonists to exert superiority over and oppress the colonized. Ngugi calls for taking the practical step to relegitimize African culture and identity by officially reinstating their national languages. This concurs with Mbembe, who suggests putting African languages “at the center of teaching and learning projects…colonialism rhymes with monolingualism…the African university of tomorrow will be multilingual” (Mbembe, 2016:36). This observation echoes Fanon’s statement that “all colonized people—in other words, people in whom an inferiority complex has taken root, whose local cultural originality has been committed to the grave—position themselves in relation to the civilized language, i.e. the metropolitan culture” (Fanon,1952: 2).

Mbembe advocates building “new diasporic networks” that encourage international study as a means of exchanging ideas which lead to decolonization. This would include Study in Africa programs, moving from West to East, to “maximize the benefits of brain circulation” (Mbembe, 2016:42). De Sousa Santos and Mignolo advocate for a decolonial world in which many worlds would coexist in a “pluriverse” (Mignolo, 2018: 240-241; de Santos Sousa, 2014). “Pluriversality” would confront and transcend the current imposition of one-sided perspectives on knowledge, values and problem-solving solutions to diverse problems and seek plurality of ideas based on

relationship and common humanity (Mignolo and Walsh, 2018:72; de Santos Sousa, 2014).

In formerly imperialist countries such as France, decoloniality calls for critical intellectuals to re-examine their imperialist histories and deep-rooted notions of western superiority and the lasting damaging effects on the post-colonial world (Chen, 2010). Connell criticizes the modern university system as being guilty of "reproducing social inequities on a global scale" (Connell, 2017: 10). To overturn this, "western" universities need to be mindful of the decoloniality movement by both exhorting teachers to "embrace myriad ways of understanding the world "and through revising curriculum to reflect "curricular justice" (Trahar et al., 2020:2). The term "curricular justice" coincides with the decoloniality movement across the globe and includes a critique of Eurocentric thought and the introduction of the Southern Theory, which is defined by Connell as "knowledge generated in the colonial encounter and in the post-colonial experience of colonized societies" (Connell, 2017:9). By sharing epistemologies, encouraging dialogue and conversation with and about people who have been effected by coloniality, universities play a vibrant role not only in *undoing* the effects of hundreds of years of "mental murder" but also contribute to the practice of *redoing or remaking* a more equitable and humane society (Trahar et al., 2020; Mignolo, 2018; Diop, 1991).

Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni credits Frantz Fanon with having the foresight to anticipate the decoloniality movement coming when he implored people to seek a new humanity, "to turn over a new leaf", "work out new concepts", "try to set afoot a new man [*sic*]" (Fanon, 1968:78). Higher education needs to be at forefront of this creation of a new humanity, through the power of discourse.

The Postcolonial Theoretical framework and Critical Race Theory are useful for exposing and confronting the lingering effects of colonialism in France, explaining how identity, agency and power are impacted by this socio-historic legacy. Decoloniality evokes action and practice, calling upon universities to create “pluriversities”, which recognize and celebrate cultural capital and knowledge from a diversity of students and resists social reproduction of inequities in society (Trahar et al., 2020). In the following section, I link Pierre Bourdieu’s theories of practice and social reproduction to the analysis of how power affects the African international student studying in France.

Bourdieu’s Theory of Social Practice

“(Bourdieu’s) relentless disclosure of power and privilege in its most varied and subtlest forms, and the respect accorded by his theoretical framework to the agents who make up the social world which he so acutely dissects, give his work an implicit critical potential” (Thompson, 1990:31).

I found the research of the renowned French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1930–2002) to be particularly relevant to this study about how African international students in France experienced aspects of identity, agency and power. Bourdieu’s social and cultural reproduction theory, comprising the concepts of capital, field, habitus, disposition and doxa, provided a format allowing for a nuanced understanding of the more subtle ways in which power impacts agency and identity in the social field (Bourdieu, 1977).

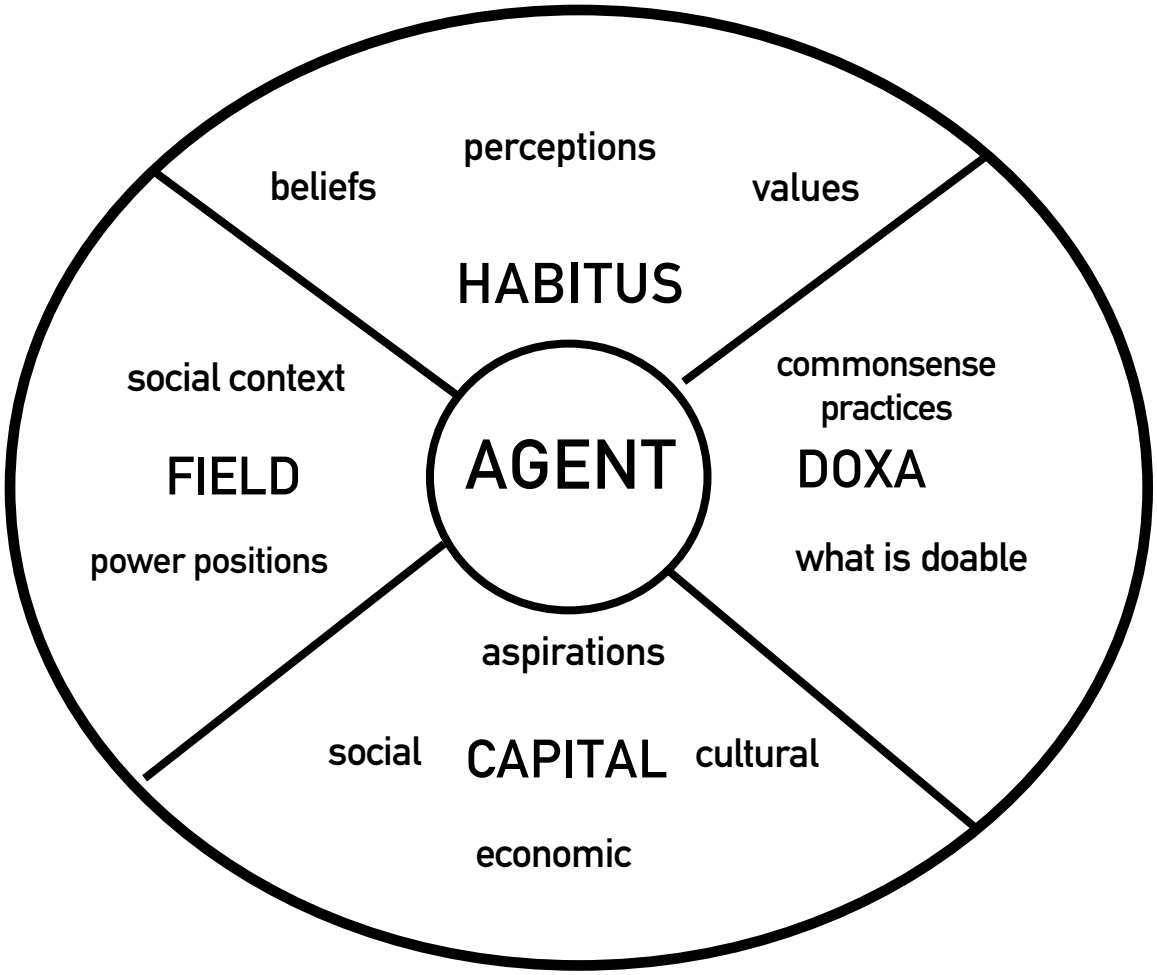
According to the social reproduction theory, the process of socialization involves the transference of sociocultural practices and beliefs so that they become regularized over time. Social and cultural institutions, such as schools, reproduce, maintain and privilege dominant power positions, thereby excluding those who do not fit in because of background or social position. Bourdieu also points to the aspect of distinction, which can be small details of appearance such as clothing or particular accents that subject individuals to social judgment (Bourdieu,1984).

Bourdieu referred to different forms of capital as the resources an individual possesses, e.g. economic, cultural, social and symbolic (Bourdieu, 1991). These terms are useful in explaining how people manage their everyday subjective practices in relation to objective social structures, that is to say, why people behave the way they do. It relates to an individual's accumulated knowledge, skills, resources, traits and behaviors (Bourdieu, 1986). Economic capital is self-explanatory, concerning the accumulation of material goods. However cultural capital relates to *assets* such as knowledge and skills gained through education, including accents and even clothing styles. Social capital involves the interaction and sense of belonging individuals experience when part of a group, along with the resources, social competencies, and specific skills acquired through networking with other people (Bourdieu, 1991). Social capital can also refer to social status and an individual's position in society as a result (Bourdieu, 1991).

Habitus, Field, Capital and Doxa

The following figure illustrates Bourdieu's concepts and their influence on our perceptions and actions in our social world.

Figure 3.1



Habitus, as conceptualized by Bourdieu and Wacquant, is a set of schemes generated in particular conditions that shape the ways individuals think and act (Bourdieu and Waquant, 1992). Bourdieu describes the habitus as "durable, trans-posable dispositions" being the seat of our internalized belief systems and a driving, though unconscious, force behind our thoughts and actions (Bourdieu, 1990:53). For Bourdieu, the habitus represents the incorporation of early or extended experiences that shape not only individuals' beliefs and values but even dress, speech and man-nerisms, that have been gradually absorbed through family upbringing, education

and social status. Dispositions, formed and held in the habitus, are reflections of the complex fusion of past and present experiences. These dispositions affect perceptions, aspirations and actions, as agents apply their history to new situations. Some dispositions in the habitus that have been formed over a long period of time may be favored over others, but Bourdieu emphasizes that the habitus remains fluid, “a history which is endlessly transformed” (Bourdieu,1990:116). It is important to establish that, according to Bourdieu, the habitus is constantly evolving and adapting to new incidents and events (Bourdieu,1977; 1990). While it informs individuals as to the appropriateness of their practices and dispositions in various situations, it by no means dictates them. In short, the habitus is formed by past experiences and influences, which affect the present by giving meaning and clarity to new contexts and experiences as well as influencing future possibilities (Bourdieu, 1977). Moreover, Bourdieu’s theory of habitus influences agency as it extends to include what he describes as a “strategy-generating principle, that enables agents to cope with unforeseen and ever-changing situations” (Bourdieu,1977:72).

Expanding on Bourdieu’s notion of habitus, Nash provides a description of the “educated” or “cognitive” habitus (Nash, 2002). This concept attempts to explain not only an inculcated value placed on education and positive attitude toward school, but also a strong desire to be identified by others as an “educated person.” It also includes dispositions favoring high aspirations and attributes that favor academic advancement (Nash, 2002). Since the educated habitus has been gradually instilled through family and school influences, as well as previous academic experiences, international students bring it along as part of their cognitive accessories as they prepare for their scholastic sojourn.

Another form of habitus to which Bourdieu referred is "religious habitus," defined as "the principal generator of all thoughts, perceptions and actions consistent with the norms of religious representation of the natural and supernatural worlds" (Bourdieu, 1971:319). Rey adds that religious habitus is "that fundamental dimension of the individual as a social being in the religious field . . ." (Rey, 2007:155). Although Bourdieu discounted the veracity of the benefit of salvation through religion, he did acknowledge the benefit of finding a sense of meaning, worthiness and purpose through religious socialization (Rey, 2018:7). According to Verter, Bourdieu's explicit writings about religion could be considered limited in scope compared to his copious contributions to philosophy, sociology, education and art, and focused mainly on the hierocratic church. He referred specifically to the Roman Church as an "instrument of exploitation and oppression" (Verter, 2003:2). Rey would argue that although his works directly addressing religion were relatively few, the latter still influenced his thought, as evidenced by his keen observations about the impact religion has had on society, especially Catholicism (Rey, 2018). Although raised as a Catholic, Bourdieu firmly believed that religion was a social construction, with the clergy possessing "religious capital" used to exercise power over the laity (Bourdieu,1971: 304).

Bourdieu's concept of habitus has been criticized for being too deterministic and ambiguous to be useful as part of a theoretical framework (Sullivan, 2002; Van de Werfhorst, 2010). Pennycook claims, "Bourdieu fails to show how actors can actually intervene to change how things happen" (Pennycook, 2001:126). However, Bourdieu was not as focused on how individuals used agency to deliberately change their circumstances as he was to explain their undeliberate actions that could impede or facilitate outcomes. Edgerton and Roberts maintain that "our choices and our actions are *shaped* not *programmed* by our habitus, we cannot fully escape nor are we

caged by our history" (Edgerton and Roberts, 2014: 202). Although the habitus inclines people to engage in regular practices, they are by no means passive agents. It is this dichotomy, between "freedom and constraint" that makes the habitus a controversial concept in the social sciences (Joseph, 2004:75). I argue that the concept of habitus provides a deeper understanding of how embedded layers of early socialization are useful to explain aspects of identity construction and agency especially during situations involving extreme change in fields of power, such as can be experienced with migration or student mobility.

According to Bourdieu, the field represents the social context within which people make use of their agency according to their habitus and accumulated cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1977,1991). The notion of field supports the idea that agents act in context or social situations, where individuals find themselves in competition for resources of knowledge, recognition and/or prestige (Bourdieu, 1977; 1991). It denotes a site of power struggle in which individuals vie for position and legitimacy according to amounts and kinds of capital they possess (Bourdieu, 1977,1991). Bourdieu liken the concept of field to a "game" in which players are equally invested and value what is at stake (Bourdieu, 1991:14). In the field of social interaction, habitus and capital provide guidance and coherency to new cultural situations. Tran uses Bourdieu's terminology to explain that if there is harmony between an international student's habitus and the field environment, he/she can be described as a "fish *in* water" (Tran, 2015: 1274). However, if there is a disruption in the field to habitus congruence, that is, an experience that does not align with a person's previous constructed categories of how he/she understands the world, there will be a need for change and adaptation to resolve the incoherency (Bourdieu and Waquant,1992). It is at this juncture that a breaking out or transformation of habitus can occur.

The term “doxa” refers to the beliefs, and social behaviors that are taken for granted in a society (Bourdieu, 1977). Weigmann describes doxa as “what is doable or thinkable” in a particular social field (Weigmann, 2017:97). Being accepted and uncontested, it imposes cultural values and social positions which are historically and politically determined, which can have the effect of curbing individuals’ ideas of imagined possibilities in a society (Bourdieu, 1984). The term “unorthodox,” when compared to doxa, would signify behaviors, words or actions that are *not* in accordance with acceptable actions in a given field (Bourdieu, 1991). What might be considered to be commonsense practices in students’ home culture may be at odds with the new host country’s cultural norms. This misunderstanding can lead to individuals being positioned outside “the doxa of the field,” causing a clash between habitus and field and possibly leaving them vulnerable to unjust treatment by the dominant culture (Weigmann, 2017:9).

Symbolic Capital, Power and Violence

Bourdieu names another form of capital as “symbolic,” encompassing notions of legitimacy through prestige, reputation, and/or fame (Bourdieu, 1991). Certain professions and roles carry greater prestige than others and serve as capital in the “field” of competition for recognition and legitimacy. This capital increases individuals’ chances of social acceptance and belonging, making it sought after and valuable. However, in his *book Weight of the World,* Bourdieu refers to “negative symbolic capital” when specifically describing North African adolescents in the French school system who faced stereotyping and prejudice. In the context to which Bourdieu was referring, these students encountered racist treatment which he attributed to “external signs of their body hexis that function as a stigmata, along with their names, accents and places of residence” (Bourdieu et al., 1999:185). This implies that in spite of

favorable reputations and prestigious titles, people can still be negatively judged on appearance and/or accent before ever having the chance to take advantage of their symbolic capital.

Language is a form of symbolic capital, as arbitrary value can be placed on certain languages over others depending on the social context. It is the notion that some varieties of language are superior or inferior to others, e.g. standardized French versus Creole. Accents are also markers of social status and prestige, depending upon their standing in a particular country or the global community as a whole (Bourdieu, 1991). Bourdieu emphasizes, “All linguistic practices are measured against legitimate practice, i.e. the practices of those who are dominant” (Bourdieu, 1991:53). An example is the parental imposition of the standard form of language to be spoken in the home instead of other nonstandard dialects for the purpose of increasing their child’s future educational and professional opportunities in the dominant culture. Thompson explains how, “linguistic exchanges can express relations of power . . . words can be used as instruments of coercion, tools of intimidation and abuse, as signs of politeness, condescension and contempt” (Thompson, 1990:1). In other words, even the simplest language exchange bears subtle power implications, that are meant to reinforce and reproduce social structures (Bourdieu, 1991).

Symbolic power is Bourdieu’s term representing most forms of power that are manifested regularly on the social stage (Bourdieu, 1991). It has nothing to do with physical force but rather gets its strength by being conveyed subtly and because it is recognized or misrecognized as legitimate in a social context. Amounts of cultural, economic and social capital afford power to the agents, depending on the social circumstances. Symbolic power takes the form of distinctive clothing, particular accents,

mannerisms, titles, and particularly academic credentials which hold worldwide recognition and legitimacy (Bourdieu, 1984;1991). Linguistic capital, exemplified by the international student's ability to speak the host language fluently, is recognized as legitimate by individuals or groups in a particular social space, and is considered a powerful asset (Bourdieu, 1989). However, when accents are associated with inferior social status due to socio-historic perceptions and stereotypes, this advantage can become a source of oppression and discrimination. This is an example of symbolic power being exerted against people coming from an *outside* space, whether geographically, culturally and /or socially, through the imposition of labels and other covert insinuations, which is considered by Bourdieu to be a form of violence coming from those *inside* (Bourdieu,1997).

Symbolic violence has as its aim to reproduce, reinforce and make visible existing social divisions and can take the form of a word, a look, or other indirect signs of intimidation and condescension (Bourdieu, 1991). To put it mildly, Individuals subjected to this form of symbolic violence find themselves positioned in ways that run contrary to their chosen identities (Doran, 2004: 93-124). Nevertheless, the word "violence" denotes much more than a person experiencing a wobbly sense of self. It is tantamount to an assault in the form of judgment forced upon an individual by those in power. According to Bourdieu, symbolic violence is only felt by those inclined in their habitus to receive it (Bourdieu, 1977). What makes it violent, is that it is within the doxa of those who have accepted their dominated place in the social order and appears normal. Bourdieu defines symbolic violence as:

> the gentle, invisible form of violence, which is never recognized as such and is not so much undergone as chosen, the violence of credit, confidence, obligation, personal loyalty, hospitality, gifts, gratitude, piety . . . cannot fail to be seen as the most economical form of domination. (Bourdieu, 1977:192).

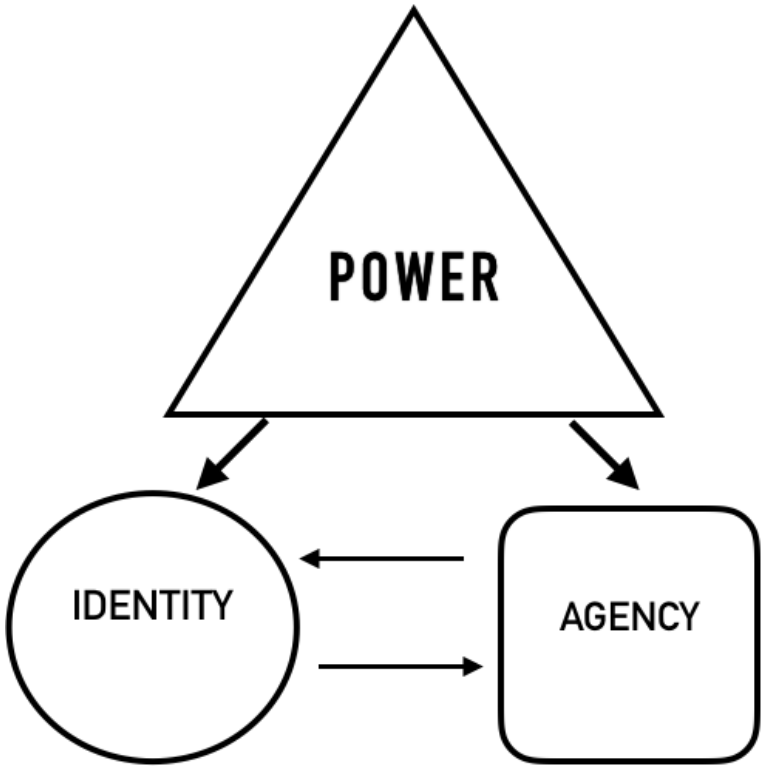
People who are victims of symbolic violence feel no need to resist it and therefore perpetuate and further legitimize oppressive practices (Eagleton and Bourdieu, 1992). This begs the question, if international students coming from the outside resist it or fall subject to the status quo?

Pennycook is critical of Bourdieu's concepts as deterministic and limiting people's agency by condemning them to only being able to reproduce their social situations and not change them (Pennycook, 2001). Bourdieu has been charged with being too elitist, implying, that oppressed people are destined to reproduce their circumstances because they lack the economic means, they also lack the awareness of their situations and the desire to change them (Lane, 2000). Garrett also finds that Bourdieu fails to address the agency of the dominated and oppressed to recognize and creatively reconstruct and improve their situations (Garrett, 2007). Although Bourdieu's theories have been considered elitist, deterministic and limiting to those in marginalized or dominant positions, Weigmann makes the point that researchers interested in immigrant and international student populations continue to find value in Bourdieu's concepts as they have the potential for adding a more nuanced meaning to the complexity of their experiences (Weigmann, 2017). Bourdieu's theories of practice and social reproduction are useful in understanding the underlying reasons why people behave the way they do, providing concepts that lead to deeper insight into aspects of individuals' experiences. In the following section, I review the literature as it relates to international students and their encounters with power discourses in their host countries, identity construction and use of agency, which form the basis of my research questions.

Part 2: Identity, Agency and Power

Although I present the aforementioned concepts in three separate sections, they are all interconnected: Identity affects agency and vice versa, with power as the overarching influence, as illustrated in the figure below**.** When confronted with new experiences, individuals will try to relate them back to the past in an attempt to find coherency in the present context in which they must act. This process involves evaluating the identities available to them as viewed through their own cultural lens and notion of how they see themselves in relation to others. It is an ongoing process where individuals use their agency to reshape their worlds, as they attempt to make sense of experiences, positions and social relations in their new contexts**.**

Figure 3.2: Power, Identity and Agency



Identity

"And so in talking about identity we have to begin to look at various ways in which human beings have constructed their desire for recognition, association, and protection over time and space and always under circumstances not of their own choosing" (West,1992:1).

The concept of identity has become a common, even clichéd catchword with myriad interpretations in today's society. There are different ways of understanding the complex and somewhat ambiguous concept of identity. I begin by giving Joseph's definition as "the everyday word for people's sense of who they are" (Joseph, 2004:10). Marginson explains identity as "what we call ourselves and what others call

us" (Marginson, 2014:8). However, Cornel West posits that our identities reflect our desire to feel valued and useful in society, and not only asks the questions "who am I?" and "who do you say I am?" but also "what can I do?" He addresses the fundamental human need to belong, to be recognized, to feel affiliated with others (West,1992).

The present-day preoccupation with the "self" began as long ago as the Enlightenment Era, during the advent of scientific discovery and was brought to light through the contributions of philosophers such as Descartes, Kant, Locke and Hegel, who emphasized the individual and his/her rights and value in European society (Bendle, 2003). The effects of this new way of viewing the human condition led to the eventual field of psychiatry in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and the upsurge of secularism, contributing to the idea of the pursuit of self-discovery and happiness in *this* world as opposed to the *next*, which, according to Bendle, set the stage for individuals seeking to know "who they are" and how they fit into society (Bendle, 2003). People were in search of attaining a stable, unwavering identity which would define them for life. Unfortunately, this idea that people have one essential identity led to individuals being categorized based on race, culture and social standing. The essentialized view of identity claims we are a product of *nature,* that is to say, we are who we are due to our genes or biological determinants. The opposite viewpoint states that we are more the product of our membership in certain social categories, or due to *nurture*. Whether identity is based on biological or social categories and conditions, both approaches adhere to the notion that identity is predetermined which encapsulates essentialism.

The civil rights movement represented a new era of progress resulting in advancements in social mobility and the disruption of ascribed categories. In

postmodern times, with globalization and the influence of social media, individuals have been presented with the flexibility of multiple identity options, making the former essentialized notion of identity more and more contested, Canagarajah also responds to essentialism by stating that identities "are not immutable or innate but can be deconstructed and reconstructed" depending on the changing social context and develop new ones as we progress through life (Canagarajah, 2004: 117).

This notion of identity highly contradicts the idea of a stable identity, focusing rather on the ongoing defining and redefining of the self as individuals move through life (Block, 2007). It encapsulates how people manage and negotiate identities in changing situations, and in relation to the influence of contexts and dominant power discourses. This is where Bourdieu's theories of capital and symbolic power provide a framework for examining how these identities are influenced and shaped by these discourses. Donovan et al. differentiate between the terms habitus and identity, explaining that they are similarly related concepts but not synonymous: "Habitus is implicit while Identity is explicit. Habitus is the unseen sense of being, the history of experiences influencing social action" (Donovan et al., 2017:2297). Through their definition and distinction of each term, they explain Bourdieu's habitus as not fixed but always "in flux, never finalized, endlessly transformed," while stating that identity is "an explicit formation process culminating in identity or socialization achievement" (Bourdieu, 1991:116; Donovan et al., 2017:2297). Norton-Pierce explains how identities are in a constant state of flux as they are negotiated according to new experiences (Norton, 1997). These experiences include transnational migration or international study, where new cultural contexts call for new identity options to be negotiated. In order to understand identity construction in its entirety it is vital to take into account race/ethnicity, social status, gender, geographical location among other

markers as well as individual particularities of experience. According to Critical Theory, these features play a prominent role in uncovering how identity is shaped by the imposition or internalization of dominant power discourses.

Social Constructionism versus Essentialism

Another view that opposes the essentialist idea of identity is social constructionism. Social constructionists emphasize how identities are "produced and accomplished in discourse," that is to say, socially constructed through linguistic means (Pavenko and Blackledge, 2004:13). Pavlenko and Blackledge succinctly describe the social constructionist view of identities as, "options offered by a particular society at a specific time and place to which individuals and groups of individuals appeal in an attempt to self-name, to self-characterize and to claim social spaces and social prerogatives" (Pavlenko and Blackledge, 2004:19). The social constructionist idea of multiple identities opposes the essentialist viewpoint that each person has his/her own fixed identity (Trueba, 2002). Social constructionists counter the essentialist view that people or groups share characteristics that are unchangeable, even inborn (Bastien and Haslan, 2008). West asserts, "There's no such thing as having one identity or their being one essential identity that fundamentally defines who we are" (West, 1992: 20). Bucholtz warns of essentialism as an ideology that "rests on two assumptions: that groups can be clearly delimited and that group members are more or less alike" (Bucholtz, 2003:40). Day et al., confirm that identity is an ongoing process, not a stable entity that people possess (Day et al., 2006:607-608). Moreover, Canagarajah asserts that individuals' different *selves* "enjoy unequal status and power," meaning some identities may come to the forefront in certain social situations, where others may be suppressed (Canagarajah, 2004:117). These sub-identities normally coexist harmoniously and comprise the sum total of who we are as

individuals (Day et al., 2006). Wilson et al., explain the dangers of essentialism, claiming it leads to classifying all members of a group with particular traits and thereby leading to generalizations and stereotyping (Wilson et al., 2007).

Interestingly, as much as social constructionists contest the essentialist view of identity, Ybema et al., observe that people still have the tendency to "essentialize" when defining themselves, making self-descriptions that serve to reinforce a sense of respectability to others or self-acceptance (Ybema et al., 2009:305). They argue that these self-generalizations are meant to support the individual's sense of social position or preserve an image or interest. They interpret people's inclination to ascribe an essence to their own identity as a need to make "matter-of-fact identity claims" which Ybema et al., believe reflect moments of stability rather than instability in the identity process (Ybema et al., 2009:305).

Therefore, social constructionists contend that people have multiple identities that are socially constructed, meaning individual identities can shift depending upon their usefulness in various contexts (Cieciuch and Topolewska, 2017; Marginson, 2014). How we see ourselves and how we perceive others see us is continuously being formed by internal and external influences. According to this viewpoint, identity options are in constant flux, being structured and restructured by ourselves and by others as we navigate new contexts in light of past cultural, social and institutional backgrounds as well as future personal and professional goals (Canagarajah, 2004; Fitzmaurice, 2013; Koehne, 2006).

Identity Possibilities

As Joseph reiterates, the term identity means more than just the "consciousness of self" (Joseph, 2004: 80). Block names seven "individual and collective identity types: ethnic, religious, racial, national, migrant, gender, social class, and

language identities" (Block, 2007: 43). Although religious identity is linked to ethnic, cultural and national identities, it can often take precedence in terms of importance. According to Joseph, individuals may choose to put their religious identity in priority over national ones in a given social field (Joseph, 2004:117). According to Norton, national identity includes "individuals who share a common history, a common language and similar ways of understanding the world" (Norton,1997:420). Kim classifies cultural identity as encompassing "racial, ethnic, gender and class identity," while Joseph emphasizes how speaking a common language "creates" and is a form of cultural identity (Kim, 2008:306; Joseph, 2004:167). Block defines migrant identity simply as "ways of living in a new country," the identities constructed in order to adjust and survive day to day (Block, 2007: 43). When referring to personal identity, Enright attempts to concisely define it as "being a human being, living in our world, and being recognized by others" (Enright, 2002:28). Joseph adds, that personal identity represents "the individual's conception of self, often called self-concept, and captures who the person thinks he/she [*sic*] is," or an individual's self-definition (Joseph, 2004:81). Joseph continues by explaining "deep" personal identity as the combination of personal and group identities, to which one adheres or prefers to be categorized (Joseph, 2004:5). Because personal and cultural identities are not separate entities but are intricately combined into the individual's sense of self, they have an influence on the choices students make, their success in school, their commitment to persevere and their feelings of self-worth (MacBeath, 2006; Tsui, 2011). Ward et al., discuss how national and cultural identities provide individuals with the social membership to a group, which also overlaps into their sense of self (Ward et al., 2001).

Assumed, chosen, or preferred identities are those we accept about ourselves, the ones we value the most, the ones we want the dominant discourse to recognize as legitimate. These titles represent a “mark of distinction” and a form of symbolic capital that becomes not only an expression of our personal identities, but guarantees social prestige and inclusion, e.g., master’s student (Bourdieu,1991:241). Pavlenko and Blackledge discuss the constant conflict between individuals’ “self-chosen identities and others’ attempts to position them differently” (Pavlenko and Blackledge, 2004:20). This tension causes feelings of self-doubt, incompetence, and uncertainty and can be brought about by destabilizing experiences due to changes in cultural, linguistic, and /or professional landscapes, challenges to one’s personal and/or professional integrity, as well as nonacceptance or recognition by the host country community of practice. The imposition of identities triggers the need to consider, negotiate, reject and practice various other identity options or discourses. Gee defines discourse as,

> an identity kit including gestures, glances, body positions, clothes; comes complete with appropriate costume and instructions on how to act, talk and often write so as to take on a particular social role that others will recognize (Gee, 1996:127).

For international students, the host country context presents new discourses that have to be recognized and reconciled in order to achieve identity coherency. Reconciling identities in crisis entails resisting imposed, reinforcing and reconstructing assumed and constructing new identities (Canagarajah, 2004; Norton, 1992). As Ybema et al., explain, identity negotiation “involves the continuous interplay between self and others, inside and outside, past and present” (Ybema et al., 2009:303). Although Marginson likened identities to a garment that can be put on for one situation

and removed later, Ybema et al., assert that Identity construction is not an anodyne process but rather tinted with shades of emotion, value judgments, morality and social, political and economic interests (Marginson, 2014; Ybema et al., 2009). In summary, identity formation is a socially constructed, complex, continuous process of contesting and negotiating externally prescribed labels, reconciling internalized self-definitions, and formulating new multiple identities according to changing contexts and new experiences.

Review of Studies: International students and Identity

In my review of the literature pertaining to international students and identity, I include studies related to my second research question: *How are aspects of identity imposed, constructed and negotiated in the participants' new environment?* In Table 1, I present an overview of the literature pertaining to international students and identity, followed by a review and comparison of the salient points and research methodologies from each study.

Table 3.1: Overview of the Literature pertaining to International Students and Identity

Author(s)	Year	Methods	Host Country	Country of Origin	Research Focus	Findings
Bocher et al.	1977	Quantitative: 1. checklist 2.questionnaire	USA (Hawaii)	Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Thailand	To investigate the friendship patterns of overseas students	Mono-cultural bonds of vital importance to foreign students; bonds should be encouraged; feelings of exclusion, peer group pressure; issues of maintenance of national, cultural, ethnic identities
Bradley	2000	Qualitative: 1.surveys 2.questionnaire 3.focus groups	UK	Europe, Africa, Middle East, Asia, Caribbean	To describe difficulties academic staff and foreign students experience; focus on needs of international students during sojourn	Feelings of isolation, financial problems, exclusion due to outward appearance; can lead to mental health problems
Robertson et al.	2000	Qualitative: 1.Delphi technique / open-ended questionnaire	Australia, New Zealand, Singapore	Singapore, Viet Nam, Japan, Korea	To gather information on international students' perceptions and academic staff	Financial problems, feelings of isolation, homesickness, loneliness, stress, overwhelming need to be accepted and succeed
Lee & Rice	2007	Qualitative/ Critical 1.surveys 2.interviews	USA	East Asia, Latin America, Europe, Africa, Gulf Region, Caribbean, New Zealand, Canada	To identify international student perceptions cross-cultural difficulties; possible cultural intolerance by host (discrimination, neoracism)	Feelings of exclusion, difficulty making relationships, pressure to integrate, homesickness, negative perceptions of home country, perceptions of unfair treatment
Montgomery & McDowell	2009	Qualitative: 1.shadowing observation 2. semi-structured/ in-depth interviews	UK	China, Indonesia, Holland, Nepal, India, Italian	To analyze the role of social networks in academic and personal experience of international students	Importance of Community of Practice and shared identities with other international students essential to adaptation in changing environment; social networks and construction of new identities and social capital
Sovic	2009	Quantitative & Qualitative: 1.questionnaire 2. semi-structured interviews	UK	Japan, South Korea, Hong Kong, Taiwan, India, USA	To investigate international students' social well-being	Need for emotional support from social networks outweighs need for academic success during initial months of sojourn; feelings of loneliness, isolation, anxiety, lack of confidence

Author(s)	Year	Methods	Host Country	Country of Origin	Research Focus	Findings
Sherry et al	2010	Qualitative 1. Internet-based survey (open-ended and closed questions)	USA	Saudi Arabia, India, China	To examine social, cultural and academic experiences of international students; focus on challenges	Importance of social support and connectedness; need for same nationality friends; loneliness, isolation, cultural misunderstandings especially of religious beliefs, financial vulnerabilities
Rientes et al.	2011	Qualitative: 1. questionnaire	Holland	Netherlands, Western Europe, USA, Australia, Canada, Turkey, China	To explore the extent of differences between internationals and domestic students in academic and social integration and impact on academic performance	"Non-Western" students experience lack of social integration with host students, more adjustment issues, face more obstacles, homesickness, culture shock, perceived discrimination; academic performance affected positively by integration
Bian	2013	Qualitative: 1. semi-structured interviews	France and China	Algeria, Peru, Togo, China, Korea, Italy, Japan, US, Sweden, France, Spain	To explore international students' experiences with identity construction during 3 phases of sojourn: preparation, adaptation, transformation	Experiences of exclusion, financial difficulties, "invisible "discrimination, isolation, confusion, disorientation," divided identities": past, present and future identities in conflict
Brown & Brown	2013	Qualitative: 1.year-long ethnographic study 2.unstructured interviews	UK	Russia, Slovenia, China, Indonesia	To explore how international sojourn is challenging to international student identity/self-esteem	Break in sense of belonging; desire to identify with and defend country of origin; resistance of stigma/collective identity; experiences with racism and impact on identities
Tian & Lowe	2014	Qualitative case studies: 1. unstructured and semi-structured narrative interviews 2.questionnaire 3. Participant diaries	China	USA	To capture the perspectives of American international students' experiences in China with focus on cultural and intercultural identity	Intercultural identity emergence; new identity construction; adaptation, stereotypes

The major foci of the above reviewed literature concentrated on how identities are affected when moving from one culture and country to another. The first outstanding yet understandable phenomenon that shone through in the literature was the basic human need to belong to a group. Making friends in the new host environment was a way for international students worldwide to counteract homesickness, as well as feelings of isolation. In these studies, international students voiced experiencing exclusion due to their physical appearance and misconceptions about their home countries by host country peers.

As the table indicates, Bochner, Bradley, Sherry et al., Rientes et al., Robertson et al., Lee and Rice, and Tian and Lowe all used a form of survey or questionnaire to gather data about large populations of international students. Sherry et al., conducted an exploratory study using an online survey instrument sent to two thirds of the international population at Toledo University in Ohio that yielded a ten percent response or 121 international students. This method was chosen, according to Sherry et al., because it allowed “participants to speak in their own words, is convenient and a common form of communication” (Sherry et al., 2010:36). They suggest that this method of data collection is effective when conducting research about international students who may feel uncomfortable with direct, face-to-face interviews. Their findings confirmed the existence of the need for social support, financial problems and exclusion by the host community, information that paved the way for future in-depth studies to be done focusing on these issues. Furthermore, they found a correlation between the number of friends one has and the mental well-being of international students, which also coincides with Bochner et al., and their quantitative study of how friendships also affect personal and cultural identities (Bochner et al., 1977). However, Montgomery and McDowell would argue that

foreign students' successful adaptation is not solely dependent upon their "social and academic exchange with host students" (Montgomery and McDowell, 2009:455). Although belonging and human contact is essential for well-being, they challenge the notion that the lack of friendships with the host population results in unsuccessful social and academic adaptation and a negative international student experience. Using semi-structured interviews and shadowing, they explored the social networking among Asian and European international students studying in the United Kingdom. The international students in their study were observed for two days while they attended classes and went about their everyday activities. Field notes were made as well as in-depth interviews with the goal of obtaining a "pluralistic view of the research context" (Montgomery and McDowell, 2009:458). Their study found that international students, in the absence of host friends, have the tendency to form bonds with fellow foreign students who provide practical help and support: a "community of practice" among themselves. This phrase was coined by Lave and Wenger and encompasses three main characteristics that apply to the international student: "mutual engagement, joint activity involving a collective process of negotiation, and shared repertoires" (Haneda, 2006; Lave and Wenger, 1991:29). A community of practice serves as a means of new identity reconstruction, "practical help," and emotional support, replacing lost social capital (Montgomery and McDowell, 2009:465). Block recognizes the natural tendency to seek out people from your own country and/or native language when feeling insecure (Block, 2003; Montgomery and McDowell, 2009). Shared ethnic, cultural identities provides a sense of stability during times of significant change, such as in international study abroad. As Montgomery and McDowell discovered, this commonality of identities as fellow international students, despite being from different countries, was sufficient for creating a

community of practice with all the positive adaptation features that includes, demonstrating not only identity flexibility but also their sense of agency in the face of exclusion.

Contrarily, studies by Reintes et al., as well as Robertson et al., contradict Montgomery and McDowell's findings. In their six to eight-month study of international and Dutch students in business schools in the Netherlands, Rientes et al., used questionnaires to collect data on 1,887 first-year bachelor's international students at this university, fifty percent of whom responded. The principle finding of these studies revealed that "academic performance is affected positively by academic integration" (Rientes et al., 2012:696). The research conducted by Robertson et al., uncovered that international students feel an overwhelming need to feel accepted by fellow students and staff, and many experiencing isolation, homesickness, loneliness and financial stress. Their study additionally highlighted the perceptions of the host country's academic staff toward these international students, which tended to be critical of their language ability and academic skills, tantamount to stereotyping and imposing negative identities on international students in general before they have an opportunity to individually demonstrate their competencies (Robertson et al., 2000). With similar reasoning to Sherry et al., Robertson et al., used an open-ended questionnaire, the Delphi technique, in order to give the opportunity to participants to express their views more freely than they would have otherwise been able to with a conventional questionnaire. The goal of this methodology is not to obtain thick descriptions of experiences but to gather overall consensus of information, as in their case study of twenty international students and twenty-six staff members in Australia. The authors assert that the Delphi technique is appropriate for populations who may be hesitant to speak English or reveal sensitive information in a face-to-face interview.

Similar to Sherry et al., they prefer open-ended questionnaires as opposed to checking boxes, asserting the former provide a means of expression that mirrors authentic beliefs and judgements.

Montgomery and McDowell and Reintes et al., focus on students' perceptions *after* the initial adaptation period, in contrast to most studies on the international student experience. Bradley, Tian and Lowe, Montgomery and McDowell, and Lee and Rice all use preliminary questionnaires/surveys to narrow down their number of participants in order to subsequently obtain responses to their research questions through semi-structured interviews. Bradley studies international students and the academic staff of a United Kingdom university in 2000, using surveys, questionnaires and focus groups. She views the need for multiple methods as a way of bringing academic staff and international students together to promote a clearer articulation of mental health needs of these students. Lee and Rice conduct a critical inquiry with a case study design, exploring issues of neo-racism including discrimination and social acceptance and focusing on international students' perceptions of the latter. Their initial use of survey data, 501 students in all, procured twenty-four volunteers who were then interviewed by the two researchers in order to "understand internationals student experiences in more depth than survey data allowed" (Lee and Rice, 2013:390). They explain their choice of twenty-four participants as desiring to gather interviewees among a range of academic fields and nationalities. The findings of these interviews reveal a variety of problems that international students experience pertaining to identity, namely "negative social images," "negative stereotypes" leading to "negative feelings about one's own cultural identity," which is significant for future studies in these areas, perhaps with a fewer number of participants and a narrower focus (Lee and Rice, 2007:395-6).

Brown and Brown conducted a year-long ethnographic study of international sojourn students' adjustment to their new host context in the United Kingdom. One of the authors chose five students who had been part of the previous large-scale study representing five countries in order to delve deeper into uncovering how international students' identities are impacted during their sojourns abroad. The interviewers used an unstructured interview style, asking one initial question and then giving control over to the participants. Their aim was to give optimal voice to the participants and create an interview setting and that feels more like a conversation than an interview, although this still requires effort on the part of the interviewer to encourage responses and keep the conversation going. Their findings confirm that national, cultural and personal identities are interwoven into our definitions of who we are and our connection to a group. When individuals move to a different country and culture, there is a break in their sense of belonging to this national group which impacts their well-being, provoking, according to Brown and Brown, "personal feelings such as shame, pride, anger and confusion" (Brown and Brown, 2013:397). Dramatic change in environment, such as sojourners and long-term international students experience when they move to a different continent, can also provoke a strong desire to defend one's country, especially when stereotypical and erroneous comments about ethnicity or culture have been perceived (Brown and Brown, 2013).

Using semi-structured interviews as his sole data collection method, Bian interviewed 16 students, eight from China and eight from France, focusing on preparation before leaving, initial adaptation and transformation. Bian's study of Chinese international students studying in France reveals that these students experienced a feeling of abrupt separation from the past and uncertainty about the future, which causes, what Bian refers to as, "divided identities," provoking

"disorientation and confusion" (Bian, 2013:4). Identity negotiation begins upon arrival in the host country, as students' status changes from nationals to foreigners. These students become more aware of their cultural identities as they are contrasted with those of the new culture and environment. They realize they are no longer part of the majority population but are different from others (Bian, 2013). Although Bian interviewed Chinese international students, his study took place in France, explored identities, and focused on international students' initial adaptation period.

Similar to Brown and Brown, Tian and Lowe's study participants were sojourners as opposed to international degree-seeking students. In their study of American exchange students studying in China, they cite Kim's theory of "stress-adaptation-growth," which encapsulates the process that international students experience as they face the conflict between retaining their "original identities" and constructing new ones, while attempting to resolve incoherence felt as foreigners in their new environment (Kim, 2008:363). Tian and Lowe highlight their participants' experiences, beginning with negative preconceptions of their host country, to feelings of isolation and confusion due to their "inability to understand their new situation," to the eventual emergence of new "intercultural identities" (Tian and Lowe, 2014:287). They describe their data collection methodology as following four phases: 1) a questionnaire; 2) semi-structured interviews; 3) follow-up narrative interviews; and 4) final round semi-structured interviews (Tian and Lowe, 2014:286). The narrative interviews sandwiched between the first and last round are meant to encourage more detailed information through narrative expression. In addition, the participants keep written and audio diaries which serve to guide monthly interviews.

Sovic and Robertson et al., concur that there is the obvious aspect that cultural adjustment is part of the international study experience, but as the previous

studies have confirmed, international students' personal and social concerns, such as feelings of isolation and homesickness, are not as easily recognizable nor remedied (Robertson et al., 2000; Sovic, 2009). According to Sovic, in her study of the crucial role of initial adjustment experiences of international students at a London University, data obtained through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews point to the importance of emotional and social support through "social networks" which outweighs the need for academic success at this stage in their stay (Sovic, 2009:759). She asserts that "emotional support from friends provides a sense of belonging and can also help students when they face problems," stating that "friends perform a bridge function between the host and international culture**"** (Sovic, 2009:749). However, Rientes et al., highlight the difficulty international students have integrating with their host peers (Rientes et al., 2012). These feelings of exclusion and isolation are a consistent complaint echoed by international students in general throughout the literature reviewed (Brown and Brown, 2013; Bian, 2013; Rientes et al., 2012; Sherry et al., 2010; Lee and Rice, 2007; Bochner et al., 1977; Bradley, 2000; Robertson et al., 2000).

The above studies point to instances where international students experience an abrupt separation from the past, anxiety about the present, uncertainty about the future, along with financial vulnerabilities, all of which have a potential effect on the construction and negotiation of assumed and imposed identities. Jung and Lee confirm that cultural identity is "socially constructed . . . negotiated, defined and produced through various social interactions inside and outside ethnic communities" (Jung and Lee, 2004:18). They agree that it is not fixed but also in a constant state of flux as the international students face new stresses that require adaptation and identity transformation. The "stress" is a product of the conflict between old and new identities and

students' resistance against the notion that they must forsake their cultural identities in order to fit in, to belong, provoking feelings of "uncertainty, confusion, anxiety" (Kim, 2008: 363). These factors are what "push" international students to construct new intercultural identities, as they adapt to the host culture, resulting in, according to Kim, positive adaptive identity transformation (Kim, 2008:363).

A common thread throughout these studies is the aspect of exclusion felt by the international students in relation to their host cohort. Belonging to a group emerges as an important ingredient in students' identity construction, the understanding of "who they are" in relation to others. Moreover, the literature confirms that a disjuncture in this basic human need affects overall emotional and social well-being, causing individuals to question their personal, national and racial identities and undermine their perception of their own competence. The drive to belong points students toward other international students in order to create a community of practice among themselves, as they seek emotional support and attempt to relieve their sense of isolation.

Agency

"Agency refers not to the intentions people have in doing things but to their capability of doing those things in the first place, which is why agency implies power" (Giddens, 1984:9*).*

To the extent that identities are subject to assumed or imposed labels, agency suggests that people possess "the intrinsically proactive human will . . . the capacity to act on one's behalf" (Marginson, 2014:11). Hewson defines agency as "intentionally in line with rational choices in response to a given circumstance" (Hewson, 2010:13). Bandura explains that the term agency is rooted in human beings' unique

ability “to transcend the social pressure of the immediate environment . . . with the development of cognitive capacities, deliberative thought, language, and other forms of symbolic communication” (Bandura, 2018:130). Coinciding with the construct of identity, Emirbayer and Mische propose similarly that the concept of agency has its roots in the Enlightenment, when the debate over free will versus determinism provoked the idea that individuals have a hand in shaping events and circumstances in their lives. They explain:

> With John Locke’s rejection of the binding power of tradition, his location of beliefs in individual experience, and his grounding of society in the social contract between individuals, a new conception of agency emerged that affirmed the capacity of human beings to shape the circumstances in which they live (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998:964).

Emirbayer and Mische evoke Bourdieu’s notion of habitus as having a definite influence on agency, i.e. background and formative experiences shape how agents act and react in social fields (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998). Drawing from Bourdieu’s theory of habitus, Swidler suggests that people make use of a cultural “tool box,” which provides them with strategies and resources, and influences their course of action, evoking the idea that actors are predisposed to choose one action over another according to their set of “tools” available (Swidler,1986:277). However, Emirbayer and Mische argue that although Bourdieu does allow for agentic creativity and improvisation when considering a plan of action, he downplays the agent’s role as a reflective inventor of new possibilities, especially during times of challenge or struggle. The former emphasize that just as actors are able to creatively reconstruct identities depending upon needs provoked by changing social contexts, so they are

also able to incorporate past experience while imagining future possibilities which direct present action: “human agency is informed by the past but oriented toward the future and toward the present; it is analytically situated in the flow of time” (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998:963).

Individuals’ ability to set goals, objectives and plans for the future reflects a dimension of human agency that can be vital when experiencing constraints in their present lives, referred to by Emirbayer and Mische as the “projective dimension of human agency” in which social actors negotiate their paths toward the future, receiving their driving impetus from the conflicts and challenges of social life (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998: 983). Bandura refers to terms used in social cognitive theory to describe the properties that explain the core features of agency, namely “forethought,” which encompasses how people set goals, make plans, and visualize outcomes in the future (Bandura, 2018:130). Bandura states, “Forethought enables people to transcend the dictates of their immediate environment and to shape and regulate the present to realize desired futures” (Bandura, 2018:131). The second property Bandura uses to describe agency is “self-reactiveness,” which has to do with how agents “self-regulate” according to their own behavioral standards, serving as a kind of moral compass which can either contribute to positive self-esteem or can have the negative effect of self-condemnation depending upon how they evaluate their adherence to their own moral norms (Bandura, 2018:131).“Self-reflectiveness” is described by Bandura as the “human core property of agency” because it reflects the capacity of individuals to self-judge and evaluate the efficacy of their actions, a key component in the incentive to persevere in difficult times (Bandura, 2018:11).

Whereas identities reflect our self-understanding of who we are and who others say we are, agency reflects self-determination to persevere toward valued goals.

In the field of education, Dejaeghere et al., define agency as “the ability of young people to make decisions and take action toward their own life and well-being” (DeJaeghere, McCleary, and Josié, 2016:2). Edwards suggests that agents use their cultural capital in the form of knowledge they’ve accrued in order to interpret a situation and choose the most appropriate response (Edwards, 2000).

Resilience and Persistence

Resilience is a term used to describe an individuals’ personal coping abilities when confronted with change in their lives (Wang, 2009). Trueba describes it as “people’s capacity to endure hardships, challenges, and difficult situations in life” (Trueba, 2002:8). He refers to flexibility borne out of struggle that is accrued as cultural capital as being vital for adaptation in a new cultural environment. Conner defines resilience as “the capacity to absorb high levels of change while displaying minimal dysfunctional behavior” (Conner,1993:6). Flexibility is considered to be a necessary attribute if one is to survive and be successful in an increasingly multicultural society. Emirbayer and Mische note that during times of disruption or merely subtle changes to the status quo, some people can react by either holding on to their past practices, e.g. routines and traditions, as a means to counteract feelings of uncertainty, whereas others use “projective agency” strategies to “imagine alternative futures for a problematic present” (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998:1006). Just as resilience requires agency, so does persistence. The latter demonstrates agency as empowerment: “the individual’s ability to perform an intended act” (Mustafa and Troudi, 2019).This form of agency reflects the power of self-determination and perseverance as agency to advance toward their aspired goals despite hardship.

Review of Studies: International Students and Agency

In keeping with my third research question: *How are aspects of agency enacted in response to oppressive discourses and/or challenges reflected in the participants' narratives?*, I reviewed the literature related to agency and international students, uncovering general themes of resilience, persistence, and flexibility. These studies revealed how the creative self is capable of imagining new identities and draw upon inner cultural strength, personal goals and commitments as agency when confronted with change, obstacles and even oppressive discourses in their new host environment. In Table 2, I provide an overview of the studies pertaining to agency and internationals students.

Table 3.2: Overview of Literature Pertaining to International Students and Agency

Author(s)	Year	Methods	Host Country	Country of Origin	Research Focus	Findings
Trueba	2002	Research Review	USA	Latin America, Asia (immigrants)	Hypothesis: oppression and abuse can generate resilience, cultural capital to succeed, identity flexibility for survival	Resilience, multiple identities as "new" cultural capital, creative ability to become "other," tapping into inner cultural strength, identity flexibility
Koehne	2006	Qualitative: 1.semi-structured, narrative interviews	Australia	China, Thailand, Korea, Africa, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Holland	To explore international students' acceptance and rejection of power discourses with post-colonial contexts	Desire to belong; agency to overcome unexpected barriers, fight against impose positions and strive to create something new, compromises in order to fit in
Wang	2009	Quantitative: correlation studies	USA	Not specified	To explore relationships among resilience characteristics	Resilience and adjustment
Marginson	2014	Qualitative: 1.semi-structured interviews	Australia	New Zealand, East, Southeast and South Asia	To explore students' self-determination, self-formation	Personal agency enhanced due to new experiences in host country in condensed time

Table 3.2: Overview of Literature Pertaining to International Students and Agency

Author(s)	Year	Methods	Host Country	Country of Origin	Research Focus	Findings
Tran & Vu	2018	Qualitative: 1. Interviews 2. fieldwork	Australia	South Asia, Northeast Asia, Southeast Asia, Pacific Islands, Europe, UK, South America	To analyze students' study purposes, social experiences, activities and agency	Evidence of students' agency in various forms: "becoming, needs-response, struggle and resistance, and collective." (Tran & Vu, 2018:182).
Baxter	2019	Qualitative: Multi-sited ethnography 1. Participant observation 2. Semi-structured, narrative interviews	USA	Rwanda	How students exercise and experience agency	Agency exercised in reimagining future selves, determination to pursue goals despite challenges

In her study of twenty-five international students, including some from post-colonial countries, Koehne uses semi-structured, narrative-style interviews to explore how Western power discourses "speak students into being" i.e. impose stereotypic labels that these students feel the need to resist (Koehne, 2006:242). Although Koehne's study is pertinent to the power section of this literature review, it also reveals how international students use agency to overcome obstacles despite the absence of their past support systems of family and friends. Her findings reveal that during the initial period of adaptation, many of these students want to give up and return home but are able to use agency to garner the strength and determination to persevere in their studies abroad.

Marginson reviews a decade of qualitative research involving a total of 290 international students from East, Southeast, and South Asia studying in Australia and New Zealand and defends the use of semi-structured interviews as a primary research method. He explains that this method is "more open and inclusive" and best captures "identities, agency, reflexivity and self-creation" (Marginson,2014:9). Similar

to Koehne, his research suggests that international students are uniquely positioned away from family and friends and because of this, are able to forge new encounters and face new experiences in a more compressed period of time, enhancing personal agency rather than inhibiting it (Marginson,2014). This concurs with Tran and Vu who point to international students' unique enactment of agency due to their positions as those who have changed physical spaces and have had to create new social relationships and identities in their host country (Tran and Vu, 2018).

In their qualitative study of the social and agency experiences of 105 international students from South and Northeast Asian and the Pacific, Europe and the United Kingdom studying in Australia, Tran and Vu confirm the influence of the past on present and future action, stating, "the way students mediate their agency might be subject to the influence of various personal and background factors" (Tran and Vu, 2018:169). Due to their own positions as foreigners, they put a critical reflexive lens on their analysis of the extent to which international students "exercise their agency in the context of their learning and social experiences in Australia," (Tran and Vu, 2018:173). First, the participants are interviewed, with a second interview conducted six months later to compare their experiences with learning and social adaptation since the first interview. The findings make the case for "agency for becoming" or "the student's active engagement to constructing his/her life course . . . taking initiatives as change agents, which contradicts the common stereotype of internationals students as passive learners" (Tran and Vu, 2018:177; Montgomery and McDowell, 2009).

Baxter, in her multi-sited ethnographic study of Rwandan students in the United States, asserts that agency for international students begins with imagining that studying abroad is possible. They must make the initial leap toward their dreams

and be prepared to adjust those dreams accordingly as they progress through the year (Baxter, 2019; Marginson, 2014). Baxter uses a combination of on and off campus participant observations and semi-structured narrative interviews, as she investigates students' relationships, experiences, expectations, personal identities and future hopes and plans. Her aim is to include the participants' voices as much as possible in all stages of the study. Although Baxter reports the disappointment her participants experience when their paradisiacal image of the United States is shattered as they experience the imposition of negative stereotypes and discrimination, they still demonstrate agency as they refigure their expectations and focus their concentration on giving back to their home countries as successful students: "students exercised agency by reimagining their futures and developing strategies to pursue their personal goals and societal commitments" (Baxter, 2019:118). These African students show resilience when confronted with perceived unfairness and incongruency, implying that flexibility is tantamount to the ability to self-change in the face of disequilibrium in a new context. These findings chime with Wang who surveys international students at American universities and concludes that a "focused, strong sense of goals and priorities" contribute to their resilience in the face of unsettling or unfamiliar circumstances (Wang, 2009:27).

The above reviewed studies highlight the aspect of agency as "the power to reconstruct and self-transform when faced with contradictory or problematic situations" (Tran and Vu, 2018:179). Although the international students in these studies experience obstacles in their new host social context, they consistently demonstrate agency in the face of opposition by making use of their new positions to create new identities in line with their future goals and aspirations.

Power

"Identities are embedded within the relations of power" (Pavlenko and Blackledge, 2004:15).

"Being black in France means facing everyday stigmatization in all social spheres and impacts the construction of self" (Druez, 2016:125)

Students in general and those studying in a foreign country in particular, reflect their own social, political and economic backgrounds and their past experiences in the classroom (Kumaradivelu, 2001; Pennycook, 2001). Kumaradivelu refers to international students studying English when he mentions "the language classroom" as being a microcosm of society, with all its injustices and difficulties (Kumaradivelu, 2001). Canagarajah asserts that the classroom, as a "community of practice" is not immune to the dominant power discourses that would place minority students and other marginalized groups at a disadvantage in relation to their peers (Canagarajah,2004:133; Lave and Wenger, 1991).

Bourdieu acknowledges the pervasive role of education in reproduction of social and cultural practices (Bourdieu, 1977). Akbari confirms that "educational systems are reflections of societal systems . . . the same biases are reproduced in the classroom" (Akbari, 2008:246). How international students negotiate identities and use agency is affected by the power discourses of the host country. Dominant powers are able to impose value on certain identities, while devaluing others. This affects the status of those who are in the minority, limiting their identity options and reproducing, through the symbolic power of language, existing oppressive narratives.

Resistance

Hopwood explains that “students enact agency as struggle and resistance, when they struggle against or ‘break away’ from injustices or inequalities” (Hopwood, 2010:114). Therefore, resistance is when people use their agency to oppose and counteract power if they consciously consider their freedoms have been challenged or they have been treated unfairly, affecting their sense of well-being and identity equilibrium (Canagarajah, 2004). Koehne calls resistance the way to “unsettle and overturn dominant discourses” referring specifically to international students subjected to postcolonial power discourses (Koehne, 2006:242). Resistance is provoked when we are met with a conflict between our imagined expectations and unexpected reality; when imposed unfavorable identities come in opposition to preferred chosen ones, causing individuals to feel inept and unsettled.

Canagarajah addresses resistance among marginalized domestic students when he describes “safe houses” or “underlife” as *places* created by students that are sheltered from the eyes of teachers or other authority figures. Its members have the same cultural identity, distinct traits, and share the same first language. Safe houses represent any time and space where students can meet and be themselves, voice their frustrations, regain a sense of power and control over an uncertain situation, and even find comic relief in mocking their *oppressors* in the safety of their tight-knit groups. It is a way for those who are part of a disempowered group to retain their dignity and demonstrates human agency by exerting action against dominant power discourses; an attempt by the individual to regain footing, save face and preserve self-esteem in a new destabilizing environment. Although Canagarajah believes safe houses can be a resistance strategy for all students, this mechanism is especially useful to marginalized groups to safely express mutual discord and reaction to events

or comments that have placed a person in an unfamiliar, unsettling or oppressive situation (Canagarajah, 2004). It is a form of self-preservation taking place *in secret* without the knowledge of the dominant power group, or as Canagarajah describes it: "surreptitious ways of living out their unusual identities" and "coping with a hostile environment" (Canagarajah, 2004:116 & 121).

Racial Discrimination and Stereotyping

A study abroad program provides an opportunity for international students to be exposed to new cultures and customs and broaden their worldviews, preparing them for professional lives in a global society. Unfortunately, an unexpected aspect of this study experience for some is their encounter with racism in the form of discrimination and prejudice in the host country (Lee and Rice, 2007).

Kubota and Lin emphasize that "racism as a discourse permeates every corner of society and shapes social relations, practices and institutional structures" (Kubota and Lin, 2006:478). It is a fact that there are no real biological differences among races: geneticists report that all races are 99.9 percent the same (Kubota and Lin, 2006). Therefore, the concept of race has been socially constructed throughout history, especially the concept of "whiteness as a racial category endowed with power and privilege" (Kubota, 2004:41; Kubota and Lin, 2006). Kumaradivelu defines a stereotype as "a fixed, frozen, and often false image we retain about an individual or a group of individuals . . . most of us implicitly accept it without clear understanding or reflection" (Kumaradivelu, 2008:50,51). Spencer-Rodgers explains that cultural stereotypes are socially constructed and must contain "beliefs that are widely shared" (Spencer-Rodgers, 2001:642). When people stereotype, they are making sweeping assumptions about the values, behaviors and characteristics of groups of people based on an "exaggerated grain of truth and not their own experience with them"

(Kumaravadivelu,2008:51; Spencer-Rodgers, 2001). These exaggerations and distortions grab our attention and evoke an emotional response (Abraham,2009). Stereotypes create a shallow, incomplete and skewed image that has a slight ring of truth to the hearer so as to make it seem believable (Kumaradivelu, 2008:51). When people feel threatened, they attempt to resolve the situation by distinguishing themselves as superior to the Other which makes them feel safe and secure (Kumaradivelu, 2008; Spiro, 2010). For the Other, whose cultural identity has been put into question, the dissemination of stereotypes can have destructive consequences as it reinforces a mentality of *us* versus *them* (Kumaradivelu, 2008; Memmi,1965; Said,1978). Lippman exhorts “there is nothing more obdurate to education or to criticism as the stereotype” (Lippman,1992:65).

Lee and Rice describe neo-racism as “discrimination based on culture and national order” (Lee and Rice, 2007:389). Jon adds that neo-racism “emphasizes racism based on nationality” rather than biology (Jon, 2012:444). Since some societies consider it to be politically incorrect to reveal racism based on physical characteristics, less overt notions of superiority and inferiority based on culture and nationality can still be discerned. Although more subtle and easier to hide, neo-racism merely masks racism, and the oppression that results for international students remains the same (Kubota, 2004; Lee and Rice, 2007; Trueba, 2002).

The “ubiquity argument” which claims that racism is everywhere and is even *natural*, warns of the danger of dismissing the issue of racism by blaming it on *human nature*. In this way, people can justify their racist attitudes and adopt a type of nationalism that fears immigrants and minorities as a threat to their cultural preservation; attitudes that provoke further discrimination, marginalization and exclusion of minorities including foreign students (Kubota, 2004:36; Lee and Rice, 2007). On the other

extreme, the “common humanity” or “assimilationist” rhetoric, sweeps the ever present issues of “power and privilege” under the rug, serving to give minorities the choice to remain marginalized in order to preserve their cultural and ethnic identities or to assimilate into the dominant power’s melting pot, in order to be accepted (Kubota, 2004:36).

Review of Studies: International Students and Power

In the following section, I reviewed the literature pertaining to how international students have been impacted by their host country’s preconceived perception of their country of origin, including incidents of perceived racism, neo-racism, discrimination and stereotyping, coinciding with my first research question: *What aspects of power, including the effects of colonial legacy, are perceived by the participants and how are these resisted?* In Table 3.3, I give an overview of the studies related to power and international students.

Table 3.3 Overview of Literature Pertaining to International Students and Power

Author(s)	Year	Methods	Host Country	Country of Origin	Focus of Research	Findings
Sam	2000	Quantitative: 1 questionnaire	Norway	Nordic/Baltic countries, Europe, North America, Asia, Africa	To explore level of “life satisfaction” among international students	Low levels of “life satisfaction” among African and Asian students, perceptions of racism
Hanassah	2006	Quantitative: 1. questionnaire	USA	Asia, Europe, Americas, Southeast Asia, Middle East, Oceania, Africa	To explore participants’ perception of discrimination	Hidden forms of discrimination experienced by certain international students in higher education
Koehne	2006	Qualitative: 1.semi-structured 2. Narrale:3.3tive interviews	Australia	China, Thailand, Korea, Africa, Holland, Sri Lanka, Pakistan	To explore international students’ acceptance and rejection of power discourses with post-colonial contexts	Resistance against “West is best” discourse; stereotyped; tension between imagined lives and reality; positioned as “fighters”; perceptions of racism
Lee & Rice	2007	Qualitative: 1.case study 2.survey 3.interviews	USA	East Asian, Latin America, Europe, Africa, Gulf	To explore the perceptions of international students, particularly experiences with perceived discrimination	Host country prejudicial attitudes perceived by participants based on country of origin; marginalisation,

				Region, Caribbean, New Zealand		neo-racism, perceptions of discrimination and unfair treatment
Montgomery & McDowell	2009	Qualitative: 1.shadowing, observation 2.in-depth, narrative interviews	UK	China, Indonesia, Holland, Nepal, India, Italy	To analyse the role of social networks in academic and personal experiences of internationals students	Perceived negative stereotypes; host students preconceived notions regarding international students' academic abilities
Sherry et al	2010	Qualitative: 1.Internet-based surveys: open-ended and closed questions	USA	Saudi Arabia, India, China	To examine social, cultural and academic experiences of international students; focus on challenges	Cultural and religious misunderstandings
Lee & Opio	2011	Qualitative: 1. semi-structured interviews	USA	Africa	To identify challenges of international student athletes from Africa	Cultural misunderstandings, negative stereotypes, discrimination based on race
Jon	2012	Qualitative:1.semi-structured 2. narrative interviews	Korea	India, Japan and China	To gather thoughts and attitudes of host students toward international students	Neo-racism, discrimination and prejudice toward international students from underdeveloped countries resulting in lower power status
Kringlebach	2014	Qualitative: 1.semi-structured interviews 2.informal conversations 3.voluntary work with French civic association	France	West Africa	Paper focus on West African students from Francophone countries studying in France: educational opportunities, policies and challenges	Neo-racism, discrimination and prejudice toward students from underdeveloped countries resulting in lower power status
Tian & Lowe	2014	Qualitative: multiple case studies: 1.questionnaire 2.unstructured and semi-structured narrative interviews 3. Participant diaries	China	USA	To capture participants' perspectives on experiences in China during exchange program	Perceived negative perceptions of ethnicity and religion by host country
Druez	2016	Qualitative: semi-structured interviews	France	French-African	Examines stigmatisation of being Black in France, effects on identity	Stereotypes, stigmas imposed due to skin color, negative effects on identity

I begin this review by citing Lee and Rice and their methods of surveys and interviews in their case studies which focus on exploring the essential reasons *why* the latter contend with issues of acceptance in their host country (Lee and Rice, 2007). They explain how these students feel "unwelcome and rejected because of being outside the culture," experiencing prejudice and negative preconceptions about their countries of origin (Lee and Rice, 2007:400). They find that minority international students perceive they are being treated like "uninvited guests" in the host country (Lee and Rice, 2007:386**).** Their study chimes with Jon who compares the experiences of international students from India and China studying in Korea, discovering that these students believe they encounter more discrimination than students from Western, English-speaking countries in Korean society, due to negative stereotypes attributed to their countries of origin, considered to be "economically underdeveloped" (Jon, 2012:446). Tian and Lowe, in their case studies, using semi-structured and narrative style interview methods, research American students studying in China. Their findings reveal that the latter perceive they are stereotyped negatively due to their ethnicity and religion (Tian and Lowe, 2014). As Koehne explains in her study of international students in Australia, these students feel positioned as inferior due to the fact that they come primarily from Asia and Africa. She attributes this attitude as the continuation of the postcolonial discourse by those in power positions who claim, "the West is Best" (Koehne, 2006; 245).

With regard to perceptions of prejudice, Lee and Rice report that international students of color, i.e. students from Asia, Africa, India, Middle East and Latin America studying in the United States often come up against perceived racism more than students from Western European countries (Lee and Rice,2007). Sherry et al., confirm instances of perceived racism among students, attributed to misunderstandings of

their cultures and religions (Sherry et al., 2010). Kringelbach's case studies among West African students in the post-colonial context in France, reveal that these students consider transnational marriage, e.g. Africans marrying Europeans, as a means to facilitating their integration into French society and the French educational system. Through semi-structured interviews, students cite examples of perceptions of housing discrimination compared to their white counterparts, for example, which they believe is due to racial discrimination (Kringelbach, 2015). Significantly, she reports that West African international students, "come under strong suspicion of being economic migrants posing as students," causing them to fear deportation and reinforcing the perception that these students are particularly susceptible to stereotyping due to their country of origin and anti-immigration sentiment (Kringelbach, 2015:8).

Sam uses structured questionnaires sent to 304 international students in his study, including some from Africa studying in Norway. His findings reveal that students from developing countries, specifically Asia and Africa, are particularly sensitive about negative attitudes about their countries and are susceptible to real or perceived discrimination and stereotyping (Sam, 2000). Sam's study chimes with Robertson et al., who reports how International students are viewed as being deficient in academic preparation and are therefore vulnerable to appearing "inferior" compared to host students (Robertson et al., 2000; Sam, 2000). Montgomery and McDowell also find that host students attribute stereotypes to international students such as "passive learners" and as those "who need support" and are "deficient in study skills, language and background knowledge" (Montgomery and McDowell, 2009:461). Their research proves these stereotypes to be inaccurate, as the foreign students in their study receive the highest marks in the class, a conclusion that

emphasizes the existence and injustice of negative stereotypes ascribed to international students (Montgomery and McDowell, 2009).

Lee and Opio interview sixteen African athletes studying in American universities, uncovering that these students are recipients of negative stereotypes and discrimination based on race, along with unfavorable presuppositions about their cultures, religions, and countries of origin (Lee and Opio, 2011). Hanassah's quantitative study used questionnaires to obtain data about international students studying at the University of California in Los Angeles. Their findings show a higher percentage of perceived discrimination *outside* the university context among those mostly from the Middle East and Africa, with Africans "perceiving more prejudice than other student groups" (Hanassah, 2006: 168). These students describe their experience with "discrete discrimination . . . never open, subtle, people are just less friends (sic) that with other Americans." (Hanassah, 2006:166).

Druez's study was conducted among second generation Sub-Saharan Africans living in France who have earned advanced degrees in business and medicine. Her semi-structured interviews of 30 participants reveal that even those with advanced degrees, report that they are immediately judged negatively and looked upon suspiciously due to the color of their skin. According to the prevailing stereotypes uncovered through encounters documented in her study, those of African origin living and working in France are not expected to have degrees, use polysyllabic words, hold professional positions, and earn above average incomes. They report experiences with "whites" where the latter show shock and surprise, for example, that their doctor is Black, assuming she must be an assistant or other subordinate but certainly not a doctor! (Druez, 2016). Resisting these attitudes and their effect on identities is an ongoing struggle, according to the participants. They find it very difficult to combat

this stigmatization which undermines their confidence, leaving them vulnerable to symbolic violence and causing them to doubt their position in society despite their academic and professional accomplishments and status: “the fact of being Black leads directly to an association with a certain social standing” (Druez, 2016:134).
Despite these negative experiences, Druez’s study does reveal how participants who are particularly goal oriented and have acquired the “tools” to reach these goals, are better able to resist negatively imposed identities and forge positive ones (Druez, 2016:134). This desire to succeed professionally, embodied in their acquisition of advanced degrees, has given them their own sense of legitimacy through this academic capital to remain indignant to and combat the deeply engrained pejorative attitudes towards Black Africans in France and the perseverance to surmount these obstacles.

The above studies emphasize the existence of negative stereotyping and discrimination experienced by international students and others in various host countries. They point to continuing problems international students face regarding social integration and acceptance by host students, cultural conflicts and misunderstandings, financial difficulties, negative identity imposition, racism and stereotyping. They also reveal the positive outcomes of resilience, the imagined future self and identity construction. These studies were selected for their relevance to my research questions, and similarities with respect to context, topic and methodology. Out of this reviewed literature, Kringelbach’s study of Africans studying in France, applies postcolonial theory and its effect on student mobility and provides a contextual model for this current study. Her topical focus is related to power and points to incidents of racism but only broadly refers to the effect of power on identity and agency.

Druez's poignant study on the everyday experiences of "being Black in France" and their effects on identity is particularly relevant to this study, as it reveals important information about the ongoing remnants of post-colonialism manifested through acts of discrimination, stigmatization and negative stereotyping towards people of color in French society (Druez, 2016:125).

The majority of the studies reviewed use semi-structured interviews, with four referring to narrative interviews, confirming my own choice of methods (Jon, 2012; Koehne, 2006; Montgomery and McDowell, 2009; Tian and Lowe, 2014). These studies also focus on a smaller number of participants and seek to obtain in-depth descriptions of participants perspectives. Although some studies explore international students' challenges and struggles, only Lee and Rice specifically refer to their study as critical. Trueba applies Bourdieu's concepts of capital and habitus to his studies review, inspiring my own interest in the applicability of Bourdieu's theories to my findings and analyses. Moreover, I find Trueba's discussion of identity flexibility, perseverance and determination as agency to be conceptually pertinent to my study (Trueba, 2002). All in all, this review indicates there is much relevant information to be gleaned about international student's experiences as well as the researchers' choices of methodologies and methods. However, despite the abundance of studies in this area, the above review further exemplifies the paucity of information in English about the perceptions of experiences of African international students studying in France. This current critical qualitative study with its specific context, focus, theoretical approaches, methodology and methods are designed to remedy this gap in the literature by shedding new light on how the aspects of identity are constructed and

negotiated and how agency is used in response to the power discourses encountered by this ever growing and important population.

CHAPTER 4

Methodology

In this chapter, I explain the methodology I chose to conduct this research study. I give my rationale for my choice of participants and my personal disclosure pertaining to my point of view and position as the researcher in this critical study. In addition, I present my data collection methods and analysis procedures, as well as how I address trustworthiness and ethical concerns. I begin with my overall epistemological and ontological theories of knowledge and reality that guided my decisions concerning research methodology and methods.

Epistemology and Ontology

"The choice of problem, the formulation of questions to be answered, the characterization of pupils and teachers, methodological concerns, the kinds of data sought and their mode of treatment, all are influenced by the viewpoint held"

(Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011:6).

The philosophical underpinnings of research are important to establish because they reflect my position on what is considered knowledge and reality, strongly influencing how my research was conducted. My epistemological and ontological stance aligns with the interpretive, social constructionist paradigms which fall into the category of qualitative research (Crotty, 1998; Greener, 2011). The interpretive paradigm denotes that research is based on the participants conception of what is true and how they perceive reality. Since a possible research aim of a qualitative study is to uncover problems and create awareness of unfair power discourses in a particular social setting, importance is placed on subjective, as opposed to objective, knowledge (Greener, 2011). Social constructionism considers knowledge and reality

to be socially constructed, with multiple perspectives possible. Within this paradigm, interest is focused on understanding lived experience from the participant's viewpoint. Richards explains that social constructionists believe "knowledge and truth are created rather than discovered and reality is pluralistic" (Richards, 2003:39). Crotty reminds that "different people may construct meaning in different ways, even in relation to the same phenomenon" (Crotty, 1998:9). From the social constructionist stance, all human experience is valuable and deserves to be heard: "each one's way of making sense of the world is valid and worthy of respect as any other . . ." (Crotty, 1998:58). This viewpoint emphasizes the effect culture has on shaping individuals' perceptions. In addition to culture, people interpret actions and events filtered through their own past experiences (Troudi, 2014). Since the purpose of this study is to produce knowledge of hidden power discourses and their influence on identities and agency, and offer recommendations that lead to transformation and action, critical and postcolonial theories provide the appropriate frameworks for achieving this end. In addition, the social constructionist approach marries well with critical theories whose central tenets , as Hardcastle et al. explain, are "freeing or emancipating people by actively addressing patterns of power and dominances"(Hardcastle et al, 2006:151). Along with Bourdieu's "Theory of Practice", these epistemological, ontological and theoretical underpinnings provide the foundation onto which methodology and methods are constructed in order to provide a more nuanced understanding of how identities are affected and agency enacted in response to power discourses.

Critical Qualitative Approach

"You are there, because I was there" (Clifford, 1983:118).

"*Qualitative research gains its legitimacy from its claim to be close to the data*" (Greener, 2011:108).

After establishing the basis by which knowledge is created, the next step was to find a compatible research approach that reflected the theoretical framework and research aims. Qualitative research studies people in their natural settings, i.e. in the contexts of their everyday lives. Its aim is to understand how the participants attribute meaning to their actions and experiences. According to Richards, qualitative research "usually focuses on a small number (possibly just one) individuals, groups and setting", a tenet that coincides with this small-scale study (Richards, 2003:10). This approach to research concentrates on drawing from participants' in-depth descriptions of events and experiences in their own words, from their perspectives, with the researcher serving as the main research instrument (Greener, 2011; Richards, 2003). It seeks to answer the *what* and the *how* of research questions and, as Greener points out, "gains its legitimacy by giving the researcher an in-depth, immersive understanding of the social context achieved by spending often a considerable amount of time with those who live and work in it" (Greener, 2001:75). Although qualitative research can be considered a "multi-method" approach, semi-structured interviews are often favored as one the of the main methods used because questions can be asked directly and participants have the freedom to share their ideas and interpretations (Crotty, 1998). Data is analyzed inductively and organized by themes and patterns which permits theory to emerge rather than beginning with a preconceived theory or hypothesis in mind and attempting to prove it.

This in-depth, small scale study blends the qualitative approach with critical inquiry and specifically attempts to make known hegemony and expose oppression: “It seeks to show how a critical stance on the nature of power in society can be wedded to a process of inquiry that asks how power circulates in our daily realities” (Apple,1996:xii). One of the tenets of the critical inquiry approach is to emancipate marginalized people in society and unmask systems of power and privilege that serve to dominate and oppress underrepresented groups. Critical inquiry directs researchers to look for inequalities for the purpose of “positive social change” (Carspecken, 1996:3). Richards adds that this approach facilitates bringing the researcher and the researched together with the goal of raising consciousness of oppressive systems among the participants while addressing unequal power discourses for the purpose of change (Richards, 2003).

Similar to the qualitative approach, the critical inquiry approach to research takes into consideration the historical, political and social backgrounds of the research participants as factors that influence multiple meanings they may attribute to a phenomenon. The two approaches share the common goal to gather “thick descriptions” and detailed explanations from the participants’ point of view, revealing their interpretations of a situation or event (Geertz, 1973:183). In addition, critical inquirers possess a strong sense of moral responsibility to expose social inequality and unfair power structures. They are not satisfied with the status quo and want to use research to change it. They desire to give voice to marginalized groups while remaining attentive to the influences of power in society.

Both approaches overlap in their methodological criteria. However, the combination of critical and qualitative approaches added another dimension to the study that provided a deeper investigation into the “what” and “how” effects of power and

postcolonialism meant to be uncovered through my research questions. The main tenets of these combined approaches adhered to in this study are:

1. suitability to my research aims and questions which are designed to answer the “what” and “how” of my research questions and generate more complex responses

2. focus on obtaining first-hand knowledge through in-depth study of the participants personal perspectives, understandings and interpretations of phenomena in a natural setting

3. flexibility of adapting my research questions and methods to respond to new data as the study progresses

4. allowance for a small number of participants and the subsequent “closeness to the data” that these approaches afford

5. consideration of the historical, political and social backgrounds of the research participants as factors that influence multiple meanings they may attribute to a phenomenon.

6. suitability of interviewing as a method by which participants are able to express their perspectives more effectively

7. emic, “insider”, interactive approach to data generation (interviews)

8. provision for compiling “thick” descriptions during data collection

9. provision for inductive data analysis according to emergent themes

10. critical aspect of uncovering oppressive practices/problems for the purpose of action leading toward social justice through transformation and change.

11. interviewer as key research instrument

12. provision for researcher and researched reflexivity

13. ethical consideration of the participants

(Burns and Grove, 2001; Carspecken and Apple,1992; Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011. Creswell, 2007; Greener, 2011; Hardcastle et al, 2006; Huberman and Miles, 2002; Richards, 2003).

In the following sections, I explain how I comply and with the above tenets, including how and why I chose the research participants, their backgrounds, the data collection methods and analysis, my personal stance as the researcher, the strengths and weaknesses of my chosen methodology and ethical considerations.

The Research Participants

"The success of the research comes in its ability to portray the interpretations and experiences of the participants" (Greener, 2011:82).

In this section I give my rationale for choosing the research participants for this study and a brief overview of their backgrounds. At the time of the study, I was a teacher at a French university, teaching English as a Second Language to civil engineering master's students. English is a required course in the French curriculum, beginning in the primary grades and continuing into post graduate education. Despite my dual citizenship and the fact that I have lived in France for over twenty years and was also once an international student, I still considered myself to be an outsider in many respects. Because of this, I felt a sense of affiliation with the international students in my university English classes.

There are specific guidelines that I use to select my candidates. The participants are purposefully chosen from among my English as a Foreign Language master's students who have never studied in France in order to gather their

perspectives as newcomers. Focusing on two to three participants, affords more time to gather in-depth data. Finally, since all of the international students in my classes originally come from Africa, this is my criterion for participant selection, as it adds the dimension of postcolonial power attitudes and influences. At the beginning of this particular school year, I only have two new international students, one from each of my two English classes. Fortunately, these two students readily agree to be part of the study and become my research participants. Therefore, my reasons for researching two students coincides with my availability as a full-time teacher as well as my limited choice of participants. Moreover, I considered a small-scale study would afford more time to spend with my participants in order to establish a closer bond, and gather more in-depth detailed descriptions of their experiences, adding to the thoroughness and rigor of this study (Richards, 2003;Tracy, 2010).

The participants are both from countries in and near the African continent and both countries were former French colonies. The names of the countries have been purposely withheld to maintain the anonymity of the participants. After signing an Ethics Consent Form including a description of the study (see Appendix C), we mutually set the dates for our first interviews. The setting where the interviews took place was chosen according to the criteria of a "natural setting": a place where the students would feel at ease to speak openly, relatively free from distraction and in a neutral yet familiar location (Turner, 2010). In keeping with these criteria, I chose a café near their residences that has a side room where we could talk without being overheard by other customers. I met with each student individually once a month for approximately one to two hours, on Saturday afternoons five to six times throughout the school year. In the following overview, I introduce my participants by giving some information about their backgrounds and their decisions to study in France.

André and Elise

André was born and raised in a French-speaking country in Africa, the youngest among five siblings, and the only member of his immediate family pursuing a master's degree in France. His father is retired and his mother works as a seamstress. He characterizes his parents and siblings as examples of generosity and perseverance, despite the difficult economic and political environment in his country, which he views as not conducive to education and advancement. He describes his country and city of birth as extremely poor. Many of the streets in the surrounding villages are not paved and the poverty is so widespread that many children cannot afford to receive an education, let alone dream of studying in France. He relates that he and one other student from his university are the first to study abroad.

Elise is from a French-speaking country located in proximity to Africa, also studying in a two-year master's program in civil engineering at a French university. In our first interview, she explains her background and her decision to study internationally. According to Elise, she barely completed high school due to poor grades in science and math. Consequently, she was advised by teachers to attend vocational school and become a hairdresser, counsel that was in opposition to her future goals. Contrary to this recommendation and with her parents' encouragement, she persevered in her studies, received her high school diploma, and made the decision to go to college, where she earned high grades. This success boosted her confidence and motivation to finish her "license" (undergraduate degree) in civil engineering and pursue her master's degree in France. I learn that she comes from a very close-knit family, with one older brother who is also an international student in California. Her brother's experience and his acquired ability to speak English inspires Elise's

ambition to get a master's degree, possibly a doctorate, and then return to help solve her country's "problems."

Methods of Data Collection

". . . interviews are there to explore the subjective understanding of a participant in a highly open situation" (Greener, 2011:86).

Coinciding with my theoretical, philosophical underpinnings, theoretical framework and a critical qualitative approach as methodology, the research methods I chose as being the most appropriate for this study are lightly to semi-structured, in-depth, narrative interviews. Kvale describes the interview as "a conversation in which knowledge is constructed in and through an interpersonal relationship, co-authored and co-produced by interviewer and interviewee" (Kvale, 2007:89). Although interviewing as a research method has only officially been accepted during the last several decades, it is a method that was used by such reputable researchers as Piaget, Freud and Bourdieu to obtain valuable knowledge which the latter considered could not have been obtained any other way (Kvale, 2007). In this section, I explained the reasons why this method suits the purposes of this study.

In the last several decades, qualitative interviewing has come to be regarded as a one of the main research methods for gathering knowledge in the social sciences (Silverman, 2013; Wengraf, 2001). Conversation and dialogue are natural means by which human beings understand and communicate with each other. Through an interactive approach as a fellow insider using face-to-face dialogue, we are able to learn firsthand about individuals' backgrounds and experiences including their hopes, dreams, fears, opinions, perspectives, social relationships, successes and failures from their point of view (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000; Koehne, 2006).

As the participants recount their life experiences, they are reconstructing their stories in a coherent way, thus organizing and emphasizing salient aspects they wish to reveal to the interviewer.

Clough and Nutbrown describe methodology as the “recipe” and methods as “the ingredients” (Clough and Nutbrown 2012:25). In line with this metaphor, I combine the following “ingredients” to form my interviewing methods to create the lightly to semi-structured, in-depth, narrative interview used in this study.

This kind of interview adapts well to my research questions because I seek to understand and convey my participants’ perspectives of their new context in France in their own words and from their points of view. Not only are these methods suited to my research purposes, but they also coincide with my identity as someone who enjoys talking to my students and who is naturally curious about other cultures. From a pragmatic point of view, adding the narrative approach to interviewing, that is, asking the respondents to retell meaningful episodes of experiences in story form, provides me with a more complete picture to analyze. Moreover, as the participants reconstruct events through storytelling, they benefit from self-revelation that emerges as they take the time to reflect upon important incidents (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000; Silverman, 2013).

Lightly to Semi-structured Interviews

First, I chose the lightly to semi-structured interview because it resembles a conversation which focuses on specific themes reflecting the research questions. Because of its conversational style, the semi-structured interview represents the most natural way of obtaining knowledge. In this kind of interview, the researcher’s questions have a purpose and focus on particular themes to be covered, in my case identity, agency and power. The questioning is not rigid but flexible and open to new

directions the interview might take. Lightly to semi-structured interviews allowed me to pose questions and guide the interview around my research questions, while at the same time allowing for freedom and depth of expression. This spontaneity is one of the features that appealed to me as a researcher, because it promised a more natural conversational-like interaction, conducive to forming relationships, as well as giving room for the unexpected answers from the participants (Kvale, 2007). This openness and flexibility allow for the adaptation of interview questions and directions as well as the modification and clarification of research questions (Creswell, 2007).

In-depth Interviews

Complementing lightly to semi-structured interviews, the in-depth interview denotes the importance of knowledge of the historical, cultural background and social context of the participants as well as the researcher, which is essential information when conducting a critical qualitative study. Consciousness of the participants' origins and understanding of their social status, is necessary in order to shape questions so as to obtain deeper, more detailed answers. As the researcher, I also needed to have a good knowledge of the study topics so as to be able to discern and zoom in on pertinent words and phrases that directly or indirectly addressed the research topics. For example, the terms identity, agency and power are not expected to be directly referred to by the participants. Therefore, it is my responsibility to maintain an ear for thoughts, feelings and other factors expressed that implicitly referred to identity construction, use of agency and/or alluded to power discourses, e.g. "I am a student not an immigrant" or "I feel like an ant among dinosaurs." In this way, by definition, the in-depth interview, probes further into the responses the participants give, asking for more details, explanation and clarification. Bearing this in mind, as the researcher, I am obliged to remain sensitive to implicit meanings and pertinent but

unexpected detours during interviews; actively listening to what was being said and making instantaneous decisions about what follow up questions to ask (Kvale,2007).

Narrative Interviews

The final ingredient I add to my interviewing "recipe" is derived from the narrative inquiry approach, emphasizing the feature of storytelling as a means to getting a fuller picture of the complexities of participants' experiences and perceptions. Clandinin and Connelly explain narratives as, "the stories of experiences that make up people's lives . . . it is stories lived and told" (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000:20). Shacklock and Thorp define narrative inquiry as being "concerned with the production, interpretation and representation of storied accounts of lived experiences" (Shacklack and Thorp, 2005:156). Trahar further defines narrative interviewing as "a conversation between usually two people for the purposes of the research of one of them in which the narrator and listener will together produce the narrative" (Trahar, 2011:49). By adding narrative interviewing to my methods, the "conversation" is expanded, and I am able to delve deeper into the participants' perspectives by giving them time to tell more. According to Josselson and Lieblich, the role of the narrative interviewer is to,

> …keep her research aims and personal interests in mind, while leaving enough space for the conversation to develop into a meaningful narrative. It has to procure "stories," namely concrete examples, episodes or memories from the teller's life (Josselson and Leiblich, 2003: 269-270).

People of all social backgrounds and cultures use storytelling as a way to recount how something happened. Stories are "the fundamental unit that accounts for human experience" (Pinnegar and Daynes, 2007:4). According to Clandinin and Connelly, telling about events in story form is a natural way of communicating and yields

more details and thicker descriptions of participants' reactions to their experiences than a question/answer approach. Creswell affirms that the narrative approach "is best for capturing the detailed stories of life experiences of a small group of individuals" (Creswell, 2007:55). When people construct past events in story form, they are not only explaining their experiences to others, but they are also making sense of these experiences to themselves in the telling. Clandinin emphasizes, "we shape our daily lives by the stories of who we are, and we interpret our past in terms of these stories" (Clandinin, 2006:45). This method fits well with the tenets of critical qualitative approach because of the shared goal of gathering full descriptions of the participants' perspectives in a natural setting.

The previous "ingredients," namely lightly/semi-structured and in-depth interviews, set the stage for freedom of expression and allowed these international students to talk about issues that were important to them. By encouraging a narrative form of expression that favors relating their experiences structured as stories, participants have the advantage of organizing their thoughts into a more coherent and chronological sequence. The role of the researcher is to listen and encourage participants to let their stories evolve for the purpose of obtaining greater details of an incident or experience and a better understanding of context, which are tenets of narrative inquiry (Trahar and Yu, 2015). The advantage for the researcher is, as Silverman explains, the ability to get "close to the data and understand another social world from their perspective" (Silverman, 2013:121). Moreover, as Koehne remarks, participants feel empowered as they are afforded the opportunity to reflect and make sense of their feelings about experiences (Koehne, 2006).

Crossley explains, "We tend to relate and interpret as significant those events and personal experiences that support our idea of the person we want to be seen as

in the present" (Crossley, 2002:8). Shek confirms that narrative interviewing "creates a space to tell stories" that implicitly reveal aspects of identity (Shek, 2015). As people narrate events through stories, they choose which identities to highlight and which ones to deemphasize. As the storyteller weaves the story, identities are negotiated and constructed in real time. In addition, Kvale explains that the interview experience "can be a rare and enriching experience for the subject, who may obtain new insights into his/her life situation" (Kvale, 2007:14). Relating life experiences to an attentive listener can be rewarding for participants by helping them articulate and clarify their sense of self.

As students grapple with new experiences and emotions in their foreign environment, narrative storytelling not only gives them a chance to try out new identities and negotiate "old" ones but also to articulate experiences with their own conflicting values and self-contradictions (Raggatt, 2006). Storytelling provides an opportunity for both interviewer and participant to understand the difficult details of new contexts, with the added advantage of being able to reinforce positive personal values and priorities as students living outside their home cultures. Atkinson further explains that as the participants express themselves, their "stories make the implicit explicit, the hidden is seen, the unformed formed and the confusing clear" (Atkinson, 1998:7).

The Interviews

The data collection process began once I had the participants, times and location for the interviews in place. All the interviews were conducted and recorded in French, and these recordings were kept in a secure location. I prepared questions for the first interview while remaining committed to encouraging a conversational style interchange, establishing rapport and remaining open to letting the students speak

freely about themselves, and recount present and past experiences in narrative form. After each interview, I made notes about the salient topics that related to my research questions and prepared follow up questions for the next interview. The interview began with these questions as my outline, but I remained open to lightening this structure to allow for the new "stories" the participants had to tell. (See Appendices E and F.)

In the first interview, I asked the students to give a biographical account including their backgrounds in their countries of origin. As I recorded and later transcribed their responses, I listened for information about their families, school careers, financial status and social standing, health, hobbies and free time activities, loves and hates, life goals and aspirations. I paid attention to themes that emerged from their biographies and referred to this information when comparing their current experiences as international students in France. I attempted to discover *how* these participants situated themselves as they told about their lives in their home countries, their present experiences as African international students in France, and their future goals and aspirations (de St. Aubin et al., 2006). In subsequent interviews, I varied between lightly structured and focused questions based on the information from the initial questions, encouraging narratives about daily events as well as particular experiences or incidents, e.g. "Can you tell me an example of time when you experienced this?" Throughout these interviews, I listened for aspects of the effects of power, identity and agency which they expressed directly or indirectly through their stories of everyday life as well as critical events (Cadman, 2005; Freire, 1970; Pennycook, 1999; Silverman, 2013).

All the questions, including the initial one, needed to be carefully thought out and designed. The scholarly question that coincided with the research themes had to

be translated into the vernacular for the participant (Wengraf, 2001). For example, a scholarly question was “How was agency demonstrated?” The question posed to the interviewee was meant to be more straightforward and simpler: “Can you give me some examples of how you reacted when . . .? What did you do when . . .? Can you tell me in detail the story about the time . . . ?” (Kvale, 2007).

As the interview sessions progressed, the questions became more and more focused on the topics raised previously. My research purposes guided me toward which topics to pursue and which to deemphasize. Therefore, it was essential to listen to and do a preliminary analysis of each interview in order to gear my questions to be in line with these purposes in order to obtain the maximum depth of data as the participants reconstructed their experiences (Kvale, 2007; Wengraf, 2001).

The first interview informed the conversation focus for the second interview and so on. For example, in a sample from Elise’s first interview, she expressed difficulty making French friends and feels excluded for her distinctive clothing style. These themes directed my follow-up questions for the second interview, focusing on issues of friendship, inclusion, and cultural/ethnic ambiguity, allowing me to delve deeper into aspects of identity, agency and resistance with each subsequent interview (see Appendices F and G). André’s first interview extracts also pointed to initial problems with inclusion and financial strain as well as his student identity (see Appendix H). It was necessary to continuously bear in mind that the participants may branch off, digress and move in a different direction from the semi-structured format. New themes and pertinent data may evolve from these digressions. At these moments, using a lightly structured form, I let the interviewees have the reins, only gently pulling them back to the topic when I deemed they had expressed themselves fully. This practice of keeping the interviews balanced yet fluid by allowing the

interviewees freedom of expression was the method I used to capture as many details as possible of their daily lives as international students (Kvale, 2007).

Because interviewing as a method involves both an interviewer and an interviewee, the position and influence of the former on the latter needs to be recognized and acknowledged. In the following section, I explain one of the most important features of interviewing as a research method: the position of the researcher with regard to the "researched" and the necessity of building rapport with the participants.

Researcher Positionality and Reflexivity

"We bias research in ways we think are best, what are the ways we think best? To bias research so that the oppressed will be empowered!" (Carspecken, 1996:16).

The role of the critical qualitative researcher is to bring hidden ideologies that affect humans adversely into the open. This research is driven by my value orientation which motivated my choice of whom to investigate, what to study and for what reason (Carspecken, 1996). Carspecken explains that just through this decision, researchers reveal their values that inevitably bias research. Although he does not believe these biases should influence research findings, Carspecken admits that even before the study begins, researchers have made the choice of what to include and what to exclude when reporting findings (Carspecken, 1996). This is why it is important for the researcher to be aware of her own background, identities and epistemological stance as these influence how research is approached and conducted.

Kvale's statement, "The interviewer is the key research instrument of an interview inquiry," sums up the importance of the researcher positionality (Kvale, 2007:81). This chimes with the assessment made by Arthur et al., that, "All

researchers need to come to terms with their own position in the research process" (Arthur et al., 2016:15). In a qualitative study, the interviewer holds a powerful position. The latter determines the who, what, where and how of the research study, the '"what" referring to which questions should be asked and followed up on. This power dynamic between the researcher and the researched can hinder transparency and inhibit the participants' openness with regard to sharing about their lives and experiences. The researcher needs to anticipate any uneven power relationships and do her best to minimize this dichotomy by actively seeking common ground with the participants. This is done by setting the tone for the interviews from the beginning by recognizing and responding to shared identities and opinions, showing genuine interest in their lives and experiences and continuing in this vein throughout the interview process.

Researchers' identities have a strong influence upon what they consider to be valuable and relevant data. McNess et al., explain that "researchers have multiple identities which can play out differently in different situations" (McNess et al., 2016:29). Therefore, researchers have the primordial responsibility to constantly self-examine and remain conscious of her own identities and how they influence perspective, interpretation as well as the participants' responses. Throughout the interview dialogue, the interviewer's roles and identities shift and form in order to adapt to the most advantageous position for co-construction of knowledge.

Not only do aspects of power and identity affect researchers' understanding of participants' experiences, but so do their own past influences and histories. In the same way that international students carry their values, cultures and belief systems with them when the travel abroad, so do researchers bring their personal histories to the research study. However, McNess et al., do not see this as something that must

be stifled or eradicated but rather capitalized upon as affording deeper shades of meaning to participants' experiences (McNess et al., 2016). Therefore, interviewers should not only be knowledgeable about their participants' cultures and backgrounds, but also become critically conscious of how their own cultural backgrounds, biases and positions color how they view others, which is referred to as critical reflexivity.

The term "critical reflexivity," according to Sultana, means "turning a self-critical eye onto one's own authority as interpreter and author" (Sultana, in Crossley et al., 2016:117). This critical self-awareness should be present throughout the research study but especially during the interview process. It serves to bring limitations to light but also affords the researcher the opportunity to position herself in a way that allows for greater self-understanding. Through critical reflection, the researcher is better equipped to understand the nuanced meanings of the participants' stories. It requires researchers to examine how their multiple roles and identities affect the interpretations of what is being related by bringing to light their own subjectivities. Just as important as critical reflexivity is how the researcher positions herself in relation to the researched.

The terms "insider" and "outsider" have been written about extensively with regard to the researcher's position to the participant (Crossley et al., 2016). McNess et al., define "insiders" in terms of the relationship between researcher and researched as "the dominant group to which the newcomer or stranger tries to become accepted by seeking to gain cultural knowledge of the insider group" (McNess et al., 2016:25). Although qualitative studies seek to study cultures from the inside, this position is not always the most advantageous for creating a space for participants to speak freely, as McNess et al., emphasize: "Insiders may confide in outsiders on issues they would not discuss with those on the inside" (Mcness et al., 2016:24). Researcher

position can vary from outside to inside, according to fluid power dynamics and shifting identities occurring throughout the interview process. This is the reason many authors on the topic have explored the notion of a "third space," where the researcher and researched are neither outside nor inside but "in-between," using joint agency to create new, co-constructed spaces (Bhabha, 1994:56; Salter-Dvorak, 2016; Milligan, 2016:141). This "In-between" or "third space" becomes possible because of shared language, background knowledge of the participants' home country, and an intercultural aptitude or knowledge of more than one linguistic context. This new space is generated as a result of breaking down the walls that divide inside from outside, as the researcher positions herself as the empathetic listener who seeks to understand the participant above all else.

The Oxford Dictionary defines empathy as, "the ability to understand another person's feelings and experiences "(oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com). Establishing rapport by showing empathy is what builds the bridge that connects outsiders to insiders in an ethnographic study. Dwyer and Buckle remind that the core ingredient to good research relates to empathy: "to be open, authentic, honest, deeply interested in experience of the researcher participants and committed to accurately and adequately representing their experience" (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009:59).

Personal Disclosure

"Researcher reflexivity…refers to the capacity of researchers to acknowledge how their own experiences and contexts (which are usually fluid and changing) inform the process and outcomes of inquiry" (Etherington, 2006:81).

Choosing a methodology that was well-suited to the purposes of my research aims, not only depends on the nature of the study and its participants, but also, as Pring acknowledges, this choice "is filtered through one's own unique personal experience" (Pring, 2000:100). By telling some of my personal background as it relates to this study, I hope to give a clearer picture as to my motivation for choosing this research topic, my consciousness of my positions, roles and identities and how they influenced the interviewing process.

I grew up in Los Angeles during the Civil Rights Movement in the United States, and although I consider myself as having had a privileged childhood, my parents instilled in me a social consciousness during these politically turbulent times, as they set an example by actively working for minority rights and against other inequalities in society. Through this, I believe my parents engendered in me a sense of compassion for those in marginalized status, whether due to race, gender or handicap, which has had a significant and influential role in directing my personal life, career, and research interests.

Researcher as International student

At the age of seven, I announced to my family that I wanted to be a teacher when I grew up and move to France to learn French. Those two ambitions curiously remained with me as I majored in education in college and graduate school and studied in a year abroad program in Avignon, France, during my senior year. I met my future husband at university in California where he was studying as a French international student. After many years of living and teaching in the States, my husband and I decided to move with four of our six children to France where I have been residing and teaching English as a Foreign Language at the middle, high school and university level for the past twenty years. I can now assert that I have become fluent in

French, although I'll apparently always have an accent. This unavoidable fact, along with my American cultural mannerisms and physique, prevent me from ever being mistaken for *une française,* despite my dual nationality. Although I had already experienced living a year abroad when I was a student, moving to France presented many new challenges, especially for my children. They fortunately had the support of their family members and a French father. Nevertheless, during their first year living in France, due to their American cultural identities reflected in mannerisms, behavior, distinctive appearance, as well as their inability to speak French, they experienced discrimination and neo-racism. I remember reminding them that this was a good lesson in how it feels to be part of a minority group, in spite of the fact that they are white in a white culture.

Speaking two languages has enabled me to form close relationships with people from a different culture than my own. Being able to listen, ask questions, laugh, cry, console, tell and understand jokes, and, in an overall sense, share in the experiences of those whom I would otherwise probably never have known, has been very enriching. I have had the possibility of entering into people's lives on a level of intimacy that I would not have accessed had I not been able to speak their language. In a sense, becoming bilingual has opened up a new world of relationships and communication possibilities: it is like living two lives simultaneously, like being an *insider* and an *outsider* at the same time (Lore, McNess and Grossley, 2016). As a teacher and a researcher, this can also be a tremendous advantage as I can communicate with my French-speaking students in their native language, and they can express themselves more freely if they so choose.

My Position

During the interviewing process, I had to not only listen attentively for clues and evidence of the participants' agency, encounters with power, and identities in formation but also be conscious of my own identities and my position of power vis à vis my participants. My most obvious identities are those of teacher, critical researcher, female, and an American outsider who empathized with their minority status as foreign students. I expected to juggle these different "hats" throughout the interviews, but it was important to recognize other identities as they emerged that are not as predictable. Through critical reflection, I realized I was constantly constructing and negotiating identities during the course of our exchanges: vacillating among identities as critical researcher, interviewer, teacher, mother-figure, counselor, friend, insider and outsider, civil rights advocate, and back again. This fluidity of identities is crucial to maintaining rapport with the participants and occurred naturally with empathetic understanding as my guiding premise and uncovering injustice as my foundational drive. It also revealed my positions of power as they related to my participants. Breaking down power barriers required a conscious effort on my part so as not to inhibit the participants from speaking freely. This was done in several ways, beginning with meeting in a neutral place outside of the university and classroom setting. Next, it was important to set the tone of the interview as more of an informal conversation than a formal, academic exercise. Finally, and most importantly, I made a conscious effort to establish rapport with the students as a fellow "outsider," someone truly interested in them. For example, when Elise expressed her disappointment about how Christmas is celebrated in France compared to her country, I agreed and explained that my family and I felt the same disappointment. Moreover, learning about their home countries and their history with postcolonialism was important to discover

before the interviews began. I believed being thus informed communicated respect and interest for the participants' homelands, at a time when they needed to cling to their national and cultural identities to counteract feelings of instability. Moreover, it provided an opportunity to enhance understanding and confidence by giving the participants an opening to talk about their countries and cultures from their points of view. According to Kvale, rapport with the participants before the first interview is important as they would be more likely to confide in someone with whom they were already familiar and/or had had previous conversations.

Although the interviews took place off campus and had no bearing on the participants' status as my English students, there was still the unavoidable student/teacher power relationship that had been previously established. However, I did not view this as a hindrance nor a hurdle to overcome in order to achieve openness from the participants but rather an asset as they knew me, and we had already established rapport (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000; Kvale, 2007; Turner, 2010). An ambience of openness can be achieved even within the teacher/student power or authority dynamic, which is different from the teacher/student relationship that exists within the classroom context. Nevertheless, I remained mindful of the social relationship between myself and the student participants, and the inevitability that their narratives might be adapted to portray the side of their identities that they wanted me, as their teacher and a white adult in authority, to hear (Kvale, 2007; Pasupathi, 2006).

As the interviewer, I considered it significant to this study that I once was an international student in France. Similar to these student/participants, I am also a non-native and yet can speak their language. These points in common may have helped them to better relate to me as a fellow *outsider*, creating a point of rapport and

solidarity, as well as facilitating more open communication between the students and myself (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000; Dvorak,2016; Khan, 2016; Turner, 2010; Wengraf, 2001).

In order to emphasize the change in the power dynamic from student/teacher to interviewer/interviewee and to elicit the maximum responses, it became my responsibility to create an atmosphere of safety and openness so that the participants' privacy was respected, and they felt at ease to confide in me more freely (Bignold and Su, 2013; Kvale, 2007). The nature of the narrative-style interview is for the interviewer the give the floor to the interviewer and, in so doing, relinquish some control of the interview over to the interviewee. This can feel empowering for the participant and the interviewer's silence, however unnatural and difficult this may be, is meant to provoke freedom of expression (Fivush, 2010; Wengraf, 2001).

Kvale describes the interviewer as the main research instrument, and as such I was required to not simply be able to speak French, but also understand the language nuances, different accents and speaking styles. Most importantly, I had *to listen* attentively to not only *what* they are saying but *how* they said it and be able to make spur of the moment decisions as to what needed to be clarified, expanded upon and/or followed up (Tsang, 2014). I also had to have a sense of what makes a good story and encourage the participants in its development and be mindful to not interrupt the flow of narratives (Kvale, 2007; Wengraf, 2001 Conle, 2001). I was interested in capturing the whole picture of their experiences in light of their cultures and historical backgrounds, while remaining attentive to not only *what* was said but also what was omitted (Kvale, 2007; Reissman,1993).

My role as interviewer is to facilitate narration. In this way the interviews become collaborative in the sense that as the participants' stories are constructed, they

are inevitably shaped by my presence, questions, verbal comments, silences, and non-verbal cues (Fivush, 2010; Pasupathi and Rich, 2005). Non-verbal cues or spontaneous reactions to what has been said, can be just as important as verbal cues as they have the power to encourage or discourage further elaboration. Wengraf describes this as “double attention,” not only listening to what is being said but remaining aware of power dynamics between myself and the student, emotions expressed, time management and any distractions that could inhibit the narratives (Fivush, 2010; Nunkoosing, 2005; Wengraf, 2001:194).

My stance as a critical qualitative researcher meant that I would broach subjects that could be considered controversial. I deemed that questions posed about specific experiences that related to power discourses in their new context were appropriate yet had to be handled with respect and sensitivity. Despite my white privileged position, when seeking responses to these somewhat delicate questions, I chose to attempt to find common ground as a fellow foreigner whose own children have experienced degrees of neo-racism as newcomers to France. In this way, I hoped to create a safe third space with shared identities as perceived victims of unequal treatment, so that this issue could be openly discussed. As it happened, the participants did not hesitate to respond to critical questions about difficult topics, i.e. racism, prejudice.

Data Analysis Techniques

“Experience attunes the ear, and repeated listenings offer a degree of assurance that the final version is at least a reasonable representation of the talk” (Richards, 2003:202).

Although there are certain steps to the data analysis process, Kvale contends that it remains a cyclical rather than linear exercise, with the researcher repeatedly rereading, reflecting and reanalyzing the data as more themes and sub-themes emerge (Kvale, 2007). According to Kvale, interview analysis should prioritize finding meaning in the data, "meaning condensation, categorization and interpretation" and not necessarily on the specific approaches and techniques used (Kvale, 2007:119).

Although I listened to the recorded interviews in French throughout the interviewing process, it was not until after the interviews were completed that I began to translate them from French to English. Once this was accomplished, I began reading and rereading the transcriptions multiple times, first to get a general impression of the data and subsequently to look specifically for meaning in significant passages. The next step was to search for common features emerging from the data which I grouped together as general themes. Creswell used the metaphor of "family, children and grandchildren" to explain the coding process of categorizing themes and sub-themes that emerge from data (Creswell,2007:153). The "family" represented an overall group of general themes, e.g. belonging, poverty, racism. These categories represented unforeseen information that emerged from the data, or as Richards describes it, "in vivo" categories (Richards, 2003:17). After identifying these common threads, the data needed to be perused again for themes pertaining to the research questions or identifying the "children" in the data by name, using the keywords power, identity and agency. This data is considered by Richards to be "in vitro" because these categories, or "children's names," were predetermined before the research began and were specifically being identified and analyzed (Richards, 2003:17). Because these themes are not necessarily observable and are implicit by

nature, the task of grouping data into these categories required my interpretation of what represented “identity, agency and power.” Any data that could not be neatly configured into a “familial” (“in vitro”) category was labelled “miscellaneous,” but remained equally important for informing and supporting data that was implicitly and/or explicitly associated with the research questions, similar to “friends of the family,” e.g. religion. The “grandchildren” represented those categories of data where existing theory could be applied, e.g. Bourdieu’s theories of habitus, capital, symbolic violence or power.

Grouping the data in this way required breaking it down into manageable sets and subsets, taking careful note of stories, quotes and incidents that exemplified themes (see Appendices G and H). On the left-hand margin of the transcription, I classified the data into “identity, agency, power or a combination of the three categories. On the right-hand margin, I allowed a wider space for noting the emerging themes and evidence of Bourdieu’s theories of capital and habitus, and for writing important information that fell under the “miscellaneous” category. My notetaking included comparing and contrasting pertinent information about the participants, e.g. background, experiences, feelings. In this way I was able to condense long quotes into shorter phrases, as well as add my interpretations as how the data connected to my research aims. Once the themes and categories were identified, I began pulling together all the threads of data provided by the participants referring to their backgrounds as an overview to my findings. Richards confirms that in a qualitative inquiry, it is important to understand “the backgrounds of the individuals involved” (Richards, 2003:21). Along with this background information, a summary of the “family” themes that emerged would also be included in this overview. In order to address the research questions, I chose the technique of dividing the chunks of data into critical

incident narrative segments for analysis or, as Richards calls them, “descriptive vignettes” (Richards, 2003:21).

Critical Incident Stories

Fitzgerald describes a critical incident as, “. . . a story with a climax, dilemma or issue to be addressed, but no clear resolution and when the incident is finished being told, there is still a need to ascribe some meaning to the incident before it can be resolved in the mind of the teller.” (Fitzgerald, 2001:151). Farrell defines a critical incident as “any unplanned or unanticipated event,” that has left a strong positive or negative impression on the narrator, provoking “conscious reflection” (Farrell, 2013:81). McAllister et al., in their study of international students in Australia, found that “stories in the form of critical incidents . . . are a valuable research tool with respect to understanding intercultural competence” (McAllister et al., 2006:371). In the ethnographic approach, critical incidents are described as narrative vignettes or “short, impressionistic scenes that focus on one moment or give a particular insight into character, idea or setting” (Reimer, 2012: 180).

Bell explains that in the narrative inquiry tradition, importance is place on participants’ stories that describe specific incidents (Bell, 2002). Therefore, identifying critical Incidents in the participants’ narratives, provides a way to delve deeper into the data by concentrating on particular episodes that mirror pertinent aspects of the participant’s experience that also coincide with the study purposes and research questions. McAllister et al., reiterate the usefulness of focusing on critical incidents when the goal is to derive meaning from experience, as they “generate whole chunks of data and allow for understanding in context” (McAllister et al., 2006:371).

While analyzing and coding the data, I highlight the participants’ stories that they had directly and indirectly identified as significant during our interviews.

Clustering the data into critical incidents pointed to specific poignant experiences from which aspects of identity, agency and power were illuminated. Moreover, the participants had the opportunity to voice what was important to them, providing an empowering occasion for reflection, identity negotiation and construction. By identifying, retelling and analyzing critical incidents, I attempted to give a more nuanced account of the participants' experiences from their perspectives and in their own words. Through the technique of winnowing down the data into critical incident narrative extracts, I attempted to create a portrait of the participants' experiences, joining family, children, grandchildren and friends together, and framed by critical theories.

Trustworthiness and Dependability

To achieve trustworthiness in qualitative research, Richards discusses three main criteria: "credibility, transferability, and dependability" (Richards, 2003:286). I was able to demonstrate credibility by consistently maintaining sustained contact with the participants, in natural setting, over the course of their first academic year. Transferability has to do with the study's relevance to other contexts. This was achieved by providing thick, in-depth descriptions in the participants' own words, as well as my perspective and interpretations of their experiences. I was able to verify my perspectives on the interviews by audio-recording my personal impressions immediately afterwards. Finally, Brown defines dependability as, "attending to issues related to the consistency of observations, the effects of changing conditions in the objects of study, etc., with the goal of better understanding of context studies" (Brown, 2014:122). I addressed dependability by triangulating my data analysis with member checking and "constant comparison" of codes and categories (Richards, 2003: 287). Member checking for this study entailed re-contacting the participants by telephone and email in order to further clarify and check for accuracy of data pertaining to

personal background information, chronology of events, and further details of specific experiences and incidents, i.e. family background, scholarship information, religious upbringing, events leading up to leaving for France (Richards, 2003). I sent the participants portions of transcripts, to read and comment on, as is commonly the practice with member checking. Their comments about clarification, including corrections, additions or requests for deletions were adhered to and incorporated into the final version of the findings and analysis chapter. Although I had some reticence about member checking because of the possibility of misunderstanding due to language and the sensitivity of some of the themes, the results were positive and yielded information that added to the trustworthiness of the study.

I further used triangulation by reanalyzing the data for categories and themes and compared this information to my initial analysis (Richards, 2003). By reanalyzing excerpts from the first interviews, after the passage of time, I looked for new perspectives, themes, and categories that differed from my previous analysis (see Appendices E and F). This comparison of the data did not reveal any differences, and therefore showed consistency between both former and latter analyses.

Strengths and Limitations

"*Our guiding principle in an inquiry is to focus on experience and to follow where it leads"* (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000: 188).

Strengths

The two main strengths of the critical qualitative approach include the possibility to enact positive change as a result of knowledge acquired in the area of research, and the opportunity for the researcher to become close to the data through

relationship with the participants. This closeness affords the possibility of yielding data that is more detailed and useful for uncovering inequities in society.

Unlike quantitative studies, the researcher is not a detached, objective observer but becomes enmeshed in the life stories and experiences of the participants in order to co-construct knowledge. This type of approach creates the opportunity for a fuller, more nuanced representation of the participants' lives and experiences. The goal is to obtain thick descriptions of phenomena, which requires methods that bridge the relational gap between researcher and researched. Bullough and Pinnegar make the point that *closeness* to, not *distance* from the participants, is the goal of qualitative inquiry (Bullough and Pinnegar, 2001). Moreover, this closeness does not make rigor, trustworthiness and integrity impossible to achieve. To the contrary, if methodological conventions are adhered to, these standards can be assured, making closeness to the participants a strength and not a limitation (Bullough and Pinnager, 2001).

An obvious strength of critical research is found in its overall purpose: "to advocate for the emancipation of groups marginalized in society" (Creswell, 2007:70). Moreover, by increasing knowledge about these groups, the participants themselves can also become conscious and reflective of their situations. This consciousness is tantamount to action or "praxis," which Freire defines as "reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it" (Freire, 1972:28). Knowledge obtained about marginalized populations is meant to be a way to give back to the participants and help their communities. Critical and qualitative approaches both provide opportunities for participants to voice their experiences, which can be liberating and empowering. Kinchloe and McLaren confirm that the consequences of exposing hidden inequities not only leads to awareness for those in positions to enact change but also opens the

way for the participants themselves to become conscious of problems and seek their own changes and resolutions (Kinchloe and McLaren, 2005).

Limitations

The limitations of critical qualitative studies are primarily concerned with the following points: the data collected can be regarded as subjective and voluminous, which presents problems with trustworthiness; the changes that are promised as a result of the research are slow in coming and progress may be difficult to observe; and finally, the interview questions and the interviewer's non-verbal and verbal responses may be leading and value-laden, influencing the participants' responses. In the following, I describe how the latter can be seen as limitations as well as strengths.

One of main criticisms of this type of research is that its data is too subjective to be considered reliable and valid. Because participants give accounts of incidents from their point of view, it is understood that someone else could interpret the same event differently. What might be true for one person might not be true for another. There is also the possibility that participants may recount stories of experiences that they think the researcher wants to hear, or even fabricate stories. However, qualitative research, does not seek to gather uniquely objective truths that can be generalized to other populations (Tsang, 2014). The latter is more concerned with theoretical assertions emerging from a study rather than its replicability (Cohen et al., 2000; Huberman and Miles, 2002; Silverman, 2013; Wengraf, 2001). Nevertheless, although the quest for objective truth in the scientific sense is not the goal of qualitative inquiry, Freire advocates for a mixture of objective and subjective views of experience in critical research (Freire, 1972). According to him, experience cannot be classified into distinct categories but needs to be regarded as a combination of fact

and interpretation (Freire, 1970). Therefore, although subjectivity may be seen as a limitation, the main goal of a qualitative study is to capture the participants' interpretation of a phenomenon, to see the world from their point of view, making their perceptions of reality of paramount importance for the purposes of change.

The copious amount of data generated from in-depth narrative interviews can appear daunting to the novice researcher. It requires taking responsibility for deciding which data to include or exclude. I choose what to notice on the basis of the research aims and theoretical framework. However, I am also unavoidably influenced by my own values and biases. Just deciding where to begin and end a narrative can change its meaning. Moreover, meaning may be difficult to derive merely because the process of listening, recording, transcribing and translating and the representations may be less than perfect.

In addition, the critical aspect of the qualitative approach implies that research gathered will lead to a plan for change. However, these changes can take time to realize. Moreover, social change can be lengthy to enact, difficult to measure and is not always directly observable (Cohen et al., 2011). These realities can be viewed as limitations and may prove to be discouraging to the researcher. It must be remembered that social change is often irregular, with uneven progress.

As it pertains to the interviewing method, Kvale reminds how the researcher's verbal as well as non-verbal responses have an influence on the interviewee's answers (Kvale, 2007). This can be seen as a limitation if it results in the participants' reticence to speak or causes them embarrassment. In order to avoid this, the interviewer must remain mindful of non-verbal cues, remembering that facial expressions and body language can speak louder than words.

Another limitation of the interviewing process is the conscious or unconscious practice of asking leading questions that can also influence participants' answers. This is particularly applicable when interviewing children or people in vulnerable positions. However, in response to this criticism, Kvale posits that leading questions should not necessarily be avoided and can in fact be useful in verifying what an interviewee has previously reported (Kvale, 2007). Bourdieu asked leading questions during his interviews with marginalized French participants, documented in his book *The Weight of the World*, demonstrating that this type of questioning was acceptable in certain circumstances for obtaining pertinent data (Bourdieu,1999). The information gathered from leading questions may even enhance reliability and trustworthiness by allowing for opportunities to follow up on and confirm understanding of earlier responses. The answer is not necessarily to avoid these questions and regard them as a limitation, but, as Kvale points out, to maintain respect and sensitivity toward the participants, throughout the interviewing process, ensuring that ethical principles are adhered to at all times (Kvale, 2007).

Ethics

"Research interviews are saturated with moral and ethical issues"

(Kvale, 2007:23).

Kvale emphasizes that the interviewer "ethically creates a beneficial situation for subjects" (Kvale, 2007:82). This is of foremost concern to the researcher in any study. It involves a delicate balance between obtaining as much information as possible while remaining respectful of the participants' personal boundaries.

Choosing a critical qualitative approach entailed being more sensitive and vigilant about the individuals who shared their feelings about sensitive issues and experiences with me. For the participants, this meant putting themselves in a vulnerable position and therefore required a considerable amount of trust on their part. I was the author of the study themes, the methodological approach chosen, the methods used, the analysis techniques and how I reported the information. The study participants, as my human *subjects* trusted me *to tell their stories* accurately, respecting their meaning and intent. Whatever they related to me in the privacy of our interviews would be made public at some point, though their identities would remain confidential. What I chose to include and how I chose to relate it, was my responsibility. As the critical researcher, my role was to protect the students from any possible harm, relating their stories and drawing conclusions that reflected their original intent (Bignold and Su, 2013; Wengraf, 2001). As Thomas King explains:

> Once a story is told, it cannot be called back . . . it's loose in the world. So you have to be careful of the stories you tell. And you have to watch out for the stories you are told (King, 2003:10).

During the interviews, the participants revealed their identities or "multiple voices" which were then *out there,* open for analysis (Clandinin, 2006:52). As the participants related their experiences, their personal identities were uncovered, clarified and even constructed as the narratives were told (Bignold and Su, 2013). They were not merely relating objective accounts of experience, but their stories were infused with their own *selves* and their perceptions of *truth.*

The in-depth, narrative interview method involves creating a relationship between the researcher and the researched. After spending hours listening to my

students' issues, concerns, joys and sorrows, my emotional involvement and strong interest in their well-being was inevitable. Because of this, Bell suggests that the researcher/ participant relationship can resemble a "close friendship" (Bell, 2011:577). I became someone whom they trusted with confidential information. I was mindful of the effects of their stories as I retold them, and I knew I had not only an ethical but a moral responsibility to present their stories as authentically as possible (Huber and Clandinin, 2002). When preparing to interview my student participants, the first priority, after completing the ethics institutional forms, was to prepare an *information sheet* in French, describing what the study was about (see Appendix A). This document gave enough information about the subject and purposes of my investigation without giving too many specifics that could influence their responses (Kvale, 2007). They also signed a Consent Form (see Appendix D*), explaining that their anonymity and confidentiality would be respected, and that they had the right to withdraw or refuse to answer any questions without explanation (Bignold and Su, 2013).

The completion of these formalities and the preparation for the interviews did not constitute the end of my ethical considerations but only the beginning. In order to protect their identities and to ensure anonymity and confidentiality, the participants were given the pseudonyms "André" and "Elise." In addition**,** I removed the names of their home countries in order to eliminate any possibility of identifying the participants, since they were the only students from their respective countries in their classes during the study. The host city in France as well as the name of the university were not named. As the data collection proceeded, the ethical issues were ever present. The narrative-style interview approach was distinctly relational and personal. Ethical considerations involved recognizing our mutual roles as interviewer and interviewee, our student/teacher relationship, my choice of the interview setting, and how

and what topics I chose to follow-up. With these factors in mind, my first priority was my responsibility to ensure the confidentiality and well-being of my research participants.

To summarize this chapter, this is a small-scale, in-depth critical qualitative study, that drew reflexively on my engagement with my participants inside and outside their university environments. I deemed the combination of both critical and qualitative approaches to be best suited to effectively answer my research questions and fulfill the aims of this study. The main tenets of both approaches were purposely adhered to so as to allow for a more personal and nuanced disclosure and a more rigorous analysis of the participants' experiences as African students in France.

CHAPTER 5

Findings and Analysis

"It's another world here; I always think I will succeed. Everyday has its challenges and difficulties but as time goes by, I get used to it and it bothers me less." André (August, Fifth Interview)

"It was hard but I've learned a lot of things. I'm going to see it through until the end. I'm not someone who's going to crack up. It's so hard to not see family, but it's very important for me to finish my master's . . . what I start, I have to finish." Elise (June, Fifth Interview)

In this chapter I present my findings and subsequent analyses of the interview data, including the stories of specific critical incidents that exemplified identities in conflict, agency in reaction to dominant discourses and how power was exerted upon and experienced by these students. I separated the findings and analyses of critical incidents into two parts according to the participant. I begin with an overview of their descriptions of their familial situations, personal goals, and the motivating factors that led them to their decisions to cross borders to pursue their education in France.

Part 1: André's Story Overview

André's plan to study in France began some years prior to his actual departure. Over the course of three years, beginning while he was still an undergraduate, André persistently applied to French universities and was finally accepted in the civil engineering master's program at a university in France. As far as cost is concerned, André had worked and saved the 400 euro tuition, although study abroad programs

require international students to secure a “guarantor” verifying how they will be supported financially during their stay. André’s cousin became his “guarantor,” but it was understood between them that André would support himself with his savings temporarily and with his scholarship from his home country’s government for the long term. He had completed all the necessary requirements for this scholarship of approximately 700 euros and had been assured before leaving his country that he would receive it. He explained that he came from a family with a modest income and had decided to not ask his parents to help him financially with his studies in France. He left Africa with his meager savings and the hope that this scholarship money would eventually come through.

African vs. French Educational systems: “I feel valued as a student.”

Because receiving knowledge and expertise in his field was his goal, André arrived in France determined to do well academically, “to be the best in the class.”

> When I first came last year, I wanted to be the best in the class. It may be difficult but nothing is too difficult. I told myself that it would be different. I had heard it’s not easy, you’re going to struggle, you’ll have to fight. (August, Fifth Interview)

However, he found the classes to be “completely different” from his home country university in terms of class schedules and organization compared to France, admitting that he had difficulty adjusting at the beginning. André expressed that for him, a key positive difference from Africa was “being valued as a student,” an aspect that would become an essential ingredient to his identity construction, as well as augmenting his social and cultural capital in his new host country. In the following excerpt, André compared his former university in his home country to his new French university.

> Compared to French university, my university in (my country) is completely different. It was a new university and it didn't have all the means it needed, so sometimes we didn't have class for a month because there was no teacher. Here in France, you find yourself with classes every day, all day, and I'm having trouble staying organized, changing classes . . . every week you have a different schedule. But the classes are well-organized and I feel valued as a student, which is not the case in Africa. (November, First Interview).

Perseverance and a "fighting spirit"

André had embarked on his international study program in France equipped with cultural capital evidenced in his initial ambition, self-confidence, self-determination and a commitment to persevere: what he summed up as "a fighting spirit":

> I know it's a great thing to have the opportunity to come to France to study. You have to have ambition. You have to fight to succeed. We Africans have a fighting spirit. To do well, you have to depend on yourself. You have to fight. It's a battle. (April, Second Interview)

His future plans were to receive his degree and return to Africa and work in a large financial institution to help his country. Although his circumstances and experiences changed, his goals remained consistent, even becoming more ambitious throughout the first school year. Interestingly, towards the middle of his first year, he began to plan for possible further studies and work experience in France or even other countries. He applied to another master's degree program at very prestigious engineering school in Paris but was not accepted.

Although not dampened, André's dreams were sprinkled with various doses of reality, as he explained how he battled with just staying "normal," e.g. eating, and

living, and being treated like everyone else. However, as it became apparent through the description of the critical incidents, there were hurdles to overcome, one of which was persistent and particularly encompassing.

Finances, Friends and Faith

Unfortunately, a large part of his story would be lacking, if I did not address his relentless financial insecurity which began as soon as he arrived in France and continued throughout the majority of his first year. Beginning with our first interview, our conversation turned to the subject of finances, as André spoke of this "problem": dwindling savings, no word of his scholarship, and uncertain room and board. This issue was evidently of primordial concern and a major theme of our interview discussions.

> The problem is, with the amount of money I have, I can't find housing because you have to give a deposit. And to eat, I must admit, every time you think about eating, you have to think about how much it will cost. I brought some food with me from my country, and I've been buying canned food. The university restaurant here is ten times more expensive than in my country: three euros here compared to fifteen cents over there. (November, First Interview)

André expressed his desire to live "normally," signifying having access to basic necessities of food and shelter. He began to see himself as not "normal" because of his precarious financial situation. This inability to live "regularly," that is, like other students, did not coincide with his imagined future life or his preferred identity as an international student in France.

> Here, when you don't have means, you live "irregularly": meaning you don't live like "regular" person. You don't have lodgings, you don't know anyone,

> you're on the streets. It's not normal so you have to fight to stay normal. (August, Fifth Interview)

André expressed his motivation and determination to succeed despite the problems he faced in France compared to his life in Africa. Ironically, although he was now living in a financially prosperous country compared to his own, he was still on the brink of poverty, sometimes not able to eat. He compared his present circumstances to Africa, particularly with regards to food insecurity.

> In Africa, it was difficult, but we always had food. I don't know how my parents did it to make it so, but thank God we always had food on the table. When I came here it was more complicated at the beginning in the sense that I'm doing what I want to do but there is the reality that I don't have consistent finances. If I had received my scholarship, I wouldn't have had these problems with housing and food. (April, Second Interview)

Bearing in mind his initial expression of high hopes for the future and confidence in himself as a student, financial insecurity would prove to be the burden that dogged him throughout most of his first year.

André described himself as open and friendly, someone who liked to talk and meet new people. During his first months as a student in France, he had been integrated into a group of other African international students and felt well-connected. However, he chose not to reveal his financial problems to others, with the exception of a few close friends. The fact that he had not been able to make French friends, perplexed him but remained a persistent goal throughout his first semester.

An important aspect to mention that emerged in the data was André's faith. Despite the many difficulties André experienced, he remained consistently faithful to his religion, Catholicism. Raised as a Catholic in his home country, he continued to

attend mass on Sundays and on Wednesday evenings in his new home. But his expression of faith did not just involve ritual church attendance. André spoke of God on a regular basis during our interviews, reflecting a foundational perspective on how he viewed life in general and his new circumstances in particular. “God” represented a spiritual force that was present, even when crossing borders internationally, able to sustain him in good times and bad; bringing consistency amidst turmoil, hope in times of desperation, and comfort in times of loneliness and isolation. For André, God was at his side through all his trials, giving him an underlying source of stability, understanding and the strength to persevere. According to him, It was through God’s help that he was able to come to France, maintain his determination throughout the year despite persistent obstacles and even taste the victory of a resultant successful year.

“I can say frankly that I believe in God and that’s what has made me be able to work normally.”

Analysis of Critical Incidents

Over the course of André’s first year, he reported many experiences that could have been included in this section. I determined the following critical incidents to be the most representative of aspects of power, identity and agency.

Critical incident #1: The Train Station

This experience marked me and made me realize what kind of a world I had entered into. (November, First Interview)

André had never been to France before, and the following incident occurred in a Parisian train station one day after his arrival from Africa. Although this incident

took place in early September, he related it to me during our first interview in November, commenting, “I’ll never forget it.”

> When I was in Paris at the train station, I had to validate my train ticket before boarding the train. I had never done this before and this train station was very large. I was lost. People are on their guard there because of thieves and I knew that, but I was looking for someone who worked at the train station to help me. You can tell who they are by their uniforms. So a man went by in a uniform, and I went up to him to ask him what time I should look at the screen to find my train. When I went up to him, I said, “Bonjour Monsieur . . . Pourriez-vous . . .?”* But he didn’t even let me finish my sentence. He said, “Je ne peux pas, je ne peux pas! Je suis pressé, regardez-là”** Then I saw someone else go up to him immediately after and he took time to talk to them. I don’t know. Maybe he thought I was an immigrant but that was my first encounter with a Frenchman and I’ll never forget it. I had prepared myself psychologically before coming, that things would not be easy. This experience marked me and made me realize what kind of a world I had entered into. Sooner or later I’m going to come into contact with people who are going to act the same way…it makes me angry, it bothers me . . . but I understand I’m here for an objective, and I’m sure I’m not going to live in France. My objective here is to study, and we’ll see what happens after. What encourages me when you’re in difficulties, it’s up to you to find a way because I know the day will come when I’ll be a “grand fonctionnaire”*** and I won’t have to worry anymore; all this will just be a memory. (November, First Interview).
>
> *Good morning sir. Can you . . .?
>
> **”I can’t, I can’t. I’m in a hurry. Just look there.”
>
> ***an elite civil servant

Field and Symbolic Power

In this incident, a seemingly simple question had provoked a discontinuity in André's self-perceived status as a customer worthy of receiving the same treatment as others. Mills reminds that, "position in the field inclines agents toward particular patterns of conduct" (Mills, 2008: 86). Bourdieu confirms that people attempt to evaluate new situations to determine the best course of action (Bourdieu, 1991). André's "field" had obviously changed, but presumably, his actions in this situation reflected what he would have done in his home culture, had he found himself in the same predicament. In so doing, he was transferring what he believed was attainable, taking into account his new context and possibly attempting to avoid negative confrontation from other passengers because of the warning he had been given, i.e. "People are on their guard there because of thieves." Bourdieu explains the notion agents' use of "practical competence" as "a sense of what is appropriate to say in a given circumstance" (Bourdieu, 1991:7). By asking the question, he demonstrated his expectation of being recognized as a legitimate customer with the right to speak and ask for needed information. However, when he addressed the train employee, he was rebuffed, and then met with a difference in treatment compared to another passenger. This initial encounter with a person in the host country constituted "symbolic power" (Bourdieu,1991; ref. Chapter 3). The train employee represented a French social institution, the one possessing the power in this field. This power manifested itself through words that André perceived as condescending and even intimidating. He expressed awareness that he would be entering a new context in which there could be unexpected events and possible conflicting situations that could be destabilizing, reflected in his comment, "I had prepared myself psychologically". However, the awareness of his "difference" became apparent during this first incident, chiming with

Fanon's and Glissant's experiences as Caribbean men arriving in France for the first time (Fanon, 1952; Glissant, 1981:23; ref. Chapter 3).

This "psychological" preparation could have indicated that he was predisposed to anticipate some forms of struggle, i.e. disruption in familiar contexts (fields), habits and customs. Nevertheless, André's following remarks revealed the depth with which he was affected by this experience.

> This experience marked me and made me realize what kind of a world I had entered into. Sooner or later I'm going to come into contact with people who are going to act the same way . . . it makes me angry, it bothers me . . .

Bourdieu's concept of habitus is pertinent to explain how actions and perceptions are not just the result of inculcated dispositions but are influenced by the individual's position in the social field as well, as "all fields are sites of conflict between agents competing for power and stature" (Thompson, 1990:16; ref. Chapter 3). From the onset, André's particular situation as a foreigner seeking directions in a large train station, positioned him in a context or "cultural field" in which the power structures and distribution of capitals were unequal. This first incident demonstrated how the train employee used his legitimate position, reinforced and symbolized by his uniform, to exert power over André.

> This experience marked me and made me realize what kind of a world I had entered into. Sooner or later I'm going to come into contact with people who are going to act the same way . . . (November, First Interview)

I interpret this coherence of the "kind of world" to be a place where he would be treated differently than others based on his appearance. This echoes Frantz

Fanon's statement when he arrived from Martinique to study at the Sorbonne, claiming he was "already on guard before there is even a sign of conflict" (Fanon,1952:132; ref. Chapter 3). André's evaluation of the incident weeks later evidenced self-reflective agency, the capacity to reevaluate the situation as he prepared himself for similar incidents by reaffirming his assumed identity as a student with an objective and openness to what the future might hold (Bandura, 2018).

> . . . but I understand I'm here for an objective, and I'm sure I'm not going to live in France. My objective here is to study, and we'll see what happens after. (November, First Interview).

Imposed Identity: "Maybe he thought I was an immigrant?"

The predominant identities that emerged during retelling of this incident were André's assumed identity as a master's student, his national identity as a citizen from his home country and African association participant, his imagined future identity as an important civil servant, his racial identity as a black African and, finally, the imposed identity as an immigrant. The title "student" was prestigious in both his home and host countries, robbing him in a personal and professional identity that included him in a class, as Bourdieu would suggest, that was recognized by society as legitimate and valuable (Bourdieu,1991).

Although André's preferred assumed identity was as a master's student, a conflict occurred when the train employee misrecognized him as such. By definition André was an immigrant, choosing, however, to reject this label, evidenced by his statement beginning with, "Maybe he thought . . ." as if he, the train employee, had made a mistaken assumption. André perceived that his physical appearance linked him to the immigrant label and that this association was already in the mind of the

train controller, i.e. the one with the power to impose identities. André used his self-reactive agency to resist an identity that carried stigma, associated with Africa's economic global standing and France's history of colonization (Bandura, 2018, ref. Chapters 2 and 3). André disassociated himself with the immigrant identity because it set boundaries that ran contrary to his assumed identity as a master's student and future civil servant, limiting his prospects and curbing his possibilities. I interpret that André believed his assumed and imagined identities carried more "symbolic capital" in the form of respectability, dignity and prestige than the imposed identity as an "immigrant." I consider André's negotiation of his "future self" imagined identity, as an elite civil servant "who won't have to worry anymore," to be consistent with self-regulating agency, demonstrating André's resistance against the dominant power's imposition of identities (Bandura, 2018). This imagined identity claim chimes with Nurra and Oyserman's notion that the closer one feels to one's future self, the more it becomes part of one's identity (Nurra and Oyserman, 2018). In André's home country, becoming a civil servant was the pathway of the educated and the elite (Hagberg, 2002). It was a title that represented opportunity and status for the privileged who had received formal education in the postcolonial context, and he donned it to counteract imposed negative, stereotypical identities. The fact that André was at the train station, literally on his way to begin post-graduate studies that would bring him, in the not too distant future, to his aspired goal, gave present relevance to his future self.

Although André described his origins as coming from a poor country, his background as a student and membership in a Euro/African association, gave evidence of social and cultural capital. Significantly, the encouragement and inspiration he received from his cousin, who had earned a doctorate degree in France and was currently working in Washington, DC, had an evident effect on his decision to pursue

post-graduate studies in France. Therefore, he had a family background that encouraged academic success and helped create a foundation or habitus that shaped his perceptions of what he could accomplish, i.e. “someday I’ll be an elite civil servant” (Bourdieu and Waquant, 1992; Edgerton and Roberts, 2014; ref. Chapter 3). The rest of his statement, ”and I won’t have to worry anymore,” could arguably have referred to the future professional title which held symbolic and economic capital, along with identities guaranteeing group inclusion as a legitimate equal in the field (Edgerton and Roberts, 2014;ref. Chapter 3).

Educated Habitus: “I knew I would do well.”

I argue that André’s “educated habitus” disposed him to move toward adjustment after this first critical incident, i.e. negotiating his valued assumed identity as a master’s student with clear, articulated future aspirations. His ability to speak French, positioned him among those who had been able to obtain a formal “scientific” education, referred to by his fellow African nationals as “the way of the whites” (Hagberg, 2002:29). Hagberg explains that in André’s country, “education and identity are intimately linked” due to the fact that formal education was introduced by French colonizers and conducted in the French language (Hagberg, 2002:30; ref. Chapter 2). I interpret that his student identity, reinforced by his educated habitus, provided capital which enabled him to wield his assumed and imagined identities as a resilient agent in his new context, empowering him to continue his international student journey, “marked” by the dominant power encounter at the train station, but not deterred from his ambition.

Critical Incident 2: Social Services

*"If you're hungry, you'll eat anything." (*November, First, Interview)

As I explain in the overview, André's preoccupying concern after arriving in his destination city was his persistent struggle with finances. The following critical incident happened when André had to seek help from the school social services office.

> I went to the school assistance office because I didn't have any money and I was in difficulty. But there they spoke to me in such a way and I thought she was only speaking to me like that but then I realized that, when I spoke to the others from Africa, they told me they don't want to go back there. She gave me a coupon to go to the Red Cross every Thursday and get food and when I went most of the food was spoiled or almost [past date of consumption]. I didn't mind taking some food that was expired, that would keep another week or two. When I looked at the date and told the woman the date had passed, the woman told me, "When you're hungry, you'll eat anything." And the first time I heard that I didn't react, I just told myself, "they're like that" but it hurt me. The fact that I'm a student, I didn't arrive on a boat without papers, I came here legally. I'm a student, I should have the same rights as the others. She knows I'm a student, I showed her my card. She said "when you're hungry you'll eat anything . . . people in Africa who are starving, they'll eat anything." (November, First Interview)

In the following analysis, I argue how aspects of power in the form of symbolic violence could be discerned from André's account. His display of agency through resistance was significant, despite his position of financial need which remained unchanged and his feeling of isolation as an outsider, with different problems compared to his cohort. His constructed, chosen identity and social capital as a student, were also spotlighted.

This incident exemplifies the role of power to categorize some identities as legitimate and others as undervalued in particular social and/or political contexts, which chimes with Bourdieu and poststructuralist thought. Arguably, the socio-historic-political element in the field was evident, as the woman directly referred to André's national identity as an African in a demeaning way: ". . . people in Africa who are starving eat anything." She recognized him as an African, and indexed him according to categories rooted in French socio-historic power relations. Alba and Silberman in their study of second generation North Africans living in France, claim that immigrants from former colonies, "are likely to be confronted with harsh stereotypes originating in the colonial experience and to be treated in a discriminatory fashion by individuals who hold their origins in low regard" (Alba and Silberman, 2002:1170). Evidently André was identified as an African by his physical appearance, and based on this, the French worker exercised symbolic power against him with her discourse. Because of his race and nationality, the imposed identity as the colonial underdog who should be grateful to receive any food, was attributed to him. This incident also provoked a reaction that is particular to foreigners living abroad, as Oberg explains, "If you criticize my country, you criticize me. If you criticize me, you're criticizing my country" (Oberg, 1960:179). In light of this identity imposition, André's comment, "it hurt me," revealed his interpretation of the incident as a personal affront. Notably, his assertion that, "I'm a student, not an immigrant" as his preferred new identities, negotiated since his arrival in France, were articulated throughout our interview sessions, every time he was confronted with, what he perceived to be, stereotypical or racist remarks.

As André related this story, he appeared to reflect further on the incident, reaffirming his assumed identity as "a student with rights" as opposed to the

ascribed/imposed identity as “an immigrant” who arrived “on a boat without papers.” This negotiation of identities uncovered similarities to the train station incident. He used his student identification card as a “symbolic device,” as Thompson describes Bourdieu’s term, part of “the very mechanisms through which those who speak attest to the authority of the institution which endows them with power to speak” (Thompson, 1990:9). The student identification card was shown to the worker as proof of his stature and legitimacy in that field, comparable to a kind of uniform that represented an admirable rank in society, and used as a symbol of belonging, recognition, resources and prestige. It appeared to have recognizable value for André as a manifestation of cultural and social capital, which could be used to gain membership into his new host society, not only inside but also outside the university context. In the university field, he was an international student among others and presumably accepted by other international students as such. However, as Block observes, “there are an infinite number of sociohistorical and sociocultural factors away from the classroom that impinge on and shape what goes on in a given context” (Block, 2007:6). This incident necessitated resistance against imposed stereotypical identities outside of the university context. Consequently, although his student identity empowered and equipped him with cultural capital, his lack of economic capital, put André in a marginalized position as exemplified in this incident.

Symbolic Violence, Resistance and Agency: “Just because I don’t have money doesn’t mean that I have to eat spoiled food.”

Thompson explains Bourdieu’s assertion of how even seemingly insignificant and harmless, “linguistic encounters among agents bear traces of social structure that it both expresses and helps to reproduce” (Thompson, 1990:2; ref. Chapter 3). In other words, a simple linguistic exchange can communicate power and capital, and

propagate unequal or oppressive socio-historical narratives. In this incident, André had an actual verbal exchange with a person whose status in the field positioned her in a dominant power role. Apparently, she perceived her remark to be acceptable within French society, although it proved to be oppressive to the receiver. Her statement correlated with prevalent pervading stereotypes of people from the African continent. Symbolic violence, according to Bourdieu, does not constitute actions taken by the dominant toward a person but rather that person's acceptance of domination as being the status quo, which in Bourdieu's estimation, makes resistance more challenging (Bourdieu, 1991; ref. Chapter 3). André, however, as an outsider with educated habitus and cultural capital as a master's student (with an identification card!), had not absorbed this existing "doxa" and was therefore able to use agency to resist the oppressive dominant narrative. This resistance consisted of planning a response to the social services agent in the event she gave him spoiled food again.

> The second week I went back and she told me the same thing but I answered her this time. I told her clearly that it's not because people are dying of hunger in Africa that you can justify poisoning people with spoiled food. It's not because I don't have money that I have to eat spoiled food! I told her clearly that I was not going to take any food past the date. I took what I wanted and didn't go back for two weeks. When I went back the third week she didn't make me take spoiled food. As far as help goes, I'm still in the process but they favor French people over other nationalities. (November, First Interview).

I find this to be noteworthy because despite this humiliating experience, he was able muster the self-reflective agency to use his cultural and linguistic capital as an international master's student, constructing prestigious and face-saving identities to counter, rather than acquiesce to injustice. Thompson confirms Bourdieu's notion that "Some words uttered in certain circumstances have a force and conviction that

they would not have elsewhere" (Thompson, 1990:1). Miller explains that, "Speaking is itself a critical tool of representation, a way of representing the self and others; a means through which identity is constituted and agency or self-advocacy is made manifest" (Miller, 2004:292).

It could be argued that despite or because of the experiences he had had thus far in France, André's cultural capital had increased, evidenced by his resistance as an agent pushing back stereotypical power discourses by choosing to counter the social worker's comments. By challenging this one person, André was successful in changing the reproduction of at least one act: distributing past date food to him, which he considered to be demeaning and representative of an attitude that Africans should be "happy" with anything, since their countries are poor compared to France. André's push-back demonstrated a change in the power dynamic of the field between André and the social worker. The status quo or "doxa" had been challenged and was altered in André's favor. Through agency, equipped with preferred identities and an educated habitus that resisted oppression due to race and nationality, André was able to have a small but significant victory in his fight for normalcy in France. In the context of this and other incidents of unfair treatment, André referred to "it" as racist actions.

> It hurts but here in France everyone tells me when you confront it, when you react, they understand and when you don't react, they'll continue to treat you that way. I talk about it with my [African] friends because it happens to almost all of us. (June, Third Interview)

Critical Incident 3: Returning home: "a paradox"

"*I wanted to go back home in February because I wanted to now see my country from a different perspective after being in France for five months."* (August, Fifth Interview)

An important and perhaps timely event happened at the beginning of February, about five months into André's first year as an international student. He had the opportunity to speak at a Euro/African conference in his capital city organized by a foundation. It is included as a critical incident because André referred to it retrospectively in our last interview as a "paradox" between a "positive" experience and also his "biggest trial."

> A positive thing happened since I've arrived in France . . . I got to return to [country] for an international conference on February 2nd for one week. It's Euro/African interviews that we organized where large companies are invited to discuss financing of renewable energy in Africa. I've been working on this for three years in association with ASAP and the lady who founded it. The company paid for me to go because it's an important time to make contacts and meet business people. I had to get permission from the university administration to make up my exams after my return. On the day I left, I barely had enough time to make the train to Paris for the flight but I did. It was God! When I returned I had one week to make-up five assignments. I knew it wouldn't be easy; I didn't sleep much. It was hard. I tell you about it because it did me a lot of good to participate in this experience. It really encouraged me to go. When I came back I saw there wasn't much change in my situation. I asked myself, "why do I keep on fighting?" (April, Second Interview)

Time in his home country provided a brief respite from André's financial stress and academic pressure; a time to replenish cultural capital through reconstructing his positive identities as an African student studying in France. Returning to Africa with

the title of master's student, carried distinction, generating esteem and accolade, earning him increased cultural capital in his homeland. Notwithstanding, his return to France would be met with the same financial problems along with the added burden of making up five final exams and projects in five days. The above comment reflected his state of mind after his trip; that he was in a battle, combatting his circumstances, even to the point of questioning if his imagined goal was attainable or worthwhile. This incident marked a critical point in his international sojourn, where he went from a mountaintop experience in his home country, in a position of power and importance, back to the valley, with his financial insecurities and academic hurdles.

"A Big Step"

"Your friends think it's a big step and they wonder how you did it." (André)

In André's home country context, he took on a distinguished role as speaker, expert, risk-taker and generally someone to be admired for studying in France, which enabled him to reconstruct positive identities. In this light, André chose not to reveal the difficulties he was experiencing in France with others in Africa, with the exception of one friend.

> I didn't tell them in [country] how hard it was for me in France. I only told one friend, who is combative like me. I told him how hard it is and will be but difficulties don't last forever. (August, Fifth Interview).

I interpreted André's choice to refrain from disclosing a part of his life that ran contrary to his preferred identities, as André's strategy for maintaining his positive student image to others and himself. In terms of identity construction, this experience

demonstrated flexibility and plurality, as André moved among professional, African national, international student and familial identities. Mills reminds that "identity is not the whole person but a cloak the person puts on, one that might be changed later" (Mills, 2008:10). Returning to his home country as a visiting speaker at a conference, André positioned himself as a professional, a newly constructed identity carrying weighty cultural capital in this field. The fact that he had already been working for three years as a volunteer for an association, visiting embassies, and interfacing with other professionals, was an indication of his accrued social and cultural capital, arguably made more evident while interfacing with Africans and Europeans in his home country.

Agency and Habitus: "I made a choice"

> I made the choice to go home even though I knew I would have to make up my exams because I didn't have the average in my classes. I'm a grown up, I made the choice. It did me a lot of good to participate in this conference. People wondered why I was invited to go after studying only five months in France. It was a privilege to be able to go. People crowded around me to find out how it is. It was very motivating. In the eyes of your friends, they think you've taken such a huge step and they don't know, they wonder how you did it. I knew the opportunity I had how lucky I was to be able to study in France. I knew I had to succeed. (May, Third Interview)

Moving from one culture to another necessitated what Marginson refers to as "personal agency," an ability particular to international students to "continuously fashion their changing selves" (Marginson, 2014:18; ref. Chapter 3). André's choice to attend the conference came with the real risk of failing the semester, endangering his aspirational chances and his reputation as a student. He had been living in what could be described as survival mode due to his financial struggles, yet continued to

imagine his possibilities linked to his future goal. André's decision to speak at the conference appeared to align with his future objectives, as an international business-man. It could be interpreted that these dispositions were behind André's purposeful choice to travel back to his homeland, allowing him to transcend his present oppressive situation and seize an opportunity for self-formation and personal growth (Mills, 2008, ref. Chapter3). Conceivably, André not only displayed agency by choosing to leave France for one week, but also independence and autonomy as an actor fashioning his own future trajectory.

"The Most Important Thing"

After a motivating and positive experience in his home country, the reality of his situation appeared overwhelming upon André's return to France. In retrospect, during our fifth interview, he singled out February and March as being "the hardest months of his first year."

> The choice I made to leave my classes and return to my home country was my biggest trial. It was a paradox because I came to France for my studies and then you decide to leave school right at the time of your exams and I had to make everything up. I took a big risk. But the most important thing for me was to not fail school, even if I don't eat, I must not fail. That was the hardest part of my first year. (August, Fifth Interview)

Arguably, this brief break from his battle with food insecurity, provided André with encouragement and empowerment to persevere. It was a time to put aside the mundane concerns of his daily life as a struggling student in France and construct an identity that placed him in a position of power and prominence among his compatriots, making the overall experience "motivating" in his words. Returning to the reality of the poverty in his home country compared to France might also have revived in

André the motivation to be in a position to help his country, a plan he articulated during our first interview. This would necessitate completing his studies in France successfully. The self-determination to persevere and concentrate on academic success chimes with Lee and Opio's study of African athletes who, when faced with discrimination at universities in the United States, felt even more inspired to excel in their studies (Lee and Opio, 2011; ref. Chapter 3). Chirkov et al., remind that when students' objectives are considered to be "personally important career and life goals," they are more likely to have a higher level of self-determination to succeed (Chirkov et al., 2007:203; ref. Chapter 3). Returning to his home country after his studies with the educational tools to combat poverty in his country was one of his articulated goals. His commitment to this objective provided the impetus for his decision to become an international student and to seize opportunities that would advance his cause. Speaking at this conference became an occasion for inspiring African youth to pursue international studies. Moreover, it provided a favorable field for self-enhancement, augmentation of cultural capital and corroboration of aforementioned positive constructed identities, as expressed by André's summation of his experiences, "Everything I do is beneficial." The circumstances of his return, referring to his unchanged financial insecurity and university exams to retake, tested his commitment to persevere. His comment,

> The most important thing for me was not to fail school, even if I didn't eat, I must not fail. (May, Third Interview)

incapsulates his determination to succeed in his studies despite his struggles with food insecurity, which stood out as his biggest setback.

Part 2: Elise's Story Overview

"Where do I fit in?" (Elise)

The move to France: "I'm lost"

Although Elise had visited France before with her parents as a tourist, she had never been there alone. She explained how coming to France as a student, had been complicated for her, practically as well as emotionally, as she had never lived this far away from her parents before. Her parents managed the paperwork and logistics necessary for the move.

> I had already been to France on vacation with my parents and we stayed in hotels and went to the vacation spots where everyone is a tourist. So it's really not the same thing now; my parents aren't here to help me fill out this paper or that reservation or go here or there because you have to. I've never done any of that and frankly, it was very complicated for me because my parents are very protective and in fact they have always been. My father told me, "Don't worry, I'll take care of that paper, I'll pay for that, I'm the one doing that for you . . . you just study and work well and we'll take care of the rest." And so when I arrived here we had to put everything in my name, open an account and I had to go around doing stuff and I didn't know where to go or where I was and it was complicated for me to study and do all that at the same time. It was really hard. (October, First Interview).

Elise's parents accompanied her to France and financed her studies, found and paid for her apartment, car, and expenses. However, when they returned to their country of residence, Elise found herself for the first time having to open her own bank account, pay bills, navigate the city, take care of her apartment and study

alone. She expressed that this was challenging in this new, unfamiliar environment and culture without the protective support of her parents.

> It was really complicated at first because we had to put everything in my name and I had to go here and there and I didn't know my way around the city . . . and to start my studies and do all that at the same time . . . it was really hard. (First Interview, October).

Elise's first class as a master's student in France was English. As she would relate later in our first interview, she had just said good-bye to her parents as they headed for the airport and was left for the first time in her life to manage this new international adventure by herself.

> As a matter of fact, I missed the first week of classes so the second week I had my first class which was English with you, and I was crying in class but I didn't want you to see me crying. That's when I told you "I'm lost," because my parents had just left. They dropped me off, but I'm not ashamed. They wanted to be sure that everything was ok. I felt like a little girl on my first day at kindergarten. (October, First Interview).

Elise was the only new international student in her classes, the others having started their studies in France as undergraduates. She was also the only one from her homeland. On the one hand, having to explain where she came from gave her an opportunity to enhance her national identity composed of favorable features, some of which could arguably include self-descriptions:

> My country is the union of lots of different origins . . . it's a mixture of everything . . . we're very warm, hospitable. We would never prevent someone from buying a house because he was different or something like that. French

> people love our island when they come. There are beaches, mountains, good food. And people feel welcomed, we're very warm people, touchy, feely, . . . we're not cold . . . we like to please, we love music, to party, to talk. (October, First Interview).

On the other hand, she expressed feeling defensive of her country due to other students' assumptions owing to lack of knowledge. Although technically her national identity was French, she appeared to relate more to her ethnic identity.

> Well, [country] is a French territory, so we are French, but since I've been here I realize that we're not as French as we thought. We are not recognized as French, the French don't know anything about us, where we come from, nothing about our lifestyle, nor how we live. They ask me for example if we have electricity in my country if there are cars, roads. (October, First Interview)

An added detail, which I deemed gave further information about her background and language identity was the information she gave about the bilingual aspect of her home country: French and Creole. Elise explained that although French is the standard language taught in schools among the "educated class" in her country, Creole is spoken among family members and close friends. Elise's parents insisted on French being spoken in the home, arguably evidencing their commitment to equipping their children with the tools for higher education from a young age.

> We speak French but lately the people in my country speak less and less French and we speak more Creole but it depends on the education level of the family. For example, my family, they prefer to speak French. They don't like it when I speak Creole. They tell me, "Elise, you must speak French because afterwards when you go to school and you have to work, you're going to have to deal with people who speak French." (October, First Interview).

Elise's ability to speak French as her first language not only reflected educational capital but provided the linguistic tools to potentially integrate into her community of practice. Her parents' insistence on using French reflected how being linked to the "civilized language" of the metropolitan culture ensured greater status, leading to better employment opportunities (Fanon, 1952:2; ref. Chapter 2). However, speaking French like a native did not prove to be sufficient to gain entrance into the new host context, as measured by her own professed inability to make French friends. Elise attributed her physical appearance to be a factor that set her apart from the French and from the other international students. She characterized herself as "the intruder," someone who felt outside her community of practice due to her looks.

> Where do I fit in? Frankly, when I'm at school, I'm nowhere. My friends* pass their time making fun of me: you're Filipino, you're Brazilian, you're Asian! Here, they know you're not from here. Here they're mostly white. So it's really weird for me, when I look around, I don't fit in. When I'm with white people, I'm the intruder; when I'm with black people, I'm the intruder; when I'm with North Africans, I'm the intruder. (June, Fifth Interview)
>
> *international

Integrating as a member of the host country would have met the basic human emotional need to belong and combat loneliness and homesickness. This adaptation process took Elise through moments of self-doubt and confusion as she tried to look, say and do like everyone else in order to be accepted in the group. She fought an inward battle, suppressing expression of her personal identity in order to be accepted, while at the same time struggling to use her cultural capital to distinguish herself as a legitimate, equal member of her host and international cohort. The following remarks revealed her self-description and gave clues to her habitus and dispositions.

> I have a strong personality that can bother people because they can take what I say the wrong way. In [country], I never let anyone walk on me. I would speak to people directly and tell them what I thought. I participated, I talked, I gave my opinion. If I wasn't happy with something I would say so. When I arrived here, I just went along with everything, said "yes." I spoke softly. I wouldn't participate and I wouldn't give my opinion. I was afraid that people would say, "the new girl is really a pain in the neck." When I did that, I felt forgotten, I erased myself. I saw people wanted to be friends for what they could get from me. (June, Fifth Interview).

The critical incidents that follow, attempt to chronicle her progression from suppression of national and personal identities, to attempts to imitate others to gain acceptance, compromising her identities as a "good" and "honest" student, to the realization that being "herself" was the key to well-being and successful adjustment. The final critical incident mirrored the transformation and personal growth that occurred throughout the school year.

> It was hard but I learned a lot of things. I'm going to see it through until the end. I'm not someone who's going to crack up. It's so hard to not see family, but it's very important for me to finish my master's . . . what I start, I have to finish. (June, Fifth Interview)

Critical Incident 1: The Classroom Greeting

The following incident represented an example of Elise's desire to "fit in" within the university context. During her first week of classes, she attempted to meet her fellow classmates in the way she had been accustomed in her country. I chose the following experience to retell because she commented that "it really affected" her. This incident took place the first time she met her fellow students.

> I have to tell you something because it really affected me. In my country when we're in school and the teacher hasn't arrived yet, we greet each other and give "la bise" (kiss on each cheek), ask how they are, and what's new, etc. Once I did it, everyone looked at me and one French boy asked if I was going to do that to everyone in the class? But to me it was logical, the polite thing to do. It was good manners. I told them in my country, this is how it's done, I'm going to show you. But I don't do it anymore because a [North African] girl told me they don't give the "bise" and they don't really talk to each other. I asked her how you make friends if you don't even say hi to each other? I wonder sometimes if I'm a parasite or something. (October, First Interview).

Elise's action of greeting her new fellow students on the first day of class and her subsequent reaction to one classmate's rhetorical question, demonstrated several aspects of identity, agency and power. Her past upbringing and common practices in her home country did not coincide with the host culture's traditions in this particular university setting. Giving the "bise" (kiss on both cheeks) and saying "bonjour, ça va?" (Hi, how are you?) are customs with their roots in French culture and language and were transmitted to her country during colonization. In other words, Elise's actions were culturally appropriate; she knew the customary "rules of the field," but, according to one student who happened also to be international, her actions were misplaced for this situation (Bourdieu, 1977). This incident reflected a learning moment for Elise as she had to adjust her familiar "making acquaintances" strategy, to the social norms of her new environment. Block discusses the miscomprehension of situations international students experience due to deficits in the host language. In this incident, the other students' reactions led Elise to believe that she was the one who had misread the situation, although language was not the cause (Block 2007). Conceivably, Elise's initiative to greet her fellow students was

motivated by her desire to move from the periphery of the community of practice group to a place inside. Although she had placed herself in what she determined to be a “coherent position,” as someone culturally aware of “insider” ways to greet fellow students in France, rather than achieving the desired outcome, she was left further “outside,” as the odd one. This critical incident disrupted her notion that the typical French greeting was her common point of reference for belonging to her new community, casting doubt on her status as a legitimate, valuable member. Her comment, “I wonder sometimes if I’m a parasite or something”, reflected not only her sense of isolation but also held a negative connotation, “a parasite”, one who is considered to be an “intruder” because of her looks and rejected in the host society.

Cultural Capital and Agency: “I told them in my country, that’s how it’s done. I’m going to show you.”

I argue here that the confidence to take the first step when meeting new people demonstrated the degree of cultural capital Elise possessed. Bourdieu refers to “social logic” with its base in the habitus, correlating to social position and level of education and expressed through cultural competencies acquired in the home (Bennett,1984:xx). She called upon her cultural capital by reaffirming a custom that she believed was a common link between her new context and her home culture. Her assumed identity as a friendly, outgoing student from (her country) also allowed her to unreservedly proceed to greet her new classmates. However, there was a disconnect between Elise’s assumed ethnic identities and the dominant power’s imposed identities in the university field of interaction, i.e. those who possess the resources to reproduce the social norms of the culture. Making the “wrong” gesture at such an impressionable moment provoked a misunderstanding which had a substantial effect on

Elise, evidenced by her reaction. Nevertheless, her immediate response revealed assertiveness to impose her "way" in defense of her actions.

"I told them in my country, that's how it's done. I'm going to show you."

Arguably, by challenging the host cultural practice, she showed aspects of agency through resistance. This boldness could have been interpreted as an attempt to regain self-respect and demonstrate a level of self-efficacy, reflected in the following question posed to the student(s):

"How do you make friends if you don't even say 'hi' to each other?"

Critical incident 2: Clothing as Distinction

Beginning with the first interview, Elise explained how she had tried to integrate herself into the small group of civil engineering master's students who were studying the same specialty. There were twelve students in the class, four of whom, were African international students and the rest were French. After this initial "greeting" incident, she explained she put up "barriers," arguably suppressing her "friendly" and outgoing" personal identities in order to be accepted. The following incident exemplified another instance where Elise experienced difference in cultural practices, specifically clothing styles. Bourdieu indicates that particular tastes, including fashion, are manifestations of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984). Bearing in mind the link between clothing tastes as a symbol of social status, and the emotional importance of belonging to a group, the following incident exemplified the cultural and personal identity conflict which emerged around the theme of fashion.

> I think it's important to talk about that clothing styles are not the same. When I came here, I noticed that people don't wear colors, they wear gray, black or brown. When I went shopping with another girl and when I picked out colorful

> clothes, she told me “you can’t wear that, we’re going into the winter.” But I’ll dress the way I want. It’s ugly to always dress in dark colors. I think wearing dark colors makes people feel even sadder. (October, First Interview).

Elise’s comments resonated with Bradley’s study of international students in the UK when speaking about a South East Asian student who felt “excluded because she stood out too much,” due to her mode of dress (Bradley, 2000:426).

Bourdieu refers to the “the pursuit of distinction which produces separation intended to be perceived, known and recognized as legitimate differences” (Bourdieu,1984:730). This act of distinction was in reaction to the imposition of style and the “misalliance” with Elise’s own customs and culture (Bourdieu 1984:730). If she couldn’t fit in to her new culture, perhaps she could distinguish herself by wearing clothes that represent her own cultural identity. Tian and Lowe discuss “othering,” a conscious effort to mark the differences and maintain a separation between the foreigner and the host country’s culture, by wearing traditional clothing from one’s home nation and other practices (Tran and Lowe, 2014:288). These actions can be viewed as resistance strategies against conforming to a culture that has already excluded them. Although, at the beginning of her sojourn, Elise expressed indignation toward conforming to the clothing styles of the other students, she eventually succumbed to the fashion that was predominant in her new context. This necessitated identity negotiation as well; adjusting her outward “mode of expression,” wearing brightly colored attire, to a more sober look that she interpreted as “sad.” This break with the past customs and practices is felt as a loss by international students, reflecting “divided identities” referred to by Bian as “a sense of separation from the past and anxiety about the future and an over-concentration on the present making them feel lost” (Bian, 2013:464; ref. Chapter 3).

By December, Elise had found herself in an in-between space, where she wanted to retain her past identities, rooted in her culture and associated with her family but felt the pull to assimilate and belong. Arguably, by giving in to the host country's imposed identity and dressing like everyone else, she was attempting to negotiate away from being recognized as a foreigner and attempting to be more readily accepted into her host country cohort. Bourdieu includes clothing style and tastes as marks of distinction and denote cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984). As a consequence to having to deny her own tastes, Elise's sense of distinctive capital in this regard was diminished. She had misunderstood or was unaware of the cultural norms reflected in fashion among her host country peers. Her cultural frame of reference had been challenged and as Baxter and Britton describe, was in "a painful dislocation between the old and the newly developing habitus" Bourdieu (Baxter and Britton, 2001:99). The following remarks reflected Elise's sense of her position among her host country cohort as, what Lehmann refers to as a "cultural outsider" (Lehmann, 2007:91).

> I felt small, erased, like an ant among dinosaurs. I felt left out, alone, lost. Other students* in my class go out together but don't invite me. (December, Second Interview).
>
> *referring to the French students in her class.

Elise continued to express feeling unnoticed, insignificant, lonelier and isolated, "lost" despite her efforts to fit in. She described how she had become shy, self-effacing and would not speak to the French students in her class because they wouldn't speak to her. This resonates with research by Sherry et al., of international students from Asia, India and the Middle East studying in the United States, who experienced "social exclusion," "cultural barriers" from their host counterparts (Sherry et

al., 2010:35). Their study pointed to these students being vulnerable not only to social exclusion but also racism (Sherry et al., 2010). Elise's only social contacts were with other international students, arguably finding common ground as fellow non-white (European) foreigners. In order to combat her present loneliness, and arguably as an attempt to move "inside" this group, she admitted doing things she would not have ordinarily done in the past to please others and be accepted, i.e. letting others borrow her notes and cheat off her test.

Critical Incident 3: Cheating

According to Elise, she had earned a reputation among the other students in her class, international and host, as a conscientious student, who worked hard, took complete notes in class and earned satisfactory grades on tests and assignments. It was because of her position as "good student," that other international students regularly asked to copy her notes when they missed class. She expressed her anger and frustration of this practice by her so-called friends. Her very reputation and constructed positive identity as a successful master's student was in jeopardy because of her actions. The following critical incident illustrated a pinnacle moment where Elise's desire to belong to a group came into conflict with her core beliefs and assumed identities. This coincides with Koehne's study of international students in Australia who claimed to have made compromises in order to fit in, although she did not refer to compromises that conflicted with students' established moral code (Koehne, 2006).

Near the end of the first semester, the civil engineering master's students from all strands were gathered for a final examination in the university amphitheater.

During the test, another international student asked Elise to pass him her test in order to copy her answers. She hesitated but then complied. As she explained later, she would not have done so in her country, but in France, under pressure to be accepted, she acquiesced. However, according to Elise, after she handed in her test, she was so incensed by the incident, she discreetly explained to the supervising teacher what had happened. Unfortunately, after the incident she would discover that, when correcting the tests, the teacher had confused who had copied from whom, and the "cheater" received a higher grade. The consequences of her actions caused her to receive a very low grade.

This incident provoked a strong indignation in Elise, as her assumed identity as "good student" had been tarnished by her own volition. Her "self-regulating" agency was now in conflict with her own moral compass, producing what Bandura describes as negative effects on her assumed identities (Bandura 2018: 130-131; ref. Chapter 3). A discontinuity between habitus and field had emerged that Elise struggled to resolve. Her identity as a self-described "good student" was in danger of being minimized, replaced by the imposed identity as a cheater. By her complicity, she admitted acting contrary to how she would have in her home country, revealing a consciousness of her role in the incident, while at the same time faulting her association with those who did not share her work values. Conceivably, the fact that she spoke to the teacher immediately after the incident, before she received the lower mark, revealed her discomfiture and possible regret for her involvement.

> I feel like fighting for myself because on the one hand, I've worked so hard but on the other hand I'm not sure it's worth wasting my time on. My grade stayed the same but my average went down. I passed the semester, but it just annoys me that I never heard from the teacher even when I sent him a second

> message. I don't really know why he didn't answer and how he viewed the whole thing. I'm just afraid he categorized me in a way that's not me. I mean, the fact that I have been around and associated with this person who cheats is going to cause me problems. But frankly it really bothers me and I never want to see him [the cheater] again. (February, Third Interview)

This incident proved to mark a turning point in Elise's desire to make friends and belong. The tension that had built up between how she saw herself and how she believed others saw her, had reached a crisis point (Block, 2007; ref. Chapter 3). Elise expressed a recognition that she had compromised her values by allowing another student to copy her answers, resolving that it was because she was "new" and that her desire to assimilate had been at the origin of the incident.

> The problem is when you're new and you don't come from the same country or the same culture and you can't seem to assimilate with the others, you turn toward others who maybe don't have your same habits and that's what I've noticed these past few months . . . that I've been hanging around with people who don't have the same mindset as myself or the same way of working. This experience changed me. (February, Third Interview)

Significantly, at the time of the event, Elise voiced concern about disappointing her parents and not fulfilling their expectations of her as a student. They were supporting her financially so that she could concentrate on her studies, an advantage that she recognized not all international students enjoyed. Her responsibility, according to her parents, was to study well and get good grades. She expressed that the possibility of failing a test and not passing the semester merely because she wanted to belong to a group, left her feeling all the more regretful and anxious.

> That's why this cheating thing affected me so much. I felt sad all the time and afraid I wasn't going to make it. (February, Third Interview).

The identity work of deconstructing the "cheater" identity and reconstructing the "good student" identity was not without complications. It required speaking to the teacher involved in an attempt to clear her name, change her grade and expose the "real cheater." As she retold the story, she questioned whether it was worth causing an uproar and drawing more attention to herself. This reticence may have reflected her estimation of her outsider status as an international student, in the minority. However, she did not hesitate to mention her resolution to "never see" the "cheater'' again. It was noteworthy that until this incident, Elise had been positioned as an outsider. Her attempts to move inside by changing her dress style, and compromising her values by letting others copy her work had reached a crescendo with the cheating incident. Elise's desire to belong, to fit in and be an insider was not without cost, a cost she began to weigh carefully.

Agency, Habitus Transformation: "I started dressing my own way then too."

I argue that this incident proved to be transformational, as it marked Elise's resolve to no longer compromise her values for the sake of being accepted. This choice reflected agency and the emergence of her beliefs and values embedded in her habitus that had perhaps heretofore been suppressed, but that now she had to evaluate with which groups she cared to be identified (Joseph, 2004; ref. Chapter 3). She related that she recognized she had been taken advantage of and she would tolerate it no longer, calling upon her cultural capital to confront the issue as an equal and not as someone who could be exploited because of her outsider status. The "friends" she referred to in the following passage were fellow international students.

> Before a test, when friends told me they were counting on me to take notes, I told them, “No, I’m not here to be your friend when you need something. You’re not going to skip class and then copy my notes.” If it’s not important to them, they should leave and make a spot for someone else! I kept it all in for a while, and then I said, “Stop!” I started dressing my own way then too. I’m careful about people now. I want to make sure they have good intentions. Because of this incident, I started putting up barriers toward people so I wouldn’t have any more problems like that. I made a mistake but it’s over now. I had to learn to say “no.” (February, Third Interview).

Resistance and Resilience: “I can’t jeopardize my studies.”

Elise used the word “barriers” again, denoting her new strategy for resisting people and situations that were arguably at odds with her educated habitus and corresponding identities linked to being a “good student,” such as conscientiousness, hard work, honesty, self-motivation. Contrary to the first incident, when the barriers symbolized a protective reaction to her attempts to greet her fellow students; a form of resistance when she felt “erased,” “like a parasite,” “like an ant among dinosaurs,” the barriers she constructed after the cheating incident, served another purpose. These new barriers represented an offensive strategy, determined action to put the incident in the past and proceed with her studies with a renewed outlook. This self-reactive agency proved to be transformational, empowering and effective, evidenced by Elise’s refusal to accept any further requests from ‘foreign students’ to take notes for them.

> I’ve changed. I used to hang out with people but now I’ve heard they have a bad reputation at school. They don’t really want to work. The problem is, they are really going to hold it against me if I don’t see them anymore. The one who

> was my only friend at the beginning, is the one who talks to me in class, borrows my notes . . . it's very hard but I can't jeopardize my studies. I have to be responsible. (February, Third Interview)

The above incident revealed the conflict of identities between the good student and the cheater, which provoked a conscious response to forego trying to fit in with "the wrong crowd" in order to belong. Elise had been caught a in a compromising situation, arguably provoked by her imposed identity as an outsider, feeling the loss of her cultural and familial frame of reference, and had succumbed to pressure. Notwithstanding, Elise realized that her actions had put her studies at risk which could compromise her future ambitions, as well as disappoint her parents. The following incident detailed this realization, as Elise began to exercise autonomy, crediting her cousin's influence on her transformation.

Critical Incident 4: Cousin's Visit

This incident represented a turning point in Elise's adaptation. She revealed her recognition that she had suppressed her personal identities which were part of her habitus, holding "the unifying principles" which undergird tastes and social practices (Bourdieu, 1984). Arguably, the suppression of these identities induced by her need to integrate, caused her to feel unhappy as a consequence.

> It bothers me to talk about it but there were times when I just started crying and I told myself, I just want to be with my family. I'm really attached to my family. They represent my origins, my roots, my foothold. I was less depressed because I got to see my parents and my brother [in May]. I think homesickness is not really negative. The negative point would be when I thought I had erased myself; I let myself be carried away with what was going on with me. I couldn't say "yes" or "no." I was new, I didn't want to impose myself, make waves. I let things go, I didn't stand up for myself. I didn't want people to say,

> “oh yeah, the new girl is trying to get attention, to be noticed.” (June, Fifth Interview)

Fortunately for Elise, she had a cousin studying in France, whom she visited in January and who came to visit her during her semester break in February. Notably, they spoke Creole together, reflecting their shared ethnic and linguistic identities. Although Creole was considered the non-standard language spoken in her country, it nevertheless conjured ethnic and cultural identities in Elise which had been heretofore suppressed. She emphasized the point of speaking in Creole with her cousin in public, seemingly finding solace by communicating in their mutual linguistic bubble where no one understood them. Bradley reminds, that in the absence of family and host-country friends, international students “need the empathy and understanding (of people) from their own country” (Bradley,2000:428). Not only was Elise’s cousin from her own country, but also from her own family. Therefore, the opportunity to confide in her in their ethnic language proved not only to be a great comfort for Elise, but also a time to reconnect with her cultural and personal identities with a fellow countryman. Their previously established relationship provided social capital which served as, what Canagarajah refers to as a “safehouse”: a protected position where she was free to reconnect with the past while struggling to fit in to her new environment (Canagarajah, 2004). Although the “cheating incident” appeared to trigger indignation which awakened her resolve to deconstruct negative identities and reconstruct positive ones, Elise marked the month of February as being the transitional time when she went from feeling “erased” to announcing, “Elise is back!”

> It was Valentine’s Day when my cousin came to visit me. We took a walk on the beach and we started singing at the top of our lungs in Creole. People saw us singing and I think they thought we were drunk. And I realized that this is

> how I really am. I've been closed up, acting really polite but I wasn't myself and I wasn't smiling or laughing or dancing or acting crazy anymore and after I said to myself, Elise, I know who I am and my cousin told me "don't let others make you closed up . . . stay who you are, dress colorfully, and if people don't like it, too bad for them." She told me not to pay attention to how others look at you . . . look at yourself and ask if something makes you happy. Why should I stop myself from being happy? I was putting too much importance on whether people like me here, how they look at me, the looks people give you. But now I say, I'm here now, Elise is back. (February, Third Interview)

Contact with her cousin, who represented her home culture and family served to remind Elise of "who she was" and encouraged her to ignore how others "saw her." Significantly their language choice served as symbolic capital equipping her with agency and power to safely explore the emergence of new identity options and modify others, especially when it came to fashion.

> When I saw my cousin it really helped me. She told me you shouldn't care what others think about how you're dressed. You should dress the way you want and talk the way you want and laugh the way you want and don't change in order to please others. I said to myself, "They don't know the real Elise, but now they're going to meet her." (May, Fourth Interview)

The "cheating" incident and her cousin's visit brought identity negotiation full circle, setting Elise back on her foundation, empowered with resilience, to continue on her adaptation journey. This contact with familiar roots proved to elevate "past" personal, cultural and ethnic identities to a primary position, creating what Pavlenko and Blackledge refer to as a "hybrid" space for new identities to be negotiated (Pavlenko and Blackledge, 2004:17). Notably, these identity negotiations were manifested tangibly in her outward appearance. As she reflected on the incident, she

highlighted her change in dress style, a semiotic expression of her social capital, and assumed personal, ethnic and cultural identities, as well as a reflection of agency against host dominance, representing her new resolution to introduce “the real Elise.”

André and Elise’s accounts of critical incidents exposed several themes for discussion. In the following chapter, I present these themes, and discuss their implications and relation to my research questions and theoretical framework.

CHAPTER 6

Discussion

"Here they know you're not from here. Here, they're mostly white. I don't fit in." (Elise, June, Fifth interview)

"Sooner or later I'm going to come into contact with people who act the same way." (André, November, First Interview).

This critical qualitative study uncovered some poignant injustices and problems, the exposure of which I considered to be crucial to the understanding of African international students' experiences in France. The study revealed four main emergent themes: encounters with perceived racism, pervasive poverty and feelings of exclusion based on appearance that these students of color faced during their first year studying in France. The final theme relates to agency and how these students used resistance and resilience to surmount their difficulties. In the following discussion I related how these themes connect to my research questions, existing literature, and evaluated how the findings made a theoretical contribution to the current body of research on international students from Africa studying in France. As it pertained to my research questions, my study shed light on how the participants' identities were negotiated, imposed and constructed in their new environment, as well as showed the ways in which the latter used agency in response to oppressive discourses. Finally, it revealed the aspects of power due to colonial legacy that continues to fuel discrimination towards international people of color in France. Although I have separated the concepts of identity, agency and power into three distinct research questions, these constructs are interwoven throughout this discussion. The following table summarizes the link among critical incidents, emergent themes and research questions.

Table 6.1

Critical Incidents	Themes	Research Questions
1. "Train Station" André 2. "Social Services" André 2."Distinctive Clothing" Elise	Racism	1. What aspects of power, including effects of colonial legacy, are perceived by participants? (Power)
1. "Social Services" André 3. "Returning Home" André	Poverty	Power, Identity & Agency
1. "Train Station"André 2. "Social Services" André 3. "Returning Home" André 4. "Classroom Greeting" Elise 5. "Clothing Distinction" Elise 6. "Cheating" Elise 7. "Cousin's Visit" Elise	Exclusion	2. How are aspects of identity imposed, constructed and negotiated in the participants' new environment? (Identity)
1. "Train Station" André 2. "Social Services"André 3. "Returning Home" André 4. "Classroom Greeting" Elise 5. "Clothing Distinction" Elise 6. "Cheating" Elise 7. "Cousin's Visit" Elise	Resistance and Resilience	3. How are aspects of agency enacted in response to oppressive discourses and/or challenges reflected in the participants' narratives? (Agency)

Emergent Themes

1. What aspects of power, including effects of colonial legacy, are perceived by the participants?

Racism

"*The black man has to confront a myth—a deep-rooted myth. The black man [sic] is unaware of it as long as he* [*sic*] *lives among his own people; but at the first white gaze, he [sic] feels the weight of his melanin"* (Fanon,1952:128).

The theme that permeated the lives of both participants during their first year of study in France was the presence of racism directed toward them because of skin color. As predictable as this result may have been, it is still abhorrent to me that remnants of the legacy of colonialism and the subsequent notions of one race being superior to another are still present in our modern times and that international students of color are subjected to it. This affirms the first tenet of Critical Race Theory, which, according to Delgado and Stephancic, contends that, "by every social indicator, racism continues to blight the lives of people of color" (Delgado and Stephancic, 2012:11; ref. Chap. 3).

Elise and André believed that race played a significant role in their outsider status, which relates to the first research question: When André had to interact with people outside the university setting, he spoke of incidents where he believed he was treated unfairly, even abusively, by those in power positions, because of his race. As Critical Race Theorists would concur, the way André was treated attested to the socially-constructed concept that ascribed his race with inferior status (Delgado and Stephanicic, 2012; ref. Chapter 3). André perceived that he was discriminated against because he was African, as he reported in the train incident, the social

services incident, as well as other instances while working as a dishwasher outside the university setting. Elise also expressed feeling excluded by host and even fellow internationals because her national and racial identity were ambiguous to others. She concluded that she was not accepted into the French community of practice because of her appearance, or as proponents of Postcolonial Theories would name, "other-ing", which is the when the dominant power excludes "foreigners" and projects negative stereotypes on them (Jensen, 2011; ref. Chapter 3). Racism was perceived to be behind identities imposed by those both outside and inside the academic community during these students' most vulnerable period in their stay. These findings chime with those of Sam, Hanassah, Lee and Rice, Kringlebach and Druez whose studies included international students from Africa attending universities principally in Europe and the United States, and their common experiences with racial discrimination and stereotyping (ref. Chapter 3,Table 3.3).

2. How are aspects of identity imposed, constructed and negotiated in the participants' new environment?

Druez reminds that, "Being Black in France means facing everyday stigmatization in all social spheres and impacts the construction of self" (Druez, 2016:125; ref. Chap. 3). Just changing cultures and continents already triggers what Block refers to as identities in crisis: causing incoherence because past identities are at odds with present cultural norms (Block, 2007). Add to this, the imposition of inferiority which these students experience "with the first white gaze", and the term "identities in crisis" takes on a weightier significance (Fanon,1952:128). Druez confirms that it only takes a look from a white person to a black one to impose a self-image that cannot be undone (Druez, 2016:131).

The signs of identity in crisis may not be easily discerned nor directly observable: rather, they surface when in conflict or when a person's sense of equilibrium is threatened, such as an international student might experience when he/she comes in contact with different practices and values or even "a look" (Block, 2007; Druez, 2016; Milstein, 2005). Joseph emphasizes that, "identities become particularly salient in contexts where multiple interpretations or messages collide, resulting in a power struggle as to whose interpretation prevails" (Joseph, 2004:10). Identities in crisis will attempt to resolve this imbalance, the success or resolution depending upon the strength of positive self-image and other supporting identities, e.g., "I may not be good at math but I'm a competent English speaker or a good football player." Benesch explains that these multiple identities give international students the chance to combat identities as the "oppressed outsider" by bringing to the forefront an identity in which they may excel, demonstrating that they may be "oppressed in one situation and privileged in the next" (Benesch, 2001:57,58).

As they were confronted with negative stereotyping and discrimination in their new context, André and Elise were faced with having to construct new identities in response to racism and "othering". The problems were new: André had not dealt with prejudice due to race nor had Elise experienced feeling like an intruder because she looked different, as they both belonged to the majority population in their home countries. André's reaction to an imposed identity was to assert his new assumed "student with rights" identity. He chose to resist racist stereotyping as a form of power, to fight to be seen as legitimately belonging in his new field, reflecting agency despite being placed unfairly in an underdog position. He was able to resist acceptance of the status quo and exert action that addressed hidden racism which demonstrated critical consciousness of a societal inequity (Deimer et al., 2016). Elise, on the other hand,

had never been separated from family and friends before and found her new position as an outsider to be particularly destabilizing. She struggled with feeling like an "intruder" in an all-white community, believing she had been shunned by host country peers because of her appearance. She recognized how she had been unfairly positioned by her white cohort but felt powerless to resolve this unequal situation: "I feel like an ant among dinosaurs."

Pavlenko and Blackledge discuss the "constant conflict between self-chosen and others' attempts to position differently," a tension that can cause feelings of self-doubt, incompetence and uncertainty (Pavlenko and Blackledge, 2004:20). Mercer explains that changing cultural settings already brings about the destabilization of an individual's sense of self, or identities in crisis (Mercer, 1990). How much more upsetting for the international student who has just arrived in his new host country to be faced with negative imposed identities, which specifically positioned André in ways that ran contrary to his chosen identities? (Mercer, 1990). Imposed identities are stereotypes, which, if negative, impose singular characteristics implying "inferiority, deficiency and disadvantage" (Canagarajah, 2004:117). For Bourdieu, identity imposition is likened to "social judgement of attribution which assigns to the person involved everything that is inscribed in a social definition" (Bourdieu, 1991:121). In André's case the identity impositions attributed to him in the first and second incident were socially constructed judgments based on his color and tantamount to racism. It is understandable why he expressed how "marked" and "bothered" he was by this first incident. Unfortunately, the train incident would not be André's first nor his last experience with negatively imposed identities in his new home.

Using Pavlenko and Blackledge's assumed, imposed and contested identities model, I observed that one of the prominent preferred identities that both participants

had in common was their assumed identity as “master’s students” (Pavlenko and Blackledge, 2004). This appeared to be an obvious identity to assume as it represented the main role they each had adopted in their new context. However, this identity held more importance for them as ethnic foreigners in a postcolonial environment, where they would be immediately recognized as different and possibly stigmatized negatively. The student identity, was meant to counter negative labels and establish their legitimacy as master’s students. It was a positive label that carried distinction and prestige. I first heard André refer to this identity in reaction to his retelling of the train station incident. I considered that he used this assumed identity as a defense against symbolic violence, as he perceived he was negatively stereotyped as “an immigrant” from Africa because of the color of his skin (Bourdieu,1991:51). These imposed identities, which were aimed at putting him in his place as a subordinate, represented to André “who he was *not* ”: an immigrant, possibly without papers, which in the French socio-political system, implied myriad negative connotations and stereotypes (Druez, 2016; McNess and Crossley, 2016). Druez confirms these findings in her study of African students studying in France. She explains how black skin color in France is directly associated with lower social classes, immigrants and therefore regarded as inferior (Druez, 2016). According to André, if you were an immigrant from Africa, you had most likely entered France illegally, and, as attested to by the comment made by the social services employee, were poor, hungry and would eat anything. Both students experienced marginalization due to their skin color, despite their education and position in society, and were victims of an “imposed stigmata”, to which were attached negative stereotypes and assumptions reflecting the enduring residue of the effects of post-colonialism in our present times (Druez, 2016:129).

Poverty

"Even if I don't eat, I must not fail." (André, May, Third Interview).

Financial insecurity among college students has become an increasingly frequent problem in the past decade. Bruening et al., in their quantitative study of food insecurity on postsecondary education campuses in the US, Canada, Australia, Malaysia and South Africa, found that "adequate nutritious food, a basic need for human well-being, may not be consistently available to these students" (Bruening et al., 2017:1767). They concluded that food insecurity is a growing problem, ironically due to the increasing availability of college education to those from lower income families. According to Bruening et al., this phenomenon has been under-researched despite the fact that their study revealed one third to one half of the students are affected (Bruening, 2017). Food insecurity is linked to negative consequences, including poor work productivity and unsatisfactory academic outcomes. These students also reported feeling isolated socially and some described varying degrees of mental health problems such as anxiety and depression (Breuning, 2016). International students have also been affected as they strive to improve their situations through education abroad while struggling to subsist amid financial vulnerabilities (Bian, 2013; Bradley, 2000; Robertson et al., 2000; Sherry et al., 2010). Hughes et al., specifically define food insecurity as it relates to the basic human right of having enough to eat: "experiencing hunger as a result of running out of food and being unable to afford more; eating a poor quality diet as a result of limited food options; anxiety about acquiring food or having to rely on food relief" (Hughes et al., 2011: 27). Unfortunately, this became André's situation as I discovered when he related how his ongoing financial struggles affected his very ability to eat regularly. Not only did he experience hunger,

he had to endure the humiliation of relying on food relief which subjected him to negative stereotypes and racist remarks from the person who distributed spoiled food. André was in a weak position as the deficient "other" in comparison to the dominant, more powerful host culture, who used her hidden power position to impose an unfavorable identity (Said,1978). André's poverty led him to isolating himself, by not discussing his problems with family and friends, so as to not worry the former and to not appear too abnormal to the latter. Compounding his hardship was his fear that if teachers and administrators became aware of his financial situation, his student visa could be revoked.

As the findings revealed, Elise's parents were able to support her financially and provide for her needs while living abroad. However, this was not the case for André. I was dismayed by the extent of his poverty and the profound effect it had on him. He lived in constant precarity, due to lack of basic needs of food and housing. André's financial status left him exposed to symbolic violence. In these instances, those in the majority are capable of using the power of language to constrain, judge or intimidate those who are in a marginalized position in society, i.e. African immigrants and students (Bourdieu, 1999). Because of his vulnerable position, André had to continually contest the self-imposed identity as one who was living "irregularly" compared to his host and international peers. His definition of "normal," i.e. having a secure place to live near the other students, food to eat and time to study and socialize, did not correspond to his lived reality. Here, his sense of what he was *not* was keenly felt and being "normal" compared to other international students was something to which he aspired to remedy throughout his first academic year.

By his own admission, André's financial status affected his academics, evidenced by his comments about not being able to study normally, e.g. with a place to

live and regular meals. He expressed a conscious awareness of the effects his financial situation had on his short-terms goals while studying in France. He explained to me that if he had had money, he would have taken advantage of his time in France by attending conferences, pursuing internships, even completing another master's degree in other civil engineering specialties.

> If I had had the scholarship, I would have saved money and done another master's . . .why not? But now, I don't have consistent finances so this has complicated things for me. (André, April, Second Interview)

Given André's financial hardship and its effects on his identities, relations, and studies it was no wonder that this theme dominated our interview sessions.

Exclusion

> *Since I was little, I wanted everyone to like me and to smile at me and spend time together. No one paid any attention to me except [name]. I was sad all the time. I thought I wasn't going to shut down actually, that I wasn't going to make it. I was afraid of changing but in a negative way. That was the time I didn't know who I was, I didn't have my friends*. (Elise, Third Interview)

Although poverty was not a problem for Elise, lack of friends, and homesickness were. Feelings of loneliness, rejection, isolation, culture shock are not uncommon experiences for international students, but their commonality does not diminish the hurtful effects they produce (Oberg, 1960). Undoubtedly, Andre felt homesick, rejected and lonely, though these subjects were not directly expressed during the interviews; his financial hardship appeared to take precedence over these emotional needs in our conversations, at least until his situation was resolved toward the end of the second semester. However, Elise's extreme anxiety about not fitting in

or being able to make French friends along with homesickness and loneliness became the central theme during our interview conversations.

Exclusion by the host cohort and feelings of isolation, loneliness and the need to belong have been well-documented in the literature. These appear to be the most commonly shared experiences of international students worldwide. Changing cultures presents conflicts between an individual's sense of belonging to a similar group, i.e. feeling on the "inside," and the abrupt realization of one's "outsiderness" (McNess et al., 2016). Elise felt this exclusion profoundly. It affected her identities and agency, even causing her to compromise her values, as revealed in the "cheating incident."

Studies have shown that in the absence of host friends, international students seek and find friendships among fellow internationals (Bocher et al., 1977; Montgomery and McDowell, 2009; Sherry et al., 2010; Brown and Brown, 2013; ref. Chapter 3). Although André was able to connect and make friends with other West African students, there were no other students from her country in Elise's classes. Consequently, even among her international community of practice, she had difficulty finding common ground: people with whom she could relate and who had some understanding of her national and ethnic background. As outsiders, both participants expressed the desire to integrate by making French friends but were not successful. On the surface, André's reasons appeared to be more utilitarian than expressing a real need to belong. He reasoned that being able to integrate into European culture would help him in his future career. However, Elise's motivation to belong was linked to her emotional need to combat homesickness and loneliness.

Joseph emphasizes that an individual's sense of membership to a group or groups cannot be underestimated and is a fundamental component of one's social identity (Joseph, 2004). When a disconnect occurs between national identities and

the new culture, international students' sense of belonging is disrupted along with their personal sense of self. Language, customs, social status, physical surroundings, including weather changes are all factors that confirm that the individual has made a shift from being an "insider" in their own country to an "outsider" in their new host environment. In relation to other students, the international student has the imposed identity as "guest" which limits his/her social status and access in his/her new academic community (McNess, Arthur and Crossley, 2016:26). To minimize this effect, people tend to attempt to hold fast to their cultural identity, in an effort to ease their sense of feeling different and foreign in their new environment. Individuals become overly nationalistic, being conspicuously loyal and defensive of their own home countries and communities (Block, 2007). I observed that both participants spoke frequently about their home countries, comparing them in a positive light to France. During unstable moments of having to contest imposed identities, the security of knowing "who I am" as far as belonging to a group represented by nationality and culture and knowing there are others like oneself, can bring a sense of comfort and coherence. Maintaining cultural practices such as food, dress, language and mannerisms can be interpreted as a sign of identity incoherence or an initial misrecognition of cultural norms and practices and/or a resistance to assimilation of imposed cultural practice from the host country. Unfortunately, continuing to show outward signs of one's own culture, especially in dress, while it conveys distinction and independence, also perpetuates the differences in cultures, further alienating individuals from others, as was the case with Elise. This show of distinction proved to be counterproductive if making friends with host country nationals was the goal. This may explain why Elise eventually decided to not display her cultural distinctiveness, opting to conform to the predominant fashion of her host country cohort.

Moving to another country also provides opportunities to affirm assumed personal identities as well as practice newly constructed ones, as individuals come in contact with novel social situations. As Pavlenko and Blackledge state, identity is strongly tied to context and therefore as contexts change, so new identities are constructed and others negotiated or even suppressed (Pavlenko and Blackledge, 2004). Elise expressed this as she shifted identities when her assumed identity as the friendly, outgoing new student was shunned by the host cohort, and even her fashion style was criticized for being too noticeable, similar to the findings in Bradley's study (Bradley, 2000). She began to suppress her personal as well as cultural identities, represented outwardly through her style of dress. However, it seemed that the more she suppressed them, the more she felt "erased," "faceless" and "invisible". She questioned what was wrong with her as her disconnect with her new culture made her feel incompetent and isolated. As previously mentioned, incoherence or identities in crisis provokes action in order to rectify feelings of instability and incompetence. She went from the gregarious one who loved to dance and laugh with friends and who expressed her personal and cultural identities through her distinctive clothes, to changing her clothing style and conforming to "French fashion" in order to fit in with the group. She stopped greeting others at the beginning of class and willingly lent her coursework for others to copy. Here her assumed identity as a "student" had morphed into the "good" student identity. This would normally have been a positively imposed identity. Unfortunately, her reputation as a "good student" opened the door for others to take advantage of her, something she willingly allowed for the sake of belonging and having "friends." She also succumbed to the imposed identities of how she should dress and behave in order to fit in with the other French students. Changing her style of clothes and trying to act like everyone else, would lead her

down a path where she felt she had to continually compromise and conform to what she perceived were the acceptable identities imposed by the host and the other international students.

Elise's experiences and interactions in her new social context made her feel rejected, lonely and isolated. The time between her expression of her personal and cultural identities, to the reemergence of her commitment to her values and goals, constituted a period of identities in crisis. During this time, her preferred and assumed identities went underground as revealed by her reflections during our interviews that she felt "erased," "like an ant among dinosaurs," and "like shutting down". However, I argue that while she expressed critical awareness that she had to suppress her chosen identities in order to be accepted, new identities were churning and brewing, and restructuring, waiting for the moment to emerge.

Resistance and Resilience

3. How are aspects of agency enacted in response to oppressive discourses and/or challenges reflected in the participants' narratives?

Fanon's observation of the new kinds of problems African students face when they arrive in France leads to this final theme and represents the answers to the third research question (Fanon 1052:123; ref. Chapter 3). Here, I discuss how the participants attempted to overcome their hardships through resistance *and* resilience, resulting in positive academic outcomes during their first year abroad. I attributed the following to be evidence of their critical consciousness and agency in the form of resistance to racist stereotypes and enabling the students to proceed successfully into their second year of their master's program in France. Freire's critical approach begins with reflexivity which leads to motivation, kindling agency in order to actively challenge hegemony (Freire,1970). This consciousness was evidenced in their

understanding of the societal inequities that surrounded them in their new host country, France. Both participants recognized the constraints imposed upon them by political and historical power legacies. They both expressed resistance to perceived injustices and racism during our interview dialogues. Furthermore, André took direct action toward the injustice he had experienced and invoked change. This desirable outcome would not have occurred had André felt too oppressed to confront inequitable situations. What made these participants different from other marginalized populations who experience feelings of powerlessness? I submit three principle theories that characterized these students' successful identity construction and negotiation, as well as demonstrating resilience and resistance in the face of myriad obstacles, including racist and oppressive power discourses. First, the positive dispositions developed from the educated habitus, including the power of imagined future identities; next, family support as a reminder of home and habitus when in unfamiliar surroundings; finally, the strong influence of spiritual capital on identity, well-being and perseverance. These three aspects enabled the development of critical consciousness as agency leading to empowerment to achieve desirable outcomes to the participants' first year as master's students.

To conclude this discussion, I tie together the key points in light of the theories I chose for my theoretical framework: the educated habitus and imagined future selves, the familial and in-between space, and spiritual capital.

Educated habitus and Imagined Future Selves

"Someday, I won't have to worry anymore . . ."
(André, November, First Interview).

André and Elise's mutually preferred identities as students and their imagined future goals as professionals, served to bolster them in times of uncertainty, exclusion and unjust treatment. These findings chime with Druez's study who attributed her participants positive identity construction to their accumulated cultural capital and perseverance in obtaining graduate degrees from French universities (Druez, 2016; ref. Chapter 3). Although they did not share the same priority for needing to belong to a group, both André and Elise conveyed a high value for education, academic conscientiousness, a strong desire to be successful in their studies, despite their respective social and economic setbacks. André's decision mid-year to change universities in order to add to his academic qualifications, reflected his tenacity to seize opportunities in order to get the best possible civil engineering education in France. At the time when André was actively applying to an elite engineering school in Paris, his financial situation could not have been worse. However difficult his daily life without enough money became, he would not let anything curtail his dreams. Fighting to maintain positive assumed identities and the agency to combat his daily struggles attested to what André referred to as his "fighting spirit" and his determination to persevere.

Undergoing the application and interview process for this elite university spoke of André's agency to not let his social/economic origins inhibit his ambitions. What made André different from his "childhood friends" who "thought it was impossible to do these things," i.e. studying abroad? Bourdieu maintains that it is the "habitus that shapes the parameters of people's sense of agency and possibility" (Bourdieu cited

in Edgerton and Roberts, 2014:195; ref. Chapter 3). I adhere to Bourdieu's claim that André's persistence despite hardship gave an indication of the dispositions found in the habitus which served as a foundation for identity negotiation and construction, along with the agency to imagine possibilities and pursue "the impossible." This interpretation resonates with Nash's theory of the "educated habitus" (Nash, 2001).

For André, now that he had achieved the opportunity to study in France, the sky was the limit. Both participants' overarching constructed identities as "students" with long-term commitments, future expectations, and dispositions that have been instilled during past scholarly experiences, provided them with capital to persevere in their studies despite struggles. Elise made the decision to pursue a doctorate degree after her successful internship in February and March. For someone who had been advised to drop out of high school, this new ambition reflected confidence in her ability to achieve high educational objectives. Instead of being defeated by her setbacks, Elise's foundational commitment to being well-educated, fueled agency to persist in these goals.

Bourdieu states that "social agents are only determined to the extent that they determine themselves," attributing the habitus or "categories of perception" as having much to do with our belief in what we can accomplish (Bourdieu and Waquant, 1992:136). Arguably, Bourdieu and Waquant's perspective could represent a limited view of agency, as they place a strong influence on economic and social status constraints on action (Bourdieu and Waquant,1992). Although Elise and André came from different economic backgrounds, they both held the mutual understanding that education was the major component that would make the difference in their future professional possibilities. Therefore, André's and Elise's commitment and strong

identifications as “students” attests to the power of the educated habitus as an important influence on agency.

Imagining the future self, proved to be a salient aspect of identity negotiation revealed in this study. Emirbayer and Mische state that by engaging in imagining their future selves, individuals become the creators of new possibilities by reconstructing and building upon past traditions for thought and action. They claim that “in response to the uncertainties of social life, actors can distance themselves from schemas, habits and traditions that constrain social identities and limit possibilities for action” (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998:984). Tran and Vu concur, explaining how agents negotiate, transpose existing capitals and schema in the habitus to include “the flow of ideas, practice and social networks associated with student mobility” (Tran and Vu, 2018:169). André’s emotional engagement to his future identity provided the thrust he needed to plow through the difficult times. This projected agency became a critical component in his ability to resist and persevere. Imagined future identities serve to help students to construct identities in line with their goals, providing a sense of stability when faced with identity incoherency due to new experiences and context. These articulated professional ambitions were essential elements that kept André and Elise on the path to their imagined future selves. André’s future identity as an elite civil servant gave him a strong foundation, helping him to resist disrespect and unjust treatment and motivating him to pursue his dreams despite uncertainty and hardship.

Several researchers have made claims that the lack of friends and sense of belonging can adversely affect international students’ academic success as well as their sense of well-being. This study revealed, however, that although the problems were numerous with the need to belong being especially prominent for Elise, these

factors did not cause these participants to fail in school. This chimes with Trueba's findings that adverse circumstances can produce new capital that favors resilience, self-determination, perseverance and flexibility (Trueba, 2002). Both participants made use of negative experiences to spur them on to succeed academically at all costs. André made the following comment in the midst of his most difficult trial, "No matter what, I must not fail" (André, April, Second Interview)

The Familiar and the In-Between Space

"Elise is back . . . now they're going to meet her!" (Elise, February, Third Interview)

For the international student, the initial separation from family and friends can be destabilizing. Bradley discusses the tendency of international students to seek empathy and companionship with people from one's own country when living abroad due to the absence of family and friends. Elise's strong family ties provoked severe homesickness that made her feel "lost." She found comfort in daily communication with her parents via Skype during the initial weeks and months of her sojourn. During her second semester, when she visited her cousin in another French city, they met in a restaurant, creating a safe space between the two of them, where Elise could re-connect with her familial roots and past identities. Her cousin's visit marked the mid-point in her academic year and this renegotiation of past, present and future identities signaled a point of growth and transformation. It was when she moved from outsider to an in-between space, symbolized by her metaphorical self-characterization when she felt outside as an "ant among dinosaurs," to a closer, more empowered inside place as a "middle–sized dinosaur."

Elise and her cousin spoke together in Creole, the language of family and friends, but more importantly, the language that others around her in France could not understand. They created a cultural bubble where they could reminisce, exchange stories about their new environment and even criticize their mutual host peers without danger of being understood. She was able to freely express her feelings and frustrations to a trusted family confidant who was also an international student, which had a liberating effect. This phenomenon reminded me of Canagarajah's exploration of what he termed "safe houses" in his study of African/American students coping with diverse and dominant power discourses in the academic context in a southwestern university in the United States. "Safe Houses" are defined as "social and intellectual spaces where groups can constitute themselves as . . . communities with high degrees of trust, shared understanding, and temporary protection from the legacies of oppression" (Canagarajah, 2004:120-121).

The adoption and testing out of dual or multiple identities as foreign students adapting to their host academic environment, while at the same time maintaining their culture, traditions, first language, through safe houses, proved to be not only applicable to Elise's situation, but created a secure place for new identity construction and negotiation to take place: a combination of past and present and projected future identities. Visiting with a family member rekindled her critical agency to find her place "among the dinosaurs" and not let others dictate which identities are legitimate and valuable. After Elise's visit with her cousin, she proclaimed, "Elise is back . . . now they're going to meet her."

Spiritual Capital: A Bridge to the Impossible

"*It was my faith that sustained me and made me able to work normally. For me anything's possible."* (André, June, Fourth Interview).

André made numerous references to his faith throughout our interview conversations. While expressing his difficulties, he never failed to express his hope in God that everything would be resolved. He described himself as "a believer" and that in spite of his circumstances, "anything was possible with God." André's faith was a remarkable source of capital, that provided an inner strength and self-confidence to pursue high goals and persevere. André's identity as a Catholic, rooted in his habitus, was evidenced through comments sprinkled throughout the data of how "God" was implicated in his daily experiences.

Sharing the spiritual knowledge and practices of the historically, culturally and socially accepted religion in France could have provided André membership and common ground as an insider. His identity as a Catholic, implied belonging to an established existing network in his host country, which, as Verter explains, "confers status upon devotees" (Verter, 2003:166). Arguably, it could be expected that this "religious" identity would be in prominence during Sunday Mass, but in André's case, it was more than a religious affiliation linked to the socio-historic background of his country. It was a foundational part of his personal identity, and habitus, linked to his cultural, ethnic, national identities as well.

This spiritual capital strongly influenced agency, not only in terms of resilience during his struggles, but also giving André the courage and ambition to expand his possibilities, e.g. attending an elite "Grande Ecole." The chances of being admitted as a second-year master's student were minimal: only two students in France were actually accepted. But André's faith translated into the capital he needed to make the

application and go through the interviews. André credited God for making him “able to work normally.” Although the context was discussion of his university application rejection, I interpreted “normal” as a reference to living and eating like other students in his community of practice. During times of food insecurity, God provided André with an inner stability vital to his perseverance. From his statement, he not only made a bold declaration of his faith, but conveyed hope that although, to the observer, his circumstances could have appeared to be beyond his control, André believed the contrary: “anything is possible.”

The most evident expressions of spiritual capital seemed to manifest during André’s most difficult circumstances. In times of struggle, such as highlighted in the critical incidents and which André referred to generally as “battles,” his self-described identities as “combative” and a “soldier,” could be interpreted from the following comment repeated twice in the third interview: the first time referring to financial difficulties and the second when recounting stories of perceived racism.

> I don’t know anyone with the same problems as I have. And like I always say, God gives the most difficult moments, to His most valiant soldiers. (May, Third Interview)

By these similar statements, André showed his positive outlook on negative circumstances by declaring himself a “valiant, great soldier,” in a battle/trial “given by God.” Although his remarks revealed feelings of isolation compared to his cohort, it appeared that his faith gave him an assurance that there was a purpose for his “trials.” His spiritual capital provided him with an answer to the “why” of his struggles: If God “gave” the battle, He had a reason and was in control of the situation. Bourdieu’s notion of symbolic capital is pertinent to explain André’s faith as a “power resource”

similar to other capitals (Rey, 2018:8). During his most trying moments with financial insecurity, this spiritual capital gave André inner strength, consolation and an optimistic outlook and as the ability to find meaning in his circumstances.

> Each day God made; I had difficulties just making it day to day but after a while I got used to it. The difficulties didn't surprise me anymore. God makes everything work out. God does things well. (May, Third Interview)

Within André's changing social context as an African international student in France, his expression of his faith did not appear to wane but arguably equipped him with agency to persevere, a personal identity that remained consistent despite conflict, and spiritual capital as power to support his self-determination and retain his hope and optimism for the future despite obstacles, as reflected in the following,

> This year I feel stronger after everything I've been through. Nothing surprises me anymore. I know how things work now . . . I have faith that everything will work out. (August, Fifth Interview)

To conclude this discussion, I would like to summarize what I believed to be the most salient findings of this study. First, the important foundational role of the educated habitus and imagined identities as agency and capital that provided the empowered them to persevere toward their dreams and make a positive difference in these participants' identity negotiation and construction. This educated habitus lay the foundation for their student identities, to which they clung during destabilizing times. As they had both been educated about the historic colonial legacy between their respective countries and France, their confrontations with societal barriers was not unexpected though still hurtful and unsettling. Diemer et al., contend that being educated implies having acquired certain strategic thinking and communication skills

along with social capital (Deimer et al., 2016). These abilities lay the groundwork for those in marginalized positions to employ agency to name the problem and the determination to rectify it. In the absence of others to fight for them, they fought for themselves.

Another important and encouraging finding was the agency that André manifested in the form of active resistance against unjust and racist treatment despite his marginalized position and poor economic status. His reaction to the social worker's belittling comments resulted in a change in her behavior. This act was remarkable in that it reflected that despite being treated as an underdog, he was able to assert his rights as an empowered agent, rejecting the imposed status and achieve results. I attribute this to André's self-described "fighting spirit," having had to overcome many obstacles in his home country just to have been able to study in France. Coming to France for the first time from Africa, he had heard about discrimination but as an outsider, he had not been accustomed to racist treatment. His indignation about being treated differently reflected his critical consciousness of the inequities of power discourses rooted in postcolonial racist attitudes still present in French culture. He did not acquiesce to the dominant power but fought back and succeeded in bringing change to his personal situation.

Finally, family and faith played crucial roles by providing bridges from past identities to present and future newly constructed ones. Both aspects provided comfort and empowerment to the respective participants throughout difficult times. This research confirmed previous studies of the tendency of international students to seek **r**elationships with those from similar backgrounds and nationalities to help stabilize initial identity incoherence. These students struggle to create something new while retaining identities from the past. When they meet with others from their own country,

they create a safe home-culture bubble, an in-between place, where students can re-discover suppressed identities and practice new ones. André had acquired a circle of other West African friends whom he referred to as his “brothers.” His own family lacked the means to communicate regularly by telephone or Skype. In the absence of this contact with his family, I contend that it was André’s faith in God that brought hope, consistency and a spiritual perspective to his situation. With his faith as powerful source of inner strength, André was able to resist feelings of incompetence, loneliness and isolation. This was by far his most formidable capital at the core of his past, present and future identities and agency, his bridge to accomplish the impossible.

CHAPTER 7

Conclusion

"*We began in the midst, we end in the midst"* (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000: 187).

The findings of this study helped to illuminate my understanding of the meanings attached to the experiences these students faced. This research delved into the worlds of these participants from Africa, highlighting the ways in which power discourses influenced identities and agency. It exposed suppressive power discourses that are aimed at people in marginalized positions in postcolonial societies such as France. Uncovering the residual effects of colonialism is the purpose of the postcolonial theory that was applied to this study. More importantly, this research revealed how the participants resisted these disempowering discourses, reacting against symbolic violence instead of feeling powerless against it. André's recognition of unfair treatment and subsequent resistance was a hopeful and encouraging finding as it attested to Freire's notion of "critical consciousness": that all humans have the creative ability, or imaginative agency, to transform their circumstances (Freire, 1970). In my role as researcher, I had the privilege of witnessing these students' transformation from downtrodden "ants among dinosaurs," in Elise's words, to champions who had overcome daunting obstacles and who emerged successfully, "no matter what, I must not fail" (André).

These tenacious African international students dared to dream of improving their lives and those of their countrymen through education abroad. To my mind, the desire for self-improvement through education is not only admirable but should be

considered a right to be facilitated and encouraged by those with the power to do so. Venturing to an unknown country in order to pursue your chosen goals not only requires strong determination to succeed but also formidable courage to persevere in spite of disheartening challenges.

Implications for Practice

"Education that ignores the conditions of students' lives and simply focuses on the transferring of knowledge denies students their humanity" (Benesch, 2001:51).

Because this is a critical qualitative study, the findings of this research must contain implications as to how to enact change. The transformation of society is a hefty task and sounds even pretentious to imagine the possibility. However, how can we fix a problem if we do not recognize and acknowledge it? It would be like trying to diagnose a disease without knowing the symptoms. This study helped to elucidate some of the trouble spots that international students of color experience in France. Once any social injustice has been identified, it must be exposed for the purposes of change in order to create a freer more equitable society. I assert that this has implications especially for TESOL teacher who can play a critical role in this transformation.

First of all, the problem of financial instability among students in higher education needs to be rigorously addressed. The revelation of André's poverty uncovered an ongoing issue, with implications for university students worldwide. It is a problem that is not unique to France nor solely experienced by international students. However, my student participant was particularly unsettled by it, as he not only experienced hunger, which engendered feelings of isolation and shame, but he also lived in fear of his financial situation being discovered and his future dreams being

deferred. This vital information has implications for policy makers, administrators, counselors as well as teachers who welcome international students to their programs. The former need to be aware of financial insecurity among these vulnerable students and its destabilizing effects on physical, emotional and mental well-being, which in turn can jeopardize their studies. André expressed, “if you have housing, you have everything.” In his experience, not being able to find a stable place to live in his new environment was particularly traumatizing. Policy makers need to make it a priority to ensure that international students’ room and board needs are met. Practically speaking, this could be done by:

- allocating a number of student residences for international students and/or students’ in financial precarity.
- providing access to professional adults affiliated with the university in whom they can confide specifically about financial precarity
- direction to the proper channels for assistance with impunity.
- oversight that verifies that only food suitable for *everyone’s* consumption is distributed

Secondly, according to Pennycook, in transformational pedagogy, teachers can be instrumental in preparing the ground for social change (Pennycook, 1999). Through their critical consciousness, they become aware of complex power dynamics among their own students, that reflect societal inequities. This implies that TESOL teachers, have the opportunity to use education to contest an oppressive societal status quo and challenge discourses that oppose treating all people equally. Teachers who teach multicultural students can invite these students to share information about their respective countries in an atmosphere of openness and mutual

understanding. This not only broadens students' understanding of each other's countries of origin, it helps to expose myths and dispel stereotypes. However, Ellsworth warns that attempting to address society's power inequities without first developing certain strategies is fruitless and even can even make some students feel disempowered (Ellsworth, 1989:297). She advocates that teachers must learn about students' background histories and experiences; to be educated about those they want to educate. Ellsworth recommends that specific ground rules should be respected in order for these important dialogues to take place in equitable conditions:

> All members respect other members' right to speak and feel safe to speak and all ideas are tolerated and subjected to rational critical assessment against fundamental judgements and moral principles (Ellsworth, 1989:314).

In my own experience as a teacher in the TESOL classroom with native French and African international students, I found numerous opportunities to discuss societal issues that related to experiences that students viewed as unjust or unfair. For example, during a civil engineering master's class when students had to give oral presentations in English about their internships, I asked one French student about how many "foreigners" he observed working as interns at the prominent construction company where he did his training. He answered that he saw many foreigners from Spain, Portugal and Poland. When I asked how many students from Africa worked there, the answer was zero. This opened the discussion up to the fact that most of the African students in this class were not able to find internships in this French city and were obliged to go to North Africa for six weeks to fulfill this first-year master's requirement. Others who could not find internships in French companies were directed to work in the laboratory at the university, which incidentally was the case for

Elise and André. One Sub-Saharan African from Guinea complained about the racial slurs and public shaming he was subjected to when he went to Algeria for his training. The North Africans in class concurred that unfortunately there is racism towards "Black" Africans in their countries. Stories were shared back and forth, concluding with the comment from one Algerian student saying, "but it's not like that here, here we're all brothers," and he then shook hands with the student from Guinea. The discussion dealt with serious issues, but the students were respectful to each other and even added some humor. This incident opened my eyes to the fact that these two groups of people from the same continent, when in a different social context, i.e. both minorities in France, made attempts to bypass their home country prejudices and find common ground as fellow African international engineering students in France. By talking about pertinent issues, these students augmented their critical consciousness of ongoing problems, which appeared to bring them some measure of empowerment. This story gives an example of how teachers can be instrumental in calling attention to inequities in society and promote discussion in the classroom. At the end of class, I asked the French students what they thought of the conversation and the step toward "reconciliation" that had just transpired. One French student commented, "It was beautiful!"

Postcolonial, Critical Race and Decoloniality Theories all have implications for practice at the university level. As I refer to in Chapter Three, Connell accuses the modern university system of "reproducing social inequities on a global scale" (Connell, 2017:10; ref. Chapter 3). Mignolo and Walsh's term "Pluriversality" confronts one-sided perspectives of knowledge, especially with regards to colonization, and seeks instead a plurality of ideas (Mignolo and Walsh, 2018:72; ref. Chapter 3). Mbembe recommends that "new diasporic networks" be encouraged through

international study, leading to exchanging ideas, awareness of common humanity, and international relationships (Mbeme, 2016:42; ref. Chapter 3). Trahar et al. call for revising curriculum to reflect “curricular justice” which critiques Eurocentric thought and introduces Southern Theory which presents knowledge from the perspective of the colonized in a post-colonial world (Trahar et al., 2020:2; Connell, 2017; ref. Chapter 3). Higher education plays an indispensable part in breaking the cycle of social reproduction of inequities, i.e. racism, discrimination. Because the onus for dismantling the effects of colonization falls on education, I apply Trahar et al.’s idea of creating “Pluriversities” in Western as well as Southern universities in order to overhaul ingrained perceptions and ways of knowing and place higher education at the forefront of presenting new knowledges that can lead to creating a new equitable society (Trahar et al., 2020; ref. Chapter 3). The following practical steps toward “pluriversity” have been derived from the theoretical literature pertaining to decolonization in higher education (Mignolo and Walsh, 2018; Trahar et al., 2020; ref. Chapter 3).

- Introduction and sharing of epistemologies, i.e. Southern Theory: knowledge generated in the colonial experience (Connell, 2017:9; Mignolo, 2018; Trahar et al., 2020; ref. Chapter 3).
- Recognition and celebration of cultural capital and knowledge from a diversity of students (Trahar et al.,2020; ref. Chapter 3).
- Critically revamping curricula to reflect “curricular justice”, i.e. diversity, colonial perspectives (Trahar et al., 2020:2, ref. Chapter 3).
- Encouraging dialogue and conversation with and about people who have been affected by coloniality (Trahar et al., 2020; ref. Chapter 3).

- Prioritizing and facilitating international student exchange programs, not only from East to West but also from "West to East," relating to Mbembe's idea of creating "diasporic networks" (Mbeme, 2016:42, ref. Chapter 3).

The above points summarize some implications for practice rising from the recognition that the effects of colonization continue to manifest in the form of racism and discrimination in our world today. Because schools and universities reflect a microcosm of society, they play a vital role in overturning socially reproduced prejudice and actions that perpetuate societal inequities.

Theoretical Implications

> *The point of my work is to show that culture and education aren't simply hobbies or minor influences. They are hugely important in the affirmations of differences between groups and social classes and in the reproduction of those differences (*Bourdieu, in Dalcher, 2018:5).

Bourdieu's theory of social reproduction points to the classroom as the social field where dominant power discourses are reproduced, leaving marginalized students further left to the wayside. His idea of symbolic violence echoes this notion that oppression is so ingrained in those who are the victims, that they do not even challenge it. However, in Bourdieu's later works, namely in *Weight of the World*, he recounts the stories of the marginalized in French society who showed dissent that could lead to resistance and change, disrupting the status quo. Bourdieu attributes this to the improvisational aspect of the habitus allowing for transformative dispositions, "making things happen rather than just allowing things to happen to them" (Giroux, 2003:8). This study demonstrated this "transformational potential of the

habitus" through André's and Elise's resistance to imposed identities, which has implications for teachers, policy makers and other international students.

With regards to religious capital, Bourdieu's perspective of its value as cultural capital is somewhat limited (Rey, 2007). In André's case, "spiritual" or religious capital empowered him with agency to resist perceived unfair treatment and persist despite the hardship of poverty. Therefore, although Bourdieu downplays the importance of religion as cultural capital, as John Lewis asserts, "the power of faith is transformative" (Lewis, 2012:29). This study gave evidence of the transformational power of faith and its essential importance in coping with new and daunting experiences in at least one African international student's life.

Limitations

"Confessions and Trumpets" (Silverman, 2013: 376).

A limitation to this study could have been due to the translation of the data from French to English. Although translation from a foreign language to one's native tongue is infinitely easier than in the other direction, there is still the possibility for misinterpretation when working with two languages. Nevertheless, I found the benefit to outweigh the disadvantages in that their stories were told in French and translated into English, which opened up new possibilities for exposure that would not have occurred had this not been a "bilingual" study. Moreover, because I conducted the interviews directly in French, I did not need to use a translator. I viewed this as a benefit outweighing a limitation because of the possible interference a third person in the interview setting could have caused, by affecting my rapport with the students and hindering their freedom of expression. I transcribed the data myself which also

eliminated the chance that someone else outside the research might not do their narratives justice as they were not present when the words were spoken.

As I mentioned previously, the interviews data contained much more information than could be included in this thesis. I see this as a limitation to the extent that I collected many more stories than there was space to include in this study. As the researcher, I had to choose the incidents that were the most representative and therefore was not able to include all of this pertinent information, which in turn could have provided more detailed support of the emergent themes. For example, both participants told stories of what they perceived as racially motivated comments and actions against them. André had a job as a dishwasher and later as a cook in a restaurant, and as he spoke of this experience, he reported continuous incidents of discriminatory treatment that he believed was due to his race and nationality. Elise remarked that she felt she had been treated differently because she was “a brown girl” (December, Second Interview). I viewed this as a limitation, due to the fact that racism emerged as a theme which could have been reinforced with additional data. Moreover, the constructs of power, identity and agency were implicit, sometimes difficult to discern and prone to my own interpretation. Although, this could have been seen as a limitation, qualitative inquiry is understood to be inherently interpretive, incorporating the perspectives of the participants in their own words, then analyzed and interpreted by the researcher.

Finally, although my five interview sessions with Elise took place consistently from October to June throughout the school year, there was an unavoidable four-month gap between the first and second interview with André. This was another consequence of his financial situation. He was unable to afford student housing near the university and had to live with people on the outskirts of town, which made it

inconvenient for him to meet for interviews. During this period, André was going to classes from eight o'clock in the morning until noon, working as a dishwasher from noon until two o'clock, returning to class until approximately six o'clock in the evening and then going immediately to work until one o'clock in the morning. He then spent time from one o'clock until sometimes four o'clock in the morning studying and completing assignments, slept for a few hours on a friend's couch in town and then repeated this grueling cycle. Despite André's understandable unavailability to sit down for interviews, we dealt with this limitation by remaining in contact: catching up weekly after class and meeting on his day off at the university library to prepare for his English interview at a university in Paris where he had applied to study for an additional master' degree. We also kept in touch by telephone. Fortunately, this problem was resolved by April and we were able to consistently meet for the subsequent interviews once André moved into student housing.

Recommendations for Practice and Further Research

"Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere" (King, 1963:170)

Almost half of the international students at French universities come from Africa. Understanding their lived experiences is crucial in order to provide them with the best possible scenario for achieving their academic potential. In this section, I intend to present what is being currently proposed in French universities with regards to the ongoing problem of discrimination and racism. I explain the status of the proposals from the French Minister of Higher Education and Research according to the "Unef" (ref. Chapter 2). Finally, I address the educational/pedagogical programs implemented in French classrooms and propose further recommendations for practice,

reiterating that the fight against social reproduction of racism and discrimination in our societies has to be reversed through education.

Despite anti-discriminatory laws passed by the French government in 2008, the study conducted in 2020 by the “Unef,” revealed the continued existence of discrimination due to country of origin, religion, gender and/or sexual orientation (ref. Chapter 2). This information has provoked the “Unef” to demand that the following specific measures be enacted on college campuses in France:

- Legislative reform that puts in place and/or reinforces certain constraints against discrimination at French universities, e.g. sanctions imposed on teachers, administrators, students who commit racist/discriminatory acts
- A national plan for implementing curriculum in all French universities that addresses the struggle against racism and discrimination,
- Personnel employed and spaces designated specifically to the implementation of programs and practices that combat discrimination, i.e. a vice president in charge of the fight against racism; a CVE (“Cellule de Veille et d’Ecoute”, a monitoring and listening unit (ref. Chapter 2)
- A consequential financial investment provided to universities in order to implement these plans
- Easy accessibility and transference of information about all anti-discrimination programs and policies put in place to ensure and guarantee that all students are aware of their availability

  (Abanda, 2020:5).

The administrative recommendations put forth by the “Unef“ are comprehensive, despite their current disappointing implementation in most French universities (ref. Chapter 2). Administrators and teachers need to continue to insist that these

measures be adopted in their universities until they are realized. I concur with the present “Unef” recommendations and add some further measures that other non-French universities have adopted:

- Commitment to appointing administrators and teachers who implement anti-racist policies at each university
- Increasing the number and effectiveness of “CVE”, i.e. monitoring and listening units for victims to report discrimination and/or harassment
- Sanctioning students, teachers and/or personnel who violate anti-racist policies
- Commitment to increasing diversity in the university workforce
- Hiring teachers and administrators who are committed to anti-racist, pro-diversity policies.
- Regular updates from administrator reporting progress made against racism and discrimination in their institution and nationwide.
- Allocation of governmental funds linked to implementation of anti-discriminatory measures at public universities
- Regular and ongoing education for educators on procedures and policies related to reporting racist actions
- Ongoing independent studies that explore the presence of discrimination at French universities
- Implementation of more scholarships and financial aid made specifically available to African international students in order to compensate for the recent rise in tuition rates for non-French students (ref. Chapter 2).

In the following, I propose further recommendations for specifically “decolonizing” the university (Mbembe, 2016: 29). Postcolonial studies at the university level have as an objective to critically analyze colonization and its effects on society (ref. Chapter 3). Authors who wrote originally in French, such as Frantz Fanon, Edouard Glissant and Edward Saïd should be mandatory reading for students and teachers alike. Studies of colonization and the slave trade are considered to be essential in order to understand the origins of the systematic racism that plagues our society still today. It is through an awareness of how racism is entrenched in the public consciousness, that people can break this cycle of bigotry. Therefore, I recommend:

- Ongoing teacher education pertaining to colonization and its effects on today’s society, including required reading of prominent authors on the subject
- Mandatory study of colonization and the history of slavery taught at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels in all French schools and universities
- Availability of graduate level study and research in African studies and colonization, including the study of African languages
- Pedagogical training in anti-racist, anti-discrimination, pro-diversity approaches to teaching

These recommendations reflect the current need for a more comprehensive commitment to equality at French universities. Despite the measures evoked, their adoption has been far from adequate. However, there has been some progress and as more victims’ voices are heard, hopefully the call to action will follow.

Future Research

This study provided a glimpse into the worlds of two students and pointed to trouble spots as well as successes. This is significant because it can serve as a springboard to further research that focuses specifically on the problems of racism, poverty and the universal need to belong that affect international students of color in France and elsewhere. It could also be interesting to interview teachers and administrators in French universities in order to gain their perspectives on the well-being of the African international students in their classes. Further exploration into habitus transformation, particularly the role of the educated habitus, and its link to different capitals would add another nuanced perspective to these students' experiences. Studies that highlight stories of resistance and determination among these students could be useful to people in general who seek to uncover injustice and its effects anywhere in society. In addition, an exploratory study uniquely focused on how spiritual capital and religious identities have an impact on the adaptation process, specifically focusing on the role of religious associations and student organizations during the adaptation period of the international sojourn. This information would add to an understanding of these associations and their influence on identity, agency, social and cultural capital, and overall student well-being and integration. Finally, it would be informative to identify, compare and contrast reasons why some international students stop their studies before completion and return to their home countries, in order to target these issues and address them. These themes and others emerged in this study and merit further investigation, possibly expanding research to other universities and using other approaches, such as narrative inquiry or case studies.

Self-Reflection

"*We need critical hope the way a fish needs unpolluted water"* (Freire,1992:9).

> Frankly, most of my childhood friends weren't interested in studying abroad. When you grow up in a certain milieu, people think it's impossible to do these things. But I saw further. I see life further, and I know that if you don't do what you want to, it's complicated after. In life it's not easy, not everyone has the same opportunities. You have to try your hardest to succeed. (André)

To conclude this study, I share my personal reflections as a novice researcher, and a professional teacher. Firstly, as a novice researcher, I found the analysis of the findings to be particularly complex and time-consuming. However, the final results yielded a more comprehension representation of the participants' experiences which compensated for the extra time spent on these chapters. Another chapter that seemed to continuously evolve was the literature review. I began reading broadly about studies related to international students, identity, agency and power and eventually discovered more and more inspiring authors on these subjects and related theories. However, the literature that had the most profound influence on me was the personal accounts of those who had been victims of oppressive systems, such as Freire, Memmi, Saïd, Fanon, and Diop. Their disturbing yet inspirational testimonies struck a deep chord, causing me to be even more passionate about making people aware of the extent to which injustice, racism and discrimination still plague our society today.

Professionally speaking, integrating Black history into the curriculum at all grade levels has been required in the United States since the 1980's. As an American teacher, I received additional training, attended workshops and was provided with materials to teach Black history at the primary and secondary level, which I taught in California and Florida for 17 years. When I moved to France and was hired

as a TESOL teacher at the secondary and tertiary levels, I continued to incorporate Black history studies into my ESL and American literature classes at the secondary, as well as undergraduate and graduate levels. In order to adapt my American lessons to French students, I would add information about the French role in colonization and the slave trade. I remember many students telling me they had not learned about colonization from the perspective of the colonized in their history classes. I realized the gap in knowledge that existed and was able to create English language lessons pertaining to these topics.

Although I had already incorporated teaching the history of the slave trade and American Black history into my ESL curriculum before I began this research study, my extensive readings in English and in French on the experiences of colonized people, have substantially increased my knowledge of this topic. Through this research, I have become more equipped to transfer this knowledge to students and even provide them with recent evidence from my study participants of the vestiges of colonization that effect people of color in France today. Consequently, I have been able to communicate a broader range of perspectives and information, which, I believe, has brought relevance of these issues of injustice to my French students. As previously mentioned, I have been inspired by Paolo Freire and his definition of the educator as one who does not simply pour knowledge into vessels, but as one who brings consciousness and ignites awareness in students. It is my hope to transfer a passion for this subject in my students, which would provoke further investigation on their part as to how past actions are linked to current injustices. My goal is to communicate the ongoing problem and everyone's responsibility to work towards eliminating discrimination and racial injustice.

My personal involvement with the study participants through this research has brought life and purpose to my lessons and opened the doors to many serious yet fruitful class discussions. For example, when I asked my secondary students the question, “Do you think racism and discrimination exists in French society today?”, the students of color would emphatically answer “yes” whereas the “white” students would hesitate, many declaring “no”. In my view, and according to Critical Race Theory, awareness and acknowledgement that racism and discrimination are ever-present today is the first step toward accountability and justice.

Pertaining to the actual thesis writing process, I often felt as if I were going around in circles and might not possibly ever get it right. Faithfully communicating the experiences of my participants, was not only my role as a researcher but my duty as an educator advocating social justice. Sometimes I thought that I had not done enough, deeply feeling the weight of this responsibility. However, during these times of doubt and discouragement, I discovered the self-determination to not give up just because something seemed too difficult. I thought of my participants, and reminded myself that, after all, the goal of this work is to bring awareness to problems and injustices for the purpose of social transformation by contributing to knowledge that links theory with practice through scholarly writing. This ever-increasing consciousness gave me the strength and motivation to persevere. I thought of Gandhi’s words, emphasizing that *any* action that moves toward improving the life of another is significant and worth the effort:

> It’s the action, not the fruit of the action that’s important. You have to do the right thing. It may not be in your power, may not be in your time, that there’ll be fruit. But that doesn’t mean you stop doing the right thing. You may never

> know what results come from your action. But if you do nothing, there will be no result. (Gandhi, in Iodice, E., 2017:12).

Taking these words into account, I remain impressed with the agency the students demonstrated through their resistance to power. This signified courageous action on the part of minority students, that disrupted oppressive discourses and brought them a sense of empowerment in disempowering situations. I could not help feeling strong indignation while listening to their encounters with injustice, as well as compassion and a strong desire to *fix* their situations when they talked about loneliness or financial struggles. However, their stories of resistance, resilience, determination and perseverance when faced with these formidable trials, gave me optimism that with increased awareness and understanding of the complexities of their experiences, followed by a call for accountability and action, we can better serve this dynamic yet vulnerable population who have set their sights on a better future for themselves and their countries through higher education in France.

Finally, I consider the personal relationship that developed between myself and the study participants to be the most rewarding part of this research experience. I found myself becoming absorbed in their lives, as we broke down barriers and shared stories as fellow human beings. André and Elise graciously allowed me to walk alongside them during that first eventful year as master's students in France. This relationship remains the most valuable personal asset I can claim from this experience.

To conclude, this study opened my eyes to the plight of these African international students. This enlightenment, tantamount to critical consciousness, occurs when we venture to try to understand events from another's perspective. Nevertheless, those of us in the majority or in privileged positions in society cannot truly

understand the deep injustice felt by people subjected to power because of race, social standing, or ethnicity. We cannot fully fathom what it means to be discriminated against or be excluded unless we have experienced it ourselves. In this study, I attempted to allow a platform for these students to voice their experiences and to give the readers an opportunity to see the world the way they saw it: to walk in their shoes. Once becoming aware of the inequalities and problems these students face, what should be done to help their situations? What is the reason for gaining this understanding if we remain silent? Freire emphasized that critical work involves dialogue and action motivated by hope of a better world. After this study, I feel even more determined to help African international students achieve their dreams of successful postgraduate studies in France, linked to the promise of future professional careers in their home countries. It is my hope that through ongoing research in this area, we can continue to point to injustices in society. If the goal is equal opportunity and equitable treatment in education, we need to identify and remove the boulders as well as the pebbles that obstruct the paths to success for *all* students, everywhere.

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Appendix A:

Information Sheet for Participants (translated into English)

The nature of the project is to explore how African international students live out their daily lives in a new personal, social and academic environment. I'm interested in your stories as international students in your present situation in France and also your past experiences in your home countries. As participants, you will be invited to take part in this study on a volunteer basis. You will remain anonymous and all data collected will remain confidential. As a participant, you will take part in interviews that will last approximately one hour and will take place off-campus at your convenience. I will interview you approximately six times over the course of the two semesters. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time and request that your data be erased. All information gathered from the interview is strictly confidential and will only be seen by myself (the researcher) and my research supervisors. The name of the institution will not be named in the study. The purpose of the study is to give voice to those who would perhaps not be heard otherwise, and bring to light the issues that you, as international students, face. This study could contribute to improving the status of future African international students.

Appendix B

Consent Letter (Translated into English)

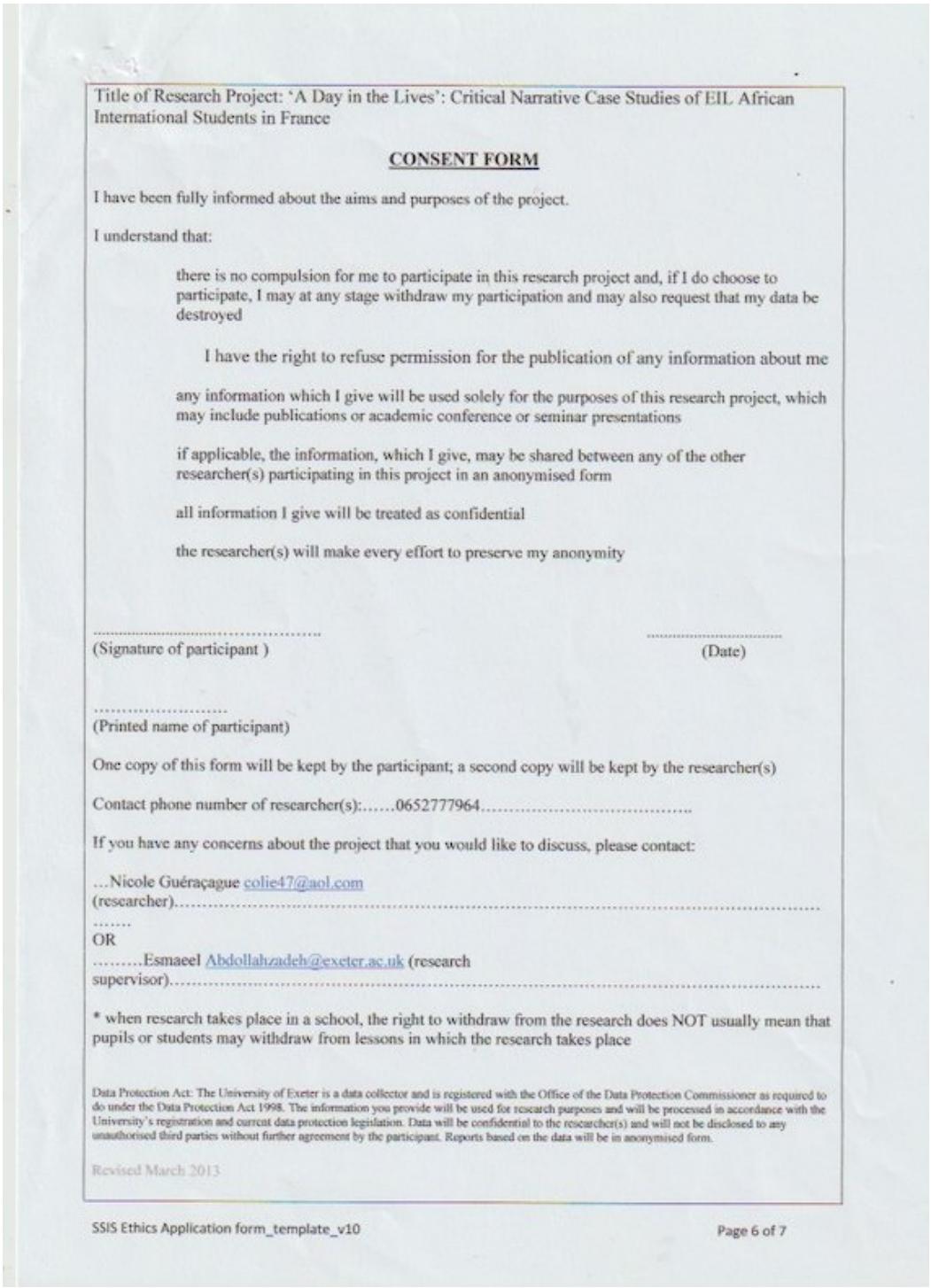
I have been completely informed as to the subject and goals of this research project. I understand that:

I am not obligated to participate in this research project and if I choose to participate, I may at any time cancel my participation and have all information about me destroyed. I have the right to refuse permission for publication of any and all information pertaining to me, and whatever information I give will be used solely for the purposes of this research project, including publication or academic conferences or seminars.

If applicable, the information that I give can be shared with other researchers participating in this project as long as I remain anonymous. All information I give will be treated confidentially, and the researcher will do everything possible to preserve my anonymity.

Appendix C

University of Exeter Ethics Consent Form (in English)*



Title of Research Project: 'A Day in the Lives': Critical Narrative Case Studies of EIL African International Students in France

CONSENT FORM

I have been fully informed about the aims and purposes of the project.

I understand that:

there is no compulsion for me to participate in this research project and, if I do choose to participate, I may at any stage withdraw my participation and may also request that my data be destroyed

I have the right to refuse permission for the publication of any information about me

any information which I give will be used solely for the purposes of this research project, which may include publications or academic conference or seminar presentations

if applicable, the information, which I give, may be shared between any of the other researcher(s) participating in this project in an anonymised form

all information I give will be treated as confidential

the researcher(s) will make every effort to preserve my anonymity

....
(Signature of participant) (Date)

.....
(Printed name of participant)

One copy of this form will be kept by the participant; a second copy will be kept by the researcher(s)

Contact phone number of researcher(s):.....0652777964.....

If you have any concerns about the project that you would like to discuss, please contact:

...Nicole Guéraçague colie47@aol.com
(researcher).....
.....
OR
.....Esmaeel Abdollahzadeh@exeter.ac.uk (research
supervisor).....

* when research takes place in a school, the right to withdraw from the research does NOT usually mean that pupils or students may withdraw from lessons in which the research takes place

Data Protection Act: The University of Exeter is a data collector and is registered with the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner as required to do under the Data Protection Act 1998. The information you provide will be used for research purposes and will be processed in accordance with the University's registration and current data protection legislation. Data will be confidential to the researcher(s) and will not be disclosed to any unauthorised third parties without further agreement by the participant. Reports based on the data will be in anonymised form.

Revised March 2013

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***Title of Research Project changed to: "C'est Compliqué": A Critical Exploration of how African international students in France negotiate aspects of power, identity and agency**

Appendix D

Signed Ethics Consent forms from Participants (in French)

Lettre de Consentement

J'ai été complétement informé au sujet des buts et propos de ce projet.

Je comprends que :

Il n'y a pas d'obligation à participer dans ce projet de recherche et si je choisis de participer, je peux n'importe quand soustraire ma participation et aussi demander que mes informations/renseignements soient détruits.

J'ai le droit de refuser la permission pour la publication de toute information à mon sujet, et quoique information que je donne sera seulement utilisés pour les propos de projet de recherche, qui peut inclure des publications ou conférence académique ou présentation de séminaire.

Si applicable, les informations que je donne, peuvent être partagées entre n'importe quel chercheur(s) participant dans ce projet d'une manière anonyme.

Tout renseignement que je donne sera traité comme confidentiel.

Le chercheur fera tous ses efforts pour préserver mon anonymat.

Signature du Participant

11 Novembre 2015

Date

Nom du Participant OLIEDANOGO Royanémanegne Herman Wenceslas

Une copie de cette lettre sera conservée par le participant et une par le chercheur.

Numéro de téléphone du chercheur : 06 52 77 79 64

Si vous avez des questions au sujet du projet que vous voudriez poser, prière de me contacter, Nicole Guéraçague, à : colie47@aol.com ou

Esmaeel Abdollahzadeh à : Esmaeel Abdollahzadeh@exeter.ac.uk (maitre de recherche)

Lettre de Consentement

J'ai été complétement informé au sujet des buts et propos de ce projet.

Je comprends que :

Il n'y a pas d'obligation à participer dans ce projet de recherche et si je choisis de participer, je peux n'importe quand soustraire ma participation et aussi demander que mes informations/renseignements soient détruits.

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Si applicable, les informations que je donne, peuvent être partagées entre n'importe quel chercheur(s) participant dans ce projet d'une manière anonyme.

Tout renseignement que je donne sera traité comme confidentiel.

Le chercheur fera tous ses efforts pour préserver mon anonymat.

Auguste

Signature du Participant

30.10.2015

Date

AUGUSTE Emma-Gabrielle

Nom du Participant

Une copie de cette lettre sera conservée par le participant et une par le chercheur.

Numéro de téléphone du chercheur : 06 52 77 79 64

Si vous avez des questions au sujet du projet que vous voudriez poser, prière de me contacter, Nicole Guéraçague, à : colie47@aol.com ou

Esmaeel Abdollahzadeh à : Esmaeel Abdollahzadeh@exeter.ac.uk (maitre de recherche)

Appendix E

Sample First Interview Question Outline

The following questions represent an outline of the semi-structured core questions posed during the first interviews with Elise and André respectively. They do not include the spontaneous or lightly structured questions and comments that I asked in response to participants' particular experiences and stories. Questions for subsequent interviews were varied, based on previous stories and responses from the interviewees.

Identity

1. Tell me about yourself . . . your background (looking for clues of habitus, capital, ethnic and national identities)
2. Tell me about your country, what it was like growing up, and how you compare your country to France (customs, educational system, attitudes)
    a. Agency
3. Why did you decide to come to France? What were your expectations before leaving? How did you prepare? (personal motivation, awareness pre-journey)
4. What are your plans after you get your master's degree? (articulation of goals, future expectations)
5. How has the beginning of the school year been for you? (Schedules, teachers, classes, students, accommodations, etc.) (adaptation, initial incidents)
    b. Power

6. What about the people here . . . what kind of welcome have you received? (articulating experiences in new environment related to engagement with host country)
7. Have you been able to make friends? (insider/outsider, inclusion/exclusion)
8. What do you know about the historic relationship between your country and France? (knowledge and perspectives about postcolonial power legacy and remnants)

Appendix F

Sample Transcription: Elise Interview #1 (translated into English)

NG: SO, TELL ME A LITTLE ABOUT YOURSELF, YOUR BACKGROUND AND SO ON . . .

ELISE: So, I come from [country] which is a very small island. I got my "Bac S" and since high school, I haven't really figured out what I wanted to do as far as studies go. I used to ask myself if I should just get a bachelor's degree or go on to the post-graduate level. I really didn't know, I mean, without really thinking about it I thought I could go into architecture, but I wasn't accepted so this was a rather rude wakening for me. So I went into civil engineering and the college was in [another city], about an hour and a half from my home. I had been living with my parents and my older brother who is 23 and who just got this engineering degree. So anyway, for me it was the first time that I left home, so I had to find an apartment. I lived with my cousin and that was more reassuring to me, and I drove home every weekend which I cannot do here [sad laugh]. Knowing that my family was an hour and a half away, at the time seemed like quite a distance. But compared to now, it wasn't far away at all. The distances here seem much farther than over there! Yes, so anyway, as far as my schooling went over there, because I wasn't terribly motivated to study civil engineering, and I saw that my level wasn't very good at the DUT which has a high level, so after all I lost confidence in myself. But by the end of the second semester, I discovered a subject that interested me, and I decided to pursue that major after the DUT. So I left that school and went to another city that was about an hour from my house, and I lived alone in an apartment. So there I was, I had a cat to keep me company and because I had self-confidence again, I really worked hard the whole year and

that's when I told myself that if I were able to get my bachelor's degree [license], why not continue with some new goals? Go even further. So I told myself I wanted to go into the master's program. And I wanted to leave the island because here, you feel really isolated from the rest of the world. And there's a mentality here: they don't want to leave their island and there everything is so expensive. The plane ticket to come to France was 2000 euros. It's too expensive to travel to other countries to travel to other countries. Not everyone has the chance to go abroad. So students prefer to go to France because when you're in France, you can visit lots of cities because they aren't that far from each other. And so that's it, I decided to go. I had already visited France on vacation with my parents and we stayed in hotels and went to vacation spots where everyone is a tourist on vacation, so it's really not the same thing now. Now my parents aren't here to help me fill out this paper or that reservation or go here or go there because you have to do it. I've never done any of that by myself and frankly it was really complicated for me because my parents are very protective and in fact they've always been like, "Don't worry Elise, I'll take care of that paper, don't worry, I'll pay for that" and "I'm the one doing that for you; you just study and work and we'll take care of the rest." And so, when I arrived here, we had to put everything in my name, open an account and I had to go around doing stuff and I didn't know where to go or where I was. I didn't know the city at all, and it was really complicated for me to study and do all that at the same time. It was really hard.

NG: DID YOU COME HERE ALONE?

ELISE: No, my parents came with me because I had to leave very quickly. In fact, the thing is that I made a request to study in [another city] in mid-July but the university was closed. So I didn't get my answer until school opened in September. I had already started my classes in [country] in mid-August. I had told myself that I was

going to register and hope. So I was in class when my mother called me to tell me they had accepted me in [French city]. I was in English class at the time [laughs]. I stood up and told the teacher, “I’m sorry madame but I will no longer be attending your classes!” I was so excited and happy! The teacher looked at me and said, “What do you mean?” I told her, “I said I’m not coming back to your classes anymore. I’m leaving [country], I’m leaving.” My friends were really sad, they couldn’t believe it. They told me, “Now, Elise, you have everything you’ve always wanted! Stay motivated!”

So then it was really hard to leave and school in France had already started on September 7th, and I think I already missed the first week, because it takes time to get an answer, and I had asked them to send me my acceptance by email, and they sent it by regular mail. By the time it arrived, a week had already gone by so that’s why I missed the first week of classes. I only had four days to prepare the move. I had from one day to the next to buy my plane ticket, look for an apartment, and it wasn’t easy because it was already September, school had already started and all the students had already rented apartments.

NG: DID YOU FIND AN APARTMENT AFTER YOU ARRIVED HERE OR BEFORE YOU CAME?

ELISE: From over there, just one day before we left. So when we arrived here, we weren’t even sure if I would have an apartment and in fact I would have had to stay in a hotel if we hadn’t found one. But luckily we found one and besides the landlady had several apartments that she rented out to students.

NG: SO IT WAS NOT THE UNIVERSITY DORMITORIES?

ELISE: That's right, it was a private residence. And she has several other students who rent from her, and I really got along with them because they were also international students. So, I have been welcomed well, she's very warm, she told me not to worry, "You're not alone, you're not the only one who's not from here so you can talk to them." And I felt that the French and [people from my country] don't have the same mentality.

NG: (laughing) I WOULD BE INTERESTED IN HEARING MORE ABOUT THAT!

ELISE: (laughing) And so that's how I arrived here.

NG: AND WHERE DO THE OTHER STUDENTS IN YOUR APARTMENT COMPLEX COME FROM?

ELISE: One is Algerian, two from Madagascar, one French I think, one from Tahiti and I don't know the others.

NG: HOW DO YOU GET TO THE UNIVERSITY?

ELISE: I had to walk to the university at first but I just got a car. In [country], my parents always had a car, and I've always had a way of getting around that I could control; I went where I wanted to go and didn't have to depend on others or the bus to take me around. And taking the bus; I don't know why but I really don't like the bus. And so that's it, I don't like it.

NG: I DON'T EITHER . . . WHEN MY HUSBAND TELLS ME TO TAKE THE BUS OR THE TRAIN I START TO HYPERVENTILATE! I'M NOT USED TO IT. I UNDERSTAND YOU! TELL ME A LITTLE BIT MORE ABOUT YOUR COUNTRY, HOW DO YOU COMPARE IT CULTURALLY WITH FRANCE?

ELISE: Well, [country] is considered a French territory, so we are French but since I've been here, I realize that we're not as French as I thought. We are not recognized as French, the French don't know anything about us, where we come from, nothing about our lifestyle, nor how we live. Often we hear, mostly from young people, they ask me for example if we have electricity in [country]. And I answer, "Yes, we have electricity, we have television," and they ask if we have cars and roads! I tell them, yes, we are just like France except it's not the same climate and we don't have large shopping centers like you. Also the cost of living is very high . . . very expensive. I've already noticed that here because over there everything is imported. So for example, you pay five euros for a carton of yogurt and here it costs 1.29 euros. And pastries and cookies are double the price over there. Architecture is not the same. Here the buildings and houses are made of stone. We use cement and the elderly live in old-fashioned type house from the olden days.

NG: THE FRENCH ARRIVED IN YOUR COUNTRY IN THE 1600'S, RIGHT? DO YOU LEARN ABOUT COLONIZATION IN SCHOOL? AND WHAT ABOUT THE ETHNIC DIVERSITY IN YOUR COUNTRY?

ELISE: We learn about it but I've forgotten the exact dates. [Country] is the union of people from lots of different origins: we have Creoles, who are the typical people from here. Then there are the Yab. They are white with blue eyes and they live in the mountains mostly. I don't know why but we all get along. There are the Cav, who are brown and mostly from Madagascar; the Malba who are Hindu and come from India, then Muslims, then there are Chinese. So you see, it's really a mixture of everything. There are more groups but we all get along and they are no differences except for religion. I noticed here, however, people don't mix, whereas in my country, you could be Malba, Catholic; you could be whatever you want but you

always greet each other; we're very warm people, hospitable. We would never prevent someone from buying a home because he was different or something like that.

NG: AND AROUND YOU, AT YOUR SCHOOL FOR EXAMPLE, YOU WEREN'T USED TO HEARING REMARKS BECAUSE SOMEONE WAS DIFFERENT?

ELISE: Not at all. French people when they visit [country] love it! There are beaches, mountains, good food. And people feel welcomed. We 're very warm people, touchy, feely; we're not cold, we like to please, we love music, to party, to talk. We notice French people are a bit shocked when they first come but we tell there it's like this here and they soon learn.

NG: DO YOU SPEAK OTHER DIALECTS, LANGUAGES OTHER THAN FRENCH?

ELISE: We speak French but lately people are speaking less and less French and we speak Creole, but it depends on the education level of the family. For example, in my family, they prefer to speak French and want me to speak French. They don't like it when I speak Creole. They tell me, "Elise, you must speak French well because afterwards, when you go to school and you have to work, you're going to have to deal with people who speak French so you need to speak French." There are some families where they only speak Creole at home and then when they go to school, they have trouble with pronunciation and they don't say their sentences right. Everything is taught in French in schools. So depending on where you live you would have a different accent. For example, where I live, I think it's so cute because we're on a tiny island but the accents all change. I think it's beautiful. And when you go north, south, east or west, you have different landscapes in each place. Every thirty

minutes you go through a different climate. People don't make a difference between social status of people who have different dialects. They just have different words, that's all. It doesn't mean any more than that.

I have to tell you about something that really had an effect on me. In [country], when we're at school and the teacher has not yet arrived and everyone is waiting in the corridor, we all greet each other, give each other the "bise," say hello, ask how we are, what's new, etc. And, once I did that here and everyone looked at me, and asked, "Are you going to say hi to everyone? You're going to give everyone "la bise like that?" I said "Well, yes, why?" For me, it was logical, it was the polite thing to do, it was good manners. I told them, "In fact, I'm going to tell you something. In my country, that's how we do it, and you haven't done it to me and it's made me angry, so I'm going to show you how it's done!" I don't know what he said, I just kept telling everyone hello. I don't do it anymore because a girl told me, "You know Elise, here we don't give 'la bise.' And we don't really talk to each other." I asked her, "Then how do you make friends, if you don't even say 'hi' to each other, if we don't have any kind of initial contact?"

NG: ARE THERE MOSTLY FRENCH STUDENTS IN YOUR CLASSES?

ELISE: Yeah, in my class there are mostly French students. The other day, I got to class and there were only three other students there. I walked in and said, "Bonjour!" and only one of the three answered me or greeted me. I wonder sometimes if I'm a parasite or something . . . There are fifteen students in my English class and about twenty in the program. By now there are only French two French students who speak to me, that's two out of twenty.

NG: SO WHAT ARE YOUR PLANS AFTER YOU GET YOUR MASTER'S DEGREE? DO YOUR PARENTS HAVE ANY EXPECTATIONS FOR YOUR FUTURE?

ELISE: Well, as for my parents' expectations, they want me to study whatever I want, but they want me to get a degree so that I can get a job. I think I wanted to do my master's here because I really wanted to discover what it's like to study some-place else, because truthfully, I'm hesitating between research and being a physics or technology teacher. I think I wanted to do this master's because I really like the program. But I admit there are a lot of subjects we learn about that have nothing to do with [country], like heaters, radiators, we don't have those! I don't even know what they look like! *[we both laugh*] We have air conditioning . . . maybe they have heaters in the mountains but I think they use fireplaces not heaters. Even in my apartment, I have a heater and I have no idea how to turn it on! I had to ask another student the difference between a heater and a water heater and what they were for! So, I was a little bit lost but I explained to them that they don't have heaters where I'm from.

NG: I UNDERSTAND BECAUSE I COME FROM CALIFORNIA AND ALSO LIVED IN FLORIDA, AND WHEN I CAME TO FRANCE, IT WAS THE FIRST TIME I HAD EVER SEEN A RADIATOR!

ELISE: So, I really like class, but I feel I have a lot to make up, to understand how it works, but anyway I'm doing this master's, specializing in heating and energy, even though I don't know how I will use this information in [country] but whatever. I'm not sure what I'm going to do after the master's but to motivate myself, I tell myself that I must make a choice. But I'm still hesitating; it's only the end of October and I've already been here two months! Two months!! I can't believe it's been two months!

This is my new home! When I sit on the couch and think about it or go outside, I still can't believe that his is going to be my home for two years! I look out the window and say to myself that it's really different as far as climate goes. I haven't adapted yet, I've lost my bearings and now I have to reconstruct my bearings because I'm all alone, there's only me. It's not like the weekends in [country] when I used to go home to my parents' house. I can't go to my bedroom, see my parents, my family . . . and in [country], after working, on Saturday we go out with friends and then Sunday is "Family Day." On Sunday's, we go to Mass . . . you know in [country] they are very Catholic. I grew up going to Mass every Sunday. My family is very Christian. My mom was worried about me being alone here so she brought me a Bible and two rosaries. She went to the Cathedral in town and got the information for me when the masses would be held. She told me, "You should go; you never know, when you feel lonely it could help." I tried to reassure her, but I haven't been to church yet. The youth are very involved in church in [country]. They go on pilgrimages, etc.

NG: SO, DO YOU THINK YOU'LL RETURN TO [COUNTRY] AFTER YOUR STUDIES? WHAT ARE YOUR PLANS?

ELISE: Well, as a matter of fact, what I think I'd like to do is work a couple of years in France but frankly my objective is to return home after because after being here one can really appreciate what we have at home. The cost of living there is high and things are expensive but it's really like paradise where I come from. It's the best; so I would like to return there. The thing is, my dream is to travel still. I'd love to visit more place but just on vacation. And you're going to hear my English presentation next Monday: if I stay in this field of study, it's to return to my country and help my country out in some way: to participate somehow in my country and Monday you'll find out how!

NG: OH GREAT! I'M LOOKING FORWARD TO THAT!

ELISE: And another thing about my apartment; my dad found an apartment for me while we were still in [country] and I was so happy because I thought I would have to live on the street or in a hotel. Then when we got here, I had to fill out lots of paperwork, and I had to ask my dad to help me. The apartment had a bed and a couch, a microwave but no oven. We had to buy lots of stuff to go in the apartment. And luckily my parents stayed one week to help me get settled. And, as a matter of fact, it was the day that I had English class for the first time with you, and I was crying in class but I didn't want you to see me crying. That's when I told you, "I'm lost," because my parents had just left *[starts to cry].* So my parents bought themselves a computer to be able to Skype with me, but my mom doesn't know how to use it! For my mom it's hard because she just has two children and my brother is also away at school and only comes home for Christmas. He's actually in California at the moment doing an internship. So my mom is alone all day, my dad works, so she's bored. I'm very close to my parents. I haven't seen my brother in two years, and I'm kind of sad because he'll be in [country] for Christmas and I won't be there. We're close even though we don't talk that much, but when we do talk we can stay on the phone for two hours. He's bilingual now and sends me messages in English, and I'm able to answer him in English but then he corrects everything I write!

NG: (LAUGHS) WHAT'S ENGLISH INSTRUCTION LIKE IN YOUR COUNTRY?

ELISE: Well, I can't really compare because I haven't been in class long enough, but I think my generation is behind whereas those who are finishing high school now are much better in English than we were. It's the same educational

system as in France. I'm glad I was put in the more advanced English class with you because I don't think I would have advanced if I had been in the other group. (Elise Interview #1 continues in Appendix E, with Sample Analysis)

Appendix G

Sample Analysis of Interview #1 (Elise)

The following is a continuation of Elise's first interview transcript, with the inclusion of a sample analysis contained in the boxes in the margins. The categories and notes in *red* represent the first analysis and the comments in *black r*epresent the revisited analyses written a year later. The emergent themes are in bold type.

ELISE: Another thing that I think is important to talk about are clothes. In my country, we wear skirts, dresses, tank tops and when I see boots and puffy coats, I have no idea what they are! When I came here, I noticed while shopping with a girl from my class . . .

NG: WAS SHE FRENCH?

Identity

Agency

Power

Identity

Agency

Power

ELISE: She's Moroccan, and when I picked out colorful clothes, she told me, "But Elise, we're going into winter, you can't wear colors like that!" I asked, "Why not?" She told me, "They're too colorful!" and I answered, "I don't care! I'll dress the way I want . . . it's ugly to always dress in dark colors . . . it's not because the weather's bad that we also have to look dark, on the contrary, we should give off warmth with our clothes." I told her not to listen to the others, to dress like she wanted to, but she said, "You know the French . . ." "But I'm not going to dress for them; I'm going to continue wearing colors. I think wearing dark colors makes people feel even more sad." Well, we only have two seasons in my country!

Exterior appearance, clothing styles, colors are symbolic, desire to defy imposed cultural norms. RESISTENCE

Distinction as capital: clothing styles; resisting new cultural norms; trying to retain cultural identity, resist culturally imposed norms

RESISTENCE

NG: MY CHILDREN AND I WENT THROUGH THE SAME THING WHEN WE MOVED HERE FROM FLORIDA. WE NOTICED HOW EVERYONE WAS DRESSED IN DARK COLORS. WE REALLY STOOD OUT! WHAT

Identity

identity

Cultural difference ; EXCLUSION people don't talk in class

disruption of habitus; doxa, what she thinks is possible

EXCLUSION

ABOUT THE PEOPLE HERE? WHAT KIND OF WELCOME HAVE YOU RECEIVED?

Ambiguous appearance to others; Inclusion with other Africans

Bodily hexis;

National identity confirmation, stereotyping?

ELISE: Well, there's the "bonjour" story . . . in class if I ask another student a question, they look at me stunned as if they couldn't believe I was talking to them. I think they're just surprised that I speak openly with them. It's only with the French students. With the foreigners, there are no problems. All of the foreigners talk to me, come toward me. I was Skyping with my parents at school because I didn't have internet at my apartment yet and an African guy was observing me and when I finished he came up to me and asked me if everything was ok. I told him yes, but I was so surprised. He told me that he had been watching me and he said, "You have creppy hair, small little Chinese eyes and brown skin . . . where do you come from?" I told him where I come from, but you see, there are no barriers. Here's a story: it takes about fifteen minutes for me to walk home, and I was with a Moroccan friend because we walk in the same direction for about halfway. She met up with another Moroccan and they started speaking Arabic and the whole way they spoke Arabic together, laughing and chatting, and the other one who didn't know me was tapping me on the shoulder and laughing until I told her, "You know, I don't understand." She thought I was Moroccan! Everyone thinks I'm Arab [sic]. She stopped speaking Arabic with me and said, "But you're not Arab [sic]?" and I told her, "No, I'm not Arab [sic]." She thought I was Moroccan. In fact, everyone thinks I'm Arab here. It happened again when there was an Arab [sic] in another class who spoke to me in Arabic, but I didn't know what he said!

Identity

Identity

Power

Identity

Identity

Agency

Appearance : who others say I am.

Ethnic identity confirmation and confusion

Making French friends, class activity expectations for friendship: inclusion, only two speak to her. EXCLUSION

Expectation for inclusion; disappointed, Disjuncture with customs

EXCLUSION

NG: HAVE YOU BEEN ABLE TO MAKE ANY FRENCH FRIENDS?

Identity

Agency

Identity

Agency

ELISE: So there are only two who speak to me and sometimes help me in class, actually three that I'm getting to know, but otherwise . . . you know that activity in English when we had to interview each other and I was partnered with XXX? And I thought to myself, this will be a good way to get to know others. And so there I was with XXX, and I spoke with her and she answered me in English. She told me how last year was her first year here and she didn't know anybody. I took advantage of the opportunity to tell her some details about myself. So I thought that she would act nicer, closer to me but actually afterwards she barely acknowledged me in the hallway. So, I realized that maybe they'll talk to you in class but it doesn't mean they want to start a friendship. I think it's weird.

Issues with self-esteem & self-worth due to exclusion, comparison with home country; does not identify with French due to rejection, conflict

EXCLUSION

Disjuncture with her culture and customs, inclusion by other African internationals.

EXCLUSION by French; national and cultural identities in conflict

NG: HOW ABOUT YOUR TEACHERS?

ELISE: My teachers don't know anything about me, where I come from or anything. Another thing that I think is weird, everyone knows who's new . . . we know too. In my country when there is a new student, it's party time! "Oh, hello! What's your name? Where do you come from? What do you do? Come eat with us, come to my house." We go straight to the new person. Here, I found out, it's the opposite. They go as far away from the new person as possible. I found that to be so weird. I was talking about it with my parents, I don't understand it. In my country it's like that but not here. I was so happy when one person came toward me in class and asked me if I was new. He is African. I told him, "You're the first one to notice. You're the only one who has spoken to me." It made me feel so good that there was one person who said hello and noticed I was new. So anyway, my friends here are not French and that's why I don't feel French.

Identity

Identity

Appendix H

Sample Interview Analysis from Parts of Transcription:

André interview #1

The following represent a sample analysis from an extract taken from André's first interview. The boxes in the margins contain initial categories, notes in red and subsequent analysis in black of the same portion of the transcript. Emergent themes are represented in bold type.

Financial worries, accommodation problems; IMAGINED FUTURE IDENTITY strong motivation against hardship

POVERTY, RESILIENCE

Financial insecurity; self-determination and RESILIENCE against disappointment

POVERTY

IMAGINED FUTURE IDENTITY

NG: HOW HAS THE BEGINNING OF THE SCHOOL YEAR BEEN FOR YOU?

Agency

Identity

Agency

Identity

ANDRE: Since I've arrived I haven't received any money so I'm using up my savings and they're running out so I'm looking for a job, which is what the other students do when they can't afford housing. If you have housing then everything else is ok. I've been staying with someone who lives in social housing with his wife and two kids. For eating, it's every man for himself. I assure my family so they don't worry about me. What encourages me is that when you're faced with difficulties it's up to you to find a way because I know the day will come when I'll be a "grand fonctionnaire internationale" and I won't have to worry anymore. All this will be just a memory. But I admit it's very complicated for students because in my case, I counted on having a scholarship, so it's very complicated.

Background of schools in home country, difficulty adapting to university, but valued as student, Assumed identity as student EDUCATED HABITUS, POVERTY

Student identity as cultural capital, brings prestige and esteem

EDUCATED HABITUS, POVERTY

NG: TELL ME HOW YOU ARE ADAPTING TO CLASSES HERE?

Identity

Agency

Identity

Agency

ANDRE: I came from a university in the capital city of my country. I lost one year because it was a new university that started, but it didn't have all the means needed, so we sometimes didn't have class for a month. Now in France, you find yourself with classes every day, all day, and I'm having

trouble staying organized, changing classes and every week you have a different schedule. But the classes are well-organized, and I feel valued as a student which was not the case in Africa. Everything we do inside and outside the university, people value you as a student, except when it comes to housing . . . there they don't consider the student!

NG: WHAT KIND OF WELCOME HAVE YOU RECEIVED FROM THE HOST STUDENTS?

Identity

Agency

Power

Identity

Agency

Power

Well, another thing is in my country, people tell you "hello," speak to you. Here you could sit next to the same person ten times in class and they won't say "hello." The Africans know each other . . . for us it's a custom, a habit to say "hello" to each other. In Africa, if you don't say "hello" you are considered to be someone who has not been raised correctly. But here, you don't have to say "hello." It irritates me because I say "hello" and they don't answer. Sometimes I wonder if it's because I'm not the same nationality as they are, I'm not French. I ask myself maybe it's not in their custom; maybe since they've started university they have never said hello to one another. Even during class, if you don't understand something and you ask another student, they won't answer you. It's a shame because I feel rejected. Some are nice, but I've had some bad experiences. Some people act racist.

(Similar experience as Elise) Bring cultural habits to new country. Questions why excluded, feels rejected, perceives racism is cause RACISM

EXCLUSION

Disjuncture with habitus, doxa, culture conflict, EXCLUSION" bad experiences" due to RACISM