Self-Formation and Societal Contribution:

The Case of Turkish International Higher Education Graduates

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Abstract

More and more international students are studying abroad. According to the latest UNESCO data, 5.3 million students crossed borders to pursue a higher education degree in 2017. This number is significantly higher compared to recent decades. Regardless of international students' increasing significance, most existing scholarly work positioned them in deficit models, neglecting their agency. Self-formation theory, by contrast, provided a novel perspective by positioning international students as strong agents and focusing on their holistic development in international higher education. Building on self-formation theory, the purpose of the present study was to investigate the self-formation of international higher education graduates and their societal contributions resulting from such formation experience.

The present study drew on case study approaches and focussed on a specific group: Turkish international higher education graduates. The selected group was treated as a case of international students. Qualitative interviewing was the primary data collection method, and participant-drawn, life-timeline forms supported it. The study included 50 recent Turkish international higher education graduates who were selected purposively through both maximum variation and snowball methods. The participants varied in terms of their host country, field of study, return status, and gender. The four purposefully selected countries were Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Germany, and the UK. Interviews either took place in these countries or in Turkey, for returnee graduates.

The findings contribute to the conceptual advancement of self-formation theory and indicate that self-formation in international higher education has three broad domains: the educational domain, the social domain, and the civic domain. The study also proposes an ecological approach to understanding self-formation in international higher education, which allows the contextual and temporal dimensions to be incorporated into the analysis. The findings demonstrate the pertinence of the ecological approach, especially for international comparative studies. Further, the study provides a new perspective regarding societal contribution by incorporating it as the continuation of self-formation in the flow from the self-forming individual to society.

Keywords: higher education, international students, self-formation, agency, Turkey

To my family

&

To a world without COVID-19

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Table of Contents

List of Figures and Tables

Chapter 1: Introduction

Mobility is becoming a defining feature of today's globalising society. Crossing borders to pursue higher education has never been more popular (OECD, 2019; UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2020). International students are increasingly becoming a significant part of higher education. Though the current COVID-19 pandemic created an uncertain atmosphere impacting international higher education, the previously evident trend mentioned above is likely to remain in the medium to long-term (Altbach & de Wit, 2020). Hence, the long-standing rising trend of international student mobility is expected to get back to its normal routines once the uncertainty resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic disperses.

Despite this long-standing rise in the significance of international higher education, the vital role of student agency in it is often neglected (Marginson, 2014; Volet & Jones, 2012). The current scholarly work on student experiences in international higher education has mostly situated students in a deficit model, focusing on helping them to adapt or adjust to the new study context (e.g., Andrade, 2006; Berry, 1980; Black & Mendenhall, 1991). This line of scholarly work reduces the position of international students to mere passive receivers and implies an underlying assumption that international students will be better off the more they acculturate to the host country context (Marginson & Sawir, 2012).

Such neglect of student agency is not limited to international higher education. The economic arguments of the human capital perspective on higher education in general, which have come to dominate the thinking about university education, do not do justice to students' role and their agency in higher education either (Ashwin, 2020b; Marginson, 2019a). Such a perspective on higher education values university degrees based on their

instrumental utility. In this perspective, graduates' own judgements or dreams about their degrees are overlooked, the students are reduced to "vessels for others to fill" (Marginson, 2018, p. 3), and the value of the vessel is decided by the market exchange (Marginson, 2018).

Amidst the realisation that some of the long-established influential paradigms in the literature on international higher education are deemed inadequate, a new perspective that positions students as active agents has been emerging. The self-formation theory is a promising approach that has been influential in the formation of this new perspective in international higher education research (Bedenlier et al., 2018). Marginson (2014, 2018) proposed that higher education—and within that, international higher education—is a process of self-formation. In his 2018 paper, Marginson noted how he came to realise that the participating international students in his previous studies were individuals with a strong agency who steer the course of their own lives under circumstances they did not control. To him, "these students were engaged not in other-formation but in self-formation" (p. 2). He positioned self-formation as a modernist idea that is different from the perspectives that currently dominate mainstream approaches. Self-formation emphasises the agentic self and builds on some of the seminal discussions on agency and freedom, such as those of Archer (2003, 2008), Sen (1992, 1999), and Giddens (2008, first published in 1991). Building on Marginson's work (2014, 2018), the present study has focussed on self-formation theory.

What is further missing in the above-mentioned emerging line of research is the potential relationship between the self-formation in international higher education and societal contributions. The contributions of international higher education graduates to their home countries and to the wider society are mostly neglected in the overall international

education literature (Campbell, 2020; Tran & Vu, 2017); thus, focusing on this issue along with self-formation can be a further significant contribution. The present study investigated the self-formation of international higher education graduates together with their perceived contributions to society. The primary assumption was that students would go through self-formation during their international higher education experience, and then, as graduates, their societal contributions would be shaped by, and sometimes become possible thanks to, such self-formation processes. In other words, the societal contributions of international higher education graduates were assumed to be the continuation of individual self-formation and hence integral to it. This is a flow of self-forming individuals from university to society, which could be seen as higher education's indirect contribution to society through its graduates (cf. McCowan, 2016).

Being a novel approach in the international higher education literature, self-formation theory, along with self-forming individuals' societal contributions, would benefit from empirical studies working towards their operationalisation. This research aimed to do so using an exploratory approach. It focused on empirically collecting the socially constructed perspectives of international higher education graduates from across different country contexts to further unpack self-formation theory and societal contributions. The following research questions guided this investigation:

1. How do Turkish young adults who completed their degrees abroad explain their self-formation in international higher education?
2. How do Turkish young adults who completed their degrees abroad explain their (potential) contributions to their home country (Turkey) and the wider society?

The present study drew on case study approaches and focussed on a specific group—Turkish international higher education graduates. This group was treated as a case of internationally mobile students. Turkish international higher education graduates are comparable to other international higher education graduates in the sense that they all go through similar dynamics of international higher education (e.g., they all cross borders to obtain qualifications abroad, leave behind their existing networks and friendships and obtain new ones, and observe and experience different communal values in a novel context). In this sense, the selected group could be considered as an instrumental case for obtaining an insight into the overall understanding of the self-formation of international higher education students and their perceived contributions to society after graduation (Ragin, 1992; Stake, 1996).

However, Turkish international higher education graduates may have some differences from other international higher education students as well. A discussion on their potential differences from others is provided under the Design and Participant Selection sections. In this sense, Turkish international higher education graduates also hold an intrinsic value, as Stake (1996) termed it, as they may provide insights into Turkey-related issues and as they are an understudied group in international higher education literature. The study, in this regard, has the potential to open up new discussions on other Turkey-related issues, such as diaspora and interrelationships with existing populations in host countries. The forthcoming journal article (Oldac & Fancourt, 2020) discussing Turkish diaspora and Turkish international higher education graduates in Germany building from the data collected by this doctoral study is an example of this.

Coherent with the case study design outlined above, semi-structured interviewing was the primary data collection method for this study and was supported by participant-

drawn, life-timeline forms. The semi-structured interviews had a biographical dimension (Goodson & Sikes, 2001; Roberts, 2002) in them, especially during the early part of the interview when the participants were asked to go over their participant-drawn, life-timeline forms freely, without being interrupted by the researcher. The biographical dimension was incorporated to obtain a better grasp of the international higher education experience within the context of what happened before and after the experience. After all, international student mobility is not just about international students and their experiences during their study abroad "but also about all those they are connected to before, during and after their study abroad experiences" (Larsen, 2016, p. 44). Participant-drawn, life-timeline forms were largely unstructured to elicit participant thinking. The forms served to prime the participants before each interview by ensuring that they put some thought on the key events in their lives, and the forms helped structure the interview that followed afterwards (Atkinson, 1998; Goodson & Sikes, 2001). Also, encouraging participants to go through a reflexive process before each interview was important as self-formation is related to reflexivity and personal reflection towards one's formation (Marginson, 2014, 2018).

Moreover, based on the assumption that different host country contexts might influence the self-formation of international students differently, the present study was designed to include participants who studied in multiple host countries. After a meticulous, purposeful selection process, as delineated in the Methodology chapter, the following four host country contexts were selected: Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Germany, and the UK. Fieldwork in Turkey was also conducted since it is the home country context where returnee graduates were interviewed. The inclusion of multiple country contexts was not to compare the findings between each of them one by one, although meaningful differences were highlighted, but to form a better account of self-formation in

international higher education and the perceived contributions to society as a result of such experience.

By "international higher education," the intended meaning is not just the learning experiences that take place within the boundaries of the physical buildings of a university. It is more than that. There is a larger experience that may include the university as one of its focal points but is not limited to it. Especially for international higher education, the broad experience of staying in a different country for a prolonged time and immersing oneself in different social, cultural, and civic atmospheres may have implications for student self-formation as much as the classes have (Chankseliani, 2018). This also indicates the importance of selecting different country contexts because this immersion factor could be the aspect where context matters significantly.

The references to international higher education graduates in this study are to degree-mobile individuals only, rather than short-term or credit-mobile individuals. This was based on the assumption that the more extended the stay in the host country, the more significant and enduring the impact would be on students, which has backing from prior studies (Adam et al., 2018; Dwyer, 2004). Also, only those who moved to another country for the purposes of studying for a degree were included in this study, which excluded those who may have been living in the host country as foreign citizens prior to their international higher education. This was to assure that the participants were going through an immersive experience in a novel context, which would trigger self-formation.

Furthermore, most of the research on international student mobility relies on data collected from current internationally mobile students themselves and not from graduates. Although some did include graduates, the samples of these studies were relatively small, sometimes limited to the alumni of one university (Collins et al., 2017).

While studies of current students can provide important insights about international student mobility, as indicated by Collins and his colleagues (2017), graduates can provide precious accounts on the longer-term value of international higher education experience, and they can reflect on their formation process during their degree study abroad.

"Young adults" is another term used in the research questions. This study adopted the definition of young adults from developmental psychology, where they are generally accepted to be between the ages of 20 and 35 (Armstrong, 2007). This definition was included in this study to ensure consistency and comparability of the collected data. The participants may have different perspectives regarding their self-formation or contributions to society depending on their age and experience. As discussed in the Methodology chapter in more detail, the participants already varied in their country of study, subject areas, and gender. Keeping this consistent helped with avoiding complexity when comparing data across contexts.

As discussed earlier, student agency is central to any discussion of student self-formation. The definition of agency, hence, would play a critical role in a study of self-formation. There are many approaches to agency in different kinds of literature including sociology, psychology, and behavioural economics, as discussed in the Education and Agency section of the Literature Review chapter in more detail. The agency understanding in this study drew on the ecological perspective proposed by Biesta and Tedder (2007). According to this perspective, agency is something that is achieved, rather than being inherent, by actors "in and through engagement with particular temporal-relational contexts-for-action" (p. 136). The ecological perspective proposes three dimensions of agency, which are the actor/individual (international higher education graduates), context (the inclusion of multiple-country contexts), and temporality (the addition of the

biographical dimension for data collection). These three dimensions are in constant interaction. A more detailed discussion on this study's agency approach is provided in the Literature Review chapter.

What has emerged from this exploratory study is that student self-formation in international higher education has three broad domains: the educational domain, the social domain, and the civic domain. The word "domain" stands for spheres of knowledge, influence, or activity. These three domains have no claim of being exhaustive but are some of the main areas that international students work on their self-formation. These domains are also shared across selected country contexts, which indicates their robustness. As these domains are important in understanding how student self-formation in international higher education works, a brief discussion on each is provided below.

The educational domain of self-formation in international higher education broadly refers to the ways the skills, knowledge, and qualifications obtained during international higher education stimulate student self-formation. When considering that self-formation is the holistic development of the individuals who work on their self-improvement (Marginson, 2014, 2018), this domain surfaces as an important and relevant part of a bigger picture (cf. Chankseliani et al., 2020). In doing so, the educational domain does not focus on end result qualifications or graduate attributes, as this would be a separate research enquiry, but on the self-formation journey of the participants within the sphere of qualifications, skills, and knowledge obtained in international higher education. The educational domain may echo some of the well-established understandings in the literature but is not limited to what they have to offer. Biesta's qualification function of education, human capital approach, and signalling theory could be examples of this.

The social domain of self-formation in international higher education is related to what individuals obtain thanks to their new social life and networks from their international higher education experience. When individuals go abroad, they leave their existing friends and family behind. The day-to-day social interactions with these newly obtained friendships and networks play a significant role in an individual's self-formation process. The social domain draws from what Marginson discussed as "the socially-contextualised character of individual formation" (p. 13) in his 2018 paper. The social domain may resonate with some of the already existing approaches in the literature but is not limited to their scope. These may include different takes of social capital and network approaches.

The civic domain of self-formation in international higher education refers to how individuals develop different civic values and understandings on helping shape their community's future or improving conditions for others during international higher education. When people go abroad for a degree education, they immerse themselves in a different civic context. They observe potentially different civic values and understandings first-hand, and some of them even take an active part in civic-related activities. Consequently, they may form different civic understandings and perspectives, which may affect them in their endeavours to shape their community's future or improve conditions for others. This could be through political and/or non-political processes (Ehrlich, 2000). This phenomenon of graduates developing different civic understandings and perspectives is referred to as the civic domain of self-formation in this study.

Further, as mentioned earlier, the second research question of the present study is about the perceived contributions of international higher education graduates to their home country and the wider society. The data on the societal contributions are reported in their

dedicated chapter under three main sections, as emerged from the study: Contributions to Home Country, No Contribution to Home Country, and Contributions to Humanity Instead. Further analytical themes arising from the findings are provided under these sections. The potential links between these themes on perceived societal contributions and individual self-formation in international higher education are dwelt on as part of the discussion.

The overall structure of this thesis takes the form of six chapters. The first chapter, which is this Introduction chapter, introduced the background, main purposes, the research questions, significance, methodology of the study, and brief definitions of the core concepts. The second chapter, Literature Review, situates the study within the international higher education literature and provides a review of theoretical and empirical scholarship related to the study's main purposes. The third chapter sets out the methodology used for this thesis in detail. It provides the rationale for the overall design of the present study and includes detailed explanations about every stage in the data collection and analysis. The fourth chapter presents the findings related to the first research question of the study concerning the individual self-formation in international higher education, and it has three main sections dealing with the three domains of self-formation. The fifth chapter presents the findings related to the second research question, which concerns international higher education graduates' contributions to their home country and the wider society. The sixth chapter discusses the overall research findings and policy implications. An account of the limitations of the thesis and suggestions for future research round off the sixth chapter.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This study investigated self-formation and societal contribution in international higher education, through data collected from Turkish international higher education graduates. This chapter situates the study within the relevant theoretical and empirical literature.

The first section of this chapter reviews the related theoretical literature. It starts with an introductory discussion on self-formation based mostly on the early key works by Marginson and his colleague (Marginson, 2014, 2018; Marginson & Sawir, 2012) that introduced self-formation theory into the international higher education literature. Subsequently, the first section continues with three subsections. The first subsection discusses the perennial cultural perspectives towards self-cultivation and education, ranging from east to west, to put self-formation theory in perspective. The second subsection reviews different perspectives on agency in relevant kinds of theoretical literature from multiple disciplines including sociology, psychology, economics, and education. These kinds of literature are brought together to discuss and elaborate relevant perspectives towards the newly emerging theory of self-formation. This subsection builds up to the next one, which proposes an ecological approach to understanding self-formation in international higher education. Afterwards, I turn to reviewing the empirical literature. The second section and third sections of this chapter provide a review of the recently emerging empirical scholarly work related to self-formation and societal contributions in international higher education, respectively.

2.1 Self-Formation in International Higher Education

Scholars have predominantly perceived international education as an adjustment process through which internationally mobile students adapt to local necessities (Marginson,

2014, 2018; Tran & Vu, 2017). Students in their mobility experience were positioned in a deficit model, in which they were seen to be on a journey of fulfilling themselves by acculturating to the new context in which they found themselves (e.g., Andrade, 2006; Berry, 1980; Black & Mendenhall, 1991; Zhou et al., 2008). However, recent scholarship has become increasingly critical of this approach. For example, Church (1982) provided a critical review of the adjustment/deficit paradigm, and Volet and Jones (2012) argued how the adjustment/deficit paradigm neglected the role of individual agency of international students.

Complementing these recent developments, Marginson and Sawir (Marginson, 2014, 2018; Marginson & Sawir, 2012) argued for framing international higher education as a process of self-formation. Student self-formation refers to students' active roles in forming their self-trajectories during their international education experience. In his 2018 paper, Marginson noted how he came to realise the participating international students in his previous studies were "strong agents piloting the course of their own lives, albeit under circumstances they did not control. These students were engaged not in other-formation but in self-formation" (2018, p. 2). He positioned self-formation as a modernist perspective that is different from the perspectives that currently dominate mainstream psychology and economics, where students are seen as "vessels for others to fill" (p. 3) and the value of the vessel is decided by the market exchange, not by the graduates' own judgements or dreams.

Marginson (2014, 2018) contended that student self-formation goes beyond the understanding of students as consumers in a market. Self-formation is not limited to investment in the self as human capital and obtaining higher economic pay-offs and status (Tran, 2016). To Marginson (2014), it might include acquiring new conversational idioms

or obtaining knowledge and personal sensibilities as part of cultural capital. Further, self-formation might also incorporate social capital through which students may obtain functional social networks. Students might obtain new beliefs and values in the country of education, and they may attain cosmopolitan relations and greater tolerance (Marginson, 2014; Montgomery, 2010).

Marginson (2014) argued that international education is an active formation process of selves as a result of the interaction with both the host and home societies. In this formation process, internationally mobile students might want to keep some of the features from their home culture but still want to acquire some of the features of the host culture. In other words, self-formation through international student mobility does not have to be an either/or phenomenon. Internationally mobile students can prefer to use the cultural and linguistic references of their host country more when they are in their host-country settings and the cultural and linguistic references of their home country more when they are in their home-country settings. Marginson (2014) called this 'multiplicity' (p. 15). On the other hand, they may combine different cultural and linguistic references as part of their self-formation. He called this process 'hybridity' (p. 15). These two processes of multiplicity and hybridity are coordinated and managed by 'a centering self' (p. 16).

Later, in 2018, Marginson further envisioned self-formation to be an encompassing frame for higher education. He put this in his inaugural professorial lecture as quoted below:

> …Human capital theory, the consumer paradigm, the theory of positional goods, Bourdieu's capitals, even liberal education, present themselves to us—as contending claims for the status of single transcendent truth. Each claim is holistic in its would-be reach. Yet it is grounded in a partial slice of the world. The framing of higher education should encompass all of these phenomena, each of these different constellations of ideas and practices, without elevating any

> one to dominance. The common element—the centre of the inquiry into the higher education process—is the self-forming student. (Marginson, 2018, p. 16)

To him, higher education as self-formation and self-formation as the expansion of freedom is the encompassing framework. Self-formation encompasses all the ways that students can construct themselves using their agency. And when the socially-nested nature of higher education is added into the account, the inquiry on self-formation can include others, contributions to the wider society, and the common good (Marginson, 2018).

In the following section, broad perennial cultural perspectives towards education and self-cultivation that self-formation theory builds on are discussed. This is to put self-formation theory in perspective broadly before moving on to more specific discussions on it.

2.1.1 The Idea of Self-Formation from East to West

Marginson (2014, 2018) proposed that self-formation is a process through which students form themselves holistically, using their agency in various purposes, processes, and products of higher education. The relatively recent publications of these papers may have revived self-formation discussions in international higher education literature, but the theory built on some of the perennial understandings of education and self-improvement that already existed in varying cultures ranging from east to west. These understandings may help put in perspective the recently emerging self-formation discussions in higher education and within that international higher education.

To start with, the western tradition of *Bildung* is highly relevant to self-formation theory. One translation of the German word Bildung is “self-formation and inner cultivation” (Taylor, 2017, p. 421); it is about the holistic development of the individual and the

broader society (Horlacher, 2004). According to Biesta (2002b), Bildung has a long history, and its roots go further back to educational ideals in ancient Greek society. It was then adopted to Roman culture, humanism, neo-humanism, and the Enlightenment. Since then, it has become a prominent notion of educational understanding in the Western tradition.

With this understanding of Bildung, an important question, then, is what it may mean to be an educated human being. The initial discussion addressing this question dealt with the contents. Thus, an educated person in this perspective would be someone knowledgeable about a certain set of ideas, values, and information (Biesta, 2002b). However, this understanding has changed over time, and the process of acquiring the contents has come to be called Bildung itself. Biesta (2002b) argued that "self-Bildung" (p. 345) would be a good name for this perspective towards Bildung in the pre-Enlightenment period.

The Enlightenment period brought further developments to the understanding of Bildung. The perspective towards Bildung begun to include rational autonomy and independent thinking. Kant described enlightenment as "man's release from self-incurred nonage"; he explained nonage as "man's inability to make use of his understanding without direction from another" (Kant, 1784)[1]. Ideas such as these have been the basis for the modern understanding of Bildung today in the Western tradition. The Kantian understanding of Bildung posits that individuals should work to cultivate the inner self in both intellectual and ethical terms to become autonomous individuals. The cultivation of the inner life encompasses the cultivation of the human mind and the human person.

[1] This is a letter written by Kant in 1784 describing what enlightenment is. No page number is available to provide for the direct quotations shared here as the source provided is a web page of Columbia University.

Like other big ideas, Bildung is not only an educational ideal; it has broader implications. Scholars have emphasised the vital role of Bildung in the emergence of civil society (Biesta, 2002a, 2002b). Bildung is, in this sense, an "educational answer that was given to the political question about citizenship" (Biesta, 2002a, p. 343). Self-cultivated, rational, and autonomous individuals can be considered the foundation of a strong and civil society. After all, robust civic systems, such as a working democracy, require constituents who can take autonomous and rational actions. According to Kant, education is a necessary tool to facilitate such Bildung among the society that would, in turn, contribute to the civic society (Kivela, 2012). Although education may be necessary for ensuring the Bildung of autonomous individuals, Bildung can take place outside of educational institutions as well. In today's world, Bildung "becomes a lifelong challenge and a lifelong opportunity" (Biesta, 2002a, p. 343).

American pragmatists, being in constant interaction with the European tradition in this matter, agreed that education is related to the formation of the free, autonomous self (Pauli Siljander et al., 2012). In their paper, Siljander and Sutinen (2012) argued that Dewey's theory of education and democracy is, in essence, a theory of Bildung, especially in his writings about a curriculum of humanistic and naturalistic studies and self-discipline. The central twist in the American pragmatist's understanding of education was "growth" (Kivela et al., 2012, p. 308). They proposed that education should nurture the harmony between individuals and socio-cultural environments, and it should focus on the growth of self-regulation by the active learner (Kivela et al., 2012).

Confucian self-cultivation is another perspective Marginson (2018) built on when proposing self-formation theory. Confucian self-cultivation understanding is the predominant tradition not only in China but also in much of Korea, Japan, and Vietnam

(J. Li, 2012). The prominent figure in this tradition is Confucius (551–479 BCE) with his teachings. He was the most prominent author in Chinese culture, shaping the course of the culture with his compilations and teachings. An important part of his legacy is his teachings on how to cultivate oneself, learn, and be a person (J. Li, 2012).

Confucian tradition posits that personal cultivation and improvement is a highly important quest for every human being (J. Li, 2012; Sun, 2008; Weiming, 2001; G. Zhao & Deng, 2015). The Confucian self is never a finished entity but is always engaged in the process of improvement and refinement (K. Zhao & Biesta, 2011). For this tradition, the self is at the centre of a person's attention, reflection, contemplation, and living. Hence, the focus of living is a constant work of self-perfection (J. Li, 2012).

Confucian self-cultivation understanding is not only about the enhancement of the individual but also about harmonising with the larger society and points out a strong relationship between the two (Sun, 2008). Cultivating the self is seen as the centre of building a larger entity in harmony. Ensuring the harmony among (in order from the larger entity to the smaller) heaven, state, family, personal life, rectifying the heart and mind, and intentions all depend on studying things and refining knowledge (Weiming, 2001, 2013). In other words, Confucian learning starts with the cultivation of the self but gradually expands to the larger spheres of life in a holistic manner (J. Li, 2012).

Islamic culture is a major civilisation that seems to be missing in the discussions of self-formation and is potentially more related to the participants of this study. There is a strong tradition and emphasis on learning and self-improvement in Islamic culture. The placement of high value on knowledge and education is seen as a sacred duty for every

Muslim (Samier, 2020; Weir, 2012). There are two, frequently-quoted hadiths[2] of the Prophet that are highly relevant to what is discussed in this thesis: "Learning is the duty of each and every Muslim" and "Go and seek knowledge everywhere, even from China if needs be" (Weir, 2012). These hadiths play an important role in showing the way for practicing Muslims as they are frequently used in daily life.

In addition, there is a read-before-anything-else understanding in Islamic culture (Atay, 1979; Gündüz, 1978), which dates back to the revelation of the first-ever verse of the Quran: "Read!" (Fatoohi, 2010). Being the first-ever verse of the Quran, the object of this command was left unclear since, at that time, the book as we know it today did not exist, and the rest of the Quran was not revealed in one night. Scholars have universally given credit to this verse for the importance of reading and learning in Islamic understanding (Atay, 1979; Weir, 2012).

Moreover, the concept of *muhasabah* in Islamic understanding could be the closest term to reflexivity that self-formation theory builds on. Muhasabah is understood as a person's critical thinking on his/her actions. It includes self-evaluation that highlights learning from the past and improving oneself for the future (Weir, 2012). It involves the ownership of one's actions and taking responsibility for them. The concept of muhasabah is the act of self-examination, which also involves self-criticism with the purpose of self-improvement (Al-Qaradawi, 2000; Weir, 2012).

However, it should be noted that Turkey is a Muslim-majority country and also a secular one, which may separate Turkish individuals from other Muslim-majority nations (Uğur, 2004). The move towards secular values in Turkey has its roots starting in the late

[2] The Oxford English Dictionary describes hadith as: "Sayings of the prophet Muhammad which, with accounts of his daily practice (the Sunna), constitute the major source of guidance for Muslims apart from the Koran."

Ottoman era when Turkish scholars thought that this move would help them "catch up" with the West. A renowned Turkish Islamic science historian Fuat Sezgin explained that the scientific activities in the Islamic world gathered speed in the 9th century but lost their speed in the 15th century, and with the 17th century, the superiority in science and technology shifted to the western world (Saygılı, 2019). Sezgin was firmly against the idea that the superiority in science being lost could be attributable to Islam; nevertheless, this idea was gaining momentum in the Turkish world (Saygılı, 2019). Consequently, with the establishment of modern Turkey after 1923, a modern and secular education system was established. American philosopher of education Dewey was invited to modern Turkey, and his reports and thoughts were taken into consideration when establishing the new system (Wolf-Gazo, 1996). In this regard, Turkish society has a unique dynamic that includes a bit of both worlds; there is a dynamic tension between Eastern and Western perspectives and values. Most Turks have a blend of both perspectives, rather than accepting one or the other (Kilinc & Granello, 2003). Hence, Turkish culture can be understood better if these two broad cultural characteristics are considered together.

The importance put on learning and self-improvement in Turkish culture not only originates from being a Muslim nation but also originates from long-established Turkic values. The traces of this can be seen in the writings of prominent Turkish figures. For example, Yunus Emre is a highly influential figure in Turkish culture. His 750th birthday in 1991 was unanimously passed as the International Yunus Emre Year by the UNESCO General Conference. An English-translated excerpt below from one of his poems on knowledge and learning may shed light into the perspective towards learning and self-improvement in Turkish understanding:

> Knowledge is to understand,
>
> To understand who you are.
>
> If you know not who you are,
>
> What's the use of learning? (Yunus Emre, n.d., stanza 1)

As can be seen, knowledge is viewed as a way to understand "who you are," which is relevant to self-formation theory.

By pointing these out, the intention here is not to make an exhaustive discussion on the cultural traditions of Turkish international students regarding learning and self-improvement. That could be the scope of another thesis. The intention here is to point out that there are different cultural understandings towards self-cultivation from east to west which may further contribute to our self-formation understanding. Just like there are variations within the idea of Bildung (Kivela et al., 2012) or Confucianism (J. Li, 2012), there may be variations in the Turkish and Islamic perspectives towards self-improvement and personal cultivation, although the ones shared here seem to be the predominant cultural orientations.

Briefly, self-formation theory in its early theorisation phase built on different cultural traditions including the perspective of Bildung in the western tradition, American pragmatism, and Confucian self-cultivation understanding (Marginson, 2019b). The review here also highlighted the Islamic and Turkish perspectives towards self-improvement, which seem to be missing in the discussions on self-formation. Although there are established perennial perspectives towards personal self-improvement and learning, the self-formation theory in international higher education literature is relatively new, and it has not received adequate attention in the existing scholarly work. The existing scholarly work has predominantly situated students in a deficit model, focusing

on their adjustment/acculturation/adaptation (e.g., Andrade, 2006; Berry, 1980; Black & Mendenhall, 1991; Zhou et al., 2008). The instrumental function of universities has prevailed (Blundell et al., 1999; Kelly et al., 2010), which only captures a limited picture of the holistic transformation students go through in higher education (Marginson, 2019a). However, as was introduced in the previous section, Marginson built on agency and its relation to education when proposing international higher education as a self-formation process. The following section discusses the academic literature on education and agency, connecting the two to self-formation theory.

2.1.2 Education and Agency

As has been mentioned multiple times previously, agency plays an important role in the recently emerging self-formation theory. Because of its importance, agency and its potential relation to education are discussed in this section. Below, I review multiple theories and approaches on agency, even though some of them do not directly relate to or are not situated within the academic discussions on education. This is to build a more comprehensive account of agency and to prevent limiting the discussion to those agency understandings that exist in the education literature only. The review of agency theories provided in this section informs the following section that proposes an ecological approach to understanding self-formation in international higher education.

The current discussions on agency and its role in education originate from at least the Enlightenment-era discussions. Kant famously described enlightenment as "man's release from self-incurred nonage," and his understanding of nonage was "man's inability to make use of his understanding without direction from another" (Kant, 1784). Ideas such as these have been the basis for the rational and autonomous action of individuals (Biesta & Tedder, 2007), which was a central premise Marginson (2014, 2018) built upon

when proposing self-formation theory. This notion of a rational and autonomous man, who lives within the society but has an autonomous self, has changed the way we see society and its relations with individuals. With this perspective change in the sociological analysis, the way we perceive life has moved away from a given and prescribed understanding to a more uncertain and liquid one (e.g., Bauman, 2000; Giddens, 2008, first published in 1991). Life, in this perspective, has become a task for the agentic self who makes his/her own decisions (Bauman, 2000; Giddens, 2008, first published in 1991), being released "from self-incurred nonage."

Being more active and autonomous, the agentic self is seen as a reflective project. This has been shown in the recent accounts on agency. Gidden's structuration theory (2008, first published in 1991), for example, approached agency as the interrelation of the individual and society/structure. Structuration theory proposed an interdependent perspective where the structure is internalised by the agents. To him, individual agency is conditioned by the larger structure that it is surrounded by. Agency plays its role through the never-ending reflexivity of the self.

Archer (2003), on the other hand, proposed reflexivity, or what she termed as internal conversation, as the modality through which the relationship between self and the outer world is exercised. She conceptualised the self and structure as ontologically separate but interdependent. To her, the internal conversation is what reflexively mediates between the objective, the external and the subjective, the internal. Archer's morphogenetic approach posits that agents have a conscious sense of the self.

Both Archer's (2003) morphogenetic approach and Gidden's (2008, first published in 1991) structuration theory are relatively new perspectives that incorporate both individuals' agentic actions and structure's conditioning aspect into one theory in

sociological discussions. A fundamental shortcoming of theoretical approaches up until now, according to Archer (2010), has been that they have either tilted towards agentic action or structure. Although these two theories address the vital issue of linking these two critical aspects together, they have differences too, which have been pointed out by several studies (e.g., Archer, 2010; Willmott, 1999). Archer (2003, 2010), for example, distinguished her approach from Giddens' (2008, first published in 1991) by arguing that structuration theory lacks the ontological separation between agency and structure. Her main criticism towards structuration theory was that without an ontological separation between agency and structure, it would not be possible to understand and analyse the interrelation between the two (Archer, 2003, 2010; Willmott, 1999).

Mead, too, had a contribution to the understanding of how the individual and the wider society might interact (Mead, 1913; Mead & Morris, 1962). Being the person who laid the foundations of symbolic interactionism, his perspective sees social interactions playing a central role in the formation of the self. He was a champion of the reflective self, working on the self. He argued for an internal discussion between the active self/the subject "I" and "me" as the object of an action. "Me" can be the object of the self on which other individuals act and thus is situationally variable. Both the actions of "I" and other individuals require a response from the individual, which is related to "me." At this point, the inner stage changes into a "forum and workshop of thought" (Mead, 1913, p. 376) to work on the self and, if need be, update it.

Being a more recent scholar who produced academic work much later than Mead, Archer commented on Mead's symbolic interactionist perspective and discussed how her morphogenetic approach is different (Archer, 2003). She made a distinction between her approach to internal conversation and Mead's argument on the conversation between "I"

and “me” by arguing that Mead’s approach lacked the intra-personal exploration of the individual and his/her relation to society. Mead’s understanding was preoccupied with the symbolic interaction between the other individuals and their perceptions of the “me”, and thus it was more interpersonal. To Archer, the reflexive internal conversation is the key to understanding the way agency mediates how the external constraints and enablements interact with the inner, subjective self (Archer, 2003).

Another important contribution to the discussions on agency is Albert Bandura’s Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 2001). Bandura’s Social Cognitive Theory is a take on agency from the perspective of a psychologist. His thoughts on self-efficacy in his earlier works (e.g., Bandura, 1977, 1997) have been highly influential in the literature. Self-efficacy can be briefly defined as a person’s belief in oneself to succeed. Later in his work, Bandura applied this theory to an agentic perspective and identified a number of concepts to frame how agency may work. He discussed human agency and self-efficacy as two interrelated notions; and that human agency in this sense would include intentionality, forethought, and self-reflectiveness as its core features (Bandura, 2001).

Bandura further identified what he termed the “modes of human agency” (Bandura, 2001, p. 13). With modes of human agency, Bandura distinguished personal agency, which is an individual’s agentic acts, from proxy and collective agencies. The latter two are different conceptions of agentic actions that were not discussed in detail by Mead (Mead, 1913; Mead & Morris, 1962), Archer (2003, 2010), or Giddens (2008, first published in 1991). The proxy agency addresses the limits of dealing with everything directly through personal agency. Since human beings have limited time and energy, they sometimes choose to exert indirect agency/influence over occurrences. This could take place through, for example, allowing a colleague or partner to take care of certain tasks while

the personal agency focuses on other issues. Collective agency, on the other hand, is about acting together with others to achieve certain goals. This mode of agency includes a sense of sharing the agentic responsibilities (Bandura, 2001).

Although Bandura's perspective provides important insights on the agency side, it is not as detailed about the conditioning/limiting aspect of structure. This becomes more visible when his social cognitive theory is compared and contrasted with sociological takes on this matter. Perhaps this could be a result of the psychological point of view. For example, in his seminal paper (2001), Bandura discussed how fortuity of events and underminers of collective agency might interfere with or condition personal, proxy, and collective agencies. However, Bandura drew attention to the fact that these do not necessarily "mean uncontrollability of effects" and that "there are ways people can capitalize on the fortuitous character of life" (p.12).

Self-determination theory is another approach originating from the field of psychology that has relevance to agency (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000a, 2000b). Deci and Ryan identified three types of motivations, or as they called them, regulatory styles. These play a role in how and if people choose to take action. The first one of these is intrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation is about doing the activity simply for the enjoyment of the activity itself. This is "the fullest representation of humanity [...] (where people are) agentic and inspired, striving to learn and extend themselves" (Ryan & Deci, 2000a, p. 68). Extrinsic motivation is the second regulatory style. The authors explained that actions taken are regulated by the person's agency in extrinsic motivation too, but they are taken because of external causes, not for the inherent joy. Amotivation is, on the other hand, a person's choice to not do anything.

While self-determination theory has important implications for understanding the human brain and, consequently, human behaviour, it does not focus on the interrelationship with the outer world or context. The discussion on extrinsic motivation does shed light on how a person may regulate his/her behaviour as a result of external causes, which may have implications for understanding how external causes condition what an agent does. However, it does not give insight into what happens when an agent wants to achieve something but cannot due to such external causes.

Biesta (2009, 2010) also had a different perspective on agency in his influential discussion on the purposes of education and agency's role in it. Biesta (2009, 2010) argued that education has three functions: qualification (obtaining skills and knowledge), socialisation (helping students become part of the society they live in), and subjectification (helping students become unique within their society). The last two functions, socialisation and subjectification, draw attention to two contrasting functions of education. While the former refers to helping students become more similar to the society they live in, the latter refers to helping them become more distinct. Agency can be said to play a role in all three of Biesta's functions of education. For example, becoming more like the society (socialisation) in some respects and becoming different from the society in others (subjectification) requires constant negotiation within a students' mind, resembling the internal discussion posited by Archer (2003, 2008), as discussed above.

Additionally, Emirbayer and Mische (1998) put a spotlight on the temporality dimension of agency, which seems to have been left out of most other perspectives, as these authors pointed out. Emirbayer and Mische's (1998) central contribution is the idea that agency cannot be understood fully if it is not situated within the flow of time. To the authors, an

agentic individual interacts with the structure in a temporal-relational manner that includes the iterational element building on what an individual has accumulated ("selective reactivation by actors of past patterns of thought and action" p. 971), the practical-evaluative element (their judgement of the present, potential trajectories of action), and the projective element (imaginative deliberations of possible future trajectories of action). Agentic action in this understanding is related to the interpenetration between individual, structure, and temporality.

Biesta and Tedder (2007) built on Emirbayer and Mische's (1998) take on agency and applied it to educational settings with an emphasis on life course and narrative approaches. They conceptualised agency as something that is achieved rather than something an individual inherently has. People have to achieve agency through and in relation to temporal-relational contexts for action. To them, agency as an achievement takes place through the interpenetration between three elements: actor/individual, context for action, and temporality. The authors called this approach an ecological perspective to agency since agency is not a quality that is inherent in the individual but a quality of the engagement between the three elements. In this view, to think of agency as an achievement helps explain why agency can be achieved in one situation but not in another or why it fluctuates over time.

The notion of freedom is relevant to the discussions of agency and it being conditioned by structure. The degree and nature of freedom one has can influence that person's agentic actions and the limitations they face. To illustrate, Isaiah Berlin's (1969) take on two notions of liberty is highly relevant to this matter. Berlin identified and differentiated positive and negative freedoms in his famous essay, Two concepts of liberty. Berlin proposed that these freedoms can be differentiated better by the questions they address.

To him, negative freedom addresses the following questions: “What is the area within which the subject—a person or group of persons—is or should be left to do or be what he is able to do or be, without interference by other persons?” (p.369). Negative freedom, in this sense, deals with where to draw the lines of freedom for individuals while keeping them free of obstruction and interference within that space. On the other hand, positive freedom addresses the questions of “what, or who, is the source of control or interference that can determine someone to do, or be, this rather than that?” (p.369). In other words, positive freedom is about being the master of one’s life, having a dream and being able to pursue it freely, and taking responsibility for its results.

An important point made in the distinction between the positive and negative notions of liberty is that negative freedom could take place in societies led by authoritarian governance structures, while this is often not the case with positive freedom (Berlin, 1969). The crucial point with negative freedom is in drawing the line for space for freedom, such as around private family life, and not letting the freedom within this space be interfered with or obstructed by others. However, positive freedom requires more than this. Being the master of one’s fate also requires being free from top-down perspectives such as “X is better for you even if you do not know yet." This point is highly relevant for educational discussions and specifically for self-formation theory. An educational understanding designed with such a perspective means positioning the student in a deficit model and playing down their agency. Self-formation, in this sense, may work better in societies where positive freedom is available.

Another significant contribution to the discussions on agency and freedom is from Amartya Sen (e.g., 1985, 1992). Sen introduced several terms on agency and freedom into the literature that are comparable to Berlin’s (1969) two notions of liberty but which

are still different in certain senses. Sen (1985), for example, argued for a "well-being freedom" and compared it to his conceptualisation of agency freedom. Well-being freedom is defined broadly as a person's ability to ensure their well-being. Whereas agency freedom means a person is free to do and achieve whatever they wish depending on their goals and values. In this sense, agency freedom is broader and more encompassing than well-being freedom, but this does not necessarily mean that one is part of the other. One can choose to follow their agency freedom at the expense of their well-being freedom. Building on Sen's (1985, 1992) explanations, a good example of this is pursuing a PhD degree, in which a person chooses to follow his/her agency freedom at the expense of enduring more stress and lower purchasing power for a few years. The main point behind agency freedom is to treat individuals as responsible agents who make their choices based on their goals and values, a notion crucial for self-formation theory.

Sen also discussed effective and control freedoms in his work. Effective freedom, according to this perspective, means achieving "one outcome or another" (Sen, 1985, p. 208). Effective freedom respects personal choices/preferences and allows one to reap the corresponding results of such choices/preferences. This type of freedom does not specifically deal with the procedures and mechanism of control. Control freedom, on the other hand, deals with whether a person is exerting power on the procedures to achieve a certain goal. It rather deals with whether a person is making decisions on the procedural aspects of executing a goal. Sen (1985, 1992) gave an example from public policy to illustrate this: people in a neighbourhood want to have parks close by that are safe to have a walk in the evenings. In such an example, they can have effective freedom with an efficient local governance system that provides them with safe parks. However, in such an example, they do not necessarily have control freedom in which they have to make

every decision about the construction of such parks or how to police incidents for ensuring safety.

To conclude, this section reviewed some of the potentially relevant agency approaches that currently exist in the literature. Amidst this transformation of current perspective—from seeing individuals as living a prescribed life towards seeing them actively navigating through a changing and uncertain life as autonomous and rational beings—our understanding of self-improvement and learning has also been changing. In a world where individuals are increasingly perceived as active, autonomous agents with a certain degree of freedom—albeit still not wholly independent of their context—education and self-improvement cannot be understood in their full complexity without considering student agency. This is one of the central premises behind the proposition of self-formation theory (Marginson, 2014, 2018).

2.1.3 An Ecological Approach to Understanding Self-Formation in International Higher Education

Positioning higher education students as active agents is central to self-formation, as is discussed in the previous section. The previous section demonstrated that there are many different perspectives towards agency. A different perspective towards agency could lead to a different position towards self-formation. Building on the review of agency perspectives in the previous section, I selected an agency approach to understand self-formation in international higher education and to advance the scholarship around student self-formation in international higher education.

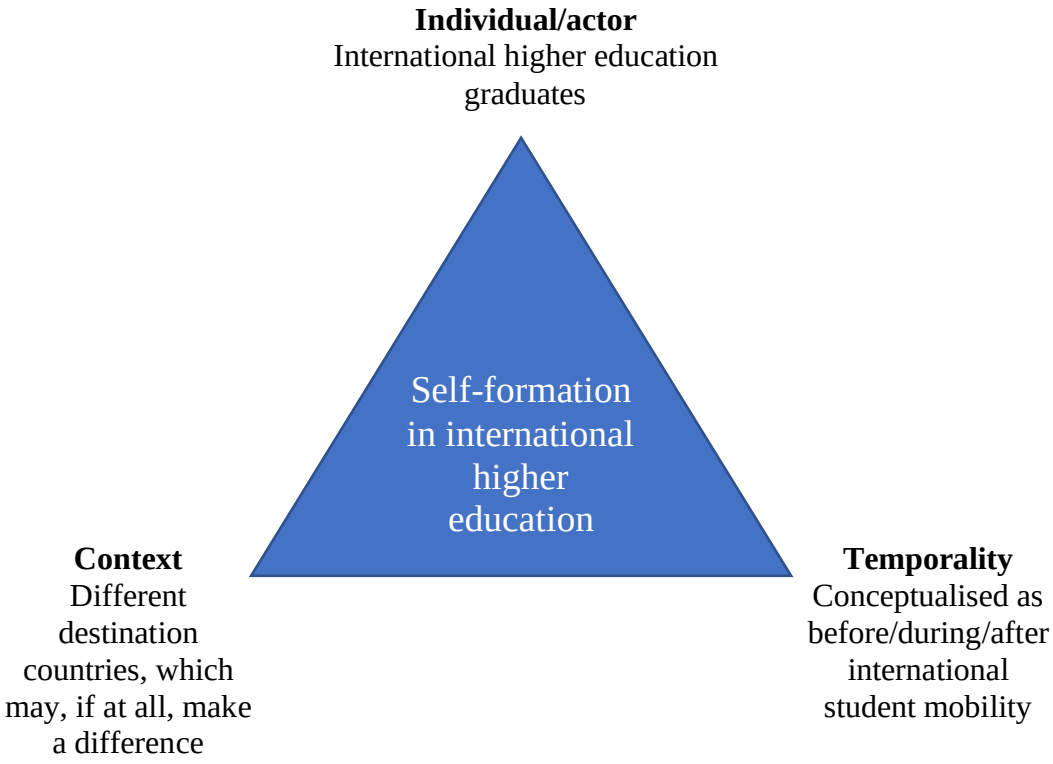
The study drew on Biesta and Tedder's (2007) approach to conceptualise student self-formation in international higher education. As introduced in the previous section, Biesta and Tedder (2007) argued that agency is something that is achieved by actors "in and

through engagement with particular temporal-relational contexts-for-action" (pp:136) within a particular ecology. Biesta and Tedder (2007) proposed calling this understanding of agency the "ecological understanding." The reason behind the choice of Biesta and Tedder's (2007) approach is that the three dimensions of agency it advances are highly relevant for an international comparative study that focuses on international higher education. Further, Marginson and Sawir (2012) also confirmed in their influential book that self-formation always plays out within a temporal dimension and is always affected by context.

Drawing from this understanding, the actors that this study focused on were international higher education graduates. An extensive discussion on the definition of and details about international higher education graduates can be found under the Participant Selection section of the Methodology chapter. Further, to incorporate context into the inquiry, this study included four meticulously selected destination countries. This was based on the assumption that different host country contexts might influence the self-formation of international students differently. The inclusion of multiple country contexts was not to compare the findings between each country contexts one by one, although meaningful differences are highlighted, but to form a better account of self-formation in international higher education. The temporality dimension was incorporated into the study as well. This was done by taking international student mobility experience as the focal point and analysing the collected data in terms of before, during, and after the mobility experience to understand the student self-formation process during and through international higher education. Figure 2.1 below summarises the ecological perspective that this study adopted.

Figure 2.1.

The study's ecological approach to understanding self-formation in international higher education



Using the ecological approach, this study intended to understand how self-formation in international higher education may work. In other words, it sought to learn more about the transformation of the "space of possibles" (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 30) for international higher education graduates and, potentially, through them for society.

The following two sections dwell on the empirical literature relating to the potential ways in which international higher education students self-form and how this individual self-formation may relate to society.

2.2 Empirical Studies on International Higher Education and the Individual

As indicated earlier, self-formation theory is at an early stage in establishing its empirical research programme. It is hard to build on the previous research conducted on self-

formation theory as there are only a few empirical studies conducted on it, and those existing ones interpret the phenomenon in different ways. This was especially the case when I commenced this doctoral thesis in 2017. However, self-formation theory has been successful in attracting the attention of researchers around the globe recently, judging by the number of citations the introductory publications (i.e., Marginson, 2014, 2018; Marginson & Sawir, 2012) received. Table 2.1 below summarises the empirical studies on self-formation to provide an up-to-date picture in December 2020, just before the submission of this thesis. The table only includes studies that explicitly focussed on self-formation in their investigation, providing empirical support to the theory. This table includes studies conducted in the last six years, which coincides with the publication of the influential article by Marginson six years ago, in 2014. This table does not include studies that mention self-formation in passing (e.g., a sentence or two on it in the literature review part) or literature review papers. To keep the table to the point and manageable, it only includes empirical studies and conceptual papers that explicitly focussed on self-formation.

Table 2.1.

Studies focussing on self-formation since 2014, updated in December 2020 (in chronological order)

Author(s)	Brief summary of contribution in relation to self-formation	Context and participant background
(Amaya, 2020) (thesis)	Person-environment fit theory is used in conjunction with SF* to guide this phenomenological study	Mixture of backgrounds in a US state university
(Jæger & Gram, 2020)	Emotional responses to studying abroad and their relation to SF	Danish Ss* in China and Chinese Ss in Denmark
(Matsunaga et al., 2020)	A conceptual paper that positions "identity/SF" (p. 648) at a central position	No participants

	for international education experience in its conceptual model	
(Wang, 2020)	Transnational identity is seen as a process of SF through which agency interacts with the four main dimensions: intercultural competence, reconstruction of locality, diaspora consciousness, and mixed senses of belonging	Chinese Ss in UK HE*
(Yu, 2020)	Proposes own theoretical framework combining agency (SF is highlighted here) and adaptation theories, and looks at how this plays out in Church participation	Chinese Ss in UK HE
(Hamdan, 2019) (thesis)	An autoethnographic study that "explores international students' identities and identity formation within social, educational, and imagined futures, and their study abroad journeys" (p.131)	Mixture of backgrounds (six Ss) in US HE
(J. Lee et al., 2019)	By grounding their study on SF theory, the authors problematise the existing distinctions between international and domestic Ss.	International and domestic college Ss in the US
(Plonski, 2019) (thesis)	Language learner identity theory and the theory of international education as SF are used together and are seen to be within the social constructivist paradigm	Ten Ss from Angola, Brazil, and China in Canadian HE
(Ahn, 2018) (thesis)	Using SF, the study investigates how support for student goals within Korean HE institutions is perceived by the students.	Mixture of backgrounds in Korean HE
(W. Li, 2018) (thesis)	Proposes own framework for SF in international education which has three elements: communicative competency, individual agency, and cross-cultural engagement	Mixture of backgrounds in a US public research university
(Nguyen & Pennycook, 2018)	Authors use SF lens to investigate language, academic, and socio-cultural concerns of international Ss	Vietnamese Ss in Australian HE
(Tran & Vu, 2018)	Uses positioning theory and proposes own framework for understanding agency in mobility	Mixture of backgrounds (Mostly East Asian) in Australian VET*

(Streitwieser & Light, 2018)	Uses variation theory of learning and proposes own typology of student conceptions of study abroad experiences	US Ss who have been abroad for non-degree education
(Xu, 2018; Xu et al., 2020)	Aimed "to lend some empirical support to the notion of self-formation" (Xu 2018, p.832)	Chinese Ss in Australian HE
(Tran, 2016)	Combines Bordieuan perspective with SF	Mixture of backgrounds (Mostly East Asian) in Australian VET
(Gerlach, 2015)	Investigates dimensions of international students' lives at one college by positioning the participants as the "authors of their own lives" (p.20)	International Ss at an American liberal arts college
(Yang, 2014)	Builds on Hegelian philosophical stance and adds the nuance of "other-formation" in his analysis of SF	Chinese Ss in Singapore HE

*Abbreviations used: SF=self-formation; Ss=students; HE=higher education; VET=vocational education and training

Among the studies listed in Table 2.1 above, Tran's publications seem to emerge as the most influential ones in the academic literature based on citations. Tran (2016) built on Bourdieuian analysis of international students' lived realities and argued that mobility is a process of becoming. Tran (2016) explained in her paper that the idea of mobility as becoming builds on self-formation theory but has its own arguments based on its Bourdieuian perspective. Later, Tran and her colleague Vu (2018) further built on the above-mentioned 2016 paper and proposed their own framework for understanding agency in mobility, which suggested four primary forms labelled by the authors as agency for becoming, needs-response agency, agency as struggle and resistance, and collective agency for contestation. The authors explained that they built on agency and positioning theories to propose this framework. Self-formation is mentioned in the paper to support the authors' framework.

Streitwieser and Light's (2018) study, which also built on the self-formation theory, attracted some attention in the literature as well, although not as much as Tran and Vu's papers. Streitwieser and Light (2018) developed a framework using the variation theory of learning to make sense of the multiple understandings students use to conceive of their international higher education experience. Their study resulted in a typology of four qualitatively different student conceptions of study abroad experiences, which they labelled as observing, interacting, participating, and embracing. This typology also included three learning features embedded within these four types mentioned above: being in, relating to, and changing. While the authors acknowledged that the original description of self-formation theory does not build on the variation of learning theory, they argued that the second and third features of their typology resonated well with the initial description provided by Marginson (2014).

Yang's (2014) study looked at the self-formation of Chinese international students in Singapore in a "microscopic case study" (p. 233). Yang used Hegelian notions such as self-consciousness, the other, desire, and negation to analyse the experiences around the identity of being Chinese in Singapore. Building on his Hegelian perspective, he argued that Marginson's self-formation is always closely entwined with other-formation. Yang (2014) explained other formation as "being formed by and through the 'other'" (p. 236).

Xu's paper (2018) is another empirical study that explicitly examined self-formation. Using a self-reflective diary approach and the analysis of own experiences as an international student, Xu (2018) lent empirical support to the self-formation paradigm. The paper concluded that through self-reflection, the author enhanced her cultural sensitivity which eased her "cross-cultural adaptation" (p. 832). Xu (2018) also argued

that the study supported the use of multiplicity and hybridity tools which was discussed in one of the two early papers (Marginson, 2014) theorising about self-formation.

Lee and his colleagues (2019) conducted another early study that explicitly grounded their paper on self-formation theory. In their study, the authors examined undergraduate students' college readiness and engagement. The study concluded with a comparison of groups of international and domestic students, problematising the existing distinctions between them. The authors argued that while the domestic students in US universities have their challenges for college readiness, English-speaking and American high school international students performed even better than the domestic students. On the other hand, domestic students who were recently learning English or who attended foreign high schools (e.g., recent immigrants) faced similar hardships and issues as the "typical international" (p. 505) students who were also in the process of learning English.

The six studies discussed above were able to attract some attention in the academic literature. The rest listed and briefly summarised in the table are yet to be discovered by others. An important point emerging from this review is that the existing studies mentioned above have varying perspectives on self-formation, and some of them even propose different frameworks that do not necessarily complement each other, as was mentioned at the beginning of this section. This is potentially because these are early studies conducted within an emerging self-formation paradigm. Self-formation is in its early stages in establishing its empirical research programme. Because the literature within this paradigm is recently emerging, these studies had different starting points. They could not build on each other either as they were conducted in more or less the same time period, except Tran's two papers mentioned above, which share the same author.

Moreover, there were even fewer empirical publications available when this doctoral study was commenced in 2017, as can be seen in Table 2.1 above. Another point evident in Table 2.1 is that none of the existing studies that focus on self-formation theory included Turkish international higher education students, although there were close to fifty thousand Turkish international students worldwide in 2018, according to the latest available data (UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2020). Thus, to seek some guidance for studying student self-formation in this doctoral thesis, I first conducted a review of the scholarly literature on Turkish international higher education students since they constitute the participants of this study. Such a review revealed how limited the literature is on Turkish international students. The majority of studies conducted on the internationalisation of higher education in Turkey focused on students from other countries studying in Turkey and how to attract more of them (e.g., Gök & Gümüş, 2018; Kondakci, 2011; Özoğlu et al., 2015). The limited number of studies that actually focused on Turkish international students either positioned them in deficit model, focusing on their adjustment/acculturation (e.g., Bektaş et al., 2009; Brown & Aktas, 2011; Burkholder, 2014; Duru & Poyrazli, 2011; Poyrazli et al., 2001; Tutkun, 2006), or focused on brain drain issues (e.g., Akçapar, 2009; Bakırtaş & Kandemir, 2010; Elveren & Toksöz, 2018; Gungor & Tansel, 2008a; Kaçar, 2016). Most of these studies are quantitative in design (e.g., Duru & Poyrazli, 2007; Güngör & Tansel, 2008b; Kilinc & Granello, 2003), and there are a minimal number of qualitative (e.g., Brown & Aktas, 2011; Burkholder, 2014; Tatar, 2005) or mixed-method studies (e.g., Akçapar, 2009). Also, the review indicated that the overwhelming majority of these studies focused on the experiences of Turkish students in the US.

In a nutshell, a review of the scholarly literature on Turkish international higher education students did not reveal much direction for researching the self-formation of Turkish

international higher education students. What it did indicate was that the overwhelming majority of researchers made use of quantitative methodologies to research Turkish international students and that they mostly focused on the experiences of Turkish students in the US context. These indicate that the literature can benefit from further in-depth qualitative research and from focusing more on country contexts other than the US, as Turkey still sends thousands of students to other countries (UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2018).

As a result, I built on Marginson's publications that introduced student self-formation (Marginson, 2014, 2018; Marginson & Sawir, 2012) and reviewed the overall literature on international higher education to understand how international students may potentially form themselves during and through such experience. The existing literature indicated three potentially relevant domains for self-formation in international higher education. By domains, I mean spheres of knowledge, influence, or activity, as defined by Merriam-Webster Dictionary. These three domains have no claim of being exhaustive but are some of the main areas in which international students work on their self-formation.

One of the potentially important domains for self-formation could be what is happening within the domain of education itself and the things obtained by students within educational institutions: knowledge and skills obtained during international higher education experiences as well as formal and informal qualifications. When considering that self-formation is the holistic development of the individuals who work on themselves for self-improvement (Marginson, 2014, 2018), the educational domain surfaces as an important and relevant part of a bigger and more holistic picture (cf. Chankseliani et al., 2020).

In the latest paper on self-formation theorisation, Marginson (2018) maintained that self-formation is more than what the existing paradigm of higher education offers, but he also argued that the existing paradigm is still important. The idea that higher education as an investment in oneself for obtaining formal and informal qualifications and increasing the potential for future employability is related to choosing one's future lifestyle. Many students make their decisions about higher education based on what qualifications they may obtain, and the instrumental function of universities within the existing paradigm of higher education is still a prominent goal for students (Gorgodze et al., 2019). These newly acquired skills and knowledge in the educational domain can be important as they may influence self-formation in a certain way.

One of the approaches that could give some idea about the educational domain of self-formation is the human capital perspective. This approach has become increasingly popular since the early 1960s (e.g., Becker, 1993, first published in 1964; Schultz, 1959, 1960). The human capital perspective is, in essence, about the incentives to invest in oneself based on the estimation of expected returns and costs. Schultz (1960), for example, looked at foregone earnings and overall expenditure on education in the US for the five decades leading up to the 1960s and found that they increased over time. He attributed this to the increasing attractiveness of investing in oneself in the form of education even though the limited money could have been invested into something else such as physical capital. This investment in oneself is not seen only in obtaining formal documents, but it happens in various areas including formal education, on-the-job training, morale-boosting activities, and exercising for physical health (Becker, 1993; Schultz, 1961).

In addition, the importance of such a perspective is not peculiar to international higher education, but it may arguably be even more important and relevant to it. As degree-mobile students go to another country with the main purpose of obtaining a degree, they go through a condensed period of education in a different country context. It is an established understanding in this perspective that how much a person invests in themselves depends on how strong the incentives are (Becker, 1993). Accordingly, it is supposed that pursuing higher education in a foreign country has higher incentives than studying a degree in the student's home country because going abroad poses higher costs than staying home (e.g., higher financial costs, and leaving the existing social network behind). Indeed, the literature has some supporting evidence for this claim.

Farrugia (2016), for example, argued that human capital attainment is an important aspect of international student mobility and international students can gain the important skills necessary to navigate their career in their host country, in their home country, or in a third country. A detailed literature review on international student mobility supported this assertion and added that graduates of overseas education are more likely to be hired, have more confidence, be better at dealing with different people, and be superior in adapting to new situations when compared to individuals who have not studied abroad (King et al., 2010).

Compatible with the human capital approach, labelling and screening theories in the literature (e.g., Stiglitz, 1975) can also shed some light on the educational domain of international higher education. According to this perspective, knowledge and skills obtained abroad may have a better label value, as crossing a border for higher education is not easy to achieve. This might help international higher education graduates with their

job search because screening of talent may favour the label value in the absence of complete information about potential candidates.

However, the human capital approach, although widely used in the literature, has its limitations. McMahon (2009) criticised the narrow definition of the human capital approach that included the economics of job-market and earnings only, and he argued for a "modern" human capital perspective. Attainment of education can make a difference during the time spent at home or in the community during non-work times. This has a significant effect on the individuals, their families, and the wider society. Confirming McMahon (2009), Vila (2000) discussed potential non-monetary benefits of education, which included private and public related benefits. The author listed health benefits, fertility benefits, benefits for children, occupational benefits, and the benefits that come from more informed and better consumption habits as some of the individual-level benefits with some externalities.

In addition, Ashwin (2020b) drew attention to the limitations of looking at university education through the economic arguments of the human capital perspective, which has come to dominate our thinking about university education. His recent book (2020b) proposed a manifesto for transforming higher education in which he argued against measuring the value of university degrees based on their economic benefits and job attainment possibilities. To the author, higher education should reconnect with its educational purposes that go beyond the economic arguments and job attainment features. Higher education has the potential to form students in many aspects.

Compatible with the arguments mentioned above in his recent book, Ashwin and his colleagues (2014) conducted a study on how the undergraduate sociology students' views on their discipline changed over the course of their degrees. They argued that the

participating students developed a more inclusive understanding of their discipline over time. Early in their education, the majority of students described sociology as a form of personal development that helped them form their opinions, but later in their degree education, they described it as a way to understand the relationship between society and people. The authors concluded that their study sheds some light on how students' relationships to knowledge in the educational setting of universities plays a role in their transformative journeys.

In line with this, different approaches in the literature are important for understanding the educational domain of self-formation. For example, Walker (2012) compared and contrasted Sen's (1999) capabilities approach to the human capital approach. For Walker (2012), the capabilities approach put human lives at the centre rather than increased recourses and income, which are at the centre for the human capital perspective. The focus of education in this approach is on promoting the capabilities and functionings needed to choose a good life. Walker (2012) criticised the human capital approach and referred to it as an impoverished normative model. This is because, she argued, so long as the economic growth continues, the issues of inequalities—such as job market distributions for women, migrants, and the disabled—would not arise in this approach. Also, well-being or human agency is not prioritised in this approach.

Another recent study also contributed to this discussion and conceptualised higher education's contribution to human development in two ways (Chankseliani et al., 2020). The first one was named the essentialist approach to human development, which included the human capital understanding. The second way higher education may contribute to human development was termed the non-essentialist approach. Chankseliani and her colleagues (2020) drew attention to holistic development and increased freedoms in

cultivating intellectual curiosity. They discussed the capabilities approach as part of the anti-essentialist approach.

Sen's (1999) and Nussbaum's (2011) take on human capabilities development and development as freedom is relevant to self-formation theory. Going abroad for higher education can be seen as an expansion of freedom (Marginson, 2018). Obtaining a degree abroad may also increase people's knowledge and skills (i.e., improvements in the educational domain) and this, in turn, opens up new potentialities for navigating people's lives in their host country, home country, or a third country (e.g., Farrugia, 2016). Increased opportunities and potentials can help international higher education graduates choose and live a life that is meaningful, rewarding, and productive for them. This may have implications for society as well.

In short, going to another country to obtain a degree may provide students with further skills, knowledge, and capabilities. Such self-formation is the fruit of the big decision to study abroad, which potentially has higher costs but, at the same time, also has higher broad returns than studying in the student's home country. This personal-formation process, when related to the educational domain, may help increase the "space of possibles" (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 30) for individuals and contribute to leading a more meaningful, productive life.

Another potentially significant domain of self-formation in international higher education could be related to the social relationships and networks graduates form during their international higher education experience. When students go abroad for studying, they leave their existing friendships and support networks behind and insert themselves into a new society. This may result in making new friendships and networks in the host country. The forging of networks and friendships does not have to take place within the boundary

of universities, as “higher education is only one social domain in which students form themselves” (Marginson, 2018, p. 17). Self-formation in higher education is better understood when it is investigated more holistically to include other contexts, such as home, work, and social activities (Marginson, 2018). These new networks and friendships may facilitate or influence an individual’s self-formation in a certain way.

One of the approaches that could provide some insights into how this social domain may influence student self-formation in international higher education is the existing literature on social capital. There are different takes on what constitutes social capital. To start with, Putnam defined social capital as “features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit” (1993, p. 1). Putnam’s definition is broadly used, but it mainly covers horizontal relationships rather than vertical ones. Coleman (1988) put forward a broader definition of the concept:

> Social capital is defined by its function. It is not a single entity but a variety of different entities, with two elements in common: they all consist of some aspect of social structures, and they facilitate certain actions of actors -whether persons or corporate actors- within the structure. (p. 98)

Further, Bourdieu (1986) focused on social capital more as an accumulated, private source: “social capital is the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition” (p.21). Fukuyama (2001) is another influential scholar on the topic who sees social capital as an “instantiated informal norm” (2001, p. 7) that enhances co-operation between individuals. In short, despite the differences in the definitions of social capital, there is a consensus on the key role of participation in networks (Onyx & Bullen, 2001).

The forms and the scope of social capital are also important to discuss. Putnam (2000) identified two types of social capital: bonding and bridging social capital. Bonding social capital is related to intra-community ties, such as individuals of the same family or workers in the same organisation. Bridging social capital deals with inter-community ties, such as knowing someone from another company or being in contact with a person from a different worldview. Bridging social capital is similar in nature to what Granovetter (1973) calls weak ties.

Besides these different takes on social capital theory, Manuel Castells also significantly contributed to the ways networks are conceived of in today's world with his conceptualisation of a network society (Castells, 2000a, 2000b). He defined a network society as the "social structure that is characteristic of the information age" (2000a, p. 5). The new economic structure, according to a network society understanding, is informational, global, and networked. Castells argued that two emergent social forms of time and space differentiate the network society, although they still coexist with the prior understandings/forms of time and space. In this perspective, time is compressed because international students can travel to their host countries within hours, which might have taken days previously, or they can communicate with their friends and family instantly using technology. Also, time is desequenced in this view, and past, present, and future occur in irregular ways, such as in the sense of "the electronic hypertext or the blurring of life-cycle patterns, both in work and parenting" (Castells, 2000a, p. 14), which are relevant for internationally mobile students as well. The meaning and role of space, Castells (2000a, 2000b) maintained, also has been changing, and the emergent form is dependent on the flows processed within the networks.

Empirical studies in the literature indicate the relevance of the social domain for self-formation in international higher education. The importance of social networks starts before international student mobility, continues during it, and maintains its importance afterwards. To illustrate, Brooks and Waters (2010) asserted that internationally mobile students' decisions to study abroad are affected considerably by their social environments. This social influence generally comes from three sources: family, friends, and partners. Carlson (2013) supported these findings and added that student mobility is a result of a process that starts long before the actual mobility experience is realised. The decision to study abroad is a socially embedded and complex process. Pedro and Franco (2016) added that social networks also have an impact on individuals' mobility decisions after their international student mobility experience. Social networks play a role in the choice of the country in which to study abroad (Pedro & Franco, 2016; Shields, 2016). A study by Heath and her colleagues (2010) added further nuance to how networks may influence decision-making regarding higher education. In their study, they focused on upward network transmission of decision-making (i.e., child to parent) related to higher education attainment, arguing that most studies focused on downward transmission (i.e., parent to child) or peer-to-peer transmission (i.e., friends/partners). The findings of the study provided empirical evidence supporting a child to parent transmission of network-based decision making.

Further, Hendrickson, Rosen, and Aune (2011) asserted how important it is for international students to build both strong-tie and weak-tie friendships with host nationals during their international study. According to their findings, international students who were successful in achieving this tended to be more satisfied, content, and less homesick. Gomes (2015) discussed how Asian students built their social networks in Australia. Her findings suggest that these students formed a "parallel society" (p. 515) that exclusively

included international students, rather than locals, and that these international students in the parallel society were comprised of people with similar cultural backgrounds based on their home countries and regions.

Rienties and his colleagues conducted a number of studies to understand the social dynamics among both international and domestic students in higher education using social network analysis. In their 2013 study, Rienties and his colleagues looked at how international students from different backgrounds built friendships and learning relationships with each other in a large class that included 200+ students. Their study revealed that the learning ties built at the beginning of the module persisted after 11 weeks into the term. These friendships were also predicted by sub-specialisation and whether students were Chinese or not. The authors argued that although co-national friendships—which were mostly forged by Chinese students but not necessarily limited to them—may be useful in obtaining social support in the short run, they may hamper the adaptation to the host culture in the long run.

Rienties and his colleagues (2015a) later conducted a study with third-year students to assess whether international and domestic students were able to build multi-national and host-national social capital links. The findings of this study largely supported their earlier study discussed above. The results revealed that Confucian Asian students, even though they become less internally focused after close to three months into the module, were still mostly indirectly connected with other internationally mobile students or domestic English students. Other international students were found to have relatively stronger links among each other, and all domestic English students were found to have developed some links with international students. However, these findings should be interpreted carefully. As Moosung Lee (2010) argued, building social networks and learning from each other

is not a one-sided phenomenon though most research looking at social capital networks focused on recourse seekers. In other words, not being able to establish strong bonds with people from other cultures would not be only one group's fault.

Rienties and his colleagues (2015b) conducted another study on student relationships, this time focusing on bridge builders among international and domestic students. This latter study identified a list of characteristics of bridge builders who facilitated intercultural communication, which included personal attributes such as cultural sensitivity, motivation to do well, and positive attitudes towards sharing and learning from others.

Montgomery is another prominent author who contributed to the literature on understanding international student experiences (e.g., Montgomery, 2010, 2018; Montgomery & McDowell, 2009). In their 2009 collaborative paper, Montgomery and McDowell reported the findings of a study that included both interviews with and shadow observations of international students. The authors argued that the strong bonds established between international students demonstrated the characteristics of a community of practice. This community of practice helped them replace the social support network they lost when moving to another country for their international higher education. This community provided support to the international students not only in their learning but also in their day to day social life. Montgomery and McDowell (2009) further argued that although domestic English students played a role in the community of practice among international students, their role remained on the periphery.

Tran and Pham (2016) investigated the motives behind and the nature of international students' intercultural connectedness. The authors argued that the motivation for international students to engage in intercultural communications was linked to their

appreciation of and respect for each other's intellectual, linguistic, and cultural capacities. The authors also argued against the stream of literature that has been dominating the discourse on international students' intercultural connectedness, in which international students are positioned as passive adjusters in the host culture. Intercultural relations were argued to be essential in ensuring reciprocal learning and mutual appreciation.

Further, social dynamics in international higher education is more than just networking: it has an empowering aspect that can help people achieve certain goals that otherwise would not be possible (Coleman, 1988). This resonates well with Waters' (2009) argument about the essential role of networks and social capital in granting value to international credentials. The author demonstrated this by using the example of Hong Kong students with Canadian degrees and how the students' personal connections made a difference in the values they obtained from their overseas degrees. With this argument, Waters' (2009) posited that human capital and social capital are not separate entities and should be analysed together. Also, Furstenberg and Hughes's (1995) longitudinal study showed that social capital improved the odds of socio-economic success in early adulthood, even when taking into account how a youth was doing three years earlier. The findings of the latter two studies emphasised the importance of studying both educational and social domains together to gain a more holistic picture, as also advocated by Grootaert (2001) in his highly-cited paper.

In short, the social aspect of international student mobility is frequently researched and then reported in the literature, indicating its potential relevance for self-formation in international higher education. In this sense, focusing on how individuals form themselves in the social domain is important in understanding the holistic development of international higher education students.

Another potential area of self-formation in international higher education could be the development of civic values and perspectives. This has been broadly shown to be indispensable to education by much scholarly work (e.g., Altinay, 2013; Dewey, 1916; Doyle & Skinner, 2017; Harward, 2013; Lipset, 1959). The term "civic," as Ehrlich's (2000), and Adler and Goggin's (2005) publications defined it, is related to the ways people participate in the life of a community to improve conditions for others or to help shape their community's future in either political or non-political ways. When people go abroad for a degree education, they immerse themselves in a different civic context. They observe different civic values and understandings first-hand and even take an active part in civic-related activities. Consequently, they may form different civic understandings and perspectives on improving conditions for others or on helping shape their community's future. This process of constructing the self can be called the civic domain of self-formation.

The existing literature indicates that the civic domain of self-formation is highly relevant for education. The seminal work of Dewey (1985), for example, suggested that quality education is a necessary step for democracy. This is because a functioning and sustainable democracy must take place in a society comprised of individuals who believe in and contribute to that understanding. Later on, Lipset (1959) famously emphasised the importance of education's role in prosperity and, in turn, the role of prosperity on democracy. To him, the level of education plays a crucial role in one's civic value development, and its effect is far more significant than other potential factors, such as income or occupation. More recently, Barro (1999) and Bobba and Coviello (2007) provided evidence supporting these authors. Vila (2000) also argued that education's value goes beyond monetary benefits and that it plays an important role in developing a

sense of civic responsibility. However, these studies did not directly focus on international higher education.

Studies investigating the role of international higher education on civic development have been emerging in the literature relatively recently. A recent publication by Chankseliani (2018) has a significant contribution to the civic aspect of international higher education. In her journal article, Chankseliani discussed the phenomenon of democratic socialisation of internationally mobile students in a host country, labelling it as "apprenticeships in democracy" (p. 281). The findings revealed that those former Soviet countries that sent a higher proportion of students to Europe and the US have attained higher levels of democratic development. By contrast, those former Soviet countries that sent higher proportions of students to study in Russia, the most popular authoritarian destination for these countries, according to the author, have attained significantly lower levels of democratic development.

Spilimbergo (2009) also researched the civic development of international education graduates. The findings of his study asserted that foreign-educated individuals contribute to democracy in their home country but only if they studied in a democratic country. This conclusion supports Chankseliani's above-discussed argument that international students go through a civic formation process during their international higher education experience. Puryear (1994) supported this position with his study on the influence of foreign-educated intellectuals' on revitalising democracy in Chile. The discussions included in Puryear's book (1994) indicated that those returnee graduates of international higher education formed new civic values and perspectives during their study-abroad experiences that were different from the existing governance structures created by the then-recent coup. Actively advocating for such values, returnee graduates of international

higher education in Chile played a significant role in re-establishing a more democratic system.

Also, being aware of the impact of international student mobility on the civic development of internationally mobile students, mobility programmes are designed with a civic rationale behind them. ERASMUS, which aims to create European citizens, is an excellent example of this (Papatsiba, 2006). Supporting this, Tarrant and colleagues (2014) argued that international study could help develop global citizenship better compared to studying in a home country if combined with appropriate academic content. Wilson (2011), nevertheless, took a critical stance towards the socialisation of international students. He questioned whether ERASMUS made an impact on making students more pro-European, implying that international student mobility may not be that effective on civic value development. However, it should be noted that Wilson's (2011) study did not focus on long term or degree mobile mobility.

Loader and his colleagues (2015) contributed to the literature on the civic formation of students in higher education by investigating the formative role played by student societies on university campuses. They posited that the student-led societies on campuses—small or large— played a significant role in the formation of the political self. The findings indicated that the university campus provided a space for non-politicos to be exposed to different civic values and perspectives and provided opportunities to engage with a range of civic activities. In this sense, the findings of the study supported the main argument here that university campuses have the potential to provide a formative atmosphere for the civic domain of student self-formation.

Crossley (2008) contributed to this literature by proposing a theory of campus-based politicisation of students that focused on student networks. In his paper (2008), which

included questionnaire data from 1,250 individuals and a theoretical part, Crossley argued that university campuses play an important role in bringing previously politicised, like-minded individuals together. These individuals then recruit novices for civic activism. Crossley (2008) argued that it is this recruiting activity with the enhanced networking potentialities of university campuses that drive the mechanism behind the civic formation and politicisation of university students. This recruitment mechanism becomes a self-perpetuating one as those newly recruited students become recruiters in time. Another important point made by the author indicated that this politicising mechanism of campuses is influential on all subject areas, even though some subject areas, such as pharmacy, have a lower level of overall civic interest when compared to other subject areas, such as sociology.

In a later publication in 2012, Crossley collaborated with Ibrahim and continued working on his theory of networks and student activism. In this study, Crossley and Ibrahim (2012) provided qualitative evidence on the previously introduced theory of campus politicisation. The evidence provided by the study supports the above-discussed theory of campus politicisation and reveals that this theory works in connection with another theory of civic activity: critical mass theory. The authors argued that students find the opportunity to get to know a high number of like-minded people in universities. This is an opportunity that they did not have back in their high schools, which are usually smaller in scale when compared to universities. Through this opportunity, the number of like-minded students reaches a critical mass, and in this way, they can share the costs and responsibilities for engaging in civic activism.

Complementing these discussions, Abrahams and Brooks (2019) investigated higher education student perceptions towards their civic participation in an international

comparative study gathering evidence from England and Ireland. According to the study findings, students in both countries indicated that they were interested in civic activities and expressed that their interest in civic activities increased thanks to their higher education. The authors also drew attention to cross country differences and argued that students in England had lower expectations that their civic activities would bring about change compared to their peers in Ireland.

Brooks and Abrahams teamed up with other researchers in a more recent study (Brooks et al., 2020) to investigate the political activeness of higher education students across six European nations. In this study, the authors claimed that there is an established perspective that university students should be politically engaged. Interestingly, those working in the higher education sector and influencing higher education policy were inclined to see students as less active than their predecessors, though students conveyed strong interest in several political topics. Also, while those working in the higher education sector tended to see political activeness as participating in collective actions, students did not valorise such collective actions as much as the higher education staff or policy influencers did. Students perceived their actions taken in smaller groups or alone as political as well.

In short, there is an established literature on the role education plays in the civic-related development of students, but when the search is limited to international higher education, the number of studies looking at this relationship decreases. One thing that is largely missing in the studies focusing on international higher education in this regard is how the role of individual self-formation and agency plays out in the development of civic values. There is room for studying the civic domain of self-formation in international higher education.

2.3 Empirical Studies on International Higher Education and Contributions to Society

Self-formation theory at the individual level, at least in some sense, has been mostly understood. However, the relationship between individual self-formation and society is "the most difficult piece of the puzzle" (Marginson, 2018, p. 3). Self-formation never occurs in isolation; it is always part of a larger social context. The relationship between the individual and the larger context is not one-way, and the recourses and opportunities provided by the larger context may not be the same in each case. However, as Foucault indicated, people are "much freer than they feel" (p. 35) and freedom is a process of struggle (Ball, 2017). People can still rise above their context thanks to the highly individual nature of self-formation (Marginson, 2018). Although a lot can be discussed regarding the role of the larger context on individual self-formation, this section focuses on the role that individual self-formation may play in society.

The potential relationship between individual self-formation and societal contributions has been discussed in the perennial cultural understandings that self-formation theory draws on as well. For example, the Kantian understanding of Bildung emphasises the individual development of autonomous, rational persons who live in the public sphere with other individual beings (Kivela et al., 2012). These self-formed rational and autonomous individuals then play a role in the emerging civil society (Biesta, 2002a). The Confucian tradition of self-cultivation emphasises the unity between "I", humanity, and the universe. In this regard, Confucian self-cultivation is not only about the continuous self-improvement of the individual but also about harmonising with the larger context (Sun, 2008), which points out a strong relationship between the self-formation of the individual and their contributions to the society.

Similar perspectives have been discussed in recent empirical works as well. Tran and Vu (2018) contended that international student mobility might play a role in transforming the "space of possibles" (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 30) for not only the individuals but also for the wider society. In their interview study, they found that positive transformation in the "space of possibles" is two-fold, influencing both the individual and the larger society, which according to their study includes the host and home societies of the graduates. Another study looking at the contribution of higher education to glonacal (local, national, and global) development in two developing-country contexts also came to the conclusion that the self-formation of individuals is related to the self-realisation of collectives of individuals and nation-states (Chankseliani et al., 2020). In the holistic development of individuals (e.g., not just focusing on human capital attainment), nurturing freedoms—positive freedoms, agency freedom, and the freedom to imagine—would play a role in the collective development outcomes.

Further evidence sheds light on how the self-formation of individuals studying abroad may play out in their contributions towards the wider society. Campbell has conducted a significant line of studies focusing on how international higher education graduates may contribute to their home countries. In her 2017 study, she challenged the idea that equates individuals' return to their home country after international student mobility with contributing to their home country. The study findings indicated that employability plays a focal role. International scholarship recipients from Moldova and Georgia, the study's case countries, deem some fields of work more esteemed in contributing to the overall economic and social development of post-soviet societies, which in Moldovan and Georgian cases are government and higher education positions. This view of how international student mobility alumni can contribute to their home countries is different from traditional approaches (such as the brain drain approach) in that it goes beyond the

return status of internationally mobile students as the sole criterion for contributions to their home countries and looks into how returnees think they contribute to their home countries.

In another study, Campbell (2020) looked at how international scholarship alumni perceived their contributions to their home country's social and economic development, comparing those who returned to live in Moldova with those who did not. The author concluded that where graduates resided after their graduation made a difference in their perceptions towards their contribution to their home country, with alumni regarding those who resided in their home country after graduation as being more effective in catalysing positive change. In a later study, Campbell and her colleagues (2021) looked at Nigerian and Ghanaian international higher education graduates' contributions. Study findings indicated that both formal and informal education played a significant role in the development of and social change in these countries, with university teaching, and citizenship and human rights education as two discrete ways of doing so.

These recent findings in the literature, which do not automatically equate returning to one's home country with contributing to it, resonate well with Rizvi's takes on cosmopolitan identities. Rizvi (2005c) argued that internationally mobile individuals tend to have more and more cosmopolitan identities. However, this does not necessarily mean that international student mobility graduates do not contribute to anywhere at all, as they can still contribute to the countries they were born into or where their parents still live. He illustrated this with one of the interviewees who asserted that even though he was privileged to live in three different countries at the same time, he felt that he was doing more for his home country, India, than he would if he had lived there for his entire life.

Spilimbergo (2009) and Puryear (1994) investigated the role played by internationally educated returnees in improving democracy and social justice in their home countries. These studies provided evidence on how the home country may benefit from the contributions of returnee international higher education graduates. According to Puryear's book (1994), international higher education graduates reversed a destructive system brought by a recent coup! Also, in the account provided by Spilimbergo (2009), international higher education graduates played a role in increasing the democracy levels in their home countries but only if they studied in democratic countries. The contributions to the home country being affected by the host country is a reminder that a university's engagement with the wider society could vary from one context to another (Bernardo et al., 2012).

Moreover, with their international social networks, international higher education graduates can be highly capable of contributing to the wider society. The literature already shows that with a high stock of social capital, communities are "safer, cleaner, wealthier, more literate, better governed and generally happier" (Woolcock, 1998, p. 155); unemployment can be alleviated (Granovetter, 1973); communities can obtain substantial material benefit even under unlikely conditions (Uphoff, 2001); and economic performance and development can be stimulated (Karagül, 2005; Tüylüoğlu, 2006). Also, studies in the literature indicate that international higher education supported by government scholarship programmes can significantly contribute to the human capital gains of the sending countries (Perna et al., 2014; Perna, Orosz, & Jumakulov, 2015; Perna, Orosz, Jumakulov, et al., 2015).

In addition, Pan (2011) drew attention to Chinese international higher education graduates and the subsequent human development in their home country. Globally, China

is a major sender of international higher education students. The evidence arising from Pan's (2011) documentary study on policy texts revealed how China was able to take advantage of shifting the cost of training its new technological elite to the developed world. China's case showed how a developing country could strategically and skilfully make use of the resources in countries with established higher education and scientific systems to build their own capacities in these areas.

Public/private good discussions of higher education and the relatively newer addition of the global common good aspect to these may also provide some insight into the relationship between individual self-formation and contributions to society. There is extensive literature on what might constitute the private, public, and common good aspects of higher education and the blurred lines in between them (e.g., Marginson, 2007; Szadkowski, 2019; UNESCO, 2015). For example, while some aspects of higher education can be accepted as a private good, such as a positional advantage obtained through a prestigious institution, other aspects of higher education may benefit the public good, such as ensuring distributional equity within a nation. The common good aspect of higher education, by contrast, refers to goods that provide benefits to areas beyond states or groups of people, such as preserving the environment and nature. The perspective that considers higher education as having benefits at private, public, and common levels can provide insight into the potential relationship between self-forming individuals in international higher education and society.

Additionally, McCowan's (2016) framework for understanding higher education may contribute to our understanding regarding the relationship between higher education and society. McCowan's theoretical model draws a picture of higher education institutions using three main dimensions. One of these three main dimensions of higher education is

interaction. McCowan (2016) defined this dimension as the flow of ideas and people between the university and society. Although the author did not get into the details on how this flow of "ideas and actors" (p. 505) from and to wider society works, he spent a considerable part of the paper explaining how the interaction dimension of higher education institutions played an important role throughout history in differing levels.

The search for international higher education and potential contributions to society naturally comes up with brain drain, gain, and circulation literature. Brain drain, gain, and circulation are used to refer to the migrations of highly skilled individuals (Saxenian, 2005). The nomenclatures used to refer to this phenomenon in the literature vary, and studies use different nomenclatures to convey differing meanings (e.g., Johnson & Regets, 1998; Teferra, 2005). These nomenclatures include ones such as brain drain (e.g., Commander et al., 2004; Meyer & Brown, 2003), brain mobility (e.g., Kenway & Fahey, 2011; Teferra, 2005), and brain circulation (e.g., Olang, 2014; Tung, 2008). Traditionally, scholars seem to have used brain drain more overall.

The studies that claim that the emigration of the highly educated leads to brain drain argue that those highly educated individuals emigrating from developing countries were educated in government subsidised educational institutions from early in their lives till their higher education (Marsh & Oyelere, 2018). When these people emigrate, all the investments on the development of individuals are seen as losses for sending countries because the returns on the investment are reaped by another country, and future tax revenue is lost (Marsh & Oyelere, 2018). Although remittances sent back by the immigrant highly educated individuals from abroad mitigate the monetary losses of the sending country, according to Marsh and Oyelere (2018), these are no match for the

potentially lost future tax revenues and the fiscal expenses made on subsidising their education.

This study, however, does not situate the contributions of international higher education graduates to society within the brain drain, gain, and circulation paradigms. This is because these popular paradigms, especially the idea of brain drain, may have some problematic assumptions. These assumptions include that internationally mobile students would be able to contribute to their home country by returning back after completing their degrees abroad (cf. Campbell, 2017), that sending countries lose their skilled workforce when these students do not return, and that each person's identity belongs to only one nation and that they should show loyalty to that nation (Rizvi, 2005b). Rizvi (2005b) contended that brain drain is a term that was coined in the 1960s by newly formed small states that worried about the loss of their skilled workforce to more developed countries and that brain drain understanding is becoming increasingly problematic in today's world. To him, the notion of brain drain essentially rests on the classical understanding of the relationship between social identities and the nation-state, which some authors think may be weakening in the modern world (e.g., Giddens, 2008). However, given the relevance and how established the line of literature on brain drain is, there is benefit in including studies from this paradigm.

The general consensus on the brain drain/circulation literature is that the flow of highly skilled individuals tends to occur from middle-income countries to high-income countries. This is generally explained by the fact that citizens of middle-income countries have both the incentives and the means to move to another country for education, while people from lower-income countries lack the means and the people from the higher-income countries lack the incentives to move (Beine et al., 2008; Docquier & Marfouk,

2006). Building on this argument, the native country of the participants of this study, Turkey, is susceptible to high levels of international student mobility and brain drain/gain/circulation because it is an upper-middle-income country according to The World Bank's (2020) designation.

In the brain drain/gain/circulation literature, the graduate contributions to home country and the wider society are generally taken with a different point of view. The question mostly revolves around whether individuals who went abroad to obtain a degree are a lost skilled workforce if they do not return and what consequences them not returning will have on their contributions to their home countries (e.g., Gribble, 2008; Hart, 2006; Séguin et al., 2006). There is also criticism of the brain drain paradigm within the paradigm itself. Tung (2008) pointed out that there used to be more clear-cut understandings for who constituted expatriates, who constituted host country nationals, and what the definitions of brain gain or brain drain are. These notions have become much more blurred in today's modern world (Tung, 2008).

A few studies in Turkish literature on this matter can be highlighted. To start with, a study that examined the issue of reverse brain drain to Turkey argued that Turkish people return back to their country mainly because of country loyalty, family ties, and difficulties in academic life resulting from others' nationalist attitudes in the host country. The same study also contended that it is the social and political factors that push individuals to leave their country rather than economic ones (Kaçar, 2016).

Güngor and Tansel (2008b), in their large-sample, online survey study, investigated the return intentions of Turkish professionals living abroad. The authors reported that many Turkish professionals living abroad are individuals with postgraduate degrees obtained abroad. The weakest return intentions of Turkish professionals living abroad are found

amongst those who completed doctorates abroad and have some working experience in Turkey. Süoğlu (2012) discussed the return intentions of Turkish students who studied in Germany and concluded that experiences in Germany, and opportunities and structure both in the host and home countries played a role in the return intentions to Turkey. Also, in her detailed report, Akçapar (2009) enquired into whether the emigration of skilled people to the US is detrimental to Turkey. One of the main conclusions of the study was that highly skilled emigrants maintained strong bonds with Turkey and thus, Turkey should focus on building up diaspora communities and invest in maintaining the cultural identity of the Turkish-American community.

In summary, although the relationship between the self-formation of international higher education graduates and their contributions to society is a complicated piece of the puzzle necessitating further efforts (Marginson, 2018), the existing literature does provide some information about it. International higher education has the potential to alter the "space of possibles" (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 30) for both the individual and the wider society. An important way this happens is through the self-formation of individuals in international higher education who, in turn, have an impact on society (Chankseliani et al., 2020; McCowan, 2016; Tran & Vu, 2018). Also, the scholarly work discusses potential contributions to society with regards to the home country, the host country, or without focusing on specific categorisations. It is visible from the existing studies that just like returning home may not automatically equate to contributing to the home country (e.g., Campbell, 2017), not returning does not automatically equate to not contributing (e.g., Akçapar, 2009). Moreover, self-formation never occurs in isolation; it is always part of a larger social context, and this relationship is not one-way (Marginson, 2018). For international students, this means that they may go through a self-formation process

during their higher education experience in the host country context, and this may impact the nature of and their perceptions towards their contributions to society.

2.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter situated this doctoral study in the relevant theoretical and empirical literature. Several general conclusions can be drawn from this literature review. One conclusion is that there has been a shift in the way international students are perceived in the literature. As the earlier sections of this chapter indicated, traditionally, international students were positioned in a deficit model, in which they were seen to be on a journey of acculturating/adjusting to the new context they found themselves in. However, the relatively recent approaches started seeing students as active agents. Self-formation theory is a product of these developments.

This review of relevant literature also indicated that student self-formation is in its early stages for establishing an empirical research programme. Also, it is hard to build on the previous research conducted on student self-formation as there are only a few empirical studies conducted on it, and those studies interpreted the phenomenon in different ways. Hence, this doctoral thesis provided its own approach to advance the scholarship around student self-formation, which drew on Biesta and Tedder's (2007) approach.

Further, in the absence of a well-established empirical research programme for studying the self-formation of international students, this review sought potential spheres of activity and influence on self-improvement in international higher education. The review of the empirical literature on Turkish international higher education students did not reveal much direction for researching their self-formation, as no existing scholarly work has focussed on Turkish international higher education students using a self-formation lens. However, it did indicate the need for more in-depth qualitative studies on the matter

and the scarcity of studies that focus on country contexts other than the US. Hence, the study built on Marginson's publications that introduced student self-formation (Marginson, 2014, 2018) and reviewed the overall literature on international higher education to understand how international higher education students may go through self-formation. Such a review indicated three potential domains for student self-formation in international higher education: the educational domain, the social domain, and the civic domain. These three have no claim of being exhaustive but seem to be some of the main spheres of activity and influence for self-formation in international higher education.

Also, as self-formation never occurs in isolation and the relationship between the individual and the society is not one-way, this literature review looked for the potential relationship between individual self-formation in international higher education and contributions to society. The existing scholarly work indicated that international higher education has the potential to contribute to society through self-forming individuals. In other words, an international higher education experience can facilitate the self-formation of individuals who, in turn, can have an impact on society.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This study aimed at investigating self-formation and societal contribution in international higher education, using data collected from Turkish international higher education graduates. This chapter provides the justification for the methodology employed to achieve this aim, and provides a full description of the methods, the data used, and the analytic approach adopted to do so.

The overall structure of this chapter takes the form of ten sections, each dwelling on an aspect of the methodology. The chapter starts with a section on the design of the study, providing a rationale for the case study design and explaining why this approach is suitable to address the study's purposes mentioned in the previous paragraph. The epistemological stance adhered to in this study is also briefly introduced in this section to explain how the overall design enabled addressing the study purposes coherently with the epistemological commitments. Subsequently, the chapter continues with the methods and instruments section, where the data collection approach and instruments are discussed. This is followed by a detailed account on participant selection, delineating the procedures and the criteria employed for recruiting participants. This section also includes the selection of countries and the universities within these countries. After the discussion on participant selection, a section on data collection procedure follows. Under this section, both the general and country-specific procedures are explained in detail. The latter also includes a timeline for the fieldwork, providing information about the main events of the multi-country fieldwork. Afterwards, the data analysis procedure is discussed in a detailed way. This is followed by a section in which research quality and rigour topics are addressed, and an account of measures taken to ensure quality is provided. This section is followed by information regarding data language and

translation. Next, in the positionality and reflexivity section, my epistemological commitment as the researcher and my potential positionality in the eyes of the participants are delineated. A reflexive account for the research process is also provided here. The Ethical Considerations section provides both the general approach taken and some participant-specific considerations that arose during the fieldwork. The chapter concludes with a chapter summary.

3.1 Design

As discussed earlier in the introduction chapter, this study was designed to gain a better insight into self-formation in international higher education and its links with perceived contributions to society after graduation. To achieve this purpose, the study drew on case study approaches and focussed on a specific group—Turkish international higher education graduates.

Case study approaches involve investigating a case in a real-life context (Yin, 2014). The group of individuals, specifically Turkish international higher education graduates, that the study focused on met the criteria for case studies defined by Ragin (1992). They met these criteria because the group was an empirical unit, existing prior to the research regardless of a researcher's interest, and the group was general, existing a priori as conventional categories rather than delineated through the research itself.

It is implicit in most studies that draw on case-study approaches that the objects of investigation are similar enough in some aspects and separate enough in others to allow for treating them as comparable instances of the same general phenomenon (Ragin, 1992). In this study, Turkish international higher education graduates were treated as a case of international higher education graduates in general. Turkish international higher education graduates serve well to address the purposes of this study, as they are similar

to other international higher education graduates in the sense that they all cross borders to obtain qualifications abroad, leave behind their existing networks and friendships while obtaining new ones, and observe and experience a different civic context in their respective host countries.

However, they may differ from other international higher education graduates in several senses. To start with, they come from an upper-middle-income country (World Bank, 2020) that is geographically located close to several high-income countries. As a result of this, they have both the incentive and the means for crossing borders (Beine et al., 2008). This makes Turkey susceptible to high levels of international student mobility and brain drain, a topic of great significance in the societal contributions literature. Also, related to the findings of the study, Turkey has been going through a complicated and volatile political situation lately, notably the recent coup attempt in 2016. This volatile atmosphere has been noted by several international watchdogs, such as The Economist Intelligence Unit (2019) and Freedom House (2020).

Moreover, Turkish international higher education graduates come from a Muslim-majority country but also a secular one (Uğur, 2004), which differentiates them from other Muslim-majority countries. As explained in more detail in the literature review chapter, Turkish society has a unique dynamic that includes a bit of both worlds; there is a dynamic tension between Eastern and Western perspectives. Most Turks have a blend of both perspectives rather than accepting one or the other (Kilinc & Granello, 2003). Turkish culture can be understood better if these two broad cultural characteristics are considered together.

Overall, Turkish international higher education graduates are a comparable group to other international higher education graduates, especially in the areas that this study

investigated, but they do have differences as explained in the paragraphs above. This indicated that the selected group could provide valuable insights into the self-formation of international higher education students and their perceived potential contributions to society after graduation (Creswell, 2013; Ragin, 1992; Stake, 1996). The selected group can be instrumental, as Stake (1996) called it, in obtaining general insights into the researched phenomena thanks to their comparability with overall international higher education students. Although the study largely drew on the instrumental case study approach, the selected group holds an intrinsic value as well because they are an understudied group in international higher education literature, and, as Turks, they have some unique characteristics. Thus, they may provide insight into Turkey-related issues.

My epistemological stance played an important role in the design and methods of this study. This is discussed in more detail later in this chapter. However, because of its relevance, it is introduced here too. Informed by Pring (2015), my epistemological stance for this study posits that reality is conceived through socially constructed perspectives. How we understand our environment is "embodied within a language and is inherited by those who learn that language" (Pring, 2015, p. 52). We acquire certain socially developed constructions because they are made possible by certain features of reality. Both self-formation and perceived contributions to society are socially constructed phenomena and are understood best by such an epistemological perspective. This reflects the decision to employ an exploratory approach in this study, which is well suited to self-formation theory as it is a novel approach in international higher education literature, and to include participants from a well-defined group of international higher education graduates. More details about this are available in the Participant Selection section.

3.2 Methods and Instruments

Case study design informed the overall methods of the study. The primary data collection method for this study was semi-structured interviewing, and participant-drawn, life-timeline forms supported it.

A biographical approach was adopted (Roberts, 2002) for data collection as the study focused on the lived experiences of Turkish young adults who obtained their degrees abroad. The biographical approach was employed because, according to Goodson and Sikes (2001), learning more about individuals' life trajectories and how they perceive the events occurred during their life trajectories helps a researcher better understand the ways in which a specific experience, in this case international higher education study, shapes their lives. These same authors argue that interviews without a processual perspective may provide a limited understanding. Thus, the study obtained a better grasp of the experiences related to international higher education study within the context of what happened to the students both before and afterwards. Although, the main focus was not on the whole life trajectories of the participants.

In line with the case study design and the biographical approach for interviewing, a semi-structured interview guide and participant-drawn, life-timeline forms were used (Appendices D and B, respectively) to facilitate data collection. Using an interview guide (Appendix D and Appendix E for the English translation) was important to make sure that the limited interviewing time with the participants was used in the best way possible. Also, interview guides help make the interview data more systematic and comprehensive (Patton, 2015). I made use of the interview guide after listening to participants' own narration of their life trajectory as part of the biographical approach.

Using participant-drawn life timelines (referred to as participant-timelines hereafter) was significant to prime the participants before the interview to ensure that they put some thought on the key events of their lives and also to help structure the interview that followed afterwards (Abbas et al., 2013; Atkinson, 1998; Goodson & Sikes, 2001). This was also important, as Marginson (2014, 2018) pointed out, because self-formation is about reflexivity and personal reflection towards one's own experiences and life trajectory. Thus, participant-timelines encouraged participants to go through a reflexive process before the interview.

Another function of participant-timelines was to help obtain a holistic perspective of a participant's life trajectory. This was especially helpful during the data analysis, as it facilitated making better sense of some of the details in the long interview transcripts by switching back and forth between the participant-timeline and the transcription of that person's interview. As mentioned above, the main focus of this study was not on the whole life trajectories of the participants but on learning the significant moments in their lives before and after their international higher education experience. This also helped me better grasp what happened during it, in some cases.

As can be seen in Appendix B, the participant-timeline form was largely unstructured. It only had one arrow along the side of the page, pointing from top to bottom, and a sentence which basically translates to "please mark the important moments in your life on the line below and briefly comment on them." Further structuring was deliberately not provided to elicit participants' own thinking. A sample participant-timeline form with an English translation and two other samples to show how they varied in terms of their details are provided in Figure 3.3 below, under the Data Analysis Procedure section.

3.3 Participant Selection

Several rigorous criteria were used to select the participants for the study. These criteria set the boundaries for the specific group that the study focussed on—Turkish international higher education graduates.

The references to international higher education graduates in this study are to degree graduates only, including undergraduate, masters, and doctoral degrees rather than short-term or credit-mobile individuals. This was based on the assumption that the longer the stay in the host country (a minimum of one year for this study), the more significant and enduring the impact would be on students, which has backing by prior studies (Adam et al., 2018; Dwyer, 2004). Also, the definitions of international students vary. An OECD report (2019) discussed this notion and differentiated foreign students from international students. Foreign students are individuals who live and study in a country that is different from their country of citizenship. On the other hand, international students are those who move to another country to pursue a degree. In accordance with the study purposes, building on the OECD's (2019) definition, and considering the similar discussions provided elsewhere in the literature (e.g., Beine et al., 2014; Larsen, 2016), I only included individuals who would fit into the international student category, namely those who moved to another country for the purposes of pursuing a degree.

Purposive sampling was used to select participants who would fit into this definition, employing both maximum variation and snowball methods. The maximum variation method is useful in making sure that the study has a balanced group of participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015). Using this method, I made sure that the participants varied in terms of their host country, field of study, return status, and gender, as the participants might have different perspectives towards their self-formation or

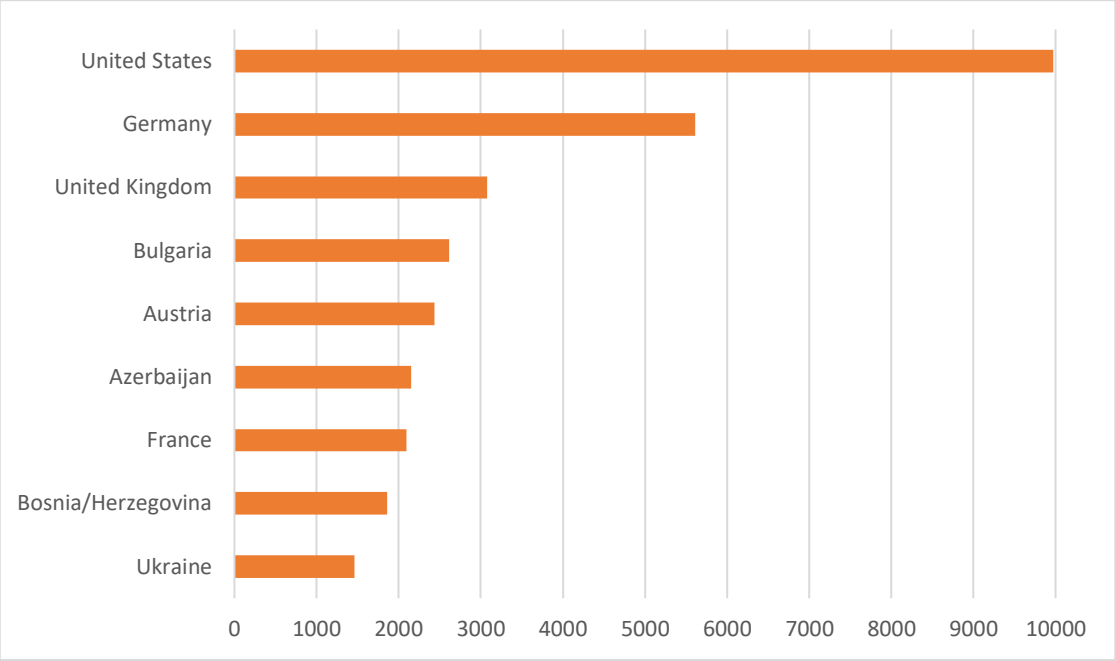
contributions to society depending on these criteria. Each of these criteria is discussed below.

The study included Turkish international higher education graduates who studied in different country contexts with the assumption that the students may go through or perceive their self-formation in different ways. Including multiple-country contexts was not to compare the findings between each of these countries one by one, although meaningful differences are highlighted. The main aim was to form a better account of the self-formation of international higher education students and their perceived contributions to society that may develop as a result of such an experience. The inclusion of multiple countries also helped ensure maximum variation among the participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Consequently, I started by obtaining the list of the ten most popular destination countries for Turkish internationally mobile students using the UNESCO Institute of Statistics data (2020). Figure 3.1 below shows these ten most popular destination countries and the number of Turkish international students pursuing a degree-level education in them.

Figure 3.1.

Top 10 destination countries for internationally mobile Turkish students in 2016 obtained from UNESCO Institute of Statistics (2020)



Out of these top ten most popular destinations for Turkish students, four countries were purposively selected: Germany, the UK, Bulgaria, and Azerbaijan. This was to ensure diversity while at the same time maintaining feasibility. Certain criteria were used in the selection of the countries. These criteria are closely linked with study purposes and a discussion on each is provided below.

Firstly, the chosen countries differ in terms of the quality of their higher education institutions. The UK and Germany have a large number of higher education institutions among the top 1,000 ranked by Times Higher Education (THE) World University Rankings (93, 44; respectively) and among the top 800 ranked by ShanghaiRanking's Academic Ranking of World Universities (50, 46; respectively). By contrast, Bulgaria has only one higher education institution among the top 1,000 ranked by THE World University Rankings and no university among the top 800 ranked by ShanghaiRanking's

Academic Ranking of World Universities. Azerbaijani higher education institutions do not feature in these rankings at all.

These countries also differ in terms of higher education enrolment rates. According to the World Bank data (2018), higher education enrolment rates are the highest in Bulgaria (71%). Bulgaria is followed by Germany (66%) and the UK (57%). Azerbaijan has the lowest higher education enrolment rate (27%). From these data, a continuum between a wider access to higher education in Bulgaria to a more elitist approach in Azerbaijan can be observed.

Further, as indicated in the Literature Review chapter, prior research implied that international study experience is not only transformative in acquiring new information but could also be influential in how internationally mobile students think about the state systems around them and their own role as citizen-contributors to their communities (e.g., Chankseliani, 2018; Spilimbergo, 2009). To ensure the diversity of countries, I drew on the approach proposed by Hall and Soskice (2001), and the Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index. Hall and Soskice (2001) argued that countries could be arrayed on a continuum that has two ideal types of political economies at the poles: liberal market economies and coordinated market economies. With the proposed continuum, the UK was included to learn more about students who studied in a typical liberal market economy, and Germany was included to examine students who studied in a typical coordinated market economy.

The selected countries also differed in terms of their political systems, according to the Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index (2019). According to the classification provided by this index, while the UK and Germany are considered fully democratic regimes, Bulgaria is considered a flawed democracy. Azerbaijan, on the other hand, is

identified as an authoritarian regime. Considering that the Democracy Index classifies Turkey as a hybrid regime, which is considered to be less democratic than flawed democracies but more democratic than authoritarian regimes, the study participants were comprised of students who completed their degrees in countries that were either more or less democratic than their home country.

In addition, the historical and cultural ties were also considered to ensure diversity. Bulgaria and Azerbaijan, being closely located, have organic ties with Turkey, but these ties are different in nature. Tavanier (2010) defined the Bulgaria-Turkey relationship as "a love-hate relationship that has been regularly soured by rising nationalism, inter-ethnic grievances and a preoccupation with the past at the expense of the future," in his online analysis article (para. 5). Currently, the official website of Turkey's Ministry of Foreign Affairs defines the current relationship between the two countries as "friendly, neighbourly and allied" (2018, para. 1). The same source reports that there are 588,318 ethnic minority Turks living in Bulgaria based on the 2011 census, which makes up 8.8% of the total population. However, Bulgaria was part of the Ottoman empire for almost 500 years, and this is still an uncomfortable era for most Bulgarians (Tavanier, 2010). The assimilation campaign of ethnic Turk and Muslim minorities in the 1980s as a result of the fear that Turkey would seek to annex parts of Bulgaria where these people live is a sign of the cold relationship between the two countries in recent history. More recently, however, the historical ill-feeling between the two countries seems to be thawing as both are building political, economic, and security ties (Tavanier, 2010).

By contrast, Turkey and Azerbaijan have ethnolinguistic and religious bonds as both speak a branch of the Turkic language family that is partially mutually intelligible and both have a population that mostly identifies as Muslims (Kardaş & Macit, 2015). This

close relationship is evident from the previous Azerbaijani president's expression that Turkey and Azerbaijan are "one nation, two states" (Official website of President of Azerbaijan Republic, 2010). Further, Turkey was the first country to recognise Azerbaijan's independence in 1991 and was presented as a role model for it (Yesevi & Tiftikcigil, 2015). In contrast to Bulgaria, Azerbaijan is not an EU member, which might affect the profile and purpose of students going there to study for their degrees.

International higher education graduates who studied in the selected four countries and were residing there after their graduation were interviewed in these countries, respectively. In addition to these four destination countries, a fieldwork trip was also conducted in Turkey, the fifth country of the multi-country fieldwork. Turkey is the home country of the study participants. Conducting a fieldwork trip in Turkey was important to gain the perspectives of those who had returned to their home country after obtaining their degree abroad. Both those who had returned and those who had not returned after their graduation were included to obtain a range of perspectives and ensure maximum variation.

Additionally, although the United States was at the top of the list, it was not selected to be included in this study. There are several reasons for this. Firstly, as explained in the Literature Review chapter, a review of the scholarly literature on Turkish international higher education students indicated that the overwhelming majority of this literature focused on the experiences of Turkish students in the US. This indicated that the literature can benefit from studies focusing more on country contexts other than the US, as Turkey still sends thousands of students to other countries (UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2018).

Secondly, as indicated before, this study focused on ensuring diversity while at the same time maintaining feasibility in the selection of countries. The criteria used for selecting countries indicated that the US showed similarities with one of the selected host countries, the UK. To illustrate, both of these countries have high-quality higher education institutions. They both enjoy a relatively large number of higher education institutions among the top 1,000 ranked by THE World University Rankings and among the top 800 ranked by ShanghaiRanking's Academic Ranking of World Universities. They both are English speaking countries, being part of the Anglo-Saxon world. In addition, as explained above, the approach proposed by Hall and Soskice (2001) was used in the selection of countries for this study, and this approach classified both the UK and the US in the same category: liberal market economy. In fact, in different chapters of the book, the authors compared and contrasted these two countries with Germany, which the authors categorised as a good example of a coordinated market economy. To authors, The UK and the US are both good examples of liberal market economies and have many similarities in this regard. On top of all these, a fieldwork trip in the UK was much more feasible for me, both timewise and economically, when compared to a fieldwork trip in the US since I was based in the former during the data collection process. Based on all these reasons, the US was not selected as a host country for this study, and instead, the UK was selected along with the other three host countries, as discussed above.

In addition to the inclusion of multiple host countries, it was important to ensure variation in the subject areas of the participants as well, as backed by evidence from the literature (e.g., Brooks et al., 2020; Crossley, 2008). For instance, the field of study impacts civic skills, and majoring in social science is associated with future civic participation (Hillygus, 2005). On the other hand, majoring in science, engineering, or business is tied to lower future civic participation (Mayhew et al., 2016). This also helped ensure a range

of experiences among the participants, as those studying applied degrees might go through different experiences, such as internships, than those studying in more theoretical subjects. These different experiences may influence the self-formation of international higher education students.

Moreover, to ensure the comparability of the participant perceptions, the age range of the participants was limited to young adults, which is generally accepted in the developmental psychology literature to be between the ages of 20 and 35 (Armstrong, 2007). The age range restriction was included in this study to ensure consistency and comparability of the collected international comparative data. Participants may have different perspectives regarding their self-formation or contributions to society depending on their age and experience. As discussed in this section, the participants already vary in their country of study, subject areas, and gender. Keeping the age range consistent was assumed to help with avoiding complexity when, for example, comparing data across contexts.

In addition, as briefly indicated earlier, this study focused on including international degree graduates rather than short-term or credit-mobile individuals. Hence, it did not make a specific distinction regarding which levels of study (i.e., undergraduate, masters, and doctoral levels) to include. This meant that participants were selected from any level of study, which may have implications for the findings. Several reasons were considered in this approach. Firstly, the main emphasis of participant selection in this regard was to ensure that the participants stayed in the host country long enough for an immersive experience to trigger their self-formation. Literature also supported the assumption that the longer the students stay in the host country (a minimum of one year for this study) the more significant and enduring the impact would be on the students (Adam et al., 2018;

Dwyer, 2004). Also, having a variation in the level of education helped ensure a range of educational experiences among the participants since those studying at the undergrad or masters levels of education may go through different experiences from each other. These experiences may have an influence on the self-formation of international higher education graduates and hence, having this range would add to this study's exploratory approach.

The participants of this study eventually were constituted of undergraduate and masters graduates who studied in the selected host country contexts. The participants who studied in Germany and the UK were mostly masters graduates, and there were a few undergraduate degree graduates as well. The participants who studied in Bulgaria had a relatively better balance of participants with masters and undergraduate degrees. Six out of 12 participants in Bulgaria were graduates of masters degree programs, while the rest had undergraduate degrees only. By contrast, the participants from Azerbaijan had undergraduate degrees only. Unfortunately, to the best of my knowledge, there is no data available on the proportion of degree levels attained by Turkish international higher education graduates by country to make meaning out of this situation with Azerbaijan. Also, the UNESCO Institute of Statistics (2020) international student mobility data, which is one of the most comprehensive data sources for Turkish international students, only provide the number of degree mobile students by host countries without distinguishing their levels of education. This is mostly compatible with this study's approach, as explained in the previous paragraph, but does not help explain the situation with Azerbaijan. In the absence of data for this matter, to my perspective, as a scholar of higher education who works in the field of the international student mobility of Turkish international students, this could be because Turkish international students may not

choose to go to Azerbaijan for higher-level degrees. This may be a reason why those who studied in Azerbaijan had undergraduate degrees only.

Also, the participants of the study were not Turkish government scholarship recipients. The Turkish government scholarship for studying abroad only funds studying in universities that are ranked in the top 500 by a well-known ranking association such as THE World University Rankings or ShanghaiRanking's Academic Ranking of World Universities. Hence, this criterion would automatically exclude studying at universities in Azerbaijan and Bulgaria, as they do not have any universities in the top 500 in any well-established ranking lists. However, Turkey still sent thousands of students to these countries in 2017. To avoid an imbalance between the participants, namely scholarship recipient participants who went to Germany and the UK and non-scholarship recipient participants who went to Azerbaijan and Bulgaria, the study did not include Turkish government scholarship recipients. This was also important because students with such scholarships may perceive their contributions to their home country or their self-formation differently from other international higher education graduates since they are expected to return to Turkey and work in a pre-specified organisation once obtaining their degrees.

Furthermore, to account for the variation in the quality and the subsequent opportunities provided by various types of higher education institutions, the study focused on the graduates of high-ranking, internationally-recognised universities in the selected countries. The international rankings associations such as Times Higher Education, QS World University Rankings, and uniRank were used for this purpose. The initial plan was to select five highly ranked universities from each selected country. However, as I started trying to contact potential participants from those selected universities within the

countries mentioned above, I noticed that it would not be possible to reach students from all the preselected universities. Some of these universities were small and had a relatively small number of graduates, such as Ada University in Azerbaijan, and in some situations, I simply could not get responses to my emails and messages to establish the initial contact. The procedures for establishing the initial contact and further details about the data collection process are discussed under the Data Collection Procedure section. Eventually, the participant universities were mostly the top ones in the rankings within the selected countries, but some of them were specialised and, while not the top ones, were still good in their specialised fields, such as Medical University – Sofia and University of the Arts London. Below, in Table 3.1, the list of universities that the study participants obtained their degrees from is provided.

Table 3.1.

List of universities the participants obtained their degrees from with regard to country locations

Country of study	Number of participants	Participant universities
Azerbaijan	12	Azerbaijan State University of Economics
		Baku State University
		Azerbaijan Technical University
		Baku Engineering University (Old name: Qafkaz University)
Bulgaria	12	Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski"
		University of National and World Economy
		Technical University – Sofia
		Medical University-Sofia
Germany	14	Humboldt University
		Free University of Berlin
		Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich

		Technical University of Munich
United Kingdom	12	University of Oxford
		University of Cambridge
		University College London
		Imperial College London
		London School of Economics
		University of the Arts London

The initial goal was to reach at least ten participants who have studied in one of the selected four countries. I was able to exceed the initial plan and interviewed 50 participants who had obtained their degrees in the selected four countries. As can be seen in Table 3.1 above, 12 participants were graduates of universities located in Azerbaijan, 12 participants were graduates of universities located in Bulgaria, 14 participants were graduates of universities located in Germany, and 12 participants were graduates of universities located in the UK.

Particular attention was given to the balance of return status, gender distribution, and field of study during participant recruitment. Further details about this are provided in Table 3.2 below. Twenty-six participants of the 50 were still residing in the host countries in which they obtained their degrees, during the interview time. The remaining 24 of the 50 were returnee graduates, and I conducted interviews with them in Turkey. Twenty of the 50 participants were female. As can be seen below in Table 3.2, participants studied in a wide variety of subject areas, which included sciences, social sciences, engineering, and arts degrees.

Table 3.2.

Study participants

	Participant Pseudonym	Country of study	Current residence	Gender	Subject area	Level of study
1	Emir	Azerbaijan	Azerbaijan, Baku	Male	Russian language and literature	Undergrad
2	Sarp	Azerbaijan	Azerbaijan, Baku	Male	Geography + Psychology	Undergrad
3	Kerem	Azerbaijan	Azerbaijan, Baku	Male	International relations	Undergrad
4	Burak	Azerbaijan	Azerbaijan, Baku	Male	Geography	Undergrad
5	Berke	Azerbaijan	Azerbaijan, Baku	Male	Computer engineering	Undergrad
6	Melis	Azerbaijan	Turkey, Istanbul	Female	International relations	Undergrad
7	Efe	Azerbaijan	Turkey, Istanbul	Male	Applied maths	Undergrad
8	Atakan	Azerbaijan	Turkey, Istanbul	Male	International relations	Undergrad
9	Rana	Azerbaijan	Turkey, Istanbul	Female	International relations	Undergrad
10	Canberk	Azerbaijan	Turkey, Istanbul	Male	Computer engineering	Undergrad
11	Tuna	Azerbaijan	Turkey, Istanbul	Male	Business administration	Undergrad
12	Koray	Azerbaijan	Turkey, Istanbul	Male	Sociology	Undergrad
13	Kutay	Bulgaria	Turkey, Istanbul	Male	Computer Engineering	Undergrad
14	Bora	Bulgaria	Turkey, Istanbul	Male	International economic relations	Masters
15	Simge	Bulgaria	Turkey, Istanbul	Female	Mechanical Engineering	Undergrad

16	Toprak	Bulgaria	Turkey, Istanbul	Male	European Union law	Undergrad
17	İlayda	Bulgaria	Turkey, Istanbul	Female	Semiotics, language, and advertising	Masters
18	Polat	Bulgaria	Bulgaria, Sofia	Male	Computer engineering	Undergrad
19	Serhan	Bulgaria	Bulgaria, Sofia	Male	Mechatronics engineering + Aeronautical engineering	Two Undergrad degrees
20	Alara	Bulgaria	Bulgaria, Sofia	Female	Medicine	Undergrad + Masters
21	Aykut	Bulgaria	Bulgaria, Sofia	Male	Mechatronics engineering + Strategic leadership	Undergrad + Masters
22	Onur	Bulgaria	Bulgaria, Sofia	Male	Turkic languages and literature	Undergrad
23	Başak	Bulgaria	Bulgaria, Sofia	Female	Economics	Masters
24	Taner	Bulgaria	Bulgaria, Sofia	Male	Mechanical engineering	Undergrad + Masters
25	Adnan	Germany	Germany, Berlin	Male	Sociology	Masters
26	Ahmet	Germany	Germany, Berlin	Male	Economics and management	Masters
27	Defne	Germany	Germany, Berlin	Female	Social policy	Masters
28	Derya	Germany	Germany, Berlin	Female	Social and Cognitive Neuroscience	Masters
29	Didem	Germany	Germany, Berlin	Female	Biology	Masters
30	Elif	Germany	Germany, Berlin	Female	Law	Masters

31	Mustafa	Germany	Germany, Munich	Male	Chemistry	Masters
32	Zeynep	Germany	Germany, Berlin	Female	Economics and management	Masters
33	Alican	Germany	Turkey, Istanbul	Male	Economics and management	Masters
34	Alpaslan	Germany	Turkey, Istanbul	Male	Law	Masters
35	Duru	Germany	Turkey, Istanbul	Female	German language and literature	Undergrad
36	Ebrar	Germany	Turkey, Istanbul	Female	Computer science + Information systems	Undergrad + Masters
37	Fatih	Germany	Turkey, Istanbul	Male	Electrical Engineering	Undergrad + Masters
38	Halil	Germany	Turkey, Istanbul	Male	Transportation systems engineering	Masters
39	Ayten	UK	UK, London	Female	Comparative politics	Masters
40	Havva	UK	UK, London	Female	Economics	Undergrad
41	Ömer	UK	UK, London	Male	Industrial product design	Undergrad
42	Salih	UK	UK, London	Male	Computer engineering	Masters
43	Yaşar	UK	UK, London	Male	Finance	Masters
44	Zeliha	UK	UK, London	Female	Political and economic sociology	Masters
45	Aysel	UK	Turkey, Istanbul	Female	Global governance and ethics	Masters

46	Eylül	UK	Turkey, Istanbul	Female	Chemistry (drug discovery)	Masters
47	Hasan	UK	Turkey, Istanbul	Male	Law and finance	Masters
48	Hatice	UK	Turkey, Istanbul	Female	Comparative social policy	Masters
49	Kemal	UK	Turkey, Istanbul	Male	Chemistry (sustainable energy)	Masters
50	Sevim	UK	Turkey, Istanbul	Female	Social and cultural anthropology	Masters

It is important to acknowledge that although the overall gender distribution across countries was at a reasonable level (20 out of the 50 participants were female), the gender distribution of participants who studied in Azerbaijan tilted towards male participants. There were ten male and two female participants who studied in Azerbaijan. This may have implications for the findings of the study. However, this may be related to the overall male to female ratio of Turkish students studying in Azerbaijan as well. Although no data about the gender distribution of Turkish students studying in Azerbaijan are available, the UNESCO Institute of Statistics (2020) provides data about the gender distribution of total inbound internationally mobile students. To the best of my knowledge, this is the closest data available on this issue. According to this data, 39.9% of total inbound internationally mobile students in Azerbaijan were female in 2018, which is when the fieldwork trip took place. This indicates that the proportion of female students was already low in Azerbaijan. By comparison, there were more female (244,383) than male (207,696) international students in the UK in the same year, which reflected the gender distribution of the participants who studied in the UK as well, with seven female and five male participants.

The criteria discussed above led the participant selection process and, hence, set the boundaries for the specific group that the study focussed on. Eventually, as discussed above, the study included a rigorously selected group of 50 participants from five countries who had obtained their degrees from 18 different universities.

3.4 Data Collection Procedure

The fieldwork for this study took place in five countries. The fieldwork visits in Bulgaria, Azerbaijan, Germany, and the UK were planned for interviewing Turkish graduates who studied in these countries and who had not returned to Turkey after their graduation at the point of the interview. The fieldwork in Turkey was conducted to interview Turkish graduates who obtained a degree abroad and then returned to their home country afterwards. This section provides detailed information about the data collection procedure of the study. The general procedure of data collection in all the selected countries is explained first. Afterwards, country-specific fieldwork procedures and issues are delineated in the following subsection, which also includes a visual timeline for the fieldwork process.

3.4.1 General Procedure

Ensuring the ethical arrangements was the first concern of the study before starting the data collection. The necessary ethical permission from The Central University Research Ethics Committee (CUREC) at the University of Oxford was obtained before starting any of the fieldwork trips. The approval document can be found in Appendix A.

After obtaining ethical permission, I started the process of locating potential participants. Locating potential participants from five country contexts was a challenging task, especially considering that I had never been to three of the five selected countries. The

initial plan was to make use of web searching and to contact scholarship providers and alumni relations departments at the selected universities to locate potential participants. However, as time progressed, I realised that scholarship providers and alumni relations departments at the selected universities were reluctant to help me establish the initial contact with potential participants. Web searching was not very useful in finding potential participants either, as not everyone had a blog, website, or some other online presence that was searchable.

At that point, I realised that I needed a platform from which potential participants for the study could be contacted. This platform had to facilitate locating participants by allowing the earlier-discussed criteria of the participant selection to be searched. After some consultation with colleagues and a great deal of personal searching for such a platform, I discovered how useful LinkedIn could be. The search feature of LinkedIn lets the users narrow their search to the criteria mentioned above in locating potential participants. Eventually, I decided on using LinkedIn to locate most of the potential participants across five country contexts and make the initial contact. A small number of participants were contacted through snowballing, as explained under the Participant Selection section, with attention given to the sample selection criteria.

However, although locating and contacting most of the participants was made possible through the use of LinkedIn, the use of such a platform for participant identification may have implications for the findings of the study, and they should be acknowledged. A LinkedIn group may have specific characteristics that are different than non-LinkedIn participants. They may have good networking skills, which could affect the social domain of their self-formation. These individuals may be professionally-oriented, and they may be more globally homogeneous than overall international students as a group.

Nevertheless, considering that there were no collaborating researchers in the selected countries, without such a search tool as LinkedIn, locating potential participants across five countries could not have been feasibly executed.

After locating the potential participants, I made the initial contact by briefly introducing myself and summarising the purposes and procedures of the study using a previously prepared participant information sheet (Appendix G). After this, I asked if they would be interested in participating in the study. Once I received a positive response from a potential participant, I proceeded to obtain their ethical consent before starting the study. For this study, I had prepared both a physical participant consent form (Appendix H) and an oral consent form (Appendix I) before starting the fieldwork. I wanted to prepare an oral consent form in addition to the physical one for two reasons: Firstly, I was aware that I would have to do some interviews through Skype because there were a small number of participants I could not meet physically. The second reason was based on the assumption that Turkish people at the time of the fieldwork may have hesitated to sign documents put in front of them by someone they did not know. This is because Turkey was going through a sensitive period at that time resulting from a recent coup attempt and other political volatilities (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2019; Freedom House, 2020).

After obtaining ethical permission, I set an interview date and location with them and sent them a participant-timeline form (Appendix B). I kindly requested the participants to come to the interview with the completed form. Before each interview, I examined the participant-timeline form that had been sent to me by that participant so that I could have an idea about them and, if necessary, make minor tweaks to the already developed

interview guide (see Appendix D and Appendix E for the English translation) to make the interview more personalised to that particular participant.

During the interview meeting, I first asked the participants to expand on the participant-timelines that they had already prepared and sent to me before the interview meeting. I did not interrupt during this part and let them explain the important moments in their lives freely in a chronological manner. Once this was over, I moved on to using the semi-structured interview guide to ask further questions (see Appendix D and Appendix E for the English translation). I concluded each interview by asking if they had anything to ask or add. I voice-recorded each interview with participant approval. The voice recordings of each interview are safely stored in my password-protected computer.

3.4.2 Country-Specific Timeline for Fieldwork Procedures and Fieldwork Grant

The fieldwork planning was a meticulous process that was influenced both by strategic and feasibility reasons. The main plan was to obtain a fieldwork grant to conduct the fieldwork in five countries. There was also an alternative plan that included conducting face-to-face interviews only in three of the selected countries: Turkey, Bulgaria, and the UK. These countries were chosen for the alternative plan because they would be relatively less costly. Based on this plan, all other interviews in Germany and Azerbaijan were to be conducted through Skype.

I wanted to travel to the selected country contexts in person because seeing the university buildings and the cities that the participants lived in would give me an understanding of what they may have experienced in their daily lives, which was important to the study. This was based on the assumption that I could make better sense of some of the discussions in the interviews if I was in the locations the participants talked about.

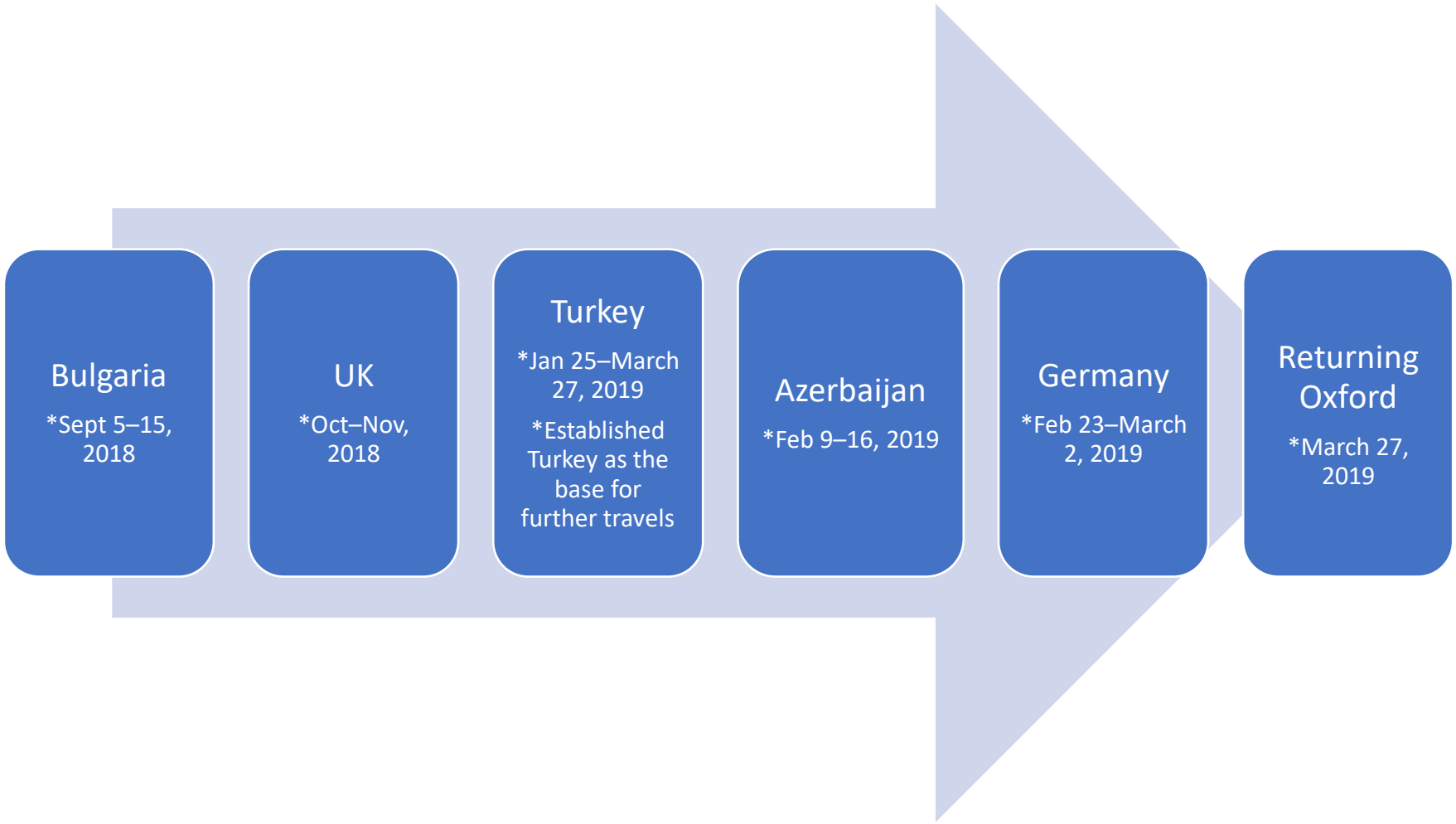
Consequently, I started the fieldwork by going to Bulgaria on September 5, 2018 and used my annual college grant to cover the trip expenses. There was no guarantee that I would get a grant, so I proceeded with the data collection according to the alternative plan, just in case. The dates of the fieldwork trip to Bulgaria are provided below, in Figure 3.2.

After the fieldwork in Bulgaria, I started conducting fieldwork in the UK. I made day trips to the greater London area to conduct the interviews with those participants who graduated from top British universities, which are listed under the Participant Selection section. I was able to complete the fieldwork trip in the UK by the end of November 2018. After this, I made a strategic decision to wait for the results of the grant application and did not make detailed plans for further data collection, as I was not sure whether I would be able to travel in person.

In early December 2018, I learned that I was awarded a fieldwork grant from British Association for International and Comparative Education (BAICE). Subsequently, I flew to Istanbul and established it as my base for further fieldwork trips. This was because the highest number of participants were residing in Turkey, as the study included 24 returnee graduates, and the travel costs from Istanbul to both Azerbaijan and Germany were cheaper than travel costs from London to those countries. I was in Azerbaijan for fieldwork between February 9–16, 2019. Subsequently, I travelled to Germany between February 23–March 2, 2019. After returning to Turkey from Germany, I conducted the last interviews with graduate returnees, finalising the fieldwork. As shown in Figure 3.2 below, I returned to Oxford on March 27, 2019, having completed fieldwork across five country contexts successfully.

Figure 3.2.

Main events during fieldwork process



3.5 Data Analysis Procedure

A rigorous procedure was followed for data analysis. The procedure for data analysis included several steps, the first of which was the preparation of the data. I fully transcribed the interview voice recordings in Turkish. I then imported the transcription documents to NVivo 12 software. Each transcription document was placed into a folder created for each participant with their associated pseudonym. Afterwards, all the relevant demographic values were assigned to the transcription documents. The participant-timeline forms were also imported into their relevant folders. I managed the data corpus and conducted all the subsequent analyses using NVivo 12 software.

Subsequently, I followed the thematic analysis approach described by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2019) and pursued several steps in the analysis process. The analysis started with first-cycle coding. I began with a "start list" of codes obtained from the literature prior to analysis. This was for the deductive part of data analysis. The start list of codes used in this study can be found in Appendix L. However, this list evolved and was updated continuously as the analysis progressed. I continuously created new codes inductively and modified the already existing ones. In the analysis process, I went back and forth between what the data were telling me and what I wanted to know, as suggested by Srivastava and Hopwood (2009), by constantly keeping a window open in my computer that reminded me of the research questions during the data analysis.

During the first-cycle coding, I did a close reading of all the interview data, participant-timeline forms, and other supplementary data to identify meaningful segments and to code or create memos. I read all the transcripts at least once and went over the first two interviews from each country again. The latter was to ensure the quality of the data analysis and also to help me remember the data from the very first participants I analysed,

as by the end of the first reading of all the transcripts, I had read 50 interview transcripts with close to 2,000 pages.

Also, I paid attention to keeping clear operational definitions of the codes. Continuously updating and revising these definitions and creating new top or sub-codes with further clear definitions when necessary was essential for having refined data. I used annotations and analytical memos during both the first and the second cycle coding, as described by Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2018) and Miles et al. (2019). Analytical memos were dated for reference to the analytic history and progress of the study, titled with memo type (e.g., code definition and assertion) and subtitled with specific content (e.g., what cases have in common and the agenda for the next site visit). Analytical memos were kept as separate documents rather than as annotations within the transcription documents.

In the second-cycle coding, pattern codes were at the centre of attention. I went through all the codes created in the previous steps and grouped relevant codes to generate themes. Some pattern codes had already emerged in the first phase. In such cases, I revaluated those already emerged ones and reconfigured them if necessary. I also chose to combine some codes together because they overlapped. I also tried to choose the most relevant codes and dropped some of the codes at this stage. I used annotations and memos during this cycle to keep a record of my impressions. Moreover, I created matrix displays of data "to organise the vast array of condensed material into an 'at-a-glance' format for reflection, verification, conclusion drawing and other analytic acts" (Miles et al., 2019, p. 83) Also, in second cycle coding, assertions were developed, or already developed ones were revaluated, as suggested by Miles et al. (2019).

Aside from following these procedural data analysis steps, I also made use of various strategies throughout the analysis process, as explained by Miles and his colleagues

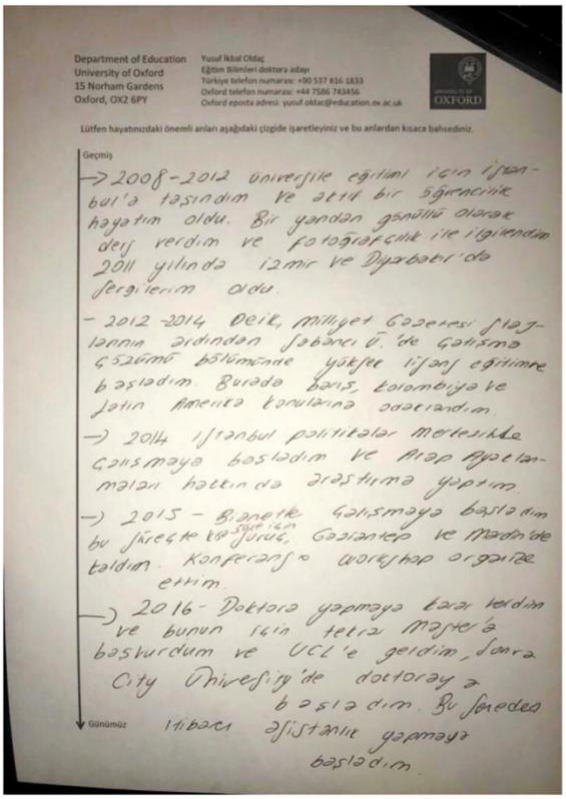
(2019) and Creswell (2013). Some of these were related to the rigour of the study and are discussed in the following Rigour and Research Quality section but with a different focus (e.g., their relevance to broader research quality concepts).

To start with, it is important to understand how the researcher might affect the participants, influencing them to act or talk differently (Miles et al., 2019). This was important throughout, both during data collection and data analysis. Being a temporary interlocutor, a prestigious PhD student who is also Turkish, and a man (the list can go on) might have had an effect on the data I collected. I was always aware of this throughout the data analysis and made sure I interpreted my data accordingly. This is discussed in more detail under the Positionality and Reflexivity section later in this chapter.

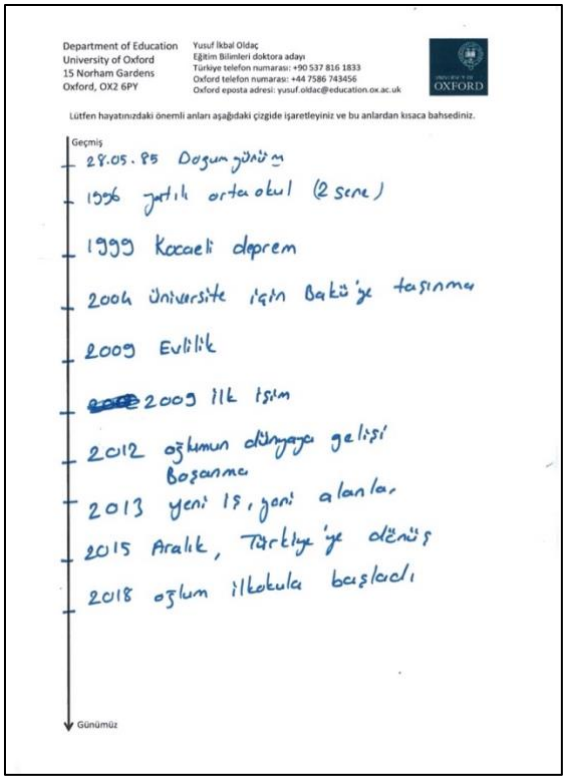
Triangulation played an important role during the analysis process (Creswell, 2013; Miles et al., 2019). This was also significant to ensure the credibility of the study, which is discussed in more detail under the Rigour and Research Quality section. I collected participant-timeline forms alongside interview data. I constantly went back and forth between the interview transcriptions and participant-timeline forms to double-check certain interpretations. Participant-timeline forms were also helpful in providing a holistic perspective. Sometimes it was hard not to get lost in the small details of a lengthy interview transcript and having a visual that summarised the participant life trajectory helped me reconnect with the bigger picture. Figure 3.3, below, provides a sample participant-timeline with an English translation and two other samples to show how they varied.

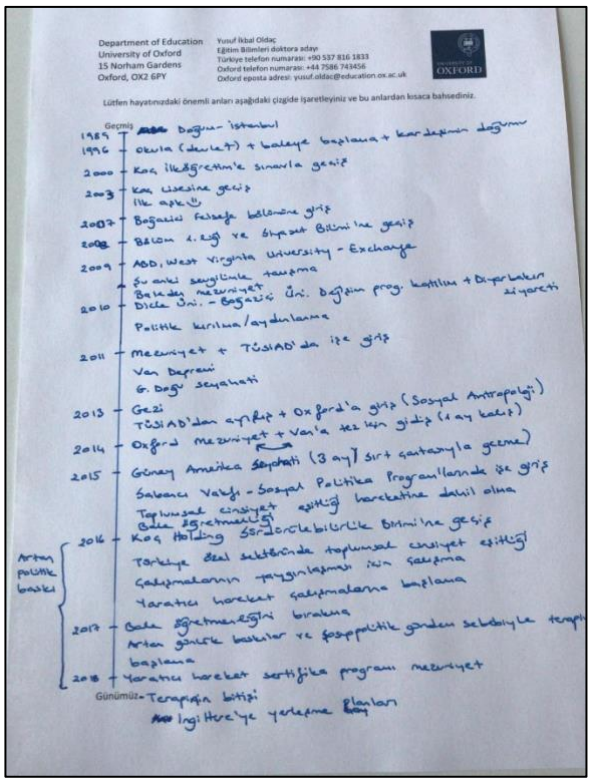
Figure 3.3.

Sample completed participant-timelines: one with an English translation and two others to show how they varied in terms of details



Translation of the main points
➢ 2008–2012—I moved to Istanbul for my undergrad education, and I started my university student life. I did voluntary tutoring. I also did photography as a hobby. I had exhibitions in the cities of İzmir and Diyarbakır. ➢ 2012–2014—I started my masters degree in conflict resolution at Sabancı University. I focused on the topics of peace, Colombia, and Latin America. ➢ 2014—I started working at the Istanbul Policy Centre and researched on Arab Spring. ➢ 2015—I started working at Bianet. During this process, I stayed in Suruç, Gaziantep, and Mardin for a short time. I organised a conference and a workshop. ➢ 2016—I decided to do a PhD, and to do this, I applied for a masters again. I completed my masters at UCL and started my PhD at City University. I have been doing a teaching assistantship since 2016.





I constantly made an effort to weigh the collected evidence. I kept track of which interview data had higher quality information. Some interviews were simply more informative than others (e.g., Ahmet's interview): the participants liked talking extensively and provided lots of supporting examples. In contrast, some participants (e.g., Başak) kept their answers short: their answers were terser, without explanations or anecdotes. I made my interpretations carefully by paying attention to evaluating the quality of the data constantly.

There was one participant, Efe, who surprised me with his strong contention that universities are all useless and that they should all be closed. Miles and his colleagues (2019) suggested that discussing surprises might be important in drawing conclusions. This person obtained his undergrad degree in Azerbaijan, but he had also been accepted into a top university in Turkey before going to Azerbaijan, only to drop out after a year of study. He kept mentioning how unfair the job market was and that he was earning much less than he deserved, even after years of study in a university. He also discussed that no one has ever asked about his degree in his current line of work, which is wholesaling plastic-made products, and that his boss is a high school dropout. Then, I further probed him about whether this could be because of his sector, which may not require a degree. At the time of the interview, Efe held a management position in a company that wholesales plastic-made products, although he was an applied maths graduate from a top university in Azerbaijan. He agreed with my point but restated that it was networking, rather than a university education, that got him to that position. One of the arguments of this study is that university education is not just for employability but also for other potential purposes, such as the development of the self, developing networks, obtaining civic values, and, even for some, finding a spouse. Although Efe talked about all these while reflecting on his degree education in Azerbaijan during the

interview, it seems that his degree was not good enough to get him a well-paying job in a relevant sector.

Checking for rival explanations is a good tactic to make sure that the interpretations are of high quality, which is discussed under the Rigour and Research Quality section as well. This study focused on the individual in the international higher education experiences of graduates. However, this is a relatively new approach in international higher education literature, and some parts of the data could have been interpreted with adjustment or acculturation perspectives too (e.g., Berry, 1980; Black & Mendenhall, 1991). I understand that these perspectives could play a role in interpreting international student experiences, but they do not necessarily reflect the whole picture. Focusing on individual agency is a valid approach that has been largely understudied and underrepresented in international higher education literature.

Further to these, the limitations of a human as an analyst also deserves discussion. Data overload was a challenge; analysing close to 2,000 pages of transcribed data and triangulating them with life-timeline forms collected from 5 countries was challenging. I acknowledge that such a large scale of data might have been too much to receive, process, and remember at once for an individual. I tried to remedy this by dividing the project into chunks and going back and forth to data during and after the data analysis. Another issue with human analyst deficiency is first impressions. An early input may make a large impression, and a subsequent revision could be resisted because of this. To remedy this, I reread and recoded the initial analyses from two participants from each country, which totalled eight participants. I also tried to keep an open mind throughout the analysis by questioning my coding decisions and by going back and forth to data during the data analysis. There were interesting ideas and arguments in the data, but the categories did

not reach saturation. This inevitably led them to be dropped from the findings chapter. This was not because they were insignificant but because more information was necessary to make a case for them.

3.6 Rigour and Research Quality

This qualitative study was exploratory in nature. It rigorously explored self-formation in international higher education and its links with societal contributions. It focused on a specific group to do so—Turkish international higher education graduates. Several measures were incorporated to ensure the rigour of this exploratory endeavour, making use of several method sourcebooks (e.g. Creswell, 2013; Luker, 2008; Miles et al., 2019).

To start with, Creswell (2013) stated that it is important to clearly discuss the instrumental and intrinsic values of any study that draws on case study approaches. As both Stake (1996) and Creswell (2013) discussed, in an instrumental case study approach, the selected group is used to understand a research issue, and in an intrinsic case study approach, the selected group has intrinsic merit. As discussed earlier, this study drew on instrumental case study approaches because the selected group was used to understand a general research issue: to obtain further insight into the understanding of student self-formation in international higher education and how this may be linked to the contributions to society. However, the selected group holds an intrinsic value as well, as they are an understudied group in international higher education literature, and they may provide insight into Turkey-related issues.

Further, an important aspect of ensuring the rigour of a qualitative study is credibility—the truth value of the research (Guba, 1981; Miles et al., 2019). It is also referred to as validity in many quantitative studies (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). To ensure credibility, I employed the methods of peer debriefing, which included consulting colleagues and my

supervisors in certain situations, and member checks, which occurred both during data collection and afterwards when necessary. I paid attention to establishing structural corroboration to make sure that coherence in the structure corroborated the credibility of the study quality. Also, the collection of participant-timeline forms, in addition to the interview data, helped with triangulation to ensure validity. As discussed earlier in the Data Analysis Procedure section, I constantly went back and forth between the interview transcriptions and life-timeline forms to double-check certain interpretations.

I also checked continuously for potential rival explanations for my interpretations to ensure credibility. This study focused on the self-formation of Turkish international higher education graduates in explaining their study abroad experiences, which is a relatively new approach. Some parts of the data could have been interpreted with adjustment (e.g. Black & Mendenhall, 1991) or acculturation (e.g. Berry, 1980) approaches. I see that these perspectives could play a role in interpreting international student experiences, but these approaches have been criticised for neglecting agency in such experiences (Volet & Jones, 2012), and, hence, do not necessarily grasp the whole picture. Focusing on self-formation in international higher education can provide a picture that has been largely understudied and underrepresented in international higher education literature.

Transferability, which is about the applicability of the findings to other contexts (Guba, 1981; Miles et al., 2019), is another significant aspect in ensuring research quality. It is also referred to as external validity in quantitative studies, but the implications may differ (Guba, 1981; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). I made several efforts to ensure the transferability of the findings so that an interested researcher could judge the applicability of the findings to their situation or context. Conducting a rigorous, purposive sampling

with a clear rationale was a part of this effort (Guba, 1981; Luker, 2008). Also, the maximum variation approach adapted for the sampling helped with the transferability of the data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), as the participants were chosen purposefully to get a balanced variation in terms of their host country, subject area, gender, and return status. Also, the inclusion of multiple country contexts contributed to the transferability of the findings, as pointed out by Merriam and Tisdell (2016).

Another aspect of ensuring the rigour of a study is confirmability, which is the neutrality of the findings (Guba, 1981; Miles et al., 2019; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). Being open about the underlying epistemological assumptions of the study is essential to ensure confirmability because it clarifies the researcher's stance to the readers (Guba, 1981). Informed by Pring's (2015) book, my epistemological stance for this study posits that we, researchers, conceive reality through socially constructed perspectives. How we understand our environment is "embodied within a language and is inherited by those who learn that language" (p. 52). We acquire certain socially developed constructions because they are made possible by certain features of reality. Holding such an epistemological stance, to understand self-formation in international higher education better, I included Turkish international higher education graduates from various backgrounds, including those who have studied in different country contexts. Also, Guba (1981) discussed the importance of external confirmability auditors to ensure that every interpretation is based on existing data. My two supervisors, for whom I am grateful, have played a significant role in improving the quality of this work, including its confirmability, by reading the work again and again and providing me with feedback about interpretations.

3.7 Language and Translation

All the data collected within the scope of this study are in Turkish. This was for two reasons. The first one is that although this study was conducted across five country contexts, the participants were all Turkish, and, thus, their mother tongue is Turkish. Also, Turkish is the mother tongue of the main researcher as well.

Birbili (2000) stated that it is crucial for social scientists who research in one language and report in another to be explicit in their decisions about the translation procedures. I decided not to translate all the transcribed data, as not all of the data are relevant to the focus of this doctoral work. In contrast, all the quotations used in the thesis were translated from Turkish to English. If a particular Turkish word or term was hard to translate, I went for conceptual equivalence, as described by Birbili (2000), and translated it into the closest English equivalent, and I provided the original Turkish version in parenthesis next to the translated one. English was used throughout the coding process, including the code descriptions. This was to facilitate communication with my supervisors.

3.8 Positionality and Reflexivity

In natural sciences, the researcher and the researched phenomena are seen as separate entities, and researcher behaviour is considered not to affect the phenomena being studied. Thus, the researcher is generally accepted to be objective in their approach, and the study is value-free (Snape & Spencer, 2003). However, when it comes to educational research, not all researchers think this approach is entirely viable. In the present study, I avoided what Pring (2000) called false dualism. This refers to the competing camps in educational research: one side supporting that “there is a one-to-one relationship between our description of reality and reality itself” (2015, p. 61) and the other side arguing that

there is no fixed reality but, instead, a socially developed consensus(es). The epistemological position of this study posits that we, researchers, conceive reality through socially constructed perspectives (Pring, 2015). We acquire certain socially developed constructions because they are made possible by certain features of reality. Holding such an epistemological stance posits that the researcher and the researched have a transactional relationship. Accordingly, how a researcher positions themselves in this transactional, co-constructed interaction plays a vital role in the research process, and, thus, reflexivity regarding this issue is essential (Creswell, 2013; Hertz, 1997; Mann, 2016; Stake, 1996).

Due to this epistemological understanding, I emphasised describing a socially-constructed reality in this study and employed an exploratory approach to do so. This is because both self-formation and perceived contributions to society are socially-constructed phenomena and can be understood best by such an approach. This approach was especially suitable for this study as self-formation theory, the main theoretical framework of the study, is a novel approach in the literature, and not much has been written about it.

Further, according to Mann (2016), reflexivity is a crucial practice in qualitative research, and clearly stating researchers' subjectivity and interests early on in the research is not adequate. He maintains that reflexivity is a continuous awareness of one's positionality in the research—a conscious thought and articulation process on how the dynamics of subjectivities may impact the research process and outcome in relation to the interviewer, interviewees, and the methodology and aims. Based on this approach, continuous effort and awareness are necessary to ensure the reflexivity and, thus, the rigour of the research.

In this research, one method for ensuring reflexivity was to be continuously aware of my possible positions or selves during the entire research cycle, which included the process of undertaking the fieldwork, data analysis, and write-up of findings. Reinharz (1997) argued that the self is a crucial research tool. She maintained that researchers possess selves that are both brought to the field and created in the field. The created self is a result of the norms of the social setting and how the research subjects interact with the selves the researcher brings to the field. Further, she proposed a framework to help researchers be reflexive regarding their positionality based on three pillars: research-based selves, brought selves, and situationally-created selves. Building on Reinharz's (1997) framework, I presumed that I had the following positionality in the eyes of my participants:

- Research-based selves: a researcher, an interviewer, a good listener, a temporary interlocutor (because most of them will probably not see me again)
- Brought selves: a Turkish person, a man, an expatriate, a PhD student, an internationally mobile student, a person in affiliation with a prestigious university, and a 24-year-old
- Situationally-created selves: a visitor in the country (when I collect data in England, Germany, Azerbaijan, and Bulgaria)

I made an effort to keep myself aware of these possible positions throughout the fieldwork, analysis, and the rest of the study and to constantly be critical about how these might affect the research outcomes.

Moreover, Mann (2016) argued that the context is also an important issue that researchers need to be aware of. According to him, the researcher should be aware of what kinds of meanings the place (such as home, workplace, or café) has for the participant and the

cultural relation and norms between the interviewer and the participant. Thus, throughout the research, I consciously evaluated what implications the context might have for the interviews and research results.

I also took Mann's (2016) advice and kept a reflexive diary of my concerns, decisions, and choices. This way, I hoped to build better sensitivity to bias, interactive behaviours, and subjectivities. This reflexive diary includes information about my reflections on how the fieldwork was going and my developing thoughts during data transcription. The information I recorded in my reflexive diary during the fieldwork included details about where the interviews took place, the power dynamics related to the location (e.g., the participant's office), the time of the day, and how I was feeling before or after interviews (e.g., if I was tired). I also jotted down my quick impressions about the participant and the interview right after interview meetings. It was important to keep a reflexive diary during the transcription process as well. The transcription process was long and tiring; I did not want to lose or forget the insights and opinions I developed while transcribing because I could not start coding at that time yet. I wrote all these developing thoughts into my diary. I also jotted down my thoughts regarding my positionality and transactional relationship with the participants as I transcribed the interview data. I realised that, as human beings, researchers might sometimes miss some of the social cues during the actual discussion, but these may be spotted later while listening to the audio recordings.

I realised that the quality of the interviews got better as I progressed with my fieldwork. For example, in the earlier interviews, I was summarising what the participants were saying rather than asking and probing them so that they would summarise these when necessary. More than a few times, the participants approved my summary of their

answers with short affirmations. I may not be able to quote these summaries in the thesis, as I am the one who uttered them instead of the participants. Also, I noticed I had a more leading language earlier in the fieldwork. I improved as the fieldwork progressed and started using less and less leading language in the interviews.

In addition, I realised during the fieldwork that I was encountering different political positions among study participants in different country contexts. This was not unexpected as the country selection was carried out in such a way to reflect the most variation among the top ten destination countries for Turkish students. Although I cannot claim that everyone unanimously fits well into this observation, I can say that I encountered more mentions of the word "Ottoman" in Bulgaria (e.g., a participant discussed how the Ottoman history was portrayed differently back home than the portrayal in his Bulgarian girlfriend's history book), more pro-Turanianistic mentions in Azerbaijan (e.g., participants mentioned the brotherhood between Turkic nations, including Azerbaijan, Turkey, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and others, multiple times), more critical perspectives to the current administration of Turkey in Germany, and mostly either apolitical stances or critical stances to the current administration of Turkey among the interviews in the UK. This, once again, affirmed my philosophical stance that our perception of reality is socially constructed. In such different contexts with different political stances, I made an effort to keep a politically neutral position and did not convey my political ideas.

The reflexive account provided here should be evaluated with Mann's (2016) suggestion that reflexivity is not something done retrospectively after the research is conducted; rather, it is something that a researcher should be aware of when preparing for and

undertaking the whole research process, including the fieldwork, data analysis, and write-up of findings.

3.9 Ethical Considerations

The ethical guidelines of the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2018) guided every stage of this study, including the designing stage, the implementation phase, and the analysis processes. Also, Oxford University's Central University Research Ethics Committee (CUREC) approval was obtained. The approval was granted on April 3, 2018 (see Appendix A), before the start of the fieldwork.

As the researcher, I made sure to explain the purposes of the study in detail before conducting each interview so that the participants were aware of the research objectives. I reassured them that the research was conducted purely for academic purposes. It was important to ensure that the participants understood that the research did not have any political agenda or any potential harm to them. Before each interview, I also explained where my funding came from, which was also included in the participant information sheet. This was important as one of the earlier participants was interested in why the name of my doctoral study funder had the word "Islamic" in it (Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies) and implied that he would not want to take part if the study was related to some aspect of Islam. After explaining that the main focus of the study was international higher education and that it did not intend to research any aspect related to Islam, the participant agreed to take part in the study with no further hesitation.

The treatment of sensitive information is an issue of ethical importance. During the fieldwork in Bulgaria, a participant started talking about his sexual orientation in the middle of the interview. Till that point during the interview, I sensed that he was not telling me the whole story, as he sometimes quickly skipped answering some of my

questions and avoided providing examples to my probes. However, I kept the interview going as normal. Before we reached the midpoint of the interview, he opened up about this sensitive information, saying that I looked like a “good” and “trustable” person. I treated the sensitive information he shared with respect and reassured him that everything he said during the interview was to be kept confidential. I made sure that the interview continued as normal.

The civic aspect of student self-formation and contributions to their home country was another sensitive issue in these interviews. Some participants revealed their political stances while talking about these issues. Whenever a participant chose to do so, I treated their opinion respectfully and reassured them that everything they said during the interview was to be kept confidential. The study was not intended to trigger any political discussion, and none of the questions included in the interview involved statements pointing towards any specific group of people.

I emphasised before each interview that the participant could stop the interview at any point and leave the study if they changed their mind during the interview. I tried to keep the interviews as short as possible to minimise the burdens on participants.

All possible steps to ensure the confidentiality of the data were taken. The anonymity of the participants was protected. Pseudonyms were used for all the participants when reporting the findings. Also, sharing any information that may reveal participant identity was avoided. The same procedure will apply to any potential publication to follow. The collected data were only used for research purposes. All the collected data, including interview voice recordings and transcriptions, are kept in a password-protected personal computer, to which no other person has access.

Briefly, the ethical guidelines provided by BERA (2018) and Oxford University's CUREC were strictly followed in this study. Following ethical guidelines contributed to the rigour of the study in several ways. For instance, providing an information sheet beforehand helped participants know what they were stepping into. Being open about the research purposes and transparent throughout the research procedures helped clear the hesitations some of the participants had in their minds. Also, explaining and emphasising the confidentiality of the collected data to the participants and telling them that they could leave the interview at any time they wanted helped built trust. This way, as the examples indicated, participants may have talked more openly.

3.10 Chapter Summary

This chapter explained the methodological aspects of this doctoral work in a detailed manner. It dwelled on how the international-comparative perspective was executed in combination with an exploratory, qualitative case study approach. It also delineated the compatibility of the overall exploratory, international-comparative approach with the epistemological commitments of the study—which opposed a single and external truth, and instead, argued for socially developed constructions that are made possible by certain features of reality. The chapter also discussed how a biographical approach in the data collection methods (i.e., semi-structured interviews and life timelines) helped with the collection of data about self-formation in international higher education, which has a temporal dimension.

Including fieldwork trips in multiple country contexts, this study necessitated rigorous planning at every stage of its data collection. Several decisions had to be made using various criteria in the planning and executing of the data collection, which ranged from

participant recruitment before the fieldwork trips to the general and country-specific procedures. These are all clearly explained in this chapter.

There were limitations to the methodological approach of this study as well. The limitations that arose from the realities of the fieldwork trips were discussed within the chapter, for example, the use of LinkedIn for participant recruitment. The broader methodological limitations are discussed under the Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research section of the Discussion chapter to prevent potential repetitions.

Chapter 4: International Higher Education and Student Self-Formation

This chapter sets out the findings relating to the first research question of this study, which was how Turkish young adults who completed their degrees abroad explained their self-formation in international higher education. The thematic analysis of the 50 interviews and life-timeline forms collected from participants across five countries indicated that self-formation experiences in international higher education could be categorised into three discrete domains. The word "domain" stands for spheres of knowledge, influence, or activity. These three domains are the educational domain, the social domain, and the civic domain. These three domains are not exhaustive but are some of the significant domains that emerged from the findings. I dwell on each of these domains under their respective sections below before summarising the chapter.

4.1 The Educational Domain of Self-Formation in International Higher Education

This section sets out the educational domain of student self-formation in international higher education. The educational domain deals with how the skills, knowledge, and qualifications obtained during international higher education may stimulate student self-formation. When considering that self-formation is about the holistic development of the individuals who work on improving themselves, this domain surfaces as an important and relevant part of a bigger and more holistic picture (cf. Chankseliani et al., 2020). In doing so, this section does not focus on end result qualifications or graduate attributes, as this would be a separate research enquiry, but on the self-formation journey of the participants within the domain of skills and knowledge obtained in international higher education. Below, I report the findings under emerging analytical themes. I also refer to

the ecological-agency approach to understanding self-formation employed by this study (which suggests three dimensions for self-formation in international education: the individual/actor, context, and temporality) within these themes.

4.1.1 International Higher Education as a Milestone in One's Life Trajectory

Self-formation may take place in many parts of an individual's life trajectory. However, higher education, especially international higher education, experience holds a special place in an individual's life trajectory. Students go through a dense period of self-formation in a compressed period of time, as also argued by Marginson (2014, 2018). All the participant interviews of this study confirmed that international higher education is a milestone or a turning point in one's life trajectory. Quotations and life-timeline forms are shared in this section to unpack this argument. To illustrate, Atakan dwelled on how critical higher education is in a person's life trajectory by placing higher education at the centre of a person's life. He referred to higher education as a turning point that separates what happened before from afterwards, as can be seen in the excerpt below:

> There are two or three turning points in one's life. . . . The university, the department you chose, the course you've taken at your department, the education you've received, . . . and all the knowledge you've acquired, that's what drives your real life. I mean, going to university is your first step into real life. . . . because university is actually the middle of one's life [not literary, but to express its importance]. *Atakan, Azerbaijan*

The description of university as being "in the middle of one's life" does not necessarily mean that it takes place literally in the middle of an individual's life course. Rather, it expresses an emphasis on the central role of higher education in an individual's life. It also implies that there are important stages for before and after higher education, which draws attention to the temporality dimension.

Later on during his interview, Atakan continued discussing the importance of self-formation while in university. He compared the self-formation process before higher education to a foundation of a building and the process of self-formation during higher education to the bricks and mortar used to construct that building. And what comes afterwards is succinctly put by himself: “Then you see a house. That house is your university. And it becomes your life; you live in that life.” These remarks compared an individual forming themselves to that of a foreman carefully building a house, step by step within the flow of time. These remarks echo well with this study’s agency perspective detailed in the literature review chapter, which argued that self-formation does not happen overnight; there is a temporality dimension to it through which an individual works on forming and cultivating themself.

Yasar, below, also supported Atakan’s remarks regarding higher education being a significant milestone in one’s life. He distinguished higher education from all the things happening before it, emphasizing that it is the first truly free environment where people can genuinely start becoming different:

> Higher education is a much freer environment than any other environment before it. You can't even decide for yourself how to dress in high school. It's the first place you start to differentiate. From the choice of profession to the choice of social activity, the cafes you go to . . . people don’t usually make decisions like these in high school. All these decisions lead people’s lives toward different interactions and environments. *Yasar, UK*

Above, higher education is discussed as an environment that is much freer than anything that precedes it (primary school, middle school, etc.), as a result it triggers self-formation. The emphasis on freedom and students subjectifying or becoming unique resonates well

with the theory of self-formation in higher education, as previously discussed in the literature review.

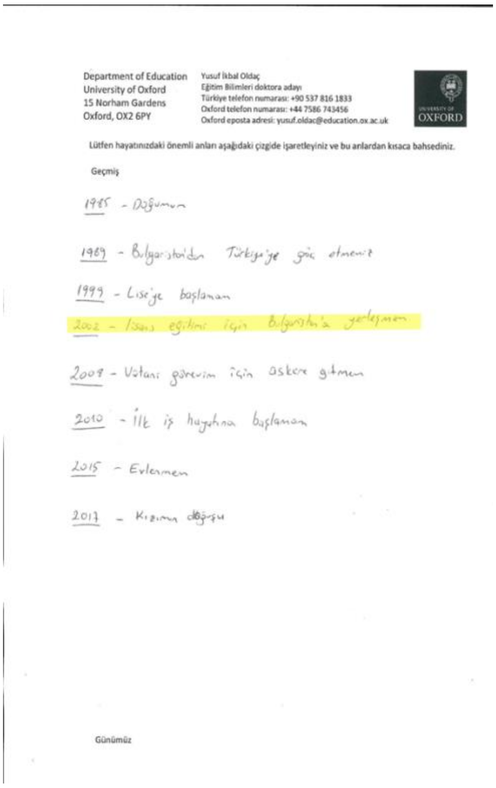
The university's important role in an individual's life and the environment it provides, which is conducive to self-formation, was highlighted numerous times during participant interviews. Another example of this is the quotation below from Koray. He drew attention to the conducive environments in universities that play a significant role in forming one's character and developing a stance towards life:

> A person can take classes and learn from them. But classes are not everything. You have to form your character. You have to develop your stance towards life. The development of some things is related to the person and their surroundings and network. *Koray, Azerbaijan*

In addition to participant quotations, this study also made use of participant-drawn, life-timeline forms for data collection, as explained in the methodology chapter. The collected life-timeline forms also supported the idea that higher education, and specifically international higher education, plays an influential role in one's life. In these forms, it can be observed that higher education is related to what happens before, and it shapes what comes afterwards. Although there was only one open-ended instruction on these forms (i.e., "please mark the important moments in your life on the line below and explain them briefly"), all participants included international higher education and other higher education experiences as important milestones in their life trajectories, along with other milestones such as marriage and birth of a baby. How detailed or quick the participants prepared these forms did not matter in this. Below, three sample life-timeline forms with higher education experiences highlighted on them are shared in Figure 4.1. One of them is provided with an English translation, and the two others demonstrate how the forms varied in terms of details.

Figure 4.1.

Sample life-timeline forms with higher education experiences highlighted. One with English translation and two others to show how they varied in terms of details



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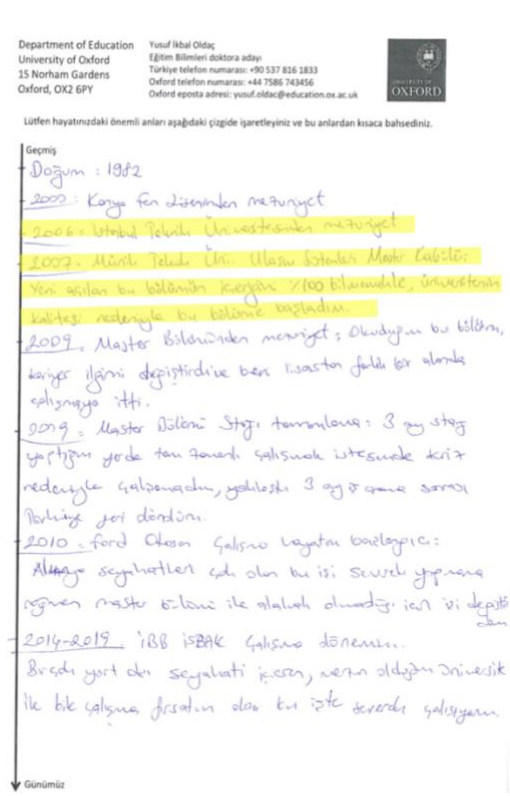
Lütfen hayatınızdaki önemli anları aşağıdaki çizgide işaretleyiniz ve bu anlardan kısaca bahsediniz.

Geçmiş

1985 – Doğumum
1989 – Bulgaristan'dan Türkiye'ye göç etmemiz
1999 – Liseye başlamam
2002 – Lisans eğitimi için Bulgaristan'a yerleşmem
2009 – Vatani görevim için askere gitmem
2010 – İlk iş hayatıma başlamam
2015 – Evlenmem
2017 – Kızımın doğuşu

Günümüz

Translation of the form on the left
1985 – My birth year
1989 – We move from Bulgaria to Turkey
1999 – I start high school
2002 – Going to Bulgaria for undergraduate education
2009 – Joining the military for my army service
2010 – Starting my work life
2015 – Getting married
2017 – The birth of my daughter



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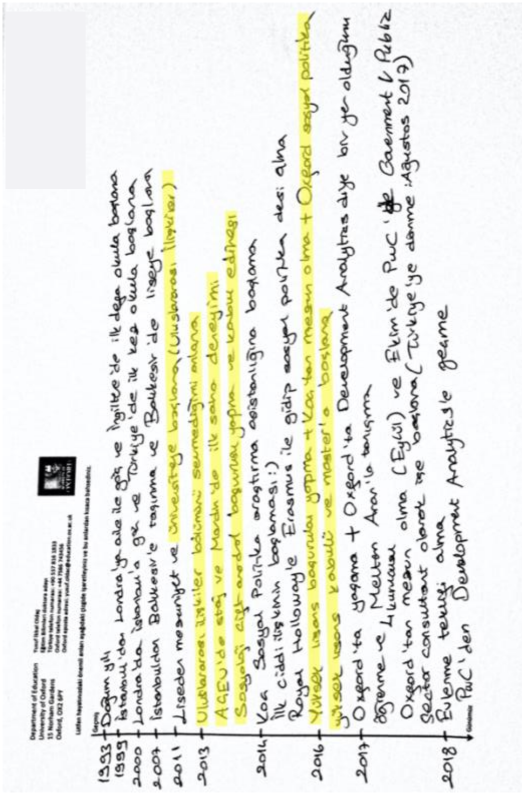
Lütfen hayatınızdaki önemli anları aşağıdaki çizgide işaretleyiniz ve bu anlardan kısaca bahsediniz.

Geçmiş

Doğum : 1982

Günümüz



4.1.2 Self-Formation that Became Possible through International Higher Education

How does studying abroad work for one's self-improvement? Is there a difference between self-formation that takes place in international higher education and higher education at home? If so, how? Most of the participants discussed how they had a chance to form themselves in international higher education that would otherwise not have been possible if they had studied in their home country. This means that international higher education experience may provide opportunities and potentialities beyond what may be achieved at home, indicating a more substantial self-formation process for international higher education experience. To illustrate, Derya, below, reflected that her main formation process has been on free thought and delineated how this process was possible in her international education:

> I think the main development came from being allowed to think freely. Especially at the place where I am is very good at making us feel like, "You think. We give you all the recourses and opportunities for it." Free thinking is challenging anyway. It is about how hard you push yourself. *Derya, Germany*

Notice, in the quotation above, Derya's emphasis on personal effort and the challenging nature of working on herself for such a formation process. In this process, university education seems to play the facilitator role that provides potentially necessary recourses. Derya continued her quotation above and made a remark about her scientific and academic development in her international higher education experience:

> Of course, I've evolved scientifically. I've learned a lot of things, but maybe you can learn about these at home too . . . I think the important thing is that you learn about how you're going to produce ideas. *Derya, Germany*

Derya distinguished her scientific and academic development from the rest by arguing that the former could have happened at home as well. This indicates that she thinks her

self-formation regarding free thought is a fruit of her higher education study in Germany. This echoes well with this study's agency perspective detailed in the Literature Review chapter, which sees context as an influential dimension in self-formation.

Onur drew attention to learning about the host country population's particular ways of thinking. Onur reflected that he became someone who could understand how a phenomenon may be perceived differently by different groups of people with different turns of mind while accepting that someone who has not studied abroad may not be able to do this:

> You have to learn the mentality of that country, which can give you an advantage. . . . Think about this as a mountain. Now you're looking at it from here, and I'm looking at it from over here . . . I think my point of view is different. . . . For example, you're here, and you don't see this side. But I see both sides, and I say, "Yusuf, there's a lake behind that mountain and there's snow on top." *Onur, Bulgaria*

Toprak studied his degree in Bulgaria, a country that has recently joined the European Union. Because of its relatively recent member state status to the Union, Bulgaria has devoted plenty of resources for studying European Union integration, as Toprak indicated elsewhere in his interview. Toprak reflected that he was able to take advantage of this situation and became an expert on European studies:

> Since I was in the European Union at that time, I thought I should do something. I registered for and took two or three EU-related certifications. There's a Horizon 2020 project on EU projects. Because of this, I learned about what they called an instrument project management system. I care a lot about such [personal improvement] efforts. And I don't mind if they are expensive. *Toprak, Bulgaria*

The excerpts such as the ones above show how the context dimension may play out in self-formation in international higher education. Becoming an expert on such an issue would not be as easy if Toprak studied in, for example, Azerbaijan or Turkey.

In addition, self-formation is a highly self-directed effort, and how individuals form themselves is related to their area of interests. For example, Fatih, who studied electrical engineering, explained during the interview that his biggest dream was to learn how a microchip was produced. Lucky for him, the city in which he was studying hosted the world's largest microchip production factory, as he explained below:

> How does this information get into these microchips? It was my greatest curiosity. . . . I realised Munich hosts the world's largest microchip manufacturing factory, which produces microchips for Nokia, etc. And they recruit students. I said, "Okay, this is my dream! I need to see this factory." I applied. They accepted. *Fatih, Germany*

Fatih maintained later in his interview that not only was he able to work in the world's biggest microchip producing factory during his international higher education study, but he continued working on his self-formation by signing up for a training programme provided by his university:

> But that didn't satisfy me. I took microchip production courses at the Technical University of Munich—a lot of them. . . . The people at Siemens were taking these same courses for 2,500 euros per hour. . . . I learned three programming languages outside the university. I took private lessons on mechatronics for my personal development. *Fatih, Germany*

Here we see a person (Fatih) who had no idea about how microchips were produced before studying abroad (temporality dimension) but got to become an expert on microchips thanks to his study in Munich, a great place to learn about microchips (context dimension). Fatih's self-formation during his study in Munich seems to have opened up

new opportunities for him, as he is now the CEO of a health technology company in his home country, Turkey.

Berke also discussed how he was able to work on his improvement and achieve things in Azerbaijan that would not have been possible to achieve back home:

> By studying in Azerbaijan, you can achieve things that you wouldn't be able to achieve in Turkey. Why? Because if you go to an English language course in Turkey, you'll have to pay at least 10,000 liras, . . . but here, we went to a very professional, . . . 2.5-months course for 500 liras. Or a CISCO course was around 10 to 12,000 liras at that time in Turkey. In Azerbaijan, we took this course for 600 liras. *Berke, Azerbaijan*

Berke's discussion on the prices of the training programmes he attended was not limited to this quotation only. This is because these price differences played a significant role in his life trajectory. Berke opened up to me and explained that he came from a lower-middle-income family and that his parents sold their house so that he could study for his degree. Thus, studying in a relatively cheaper country (context dimension) was a game-changer for him. He had been a poor boy who did not have the qualifications or knowledge to sustain himself before his mobility. However, thanks to his immense work on self-formation during his international higher education experience coupled with the cheaper and more accessible education in Azerbaijan for Turkish people, he became a wealthy businessman (temporality dimension). He not only bought his family a new house but also runs a large multi-million dollar business in Azerbaijan now.

4.1.3 Broadening the Space of Possibles for Self through Signalling

The majority of participants argued for a "you'll have a better future when you study abroad" understanding (*Toprak, Bulgaria*). Studying abroad is seen as a way to broaden the "space of possibles" (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 30) for the self, as argued by Marginson

(2014). Relevant to this study's ecological perspective on agency for self-formation, the major decision by an individual to alter the country context of where their higher education experience would take place seems to have an immense influence on their self-formation process.

Broadening the "space of possibles" through altering the country context seems to be associated with the signalling value that comes with it, as close to half of all participants talked about it. For example, Defne shared her reflection that, while the importance of high-quality programmes should not be dismissed, the main reason behind her study abroad was to be able to say that she studied in Germany or the UK:

> I'm sure there are some good programmes like, "I went and learned amazing things," etc. But, at least to my humble observation, it's more about being able to say, "I studied in Germany." . . . Most people seem to be going abroad to be able to say that "I studied in Germany" or "I studied in England," etc. *Defne, Germany*

Being a graduate of a higher education degree programme in Germany or the UK seems to open up new potentialities for navigating life back in one's home country, and potentially in other parts of the world (i.e., the host country, or a third country). This becomes more evident with the following quotation by Hasan:

> I was 32 years old when I started my own law firm in Turkey. I'm competing with lawyers who are in their 50s and 60s, who've done this for years. What sets me apart is that I am an Oxford graduate. How can a person who doesn't know you at all understand that you know the law well?—where you graduated from. . . . Of course, I cared about improving myself and the education quality, but I also came to get this diploma as an investment in my own business for the future. *Hasan, UK*

This excerpt supports how one may gain opportunities and potentialities through international higher education, helping them choose a life that is productive and meaningful. Hasan's interview also implied that studying at a prestigious institution may be crème de la crème, opening up new potentialities for individuals and expanding their freedoms.

Participant reflections suggested that broadening the space of possibles does not work the same in all country contexts. The level of opportunities obtained by graduating from a higher education institution abroad is not equally distributed. Koray's reflection, may shed some light on this:

> It depends on which country's diploma we are talking about. For example, I am Turkish. If the overseas diploma we are talking about is from Azerbaijan, I mean, . . . I know the quality of the education there. . . . It does not excite me much. But if my diploma was, say, from Oxford or Cambridge, that would be a bit different. *Koray, Azerbaijan*

Koray's reflection indicates that not all degrees obtained abroad provide the same level of freedom expansion, in navigating life after graduation, be it in one's home country or a third country. Toprak, below, also reflected on this issue:

> My preference is for a better-quality education . . . I mean I am not sure if studying in Bulgaria is a plus point . . . not for me. . . . No one asks which university you studied at or what you studied when you say you studied in the UK or the US. They would say he is a well-read person. But I don't know if studying in Bulgaria is the same. *Toprak, Bulgaria*

Toprak reflected that the quality of his education is more important to him, as his study abroad experience in Bulgaria does not seem to mean much as a signalling value to others. In fact, other participants, such as Polat and Onur, explained that studying in Bulgaria

hindered their potentialities back home since the Council of Higher Education in Turkey no longer nostrificates the degrees awarded in Bulgaria.

4.1.4 The Guiding Role of the University for Self-Forming Students

When looked at from a self-formation perspective, a university education is increasingly a guiding experience for agentic, self-directioning students. The majority of the participants said that the purpose of universities goes beyond the pragmatic approach in which students are educated for the job market. The participants indicated that their universities guided them in regards to the things they wanted to achieve or be knowledgeable about. The guiding role of universities is congruent with self-formation theory as the participants consistently emphasised their active agency in this process. Only the learner does the actual learning. Logically, the guidance role would not work with passive receivers/adjusters. Ebrar further explained this:

> Nowadays, . . . university departments no longer train you to perform a predetermined professional line of work. Nowadays, they educate you so that you find your own path and try things. With such events and networking opportunities, etc., the university lets you work on whatever interests you. It helps you find your direction. *Ebrar, Germany*

As can be seen, Ebrar disagrees with the understanding of a university as a place for preparation for work life but sees it as a place for finding one's path. Higher education institutions are places where students lead their own paths and the institution's role is to facilitate this by providing opportunities and guidance.

Another participant, Elif, explained how this guiding role might work with a hypothetical example. She started by presenting a hypothetical student: "Let's say you wanted to specialise in something. Let's say you decided on becoming an engineer." She continued:

"I am sure you will be in doubt about where to start and what action to take. It is a bit difficult to draw a road map for yourself about something you never knew about." Then she went on to explain the role of a university for this hypothetical self-forming student who does not know where to start:

> I think universities are there for this. You get an education from people who are well-knowledgeable about topics that've been discussed for a while. The university also allows you to improve yourself. For example, a library for lawyers or a laboratory for engineers or opportunities for working at a hospital for a medical assistant. *Elif, Germany*

The specific mention of the opportunities universities provide for self-improvement is important in understanding the role of universities for self-forming students. Although there are other activities going on in universities, such as teaching and homework, multiple participants talked about the opportunities offered to students who could pick and choose from them for their self-formation. Canberk, below, called this the "trial and error" environment that universities provide, in which an individual tries new things to see if they are true, through which they broaden their horizons:

> Universities are actually like guides. They give you a direction. It's a trial-and-error environment that you enter. You read stuff about a certain area, try things, and use your agency. This is a good thing; it broadens your horizons. *Canberk, Azerbaijan*

This trial and error environment, the way Canberk explained in his interview, takes place under a guiding university that can help students not to worry if they err. This perspective implies that the costs of making a mistake may be higher in life after graduating from a university, which points out the importance of agency and self-formation during higher education.

Berke drew attention to how the students may self-direct themselves in this trial and error environment that lets students actively self-form. He explained how they do this by setting goals for themselves to ensure self-improvement in the right direction that is congruent with what a student wants to do with their life:

> You have to make a transition. You need to decide, let's say, . . . if I want to work at a bank. What do I need to know? I need this certificate from Cisco. Also, I may need to work in these companies for free in my third or fourth years at university to ensure this. I mean you can make the transition, but it's all about what you want. How much is enough for you? *Berke, Azerbaijan*

These last two sentences are especially relevant for self-formation theory: "but it's all about what you want. How much is enough for you?" These come after he reflects on what investment in oneself might be necessary for specific goals. These two questions directed towards the self show that it is the student that does the learning: they decide what to learn and how much depending on what they want from life. This is one of the main ideas behind student self-formation in higher education.

Omer clarified how higher education might help with the transition process that Berke, above, discussed. Omer drew attention to how the universities may help a student transition into the professional world by connecting them with those who are already in the professional world and by helping them gain self-confidence through those connections:

> It [university] gave me an opportunity to work in the professional world, for example. I met professionals through university. I had a chance to work with them in some way. Then the contacts and experience and self-confidence I obtained there helped me in the professional world. For example, I might not have even known about that job post for [students] if they hadn't e-mailed me. *Omer, UK*

An important point here is, again, that it is the student who self-forms, taking advantage of the opportunities provided by the university. The university is a guide and facilitator in this socialisation process, as in the socialisation understanding proposed by Biesta (2009, 2020).

4.1.5 Contextual Differences in the Approach to Learning

There is recent developing attention on the relationship between academic knowledge and student self-formation (e.g., Ashwin, 2020a; S. Lee, 2020). Related to this, the findings of this international comparative study indicated that the nature of education and the philosophical understanding held about higher education does not seem to be the same in every context. As the above-mentioned, in-progress studies also investigated, different natures of academic learning might lead to different paths for self-formation. The data I share here are not to be treated as conclusive for generalisation but as observations that indicate potential differences in the approaches to learning and teaching in various higher education contexts. To start with, Alpaslan discussed the nature of education in Germany and compared it with that of Turkey:

> I noticed this distinction after going abroad for my masters. What we call education and teaching in Turkey is—it'll be an interesting wording but—spoon-feeding students with information. But after I went to Germany, I realised that university is not a place that teaches information to people but a place that teaches how to evaluate/utilise information. . . . University is actually a place that teaches reasoning. *Alpaslan, Germany*

Notice how he implied that the university education understanding in Germany is about educating people to become more autonomous learners; they teach how to reason and judge knowledge, as compared to the focus of teaching in Turkey. This understanding in Germany is parallel to the Bildung understanding discussed in the Literature Review

section (e.g. Biesta, 2002a; Kivela, 2012), which has its roots in Germanic traditions. Fatih, who also studied in Germany, lent support to Alpaslan's comments:

> Germany taught me how to learn. . . . They never teach anything. They give you the arguments. This and this are the sources, play with them. They guide you. In the advanced stages, they won't even guide you. Figure it out yourself, just like that. *Fatih, Germany*

In support of these comments, Omer, who studied in the UK, also provided similar remarks. He compared a university education in the UK to that in Turkey:

> [In Turkey], for example, if you went to study animation, they would have you sit down and learn. And you become an animation artist after four years. I mean, they will teach you how to draw, teach you how to hold a pen, and stuff like that. But it's not like that here. Here you really have to make an effort yourself to learn these. *Omer, UK*

Omer further continued in the interview to provide more information about the nature of the higher education he encountered in the UK.

> They don't teach much. They don't give you much technical information. This is why some people complain about it. They let you loose a lot in university here. "Take care of yourself." There's this logic that "we're already teaching you to survive in the field anyway." . . . They teach you to stand on your own feet. *Omer, UK*

By contrast, Canberk compared the approach to higher education in Azerbaijan with his perception of Europe. His emphasis on the focus on the instrumental approach in Azerbaijan (e.g., getting a degree for potential earnings afterwards) versus the prioritisation of learning itself in what he perceives to occur in Europe is interesting:

> In Europe, it's more like "let me learn first; I'll find out how it will be of use later." It's the opposite for us. We learn to obtain benefits and to make money.

> That's why there are a lot of people studying sociology, philosophy, or theatrical education, etc. in Europe. He is doing it for the fun of it. He doesn't have to think too much about it. But a person here says, "If I study this, I will make this much." *Canberk, Azerbaijan*

As can be seen, Canberk implied a mechanistic approach for higher education in Azerbaijan, in which students focus on what they can get afterwards, and learning becomes a means for an end. By contrast, learning and self-formation is the end in itself in his perception of education in Europe. Sarp, who also studied in Azerbaijan, supported Canberk's reflection above. Sarp mostly talked about "raising" individuals who would become "useful" for the nation and the world in general:

> University educates everyone, everyone goes through it and begins to work afterwards. It would be beneficial on behalf of the country, the nation, or the world overall if a good or knowledgeable individual were educated there. . . . This applies to university teachers or any other [teacher]; if they want to educate a good individual, then they can. . . . I mean the educator needs to be good so that a good individual can be raised. *Sarp, Azerbaijan.*

Sarp's quotation above did not include much about learners and mostly focused on teaching and teachers. This perspective about learning at higher education institutions indicates a hierarchical nature of education in which students are perceived as learners/receivers, which implies a deficit model for students in higher education. This is further supported by Melis, who also studied in Azerbaijan. Below, she shared her experiences as part of her university education in Azerbaijan:

> They even checked the notes you kept during classes. Were you taking notes or not? . . . We were getting points from that, too. Also, there was no concept of being absent. If you were not present at a total of 50 classes, you would automatically be kicked out. *Melis, Azerbaijan*

As can be seen above, Melis's quotation put forward that it is more about teaching and making sure that students take notes and attend the classes in this particular context and not much about being an autonomous learner.

International higher education experiences may differ from person to person. No claims of generalisation can be made here due to the nature of the data. However, there may be a potential pattern here that requires further scrutiny. Those participants who studied in western contexts (i.e., Germany, the UK) seem to draw attention to becoming autonomous learners. In contrast, those who studied in Azerbaijan seem to draw attention to teaching and to students as receivers.

4.1.6 Socialising into the New Language and Communication Dynamics

When an individual goes abroad for studying, they insert themself into a new context that has a different language and different communication dynamics. It often requires a great deal of personal effort to become accustomed to (or what Biesta (2009) terms, socialise into) this new communication ecosystem. The overwhelming majority of participants discussed the difficulties they encountered in the novel communication ecosystems in which they found themselves when they went abroad for international higher education. It should be noted that the focus in this section is not on the new languages international higher education graduates acquired—which would be more suited to graduate attributes literature. Learning a new language has a profound impact on an individual's self-formation. It is more than just a new tool for communication and often comes after immense work on the self. This excerpt from Ebrar's interview, below, shed some light on this:

> Going abroad to study in a different language changes things in the brain. I mean, your way of thinking changes, the way you express yourself changes,

> even what you stress changes. I think this has added something to me with regards to the way I think. *Ebrar, Germany*

Ebrar implies that learning a new language rewires how an individual thinks and expresses themself in compatible ways with the culture of the host society. It is more than just translating whichever words an individual would use in their native language into the new language they learn. Ebrar's reflections become even more meaningful when considering that she expressed elsewhere during the interview that she already knew the German language before her mobility. Her life-timeline form also indicated that she attended a German-medium-instruction high school in Turkey beforehand. It seems that it is the process of socialisation into the communication ecosystem embedded within the host culture that makes the difference. This idea is supported by Fatih, who said that the more he grasped the host culture, the better he understood what his German network intended to say:

> The more I socialised in their culture, the better I understood their puns and humour. I started understanding everything. . . . You also understand better what they mean in a particular context. You understand the ironies, too, because when you first arrive, you don't even speak the language, how could you understand ironies? *Fatih, Germany*

The impetus to work on one's communications skills starts early in an international higher education experience. One of the early things that occurs when someone goes abroad is that they become more aware of the inadequacy of their language and communication skills in a multilingual world. This is how Koray decided to learn languages that are "globally valid":

> When you go abroad, the main language you use is not your native language. It must be a language that is used worldwide, and the people of the world need to be aware of that language, like English. Thus, I started to realise that my English

> was inadequate. That's why I started developing my English. Afterwards, I started to develop my second, local language, Azerbaijani. Also, I learned Russian for the same purposes too. *Koray, Azerbaijan*

Context plays a role in the language and communication ecosystem an individual chooses to work on, which echoes well with the ecological perspective for the understanding of self-formation this study adopted. To Koray, who studied in Azerbaijan, Russian was an important language that had global validity, and he put in an effort to learn Russian in addition to the Azerbaijani language. By contrast, for Fatih and Ebrar, it was the German language.

Studying abroad and socialising in a new communication system has a temporality dimension as well. Although some of the participants knew the local language of the host country before they moved there to study, they all ended up forming themselves further into the cultural dynamics and transforming the way they expressed themselves as indicated above. This process naturally requires a period of time, which may lead to stark differences between what a person was like before their mobility and the results of their self-formation after graduation, as discussed by Emir below:

> I had international conversations in Turkey, too, but here [Azerbaijan] you end up having to speak English or Russian more in some places. In terms of speaking, there's a huge difference between the old Emir and the current Emir. I could only communicate on paper before, for example, through writing and reading books. *Emir, Azerbaijan*

As can be seen, he compared the "old Emir" versus the "new Emir" to describe the transformative experience he had been through during his international higher education experience. He seemed to be aware of the self-transformations he has accomplished during his international higher education experience regarding language and communication dynamics.

4.1.7 Section Summary

This chapter has reported the findings related to the educational domain of self-formation in international higher education, which is related to the first research question of the study (i.e., international higher education and individual self-formation). As introduced earlier, the educational domain deals with how the skills and knowledge obtained during international higher education experience stimulate self-formation. The findings have been presented under emerging analytical themes.

The study findings suggested a number of points. To start with, the data indicated that international higher education plays a major role in one's life trajectory, supporting Marginson's argument that international higher education students "undergo substantial changes in compressed time periods" (2018, p. 3). Participants tended to separate their life trajectories into before their international higher education experience and after their graduation, placing higher education as one of the milestones in their lives, like marriage or the birth of their child. The visual life-timeline forms strengthened this argument.

A premise of student self-formation is that it can take place in one's home country as well. However, the findings of this study propose that thanks to their international higher education, individuals can access and achieve things that would not otherwise be possible if they stayed in their home country. These increased opportunities and potentials obtained through international higher education may further support the expansion of freedom and may broaden the space of possibles in which participants can achieve more. By contrast, the potential for broadening the space of possibles is not equally distributed. It is very dependent on the country context studied and the signalling value that comes with it. While a prestigious university in the United Kingdom or Germany can make a big difference in altering the potentials for self-forming individuals, even the most

prestigious universities in Azerbaijan and Bulgaria may not be as strong in supporting this.

Also, the role of a university education from a self-forming individual's perspective seems to be that of a guiding one. This is not to claim an exhaustive role for universities but is to simply argue that this function of universities seems to come to the forefront among their other potential functions when student self-formation is being discussed. According to the collected data, universities serve more than just the pragmatic purpose of preparing students for the job market, but they also provide them with an environment that is reportedly safer for making mistakes. The combination of all the events taking place within a university (e.g., seminars, classes, or networking events), with this environment that is reportedly safer for trial and error, helps guide self-forming students in regards to the things they want to achieve or be knowledgeable about (or even to make them aware of things that they did not know they were interested in). The guiding role of universities is congruent with self-formation theory, as the participants consistently emphasised their active agency in this process. Only the learner does the actual learning. Logically, the guidance role would not work with passive receivers/adjusters.

Further, the study findings revealed potential contextual differences in the approach to learning in different country contexts. These differences, although not possible to generalise given the nature of the data, shed some light on a potential pattern of difference in the philosophical approach to teaching and learning in higher education. Self-formation and the nature of academic learning may potentially hold a significant relationship and are recently under scrutiny by esteemed colleagues (e.g., Ashwin, 2020a; S. Lee, 2020). The participant interviews seem to indicate more Bildung-like learning in the UK and Germany contexts, which focuses on becoming an autonomous learner.

However, by contrast, those who studied in Azerbaijan seem to focus mostly on the teaching at a university and students as receivers.

Also, learning a new language is seen as an investment in oneself in any human-capital approach. However, this study focused on its potential implications for self-formation. The interview data suggest that learning the language of a host country is not just about obtaining a new tool to communicate with the local population but is rather a process that requires substantial work on the self to socialise into the new communication ecosystem of that country. Learning a new language has a profound impact on an individual's self-formation in that they rewire the way they think and change how they express themself due to the cultural differences in expression.

Lastly, the findings indicate that no dimensions of the ecological perspective of agency could be downplayed when examining self-formation in international higher education. An individual's personal efforts in forming oneself always play out in relation to their context (conceptualised as the country context, in this study) and temporality (conceptualised as before/during/after international student mobility, in this study). Self-formation is a process that inherently requires a time period and interaction with the context by an active, agentic individual.

4.2 The Social Domain of Self-Formation in International Higher Education

This section sets out the social domain of student self-formation. As indicated earlier, the self-formation of international higher education graduates takes place through three domains. These are the educational domain, the social domain, and the civic domain. These domains are not intended to be exhaustive, but they are some of the important domains in which self-formation takes place in international higher education.

The social domain of self-formation in international higher education is concerned with what individuals obtain thanks to their new social life and networks built during their international higher education experience. When individuals go abroad, they leave their existing friends and family behind. They have to make new friendships and networks in the new societal context they find themselves in. The day to day social interactions with these newly obtained friendships and networks play a significant role in an individual's self-formation process. This section builds on what Marginson discussed as the "socially-contextualized character of individual formation" (Marginson, 2018, p. 13).

Below, a few general reflections on the social domain of self-formation are shared to illustrate its significance, before moving on to unpacking the emerging analytic themes. To start with, Havva's reflection below illustrates how transformative the social domain of self-formation can be on an individual's life:

> It has been six years in England. I think I started being like them after having been hanging out with them. It's not like I am just Turkish or just one of them. . . . I think it's about spending a lot of time in an environment and opening yourself up to that environment. I have changed; I am definitely not me six years ago. *Havva, UK*

Havva's emphasis on opening oneself up to and spending time with her new social environment indicates that this transformative process is not a passive one: it is herself that makes these conscious decisions to interact.

However, although it is the individual who makes the decision and actively chooses to interact, the nature of the self-formation resulting from this is not determined solely by the individual. The contextual dimension plays its role in the social domain as well. The excerpt from Rana, below, illustrates that what an individual wants to acquire may be

different from what they end up acquiring, backing the argument that the self-formation process is context-dependent:

> When you leave your comfort zone, you, or any other person, are very influenced by the context. . . . What you want to gain from it may be different for me. It may be different for someone else. . . . This circle of friends affects you and can introduce you to different areas. You can also change from your culture, your own personal characteristics. *Rana, Azerbaijan*

As indicated earlier in the framework section of the Literature Review chapter, context is one of the three dimensions of the ecological perspective on agency adopted for this study to understand self-formation. In Rana's reflection above, the context dimension is more visible, and Havva's reflection earlier drew the individual/actor dimension more to the forefront. The third dimension, after individual/actor and context, is temporality. After all, self-formation is inherently a process that requires time. To illustrate Serhan's reflection indicates the relevance of temporality for self-formation in international higher education:

> I think having spent a short period of my life in a different culture has changed me a lot. At least my circle of friends in Turkey, who saw both Serhan [himself] before Bulgaria and Serhan after Bulgaria, interprets it this way. *Serhan, Bulgaria*

Serhan's reflection above hints how a short but intense period of his time studying abroad impacted the rest of his life significantly. The use of the words "Serhan before Bulgaria" and "Serhan after Bulgaria" to reflect on his transformation bolsters the temporality argument and indicates the strength of self-formation individuals go through while studying abroad.

This self-formation process in international higher education is so strong that reflections like that of Serhan above came up again and again. Another example, from Polat, also drew attention to the powerful impact of temporality on self-formation:

> Maybe this is a fact that even I myself cannot accept. After 9-10 years, I may have become a native of here and a foreigner of Turkey. Though I cannot feel like a tourist when I go to Turkey, I don't feel like a native of it either. *Polat, Bulgaria*

Only a sample of interview excerpts was shared here, in this introductory part, to draw attention to the overall significance of the social domain of self-formation in general. Below, the empirical findings on the social domain are reported under emerging analytical themes.

4.2.1 Bridging Cultures and Worldviews in International Higher Education

International higher education plays a significant role in bringing together people from different parts of the world with different worldviews and socio-cultural backgrounds. International higher education students meet people from different parts of the world and build inter-community bridges. Almost all the participants discussed this and hence, the decision to detail it here. This theme builds on Putnam's (2000) bridging social capital and, to some extent, Granovetter's (1973) discussion on weak ties, which were outlined earlier in the Literature Review chapter.

To start with, Defne explained how her international higher education experience in Germany led her to hang out with people that she would not have been able to hang out with before. She claimed that she became aware of her prejudices thanks to this experience:

> Having an international circle of friends— . . . it has been an experience that has brought me together with people that I wouldn't easily be in the same environment with. I am happy in that respect because we always think like *I am a very good person. I don't have any prejudices*, or something. But actually, it is not like that. Of course we have prejudices. I think it's nice to confront them. *Defne, Germany*

Defne's realisation that she has prejudices just like any other person, she claimed, is important. Congruent with the main argument of this theme, international higher education played a triggering role in this by allowing her to hang out with people outside of her usual social bubble in her home country. Defne further continued on this idea elsewhere during her interview and showed the results of facing one's prejudices:

> You do not have to change your mind. For example, I do not think that I have changed much in terms of my worldview, but at least it provides you with a platform where you can understand the other party's position. *Defne, Germany*

The excerpts above from Defne highlights how bridging in the social domain of self-formation may work. The focus is on becoming aware of one's prejudices and the formation of an understanding of others' positions afterwards.

The excerpt below, from Eylül's interview, also touched upon how she got the chance, during her international higher education experience, to communicate with people who came from numerous parts of the world. This helped her learn more about the ways of getting along with people from different backgrounds:

> I was able to communicate with so many people, I mean, from a wide variety of countries. I got to see ways of getting along with people. For example, music and hobbies are very important. People can talk about many different hobbies. Different things can be fashionable in their countries. *Eylül, UK*

Eylül's and Defne's reflections above show how international higher education helps individuals form a skillset to use in inter-community social occasions. Mustafa's reflection expands on this point. He explains how he was able to learn about the lives of different peoples:

> You see, for example, how a Chinese person works, how he lives, and— You know, China has performed a miracle in the last 20 years. I mean, what was their gross national product twenty years ago and what is it now? How did they do that? It is different when you see it by experiencing it first-hand and different when you hear about it from the news and your surroundings. *Mustafa, Germany*

Notice in Mustafa's reflection how he distinguished between hearing about these peoples' lives and experiencing it first-hand through day-to-day social interactions. This illuminates a core argument of the social domain: meeting new people during international higher education plays a significant role in self-formation. Mustafa continued on his reflection by contrasting people from different backgrounds, who he was able to observe during his international higher education experience:

> For example, here I look at my Chinese friends. The Germans are incredibly hardworking people, and I saw that the Chinese are definitely the same. They are no less hardworking than Germans in any way. . . . It is also very important to see their point of view. *Mustafa, Germany*

As can be seen, such an understanding of people from different backgrounds would not be possible if he had stayed in his home country. Supporting the excerpts from Mustafa's interview above, Kemal reflected on his intercultural bridging experience and gave further examples:

> The Chinese are very interesting. They usually came from Hong Kong. Their economic situation is very good. Now you think the Chinese are a little poorer. For example, I had a friend. He said his dad was a police officer and that his

> mom was a teacher. I say, “How do you pay for this?” . . . I learned that they run a hotel secretly and that you are not allowed to have a second job there. . . . I heard he learned what YouTube is after he came to England, etc., etc. *Kemal, UK*

Kemal realised that he had a lot to learn about the lives of Chinese people. Kemal explained later in his interview that Chinese people became his best friends during his international higher education experience. The immense personal transformation experience he went through during his degree education helped him move from not knowing much about Chinese people to becoming best friends with them. Similar to Kemal, Sevim also reflected on a similar encounter in her study-abroad experience. Sevim explained how she formed a much more nuanced understanding of Saudi Arabia and what was going on in that country context:

> Two of my best friends were from Saudi Arabia. Normally when someone says Saudi Arabia, I would go, "Oh yes, so no women's rights." I never had a desire, for example, to go to Arabia. But I did not know that there was actually an alternative life there, that there were activist people. That is, people were trying to transform it, rejecting what is imposed by the system . . . I think that was also valuable knowledge. *Sevim, UK*

Bridging cultures and worldviews in international higher education helped participants form a more open mind and tolerance towards differences. Almost all participants reflected on this. Alpaslan succinctly summarised this: “Living with people from the same culture all the time versus bringing people from different cultures into your life creates a different perception. Maybe you become a little more open-minded” *(Alpaslan, Germany).* Alpaslan continued this discussion later during his interview and provided a further explanation about how this may work:

> No matter how open-minded you say you are, you continue some parts of your life by habit. And these are part of the cultural habits of the society you live in. But when you build friendships with members of a foreign community, you have to take yourself out of the habits of your own society. *Alpaslan, Germany*

As congruent with the main argument of this chapter, the forming of a more open mind and learning tolerance towards differences mostly occur during daily life in the novel country context thanks to experiences with newly obtained social networks and friendships. All the excerpts shared since the beginning of this section have suggested this too. Hatice's reflection also supports this argument but shows how international higher education might be more advantageous in this regard than domestic higher education.

> Mia invited me for Thanksgiving dinners. I haven't been to a Thanksgiving dinner before. I knew that turkey would be oven cooked, but I didn't know about the berry sauce, for example. In a more international community, I became more aware of, and got to learn important things about, people's lives. *Hatice, UK*

A Turkish individual may know about Thanksgiving dinner, but a Turkish individual who is studying abroad may experience it first-hand in a different cultural context with their newly obtained friends. This seemingly simple social occasion where Hatice joins her friend, Mia, for a Thanksgiving dinner plays a role in the social domain of her self-formation and helps her learn new things that she would not be able to learn at home had she not studied abroad in the UK.

Elif further supported the main argument of this theme on bridging when she explained how she came to realise that people she thought were different from her were actually similar in many ways:

> At first, you think that there is a big difference between you and an Asian, for example, but as your friendship progress, you see that you are both human and that in essence you both feel sad about or rejoice at the same things. *Elif, Germany*

Elif's reflection above shows once again that self-formation is a process that requires a temporal dimension. According to Elif, it was only through a period of time, interacting with her newly obtained friends in Germany, that she started recognising that there were more similarities between her and people from other cultures, which in this case was Asian people. As a result of such a process Elif stated later in her interview: "You see being open to different cultures and the concept of racism, that is, racism internalised in all of us, goes" (Elif, Germany). This short quotation from Elif is an excellent sentence to round off this theme.

4.2.2 Becoming a Better Intercultural Communicator

The majority of the participants in the study reflected on becoming better communicators with people from different cultural backgrounds, thanks to the new friendships and networks they obtained during their international higher education experience. According to the participant interviews, becoming a better communicator starts with an awareness of the self regarding how limited one is in communicating with people from different cultural backgrounds. To illustrate this, Ebrar, like many other participants, reflected that she was not even aware of how limited her friendships were before her international higher education experience: "I realised that before I went to Germany, I was generally able to make friends with a limited sense of humour and limited common cultural values" *(Ebrar, Germany)*. However, as she continued reflecting on her self-formation process, she explained how she had formed herself to become a better communicator with different types of people and to ask questions that showed more interest in their lives:

> After going to Germany, 'Ebrar' [referring to herself] started to get to know different nations, . . . I noticed I started to communicate by asking questions that would touch a little more into people's lives. Such as, saying 'hello' to a person I didn't know: how are you, how was your day, what worried you today, etc. *Ebrar, Germany*

Notice Ebrar's use of self-reflective language in her quotation above. It sounds as if she is looking at herself from the outside and comparing her previous self with her present one, which indicates strong reflexivity. Defne, below, used a similar language in her reflection and discussed how she became aware of her limited communication skills:

> I also realised that I was not a person who could do small talk or easily communicate with people. . . . I used to think I was a relaxed person since I did not have any issues like this back in Turkey. This way, I think I can actually discover and improve things about myself. *Defne, Germany*

Defne, after her degree education in Germany, developed herself significantly, as she explained later in her interview: "As someone who has been here for more than a year now, I can communicate with people much more comfortably now." Supporting the quotations above, Didem also reflected on her formation experience in communicating with "foreigners" and provided an example from her undergrad education in Turkey prior to her masters education in Germany:

> I was not very. . .[good at communicating] especially in a foreign environment like this. For example, an Erasmus student came to our department once, and I had such reservations about speaking to him. This is also about having a command of a foreign language, too. I had many reservations. But I overcame this fear when I got here. *(Didem, Germany)*

Notice Didem's mention of language skills and building confidence. Didem is not the only one mentioning these two aspects; many others discussed these too. This indicates that they play an important role in one's formation process in becoming better at

intercultural communication. Aykut, for example, explained how hanging out with people during his international higher education built his confidence and helped him develop his language skills:

> You meet foreign people. You talk to them. Of course, my English is not perfect, but talking to foreigners had a great effect on my self-confidence. I mean, I am not afraid about saying something wrong because their native language is not English either. I make a mistake. They make it too. . . . This is how my language skills have developed. *Aykut, Bulgaria*

Aysel's reflection also supported the main argument of this theme. She drew attention to how she developed her skills in finding a common ground with different people and built her confidence within this process:

> I think it also improved me in terms of my communications with different people, finding common points. I may have gained some self-confidence in this way. . . . For example, if I went to an environment where there were only foreigners in high school, and I had to express myself in English, . . . I would be a little more nervous, but now I am more confident. *Aysel, UK*

Halil also pointed towards similar points as Aykut and Aysel above. He discussed how his international higher education experience helped him become more confident in multinational meetings or on similar occasions with customers in international contexts. In contrast to the previous reflections though, he also compared himself with Turks who have not studied abroad:

> What it added to me is being able to establish friendships in international environments. When we, Turks, go to multinational meetings or to a client, etc., we stay timid and withdrawn and end up talking to other Turks. It's not a good thing. For example, I see myself as having more advantages in this regard than my colleagues. Since I experienced living in an international environment, I can

> say that when we go to a meeting, I find the self-confidence to chat with someone more easily. *Halil, Germany*

Seeing himself as having an advantageous position is visible in Halil's daily life quite tangibly, as elsewhere in his interview he mentioned that his company chooses to send him to international meetings and deals most of the time. Another participant, Mustafa, also drew attention to the difference between those who have studied abroad and those who have not in terms of becoming a better communicator:

> The communication skills of someone who has not been to abroad . . . with foreign people would be very different from that of someone who has lived with them [foreigners] for a while. After all, you learn to be tolerant. The religion of the other person is important, what they eat and drink. *Mustafa, Germany*

Mustafa's emphasis on knowing more about the interlocutor (i.e., their religion, what they (don't) eat or drink) implies that becoming a better communicator is not just about speaking the language better. This supports the main argument in this theme that a more holistic transformation, thanks to the daily interactions with new friendships and networks acquired in international higher education, is important in becoming better communicators with people from different cultural backgrounds.

4.2.3 Self-Formation through Extracurricular Activities

The main argument of this chapter contends that self-formation in international higher education does not only occur within the classroom environment. The social domain of self-formation is related to the friendships and networks built during international higher education, and extracurricular activities play an essential role within this domain. This section reports the participants' reflections on the self-formation experiences they had in their social interactions while participating in extracurricular activities during their international higher education. For this study, extracurricular activities are socially

organised activities outside the classes taken at higher education institutions. These could range from sports, hobbies, and gatherings to the arts. To illustrate, Zeliha reflected on her personal formation experience during the formal dinners she attended at Oxford:

> I read this in an article written about the Oxbridge experience: the author explained how he came from the lower class and studied at Oxbridge. The thing they taught him the best was how to act like upper-middle-income people. . . . I also think I learned how to behave like that in England through socialisation. For example, at college, you drink champagne with the dean at a formal dinner. There is no such thing in Turkey, after all. *Zeliha, UK*

Zeliha's mention of social occasions and socialising through them in her reflection above indicates the significant role of these in the social domain of self-formation. Another interesting reflection by Burak shed further light on the potential role of extracurricular activities in an individual's self-formation. Burak explained, how he joined extracurricular groups that taught the art of carpet weaving and painting during his international higher education experience. He emphasised his newly obtained friends' role in this:

> I joined the art of carpet weaving and painting. I did not have a network that did these in Turkey. Here I got to meet people who are good at what they do. . . . They invite us, and we go join them. *Burak, Azerbaijan*

What is interesting about Burak's situation is that, later in his interview, he admitted that he did not like the arts before his study abroad. He reflected below on how he came to the understanding that art is, in fact, valuable:

> I am a person who values art . . . I understood this better when I got into it. I used to find it repulsive, like what's the point of painting or sculpting? But when I saw that the artist worked on the knots one by one and even used a magnifying

> lens for some parts, I said to myself that this is very delicate and sophisticated work. *Burak, Azerbaijan*

Burak's reflection implies a significant change in his perspective towards certain kinds of arts, which occurred thanks to his new-found friends who invited Burak or took him with them to go and be part of art events. Moving to another country for international higher education and leaving one's existing network behind is usually a challenge for internationally mobile students. However, when looked at through a self-formation lens, this is also an opportunity. In this case, Burak had the *opportunity* to leave his existing friendships in his home country behind and acquire new ones during his international higher education; this led him to obtain a more positive perspective on arts. Rana had a similar story to share. Her short reflection below also supported the main argument of this theme:

> I did not attend such things at the university but attended outside events as an art lover. I mean there is opera, ballet, or anything—you name it there, I attended. I had not attended these before in Turkey. . . . I became a little more cultured there, in short. *Rana, Azerbaijan*

Rana also did not attend many cultural activities before, but during her international higher education experience, she got the opportunity to do so.

Yasar's interview supports the main argument of this theme further. The excerpt, below, from Yasar's interview supplements Burak's and Rana's reflections shared above.

> My university has its own symphony orchestra. It has its own concert hall. Every week on Fridays, after my classes, I would go to a classical music concert. . . . That would do me very well. It helped me improve my knowledge and educate myself in this field. I had the chance to meet, talk, and discuss with other people who had the same interest. *Yasar, UK*

Sometimes the extracurricular activity ends with the end of the study abroad experience, but its impact remains. Atakan explained his relatively short, but reportedly successful, music career. He did not continue this after graduation, but the confidence he built during this period stayed with him:

> The things I did at the time when I lacked self-confidence— I was interested in music, and we had a group. I wasn't playing, but we were singing. We gave a concert in front of 25 thousand people in a stadium. . . . That band, in which we made music, consisted of two Turkish and one Azerbaijani. . . . a friend of mine from the band is a well-known artist there now. *Atakan, Azerbaijan*

The sample excerpts shared here showed how extracurricular activities might play an important role within the social domain of self-formation in international higher education. It seems that interacting with people, socialising in new friendships, and encountering different social environments in the host country during extracurricular activities could be a significant catalyst for an individual's self-formation, considering how much they enrich a person's experience.

4.2.4 Increasing Professional Potentials through the Social Domain of Self-Formation

The majority of participants discussed how the networks and friendships they obtained during their international higher education experience helped them achieve greater professional potentials, build their own businesses, or get jobs after their graduation. The international networks that participants obtained, including alumni networks, made certain things easier and increased their potentials in life after graduation. This can be considered as part of the social domain of student self-formation because an important way individuals increase their professional potentials is through the networks they build

in their daily social interactions during their international higher education. Consider, for example, Sevim's reflection below:

> Because I made many contacts [in England], I can both obtain information from them about what is happening [there and] around the world and write to them when we need to collaborate with a university in the UK, such as Oxford and Essex. So, it actually gives you the chance to expand your influence. *Sevim, UK*

This excerpt indicates that Sevim, as an international higher education graduate, has a means for knowledge exchange with people abroad and knows people in institutions outside of Turkey for future collaborations. These are important assets to increase one's potentials.

Similar to Sevim, Yasar also discussed how the network he built while studying abroad empowered him in his professional life, supporting the main argument of this theme:

> I have friends who work in almost every bank in this city [London]. I have friends who work in almost every fund. Well, it happens sometimes. For example, I heard about new investment projects even before my boss because a friend of mine would work on the sales side of that project, for example. *Yasar, UK*

Notice how Yasar sometimes got to learn things even before his boss. Working in finance and the investment banking sector, obtaining such information could make a big difference in his success, as Yasar explained later in his interview. Hasan also reflected on how the network he built while studying abroad helped him increase his potentials in the law sector back in Turkey:

> My value has increased in my clients' eyes. . . . I mean, I have become a lawyer who creates more trust in my clients' eyes because . . . you become a lawyer who can get a job in Paris done with a contact in France. I mean, although I don't go to Paris personally, my classmate from Oxford does it for me. *Hasan, UK*

Hasan's reflection above is further supported by Alpaslan who also is a law graduate. He explained the importance of alumni networks in this regard:

> Since it is a long-established school, most of the companies you encounter in your professional life have Humboldt graduates. This becomes a network that connects you to people in different positions or places. "Oh look, this person is also from Humboldt! I can also reach out to him through this way," etc. *Alpaslan, Germany*

The new networks and friendships obtained during international higher education help individuals build their own businesses or get jobs easier as well. To illustrate, Atakan established his own company in Turkey, building on his network from the student-run society he contributed to during his study in Azerbaijan:

> [A foundation university in Turkey told me], "Now that you have such a large student network, we want students. Bring us students." . . . A business opportunity emerged with this exchange of ideas. . . . After establishing this business, we started to bring international students to universities gradually. . . . We are currently working with [many] private universities. *Atakan, Azerbaijan*

Tuna had a similar situation. He created his own business after returning to Turkey and started sending goods to his Azerbaijani university friend, who continued residing in Azerbaijan. Such an opportunity would not even be an option if he had not studied abroad:

> I had a good relationship with a friend from university, and we are still in touch. Well, he opened a page there on Instagram, selling products and stuff. I ship products from here, he sells there, for example. . . . In that respect, Azerbaijan enabled me to develop my commercial side a little more. *Tuna, Azerbaijan*

Another example supporting this can be observed from Kerem's reflection. He met so many people from a charitable foundation during his study in Azerbaijan that he obtained all his professional positions after graduation thanks to this foundation:

> Since I studied at the foundation's university in Azerbaijan, a job opportunity opened up in Afghanistan. It is because of this foundation that I worked as a manager there. These opportunities have always been through this foundation. My transfer to here [Baku] as an assistant manager was because of this foundation too. *Kerem, Azerbaijan*

Kerem further explained later in his interview that he did not know about this charitable foundation back in Turkey before going to Azerbaijan, which implies that these are direct gains from his international higher education experience.

Melis's reflection also supports the main argument in this theme but looks at it from a different angle. Melis drew attention to making local friends at a top university, which opened up further possibilities for her in Azerbaijan. She explained in her interview that she was able to stay in the host country after graduation and worked at high ranking positions in large corporations in Azerbaijan thanks to being friends with hard-working domestic university friends. They motivated her to work hard and helped her with their connections in Azerbaijan. Below, she compared herself to other Turks and mentioned the difference her friendships made for her.

> Most of the Turks returned to Turkey. I mean, they couldn't find a job [in Azerbaijan] or they worked in very low-profile jobs. My Azerbaijani friends, I mean I have a diplomat friend in almost every country, they are in ministries and the courts. . . . I didn't know this before going to the university. I realised that it is the best university and the best department there. *Melis, Azerbaijan*

The above-shared excerpts were related to increasing one's professional potentials through the friendships and networks built during day-to-day social relations. The

majority of the participants discussed this during their interviews. In addition to these, though smaller in number, potentially due to being sector relevant, some participants discussed the institutionalised aspect of network building during their international higher education experience. To illustrate, Omer reflected on how his university helped him socialise into professional life in his chosen career field:

> Universities can provide you with contacts somehow. They can take you to fairs. I am speaking about my field. At the fair, you prepare a business card and make serious presentations. People get your business card. They interact with you, as I said, they put you in contact with manufacturers or suppliers. *Omer, UK*

Yasar also discussed how he was able to get his current job in his host country after chatting with people at one of the career fairs organised by his university:

> Career fairs, networking events . . . you go in and out of these. You shake hands with people. Then you chat with them. They tell you their goals, and you tell them your goals, plans. I even found my first job this way. I found it at an LSE fair. They got to know me there and asked for my CV. *Yasar, UK*

These sample reflections shared here shed light on how the networks and friendships obtained in international higher education helped participants achieve greater professional potentials, build their own businesses, or get jobs after their graduation. The international network these graduates obtained made certain things easier and increased their opportunities in life after their graduation. This argument about increasing professional potentials is not limited to the social domain and can also be relevant in the educational domain (dwelled on in the previous section). This is the reason why I argue that these domains are connected and are domains of one broader phenomenon: self-formation in international higher education.

4.2.5 Section Summary

This chapter has reported the findings related to the social domain of self-formation in international higher education. As introduced earlier, the social domain deals with what individuals obtain thanks to their newly found social life during their international higher education. When individuals go abroad, they leave their existing friends and family behind. They find themselves in a new social context and build new social connections there. The day-to-day social interactions with these newly obtained social connections play a significant role in an individual's self-formation process. This section empirically supported the argument of the essentiality of acknowledging "the socially-contextualized character of individual formation" (Marginson, 2018, p. 13). In this chapter, the empirical findings have been presented under emerging analytical themes.

The findings reported in this chapter suggest a number of points. To start with, the participants explained that they obtained the chance to meet people from different parts of the world, with different worldviews and socio-cultural backgrounds, through their international higher education experience. Echoing Putnam's (2000) perspectives on bridging social capital, this is immensely valuable not only for international higher education graduates' life trajectories but also for society. He argued that bridging across a divide between communities helps build understanding between them and increase open-mindedness. The participant interviews supported this as almost all participants said that connecting with new networks and friendships first-hand during their international higher education experience helped them form more open minds and tolerance towards different worldviews.

The majority of participants believed that they not only formed a broader perspective towards different cultures and worldviews but also became better communicators with

people from different parts of the world. They attributed this to their daily social interactions with the newly obtained social connections during their study abroad experience. Interviewees indicated that early in their time abroad, they became aware of their limitations in communicating with people from different parts of the world. This was followed by an arduous work on the self to become better at inter-community social interactions and language skills, which contributed to them becoming better communicators.

Also, congruent with the main argument of the section, extracurricular activities emerged as significant catalysts for the self-formation of international higher education graduates. Participants discussed how they became the persons they are today through the daily social interactions with new friendships and networks built thanks to the extracurricular activities they attended during their international higher education experience. The findings reported under this theme reiterated that leaving the existing networks and friendships behind and obtaining new ones, though not easy, is a facilitator for one's self-formation process, considering how much they add to the individual.

Moreover, the newly obtained networks and friendships during international higher education experience help graduates achieve greater professional potentials, build their own businesses, or get jobs after their graduations. This is consistent with Granovetter's seminal work on weak ties (1973), as he contended that increased networks between different groups or communities help bring success to individuals' lives. Daily social interactions with people from different parts of the world during international higher education gives just that (i.e., increased inter-community networks) but on an international scale.

4.3 The Civic Domain of Self-Formation in International Higher Education

This section sets out the civic domain of self-formation in international higher education, which is related to the first research question of the study (i.e., How do Turkish young adults who completed their degrees abroad explain their self-formation in international higher education?).

There is no single and widely agreed-upon definition for the term "civic" in the literature. In their influential paper, Adler and Goggin (2005) reviewed various existing definitions of the term and proposed a definition of their own. The definition of civic in this thesis builds on Adler and Goggins' (2005) definition: "Civic engagement describes how an active citizen participates in the life of a community in order to improve conditions for others or to help shape the community's future" (p. 241). This definition was specifically selected since it has a broad perspective towards civic participation, as this study avoided narrow definitions to cover what participants might have gone through in their diverse experiences as part of their self-formation process.

Building on this definition, for this thesis work, individuals hold certain civic understandings and perspectives towards their participation in the lives of their communities. These civic understandings and perspectives affect them in their efforts to help shape their community's future or improve conditions for others. These efforts could be through political and/or non-political processes, as Ehrlich (2000) argued. As graduates of international higher education go through a self-formation process during their study abroad experience, they may develop different civic understandings and perspectives on helping shape their community's future or improving conditions for others. Almost all participants stated that this was the case for them and that they self-formed civically in one way or another, as explained in more detail in the following

themes. This phenomenon is referred to as the civic domain of self-formation in this thesis. Below, the empirical findings on the civic domain are reported under emerging analytical themes.

4.3.1 Forming a New Perspective towards Public Civic Engagement

Almost all participants of the study reflected on forming new civic perspectives due to living in a different society during their international higher education experience. This specific theme focuses on how students have self-formed in relation to public civic engagement. It dwells on individuals' self-formative reflections on civic activities that have a collective nature in "improv[ing] conditions for others or to help[ing] shape the community's future" (Adler & Goggin, 2005, p. 241). These may include expressing concerns, demonstrations, involvement in civic organisations, and activism.

Many participants considered that they became more aware of how civic engagement might work in different country contexts, which influenced how they formed themselves. To illustrate, Alpaslan gave the example of the differences in May 1st, International Worker's Day in Germany and Turkey to reflect on his observations of the civic activities there. He started by describing his observations of Worker's day in Germany and explained the cheerful atmosphere in which people were attending demonstrations and other activities: "In Germany, there was such a fun atmosphere in the form of a street festival. People were involved in various activities related to May 1st. They were also marching together."

Then, Alpaslan went on to compare his first-hand observation in Germany to his perception of what normally occurs in his home country, Turkey. He described it as a "problematic day" in Turkey and explained why he thinks so:

> You know we first have this dispute over whether the celebrations could take place in Taksim Square[3]. Then, the permission for Taksim Square would not be granted. Another place would be offered. That new square would be encircled with security forces to prevent potential incidents. There was no such atmosphere in Berlin. *Alpaslan, Germany*

Later in his interview, Alpaslan reflected on how such first-hand observations while studying abroad played out in his self-transformation. In his reflection below, he turned the spotlight on himself:

> I saw that everything could be resolved with tolerance and consensus-building. I mean I was not thinking the opposite of this here [in Turkey before mobility] anyway. I was in the same opinion, but I had not observed it being practised in this regard. In Germany, I saw this being practised. *Alpaslan, Germany*

The quotations from Alpaslan show how he had an opportunity to self-form over time through his international higher education experience. He reflectively described an updated, so to speak, Alpaslan after the mobility compared to himself prior to mobility. Apparently, his observations of civic activities in Germany played a role in this self-formation.

Similar to Alpaslan, Sarp reflected on how he became someone who organised marches to raise awareness among society after his international higher education experience:

> We organised marches in Azerbaijan to raise awareness about students with autism. We organised activities. We raised people's awareness. . . . We did these multiple times. We organised seminars and other activities. *Sarp, Azerbaijan*

[3] Taksim Square is an important venue for political protests for its visibility and central location. Hence, groups and NGOs from different political spectrums in Turkey try to organise their demonstrations in this square.

Sarp expanded on his reflections above later during his interview. He explained that he had not taken part in such activities back in Turkey at all. For Sarp, his international higher education experience in Azerbaijan played a pivotal role in his becoming the person he is today, in terms of becoming an active citizen.

Alican also discussed how he had formed a different perspective towards public civic engagement activities, such as protesting. In his interview, he reflected on how protesting does not necessarily have to be a disputed or a negatively perceived issue. He interestingly put that he "saw [in Germany that] protest is something that can be done." Alican explained that he saw first-hand how protesting does not have to be like a "confrontation" or a "battle." Instead, it could be peaceful, and in some cases be like a "celebration," referring to the May 1st celebrations in Germany, which indirectly agreed with Alpaslan's quotation above.

Havva lent support to these remarks. She reflected on her curious observations while attending gay pride marches in London every year, which, as she explained later, is followed by a life-changing formative experience:

> I attend the gay pride marches every year. It really is very nice that they defend this together with this many people. . . . Police officers also come with their pink shirts to support this, firefighters . . . This really impressed me a lot. *Havva, UK*

Notice how she used the word "impressed." There are pride marches in Turkey too, but her choice of words implies that they may not be the same as she experienced in the UK (e.g., police officers also wearing pink and firefighters coming to support). Here the focus is not about pride marches per se but how people can get together for any issue and collectively work on improving conditions for others in the community. Havva implied in her interview that while the officers and security forces would work with the pride

demonstrators every year, they would not do so in her home country. Her reflections are similar to Alpaslan's comments on International Worker's Day shared earlier in this section. Later in her interview, Havva discussed her inner reflections on how she transformed herself through such experiences while studying in London. She explained that her "perspective on the world has become more open." This was "not because someone told [her] so" but a result of attending such marches and other civic activities with people from different cultures and nationalities during her international higher education experience.

Sevim also lent support to the participants above. She reflected on taking part in civic activities in Oxford, which aided her in her self-formation:

> I feel I became more active after going to Oxford. There was no huge transformation, but after Oxford, for instance, I started taking part in those civic activities more. The reason for that, I suppose, when I was in England, I would always join events, such as Palestine protests. . . . I think the idea that such things could be different and that they could succeed, change things, came to me in England. *Sevim, UK*

Notice her evolutionary change, rather than a revolutionary one, by her emphasis on "no huge transformation." This, once again, indicates the importance of the temporality dimension. Whom a person becomes after an international higher education experience is the result of building on oneself before it. An individual's life trajectory does not change into something else overnight but evolves through personal efforts on one's formation, as supported by participant-drawn, life-timeline forms.

Hatice talked about a similar issue with a different focus. She discussed extensively how civil society organisations make a difference in the UK. The reflection below is an excerpt from her interview:

> I noticed that they [the civil society organisations in the UK] can get involved with the policy-making processes. They have a voice. . . . They can get in touch with a minister or an MP and steer the process by assuming an expert position. . . . At the end of the day, what they work on can become an actual policy. *Hatice, UK*

Later in her interview, she reflected on how she formed her beliefs and expectations that her work in civil society organisations, as a graduate returnee in Turkey, could make a difference:

> For the first time, when I was reading for my degree in social policy, I felt more powerful in the sense that I could change some things regarding these issues. . . . I think that my daily work does change some things. I feel I contribute to them. *Hatice, UK*

Hatice continued reflecting on her self-formation journey in her interview. She explained how her transformative international higher education experience helped her "discover [her] way of making a difference." She compared "previous Hatice" before her mobility with the Hatice of today:

> I think the previous Hatice was someone who tried to be more involved with grass-root activities but didn't know how to do so. I mean, she did not have a personality that fits with marching and protesting. . . . But on the other hand, I support grass-root activities and protests a lot, and I want to be part of them. *Hatice, UK*

Then comes her transformative international education amidst her quandary:

> Reading for a masters degree in Oxford and academically maturing further, I discovered my way of making a difference. That is, I do not force myself to do something that I do not like to do. I find it valuable and hard, but still, it is something I do not like to do. But at the same time, I can satisfy myself [by expressing my concerns through my professional work]. *Hatice, UK*

Hatice is not the only one who discovered her way thanks to international higher education. Aysel explained in detail her observations about her friend who worked with a church to organise youth events and other activities for helping shape the community's future. Her explanations implied that she had not seen such work in Turkey. After listening to her explanations in this regard, I asked her:

> [You mentioned that your friend] works with a church to organise camps, etc. and that they are very religious but, at the same time, open to other cultures. If you compare that with here [Turkey], do you think this is possible here?

After such a question, Aysel started talking about her inner reflections regarding this. As can be seen, her international higher education experience led her to reflect on this a lot, even before the interview:

> I have been questioning that in my mind as well. Maybe such things are happening. I don't know if I have prejudices towards my own country. . . . Actually, I can say that what I gained was that I started to reflect on what I can do to resolve the social gender-equality issue. It is an important topic for me, and I am currently working in a place that does work in this area. I try to contribute to a solution. I followed such a way. . . . It didn't happen like "People there work with a church, and I should do it that way too [with a mosque]." *Aysel, UK*

Notice how she found her way of helping shape her community's future in terms of social gender equality. It is not exactly the same way her friend does with the help of a church, but it builds on it, as seen in her inner reflections about it. This way, the previous Aysel, who had not yet studied in the UK, was not the same as the Aysel after her graduation; she has self-formed.

4.3.2 Becoming More Vocal for Helping Shape Their Community's Future in Daily Discussions

As it has emerged from interviews, discussing contemporary and political issues is a way of expressing opinions to help shape a community's future. Unlike the previous section, the reflections shared in this section dwell on how the participants became more vocal. They are not collective in nature and more micro-level in helping shape the community's future. This resembles Habermas's (1991) daily informed discussions in coffee houses that provided critical reflexivity for the domains of common concerns. Almost half of the participants expressed that they become more confident in such discussions.

Alpaslan reflected on how he started discussing contemporary issues with others more thanks to his first-hand experiences during his international higher education:

> We started discussing contemporary political issues more, naturally, after studying in Germany. I discuss it with my family and with my friends a lot. The reason why I discuss this more is that I saw it first-hand and understood that the west or, to be more specific, Europe does not live a very different life than ours, but they made a different system sustainable. *Alpaslan, Germany*

Notice how Alpaslan was interested in the ways Europeans live during his studies in Germany and became more vocal in discussing this "better working system" with his family and friends after his return to Turkey. Similar to Alpaslan, Simge also reflected on how she became more vocal about discussing contemporary issues and politics after her international higher education experience:

> Of course, normal things are always talked about and discussed, but contemporary issues, politics, economy, the status of the countries, their culture, etc., we started to talk about these topics more after that experience, of course, because my knowledge has increased. *Simge, Bulgaria*

Her emphasis on the increase of knowledge is noteworthy here. Simge further expanded on how she became more vocal:

> I learned that I could disagree and say 'you are misguided!' I learned that things are presented differently here [Turkey] and differently there [Europe]. And when you look at it, yes, I believe in the truth of the news in Europe more. *Simge, Bulgaria*

Atakan, below, supported Alpaslan and Simge and drew attention to his increased self-confidence and an increased ability to express himself as a result of this:

> The biggest thing that Azerbaijan added to me at that time was my self-confidence. . . .You are abroad, and you have no family around. You are on your own. Nobody else can express things for you anymore. I had an incredibly explosive increase in this in Azerbaijan. . . . I became a person who can easily express himself. *Atakan, Azerbaijan*

As can be seen, Atakan, based on his reflections on his self-formation, became someone who could easily express himself in daily discussions. Onur corroborated the interview excerpts shared above and provided a further explanation on how this may work:

> What advantage will you have when you are talking about a different country? Well, "they have been doing this in our country this way at some point, and this brought us more income." . . . That is, "they took that way, we took this way, and it was better." So, you put this in your subconscious thinking: *I wish it was like this in our country as well*. *Onur, Bulgaria*

Notice how he compared and contrasted the home and host country contexts. What naturally comes afterwards is, as he also talked about, a motivation to work for the wish that "it was like this in our country as well." Alara provided a further explanation regarding this matter. She too drew attention to comparing the two contexts. She

emphasised the perspective differences between looking at things from inside versus outside of the context:

> I always get my parents' opinion and observation about what is happening there [Turkey] first. . . . But after living here [Bulgaria] for a while, this happened while expressing my opinions: "What do you see when you look at it from this angle?" That is, "You are inside [Turkey], and you commented on this, but I have thought about this and this." *Alara, Bulgaria*

Giving her parents as an example, Alara compared how she can think differently due to her international higher education experience, whereas her parents cannot. Later in her interview, Alara further confirmed this and reflected that her questioning things this way "happened afterwards because . . . when people are inside of the situation, they may not be able to look objectively, but when they are outside, they may obtain a new perspective."

Ebrar also reflected on a similar topic, but she focused her discussion on the role of women in society and professional life. She first started discussing her observation of the situation of women in Germany and compared it to her perception of the position of women in Turkey:

> Before studying abroad, I was confused about topics such as the role of women . . . I felt a bit less informed about what kind of other roles a woman can have. Germany helped me with this. Women seem to be in a better position there . . . Of course, this is not very easy to observe from outside, but in professional life, I saw that women were able to obtain better positions. *Ebrar, Germany*

As Ebrar continued reflecting on her formation experience during her international higher education, she explained that she became more vocal for women in professional life in Turkey, taking an active stance on this issue:

> Now in my workplace, I try to persuade others. Most of the female colleagues in my company show a more feminine, maternal behaviour. . . . I try to convince others that you can be a woman at a workplace without having to have this maternal attitude. *Ebrar, Germany*

Canberk's reflection below also lent support to the main argument of this theme on becoming more vocal, but in a different manner. His international higher education experience in Azerbaijan led him to question why Turkey is not doing better given the opportunities and advantages it has:

> I may have returned as someone who expresses himself more. This is because I saw Turkey from there [Azerbaijan]. Because I saw that country, their situation, you see that our country is a paradise compared to theirs. With all these opportunities, why can't we do more? We should do some things. That is, I saw there that it is as if we had our hands tied. *Canberk, Azerbaijan*

As can be seen, Canberk became more vocal about contemporary issues and argued that Turkey should be able to do more. This echoes well with all the other reflections shared in this section where participants explained how they self-formed to become more vocal in helping shape their community's future in daily discussions.

4.3.3 Building "International Awareness"

News following habits and media consumption affect how people form their opinions regarding current events and political issues, and they are relevant to people's community and citizenship understanding (Anderson, 1983). Having spent a considerable amount of time abroad as part of their international higher education, the participants often started following news and media from all around the world and not just from or about their home country. I decided to call this building "international awareness." Quotation marks are used to denote that this is an in vivo code that naturally emerged from the interview

data. Quotation marks will not be used from here on in the text for simplicity and avoiding potential confusion. Close to half of the participants across all selected country contexts talked about building international awareness. To illustrate, Ahmet, reflected on how living in Germany while studying abroad increased his international awareness:

> Since I live abroad, there is this situation: my international awareness increased, or to be more precise, it naturally developed. . . . This is about being aware of what's happening abroad. For example, in Turkey, you need to [make an effort to] follow what is happening, but these are our daily conversations here [Germany]. *Ahmet, Germany*

Ahmet continued discussing extensively how he formed an increased international awareness naturally during his international higher education experience. Later in his interview, Ahmet discussed the role of his international network in this matter:

> I don't even need to follow the news as much as I did in Turkey because when I learn about some news and start talking about it with my foreign friends, they provide me with details anyway. This is the case for things that I cannot access as well. Sometimes I don't have access to some news as my German is not as good and when there are no English resources about it either. *Ahmet, Germany*

Interesting to highlight, his newly acquired friends made it easier for him to access the pieces of news that were in a language he did not understand. Zeliha also supported this argument and reflected on how she got to know that there was "another" more global world that she became aware of during her international higher education experience in the UK:

> When you are around here, you see that there is another world. I am not just talking about Europe: there is China, there is India— [You can] look at global issues more, for instance. I am not sure how well I do this, but I try to keep doing this as much as possible. *Zeliha, UK*

Zeliha further explained how she got a chance to increase her awareness regarding this. As she explained in the interview excerpt below, her housemates during her international higher education experience played a role in this:

> When I was living there [the UK], I was specifically following the international media more because I wanted to be able to converse with my housemates, etc. For example, one of them was from the St Vincent Islands. So, to be able to talk to her I read stuff about St Vincent. I would tell her about Turkey, and she would tell me about their independence, etc. Or the other one would tell me about Lithuania. *Zeliha, UK*

Alara also corroborated the reflections shared above. She explained how her news following habits changed and became more international, supporting the main argument of this theme:

> Before, it was about buying a local newspaper and reading whatever is written in it. . . . but afterwards, related to our situation, you start reading a number of international newspapers. [your habits] related to newspapers you follow or the magazines you follow changes. . . . You read different magazines, you follow different agendas and start following different people's articles. *Alara, Bulgaria*

As can be seen in Alara's situation, coming across Bulgarian newspapers, and potentially other English newspapers, whenever she went to newspaper counters seemed to play a role in forming her news-following habits that became more international in nature. Simge also went through a similar process of building international awareness, and this process seems to have led her to become more critical towards the news sources in Turkey:

> While in Germany, [I followed] the world news more in general and those news items that were related to Turkey but not published in Turkey. . . . My interest increased. . . . I noticed how they [Turkish news sources or authorities] made us wear blinders in a way that would block everything. *Simge, Bulgaria*

Aysel corroborated the excerpts shared above in that she too built an international awareness during her international higher education experience, but she added that her subject area played a role in it too:

> This [study abroad experience] might have changed the media sources I follow. I try to follow more international sources now. [Before studying abroad] I followed the local media mostly. Yes, related to my subject area, I would still follow what is happening around the world in terms of international relations, but especially after my international experience, this has increased even further. *Aysel, UK*

Aysel was not the only one who discussed the role of her subject area in building her international awareness. Atakan said that he would follow the news from around the world before, but that his international higher education amplified this:

> I regularly follow world news and Turkey news related to my subject area out of necessity. . . . [Before mobility] I would read newspapers from time to time, but it was not that much. But now when I get to the office—I gained this in Azerbaijan, . . . the first thing I do is to directly look at the news and stay up to date with contemporary issues. *Atakan, Azerbaijan*

Notice how both Aysel and Atakan still emphasised the importance of their international higher education experience on their news media consumption habits, even though before their mobility they had followed the news from around the world in their subject areas. This implies that they started doing this more thanks to their international higher education experience.

Fatih also reflected on how his international awareness increased with his international higher education experience. He provided further details about the reason why he started to read more news sources outside of Turkey:

> I don't think I would follow the global media as I do now if I didn't go to Germany. I follow all the media around the world. . . . I gained this there [Germany]. If I had stayed in Turkey, I would just suffice with Turkish newspapers. . . . When something happens, I immediately look at CNN or other similar sources. . . . I look at what they think rather than what we think. *Fatih, Germany*

Fatih's emphasis on wanting to know more about what "they" think rather than what "we" think indicates that Fatih aimed to obtain an international comparative perspective on the matters he followed. Toprak also reflected on how he started following international news around the globe comparatively:

> I still follow the media sources of other numerous countries. . . . I did not follow these many countries before. Now whenever something happens, I immediately check how the incident is reflected in other countries. . . . For instance, even for the latest Saudi Arabia incident, I checked how the English would look at it, what the Spanish have to say about it, what is the reflection of this abroad. *Toprak, Bulgaria*

As can be seen, Toprak emphasised that he did not have this trait before his mobility experience, but he became someone who compared and contrasted how news headlines were reflected differently around the world on important incidents. This is a result of his self-formation process in his international higher education.

4.3.4 Becoming More Interested in Following the News Sources of a Host Country

As introduced in the previous section, news-following habits and media consumption is relevant to people's community and citizenship understanding and plays a role in forming their opinions about contemporary and political issues. These may also have implications for their feelings of belonging to a society (Anderson, 1983). Building on this, knowing

that graduates followed the news sources in their host countries more after their mobility might be valuable in understanding the civic domain of their self-formation.

Close to half of the participants explicitly discussed how they started following the news sources of their host countries more. To illustrate, Koray reflected how he started following the news sources of Azerbaijan more after living there for his international higher education experience:

> After two years [of my stay in Azerbaijan], I stopped following Turkish news. I would follow Azerbaijan news only because the society I was living in was Azerbaijan. I would learn about whatever I may encounter during the day through Azerbaijani channels. *Koray, Azerbaijan*

Interesting to highlight, Koray even stopped following Turkish news while he was residing in Azerbaijan with the explanation that he was a part of the society there. This may have indications of a shift in his belongingness, even if it was temporary.

Derya gave similar remarks regarding her study in Germany. She added that she not only started following the news and the media in her host country to be informed about basic daily events but also developed an interest in more intricate issues and political debates going on there:

> I still followed Turkish news after I came here [Germany], but here we were interested in German media as well. I think Germany is more interesting because we are now living here. We have been buying newspapers for the last two years at our house. Although it is hard for us, we try to read 2–3 articles with our limited German. . . . We mostly follow German politics. *Derya, Germany*

Similar to Koray, they developed an interest in things happening in Germany, citing a similar explanation that they were living there. In other words, they felt they were in some way or another part of that society.

Hasan reflected on how he started following the intricate contemporary issues and political debates in the UK as he and his friends would actively discuss them during his stay there:

> Contemporary issues are discussed a lot. It might sound like a cliché, but Brexit is discussed. It comes up somehow. If you fall behind such topics, you would not be able to take advantage of the discussion platforms in the classes in the best way. In a way, you need to follow contemporary issues. *Hasan, UK*

He explained that he has to follow the news about the contemporary issues there. This, again, indicates the importance of following the news sources in a host country to become part of the community there.

Further, it may be obvious that those who stayed in their host countries after graduation continued following the news about and from there. However, many returnee participants explained that they kept following the media of their host countries even after returning home country. The excerpt below from Alpaslan is a good example of this:

> I did not have the habit of following the news related to Germany before going to Germany. Naturally, now I follow [the news from] Germany as well. I read German newspapers, websites. I gained this in Berlin, and it still continues today. Although not as frequent as the times when I was living in Berlin, I still do follow the German media agenda. *Alpaslan, Germany*

Notice how visible the temporality dimension of his self-formation is. He did not even follow the news sources of Germany before his mobility but became interested in their agenda during his international higher education experience there, and he kept this interest even after his graduation.

Hatice's reflection below explains how she started to follow the news about the UK and Europe region more after returning home, whereas her focus areas were different before her international higher education experience:

> I used to follow news related to the Middle East more. . . . While I was in the UK, I would follow British news, and I stopped following Middle East news. After I returned, I started following news related to Europe more. This is also because they started showing up in my feed more often through different applications, emails, or the network I keep in touch with. *Hatice, UK*

The way Hatice justified her self-transformative experience in the last sentence is telling. Such a change in interests seems to come naturally with the new accounts one starts to follow on social media, new email subscriptions, or with the newly added network.

An important point about participants starting to follow the news and media about and from their host countries more—even after they returned—is that this does not mean they were no longer interested in Turkish news. Below, two sample interview excerpts are shared to demonstrate this. For example, Mustafa reflected on how he managed to find a "fifty-fifty" balance in this regard:

> The situation became more like fifty-fifty. This is because I want to improve myself and have a better grasp of the German language [after my language course]. I wanted to, at least, be aware of what is happening around the city, what events are there, etc., I follow this in German of course. But [following the media from] Turkey continues the way it was. *Mustafa, Germany*

Onur also lent support to this with the excerpt below. According to his reflection, he kept following the news about or from Turkey:

> I had this back in Turkey as well. I would sit-down like old people and read the news every day. Here, maybe I added a second country context to my news

> following. It expanded a bit. It is broader now; I follow both here [Bulgaria] and Turkey. *Onur, Bulgaria*

Onur's word choices in his reflection above are important to highlight. His uses of "added a second country context to my news following," "expanded," and "is broader now" are explanatory regarding his self-formation in this regard. They also serve well in summarising the main argument of this theme.

4.3.5 Apprenticeship in New Worldviews

It is said that fish cannot recognise that they were in water unless they are taken out of it. Similar to this, the majority of participants discussed how they got a chance to observe new worldviews first-hand during their international higher education experience in a new country context, and because of this, they were able to contextualise and understand what they had been experiencing back home better. Most participants expressed that they obtained a more nuanced understanding of the novel worldviews they encountered, and some of them developed new worldviews as a result of this.

The theme of this section draws on Chankseliani's work (2018) on political mobility, but it expands it. She identified a similar phenomenon, calling it "apprenticeships in democracy" (p. 282). Here, I chose to title this section "apprenticeship in new worldviews," as I would like to take a more descriptive stance, building on my exploratory approach. This is also because the international higher education graduates, who participated in this research, studied in different country contexts with differing democracy levels, as explained in the Methodology chapter.

It is hard to argue for major tendencies across country contexts because this is a very context and individual-dependent, transformative process. The findings I discuss under this section are explorative and are not intended to draw strict lines. Having said these

things, it does seem that international higher education graduates form a more nuanced perspective towards the civic understandings in the host countries they studied in. For example, this excerpt from Fatih's interview indicates how the impact of the apprenticeship in new worldviews in the host country could be.

> It [international higher education] helps you gain a lot both socially and politically. You have incredible conversations about how the system works in every country, etc. I mean your view of the world changes a lot. My family did not recognise me when I returned. They even got angry with me at some points. I am much more flexible on some points of view. *Fatih, Germany*

Fatih's mention of his family having a hard time "recognising" him after his return from his international higher education study implies an immense self-formation process during his study abroad experience.

A number of interview excerpts are shared below to provide more specific examples of what these potential new worldviews could be. For instance, Rana reflected on her observations of the remnants of socialism in Azerbaijan. She talked about how she was impressed by the local population's positive remarks about socialism, especially when she contrasted them with her perception of the thinking in Turkey towards it:

> Capitalism is recent [in Azerbaijan]. This is a culture that I have never seen before. That was the thing that changed me. You grow up with capitalism here [Turkey], and you see socialism there. We have always been told that socialism is bad. . . . We characterise socialism as an unwanted regime that people are forcefully held part of. Then you go there and hear people say they were very happy back then. They even say they wish the system hadn't fallen apart. *Rana, Azerbaijan*

Rana's excerpt above indicates that she formed a less negative stance towards socialism in Azerbaijan. On the other hand, Melis also studied for her undergraduate degree in

Azerbaijan in the same subject area as Rana. Melis also talked about how she had a chance to observe the transition in Azerbaijan from "communism" to "capitalism", but in a different way. She seems to have formed a negative perspective towards it, unlike Rana. The terminology the participants chose to use is also interesting. Some of the participants who studied in Azerbaijan used the word "socialism," while the others used the word "communism" to describe the same political environment. This shows that the participants might be liberal with their word choice.

> When we first went there [Azerbaijan], they were recently attempting to transition to capitalism. It was incredible to see that transition. . . . I saw that communism is not something like the communists in Turkey dream of. *Melis, Azerbaijan*

Melis continued reflecting on her observations about the remnants of "communism" in Azerbaijan and provided extensive details about it in her interview. Below is an excerpt from her interview that included some of her remarks supporting her reflection above:

> First, in the simplest terms, you get bored. I was having a hard time finding my house because all the houses are the same! I mean there is a Stalinski type of house and a Leninski type. . . . Then, I see that I have many friends in the public sector who defend communism, but they, at the same time, make an unbelievable effort to get promoted to a higher position. Actually, communism is completely against this. You may be working harder, and I may be working less, but we should all have the same facilities and opportunities. *Melis, Azerbaijan*

These first-hand experiences Melis reflected above seem to have triggered a process of reflection and critical thinking, which had an impact on forming her personal thinking regarding this topic. Below is an excerpt from her more extended discussion on this:

> Not everyone is equal in actuality. Everyone deserves to earn the amount of work they put in. Of course, I agree that blue-collar workers are working under very hard circumstances and they earn a minimal amount. I think there should not be a 500%–600% wage difference between the CEO of a company and the lowest level of workers in that company, like we have in Turkey. *Melis, Azerbaijan*

The quotations from Rana and Melis above demonstrate the transformative experiences of two international higher education graduates. They both were apprentices in new worldviews in Azerbaijan, even though their individual self-formation process took them to different points. As previously indicated, self-formation is a very individual process, and this seems to play out in apprenticeships in new worldviews too. As discussed in the Literature Review chapter, the ecological perspective on self-formation posits that the interaction between the three dimensions of agency (i.e., individual/actor, temporality, and context-for-action) create unique self-formation trajectories for internationally mobile students. Both Rana and Melis share a lot of commonalities: they both lived in Istanbul before going to Baku for their undergraduate education, they both studied international relations, though at different universities in Azerbaijan, and they both returned to Istanbul after their studies. Regardless of the similarities, one argued that she was able to observe "socialism" more closely and formed a milder stance towards it, while the other formed a more negative stance towards "communism," which she claimed to be the governing system in Azerbaijan until recently.

Further, Ahmet studied in Germany and currently resides there. During his interview, he discussed how studying and spending time in Germany helped him further mature his perspective towards capitalism extensively. In the excerpt, below, he recognised the role of his international higher education in this:

> I always had in my mind that capitalism does not work. But I couldn't call myself a socialist or anti-capitalist. Because although I could think and question that capitalism does not work, I could never prove it to myself. After I came here [Germany], I was able to develop these thoughts more easily. *Ahmet, Germany*

After a probing question on how this acknowledged apprenticeship in Germany took place, Ahmet expanded on it and provided a reflective account of his self-formation process in this regard:

> The people around me helped me with this, not by teaching but they gave me food for thought. They would tell me a book name, and I would read it. My world would change afterwards. . . . Or I would say something that would challenge them. Talking about things opposed to my worldview pushed me to do further research. I formed a more critical perspective. I think I can look at the world in a more realistic and better way now. I learned that accessing alternative information can be easy. *Ahmet, Germany*

Ömer also reflected on his apprenticeship in his host country while studying abroad. In his interview, he started by describing himself prior to his mobility to the UK. His remarks below imply that he had no idea about politics and civic engagement:

> In Turkey, in high school, for example, rightist and leftist people would argue among themselves, and I wished that I knew a little about such issues so that I could get involved with the discussions. I had no clue about it. At some point, I thought I needed to learn more about such issues as I was about to start voting, and I did not know whom to vote for. *Omer, UK*

Building on this, he then explained his self-formation during his international higher education experience in the UK. The excerpt below demonstrates how his study in the UK, and the sources he had access to there, had a profound impact on developing his perspective towards the world:

> My coming to the UK and learning English had a profound impact on my developing an understanding of the world. I watched objective documentaries. I listened impartially, objectively, because there is some truth to be taken from all sides. I developed a certain perception, a certain understanding. *Omer, UK*

According to Omer's reflection above, learning the English language and having access to English sources played a significant role in helping him understand the world around him. Obtaining a worldview through the English language and the English sources during international higher education echoes well with the main argument discussed here in the Apprenticeship in New Worldviews section.

Further, ten participants (one-in-five participants) reflected on how they became more "global," as some of them termed it, after their international higher education experience. They started problematising their belonging and the borders of countries. Take Aysel's reflection on her transformative experience, for example:

> There is a more global Aysel now, a more world-citizen Aysel. I was never a highly nationalist person. I was not like, "I am a Turk. I was born here, and I am from here." But now it is more like these borders seem meaningless to me. I mean, I was born here but so what? I could have been born a thousand kilometres further away or in a different place. This does not say much about me. *Aysel, UK*

Notice how she compared her self before and after international higher education in the third person singular. This could be a sign of the strong reflexive process she has been going through as part of her self-formation.

Mustafa corroborated Aysel's reflection and added that people evaluate themselves differently depending on how closed they are to the world:

> You evaluate yourself differently depending on how closed you are to the world. So, when you look at Turkey, for example [you see an] unnecessary confidence, unnecessary nationalism. Or let me tell you in the simplest terms, I too thought that the best food in the world was in Turkey, but as I got to know the world I was like, "hold on a sec!" *Mustafa, Germany*

The excerpt from Mustafa above implies that when a person goes abroad, their nationalistic stance might soften. Adnan strongly supported the reflections from Aysel and Mustafa. He talked about how he "lost" his nationalism:

> I lost my nationalism. I am no longer a nationalist. And I learned how bad nationalism could be. I saw how nationalism could make people discriminate, make people do racist things. And I am happy that I am no longer a nationalist. *Adnan, Germany*

Adnan's proud remark that he is "no longer a nationalist" is interesting. This could be because he studied in Germany (context dimension) where people seem to be more careful about such issues because of recent history. This claim is also supported by his mentioning that he now knows what negative things nationalism and racism can make people do.

4.3.6 Section Summary

This section has reported the findings related to the civic domain of self-formation in international higher education, which is related to the first research question of the study (i.e., How do Turkish young adults who completed their degrees abroad explain their self-formation in international higher education?). As introduced earlier, civic understandings and perspectives affect individuals in their endeavours to help shape their community's future or improve conditions for others, a definition that builds on Adler and Goggin's review of definitions (2005). These endeavours can be accomplished

through political and/or non-political processes, as Ehrlich (2000) argued. As the participants went through a self-formation process during their study abroad experience, they reportedly developed different civic understandings and perspectives on helping shape their communities' futures or improving conditions for others. I discussed this process under five emerging themes and refer to these collectively as the civic domain of self-formation.

The findings reported in this section suggest a number of points. Many participants developed a new perspective towards public civic engagement, such as marches, protests, and demonstrations, and they also became more vocal in normal day to day discussions after their international higher education experience. The resulting increased awareness of how things work differently in different country contexts played a role in these, as many participants also discussed. Graduates becoming more active in daily discussions, like those discussed by Habermas (1991), or them developing softer or more positive stances towards public civic engagement could help them become catalysts in shaping a more positive future for their communities or improving conditions for others.

Further, the findings shared in this section demonstrate that international higher education seems to lead students to follow the news more globally and, especially, to follow the host country's news more. News-following habits may help shape what people think a community is and sometimes even draw the boundaries of it, as Anderson (1983) famously discussed how the establishment of mass printing and the mass distribution of news and published work paved the way for the creation of nation-states. Supporting this, news following was discussed by the participants as a necessary way for communicating with the society an individual considers themself a part of. With this regard, changes in their news following habits may have influenced participants in their senses of belonging

(e.g., becoming a global citizen, as discussed by some, or becoming more interested in the host society news). Following the news internationally may also play a role in international higher education graduates' civic activities, as they may want to help shape their communities' futures or improve conditions for others based on what they comparatively observe in different country contexts.

Also, like a fish noticing that it was in water once it is out of it, international higher education provides graduates with an opportunity to contextualise what they had been experiencing in their home community and develop a new perspective towards life by experiencing living in a host community first-hand. This process was likened to those of apprentices who learn by practical experience (cf. Chankseliani, 2018). To give an example from the participants, some of them experienced living in a post-Soviet culture in Azerbaijan, and some others experienced living in the social democracy of Germany. These experiences played an important role in their self-formation, as demonstrated by the participant reflections shared in this section. These would not be possible if the participants had stayed in their home country.

4.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter has dealt with the first research question of the study, which was how Turkish young adults who completed their degrees abroad explain their self-formation in international higher education. The thematic analysis of the 50 interviews and life-timeline forms collected from participants across five countries indicate that self-formation experiences in international higher education can be categorised under three broad domains (i.e., spheres of knowledge, influence, or activity). These three broad domains are the educational domain, the social domain, and the civic domain of self-formation in international higher education. These three domains are not intended to be exhaustive but emerged to be significant ones that are shared across various country contexts.

Each of these domains was discussed in detail under their respective sections. The section on the educational domain expounded on how the skills and knowledge obtained during international higher education experience may influence student self-formation. In doing so, it did not focus on end-result qualifications or graduate attributes but on the self-formation journey of the participants within the sphere of qualifications, skills, or knowledge obtained in international higher education. The second section, which covered the social domain, showed how individuals self-form due to the day-to-day social interactions with their newly obtained social life during their international higher education experience. After all, when students go abroad for studying, they leave their existing friends and family behind, and they have to build new social connections. The third section, which was about the civic domain, dwelled on how participants developed different civic understandings and perspectives on helping shape their communities'

future or improving conditions for others during their international higher education experience.

The findings reported within these three domains of self-formation in this chapter support the growing body of literature that shows how universities serve more than just an instrumental function, which only captures a limited picture of the holistic transformation students go through in higher education. As the participant reflections demonstrated, the economic arguments currently dominating the mainstream literature (which sees students as containers to be filled, and the value of the container is decided by the market exchange, rather than by the graduates' own judgements or dreams) does not cover the whole picture. Instead, the data shared here demonstrates how students self-form as active agents, though this is conditioned by the context they study in, and by temporality building on their previous selves.

Further, the deficit model, which dominated the international higher education literature until recently, has positioned international students as passive receivers and adjusters in the host country context. The evidence shared in this chapter demonstrates that international students are not just passive receivers and adjusters in their host countries. They play an active role in how the course of their international higher education unfolds and the three domains identified in this chapter are some of the significant spheres of knowledge, influence, or activity in which they use their agency to steer this transformative experience.

Lastly, this study employed an ecological perspective on agency to understand self-formation in international higher education. The findings reported in this chapter indicate that no dimensions of agency in higher education can be downplayed. Individuals' efforts in forming themselves always play out in relation to their contexts (conceptualised as the

country context in this study) and temporality (conceptualised as before/during/after international student mobility in this study). Self-formation is a process that inherently requires a time period and interaction with a context by an active, agentic individual.

The following chapter will report the findings on international higher education graduates' societal contributions and how these contributions are potentially connected with self-formation during international higher education.

Chapter 5: International Higher Education and Contributions to Society

This chapter sets out the findings related to the second research question, which is how Turkish young adults who completed their degrees abroad explain their (potential) contributions to their home country (Turkey) and the wider society. In this study, societal contributions were studied together with self-formation as it was assumed that such contributions would be shaped by, and sometimes become possible due to, self-formation in international higher education. In this regard, the contributions aspect is considered to be the continuation of individual self-formation and hence integral to it. This is like a flow from the individual to society: students go through self-formation during their international higher education experience and then, as graduates, they may contribute to society accordingly.

The findings in this chapter are provided with an exploratory perspective by focusing on the thinking of the graduates. The chapter has the potential to guide future research on what aspects to focus on next by providing empirical evidence on international higher education graduates' societal contributions and how self-formation might relate to this. I investigated the potential links between societal contributions and individual self-formation during international higher education both by asking the participants about them during the interviews and by seeking after them in the analysis phase.

The data on the contributions to society are reported under three main sections. These are "Contributions to Home country," "No Contribution to Home Country," and "Contributions to Humanity Instead." Under the Contributions to Home Country section, participant perceptions of their contributions to their home country are reported under seven themes. Where possible, how these perceived contributions may relate to the

domains of self-formation discussed in the previous chapter is highlighted. The overwhelming majority of participants reflected on their contributions to their home country and, hence, are part of this section. Further, under the No Contribution to Home Country section, participant reflections that specifically emphasised an unwillingness to contribute to their home country are presented. The third section, Contributions to Humanity Instead, comprises participant reflections which openly expressed an intention to contribute to the global society instead, unwilling to limit their contributions to their country only.

5.1 Contributions to Home Country

The majority of participants talked about their perceived (potential) contributions to their home country. To make the data in this section more conceivable and relevant to the literature, participant reflections are reported under seven emerging themes. These seven themes are shared in the following three subsections: those that require returning, those that require staying, and those that can be achieved in any location. Below, the section starts with presenting the findings that require returning to their home country.

5.1.1 Requires Returning

5.1.1.1 Bringing Back Expertise.

This theme gathers together participant reflections that explicitly dwelled on participants bringing back their expertise to their home country upon returning. The reflections categorised under this theme focus on bringing back subject-area-related and degree-education-related expertise. Hence, they predominantly apply to the educational domain of self-formation in international higher education. One in three participants (16/50), who

returned or who were intending to return to their home country, talked about this. A selection of excerpts is shared below.

One way of bringing expertise back to home country is returning with know-how and technical information about the production of technologically advanced instruments. For example, Fatih is an electrical engineering graduate. In his interview, he dwelled extensively on how his contribution is in bringing technical expertise on designing and producing medical devices. Below is an excerpt from his long reflections on this regard:

> [Developed countries] increase their level of welfare by controlling the information, I mean, know-how. We were getting this in education, the most valuable thing in the world. I said, "I have to do this. Let me keep the information, sell it to others (as products) and earn money with it. . . . I have to get money into the country." My vision is to close my country's current account deficit. *Fatih, Germany*

Bringing know-how about the production of technologically advanced devices is not the only way of bringing back expertise. Other participants talked about different ways in which they could bring back their expertise to contribute to their home countries. For example, the excerpt below is from Salih, who started working in a large corporation in London after graduating with a degree in the same city. Below, he shared what his potential contribution would be if he returned to his home country:

> If I return to the country, I will be back with experience. Knowledge, experience, having lived in a big city and worked in a big company. This is a significant gain. I will transfer it to my country. I will work in a good place, most likely, if I return. I will likely be involved in some decision-making mechanisms. *Salih, UK*

Another way of bringing back expertise is shown by Ayten. Different from the preceding excerpts from two participants, Ayten is a social science graduate who studied

comparative politics at a university in the UK, and she currently researches opposition parties in emerging democracies. In her interview, she hinted that she might become an advisor to the main opposition party in Turkey, as the excerpt below also indicates:

> My doctorate is in politics, and I look at the oppositions in Venezuela and Turkey . . . so that it is comparative. I'm looking at the mistakes of the oppositions. Unfortunately, the strategies, the style, they are similar.
>
> Researcher: Your counselling will help a lot then, maybe you can show a way to CHP [the main opposition party in Turkey].
>
> Yes, yes. But I think that CHP should be more open to dialogue and self-criticism for this to work better. *Ayten, UK*

As can be seen, she will be putting what she has learned in her international higher education into use for the political advancement of an opposition party in Turkey.

Another way that a social sciences graduate can bring back expertise to their home country, was shown by Sevim. Sevim is a graduate of social and cultural anthropology, and she reflected extensively on how she contributed to her home country through her professional life. During her interview, she explained how she was able to combine her theoretic knowledge of civic organisations thanks to her degree education in the UK, and her practical observations of such organisations during the same international education experience. Building on this combination, she explained how she chose to work in this field after returning to Turkey even though she had options:

> After returning, I started working on social policy programs at the Sabancı Foundation. We conducted programs for disabled women and youth there. . . . I was in a position to give grants to civil society. . . . Now, I have been working with KOÇ in the field of sustainability and social benefit for 2.5 years . . . I try to do this way as much as I can: the field I choose is the field of social benefit,

> the values I believe in. I could have earned much more money by doing mergers in a bank or something. *Sevim, UK*

In short, the sample excerpts shared under this theme indicate that bringing back expertise was seen as a way of contributing to one's home country by one in three participants. The theme has focussed on what participants bring back related to their subject areas and degree education and, hence, the shared excerpts were predominantly related to the educational domain of self-formation in international higher education. However, as is discussed in the following section, international higher education graduates do not just bring back expertise related to their subject area.

5.1.1.2 "Enlightening People at Home."

This theme contains participant reflections on "enlightening people at home" by bringing back what participants perceived as "better working" (*Alpaslan*) aspects of the host countries in which they studied. These contributions are not directly related to their subject areas or specialisations, which sets this theme apart from the preceding theme that discussed bringing back expertise. Quotation marks used in the theme title denote that this is an in vivo code that naturally emerged from the interview data. Quotation marks will not be used for this phrase from now on in the text for simplicity and avoiding potential confusion. Nine participants, which is close to one in every five participants, explicitly discussed this.

The reflections shared in this theme show how returning graduates became more vocal in their home country when they returned. They are mostly about bringing back and advocating for what they observed as a "better working system" (*Alpaslan*) in their host countries. Such observations, based on participants' reflections, mostly occurred through day to day social interactions and experiences in the civic sphere, which means that the

social and civic domains of self-formation are more visible in the reflections under this category.

Hasan's observations about how the general society and government in the UK are engaged with environmental sustainability are a good example. In his interview, Hasan explained that he developed an interest in this topic during his international higher education and started following it more closely. This interest he developed while in his host country led him to work towards bringing his observations about environmental sustainability back to his home country, as briefly explained in the following excerpt:

> I looked and said, "How do they keep this place clean in the river Thames?" I learned that they established a purifying centre. They are getting biogas. . . . and from that, they generate electricity. And also, clean water comes out. You know, this is very important, and we do not do it . . . I conveyed this [to the municipality]. . . . It contributes to the environment. Are you trying to open people's eyes, Hasan? I definitely try. *Hasan, UK*

Notice Hasan's desire to "open people's eyes" in his home country. This may show that Hasan had a viewpoint that looked down on his home country society. With such wording, it seems he assumed the role of an enlightened person who opens the eyes of others. This is congruent with the main argument of this theme.

Hasan is not the only one with such an attitude. Simge is another participant who reflected on enlightening people in her home country and perhaps with a more stringent looking-down attitude:

> At first, it was like I was belittling my place, people, and culture. Something like: "Who do you think you are? I've seen Europe," etc. . . . This is a bad prejudice that I had acquired over time. Of course, then this happened: why do you use it [referring to her reportedly higher level of education and culture due

> to her international mobility] this way? Use it positively. Ok yes, there is a deficiency in the people here but then try to wake them up. *Simge, Bulgaria*

Though Simge acknowledged her depreciatory attitude towards people in her home country, she still sees "deficiency" in people there and tries to "wake them up." This depreciatory tone is not as obvious in other reflections in this theme though. Alpaslan, for example, explained his observation of a different sense of community in Germany and how he thinks people in his home country should internalise this:

> Being more open-minded is something I learned in Germany. I think that this should spread throughout society. . . . I think it is perfectly normal that somebody else lives a different life than yours, and this should be very acceptable in society. . . . If I take part in social responsibility projects, etc. . . . I will advise people in this direction. *Alpaslan, Germany*

Below is an excerpt from Elif regarding enlightening people at home. She discussed in detail how she was able to observe a better-working health system in Germany. She explained her attempts to enlighten the people at home about this:

> I am trying to convey what I learned about the system here [Germany], for example, the health system, to my friends and family. For example, the health system here is more oriented towards prevention, and individuals are more conscious about prevention overall. . . . This kind of information, I'm trying to share it with people I can reach. *Elif, Germany*

As the sample excerpts shared here indicate, international higher education graduates do not only bring back things related to their area of expertise but also what they perceive to be "better working systems" in their host countries. They mostly get a chance to learn these thanks to their day-to-day social interactions or through their first-hand observations of communal values and perspectives in their host countries.

5.1.1.3 Educating Youth at Home.

This theme gathers together those reflections that explicitly argued for educating the youth in Turkey as their contribution. One in six participants (8/50) explicitly discussed how they teach (or plan to teach when they return) the youth in Turkey. The clear focus on youth and students in their home country is the main difference that sets this theme apart from the preceding two themes. The sample excerpts below delineate further.

To start with, Elif received her masters degree in law while in Germany. Throughout her interview, she discussed how Germans have thought of everything in case law. When asked about her contributions, her first and most enthusiastic response was about her wish to teach the youth back in Turkey about the things she learned in her law degree programme in Germany, as she plans to be a professor in Turkey when she returns.

> My biggest goal is, of course, to be able to transfer the knowledge I accumulated here to my future students. Because as I said, here the legal system is really good. They thought of everything. *Elif, Germany*

Elif's remarks above imply that what she wanted to transfer was the knowledge she "accumulated" from her degree education. This shows that this aspect of her contribution is related to the educational domain of self-formation. However, the reflections categorised under this theme indicate that other domains of self-formation may also be in play when educating youth in at home. An example of this is seen in Aysel's excerpt below. Pay attention to her mention of civic values and the international perspective she obtained abroad in addition to the academic information she wanted to teach the youth in Turkey:

> It teaches you to think in a more international way and not in a Turkey-centred way. And this can help my students attain a more international perspective, for

> example, when I become a lecturer back in Turkey. Not everyone can study abroad, but at least if the lecturer studied there, I think they can at least convey the methods, writing, and those civic values they learned there. *Ayten, UK*

Burak is another participant who explicitly discussed educating the youth in his home country after returning. Having studied in Azerbaijan, he also said that he wanted to teach the youth in his home country more than just the educational information he obtained in his international higher education:

> It is nothing other than raising our children for the bright future of our country. Only education, I don't think of anything else. Of course, this is not to make money. I don't have any other purpose but to raise individuals with lofty ideals. As I said, to raise a youth that does not break with their core identity, their culture. *Burak, Azerbaijan*

Notice his emphases on raising a youth that adopts their own national identity and own culture. Such desires were not expressed by participants who studied in the other countries, but only from those who studied in Azerbaijan (other participants who studied in Azerbaijan who mentioned this include Sarp and Kerem). This may indicate a relationship between studying in Azerbaijan and the apprenticeship in this worldview, implying the relevance of the civic domain of self-formation in that broader country context.

Also, educating youth in Turkey is not necessarily only for teachers' or university lecturers'. Two of the eight participants were professionals in different subject areas who still pointed out how they are contributing to their home country by educating the youth. For example, Hasan is a lawyer who has his own law firm in Istanbul. Below is his reflection on how he plays a role in educating the youth in his home country:

> There is a competition formed by the Istanbul Arbitration Centre called the arbitration lawyer of the future. Hypothetical litigation. Since the current student group studying at Galatasaray University couldn't find a coach at their university, they reached me and asked if I could help them prepare. So, I, for example, give them resources, we use the office, we meet together. *Hasan, UK*

In short, educating the youth in their home country was expressed explicitly by one in six participants who either have returned or were intending to return. As the selected sample of excerpts in this theme indicates, educating the youth at home seems to predominantly build on the educational and civic domains of self-formation in international higher education.

5.1.2 Requires Staying

5.1.2.1 Building a Diaspora Community.

Building a diaspora emerged as another way of contributing to home, as close to one in every four participants who stayed in their host country after graduation (6/26) directly discussed it. This theme gathers together interview excerpts that show how staying abroad after studying advances the agenda of "their" people and helps them in a general sense. This also included reducing the costs of moving and living in their host countries for newcomers from Turkey. A sample of interview excerpts is shared below to illustrate this.

To start with, Ahmet studied in Germany and stayed there afterwards. During his interview, he discussed in detail how he and other graduates in Germany could contribute to Turkey from abroad. Below is a shortened excerpt from his more extended discussion on this:

> We are establishing an expat life here. . . . Everyone who comes to Germany comes to either do a masters, a doctorate, or to work in qualified jobs here. These

> people somehow find each other and form a culture here. . . . I believe that in the future these people . . . will be much more influential in German politics, in the German economy, in the German private sector . . . Because a minimum of 50–60 thousand people will be at the top level of decision-making. *Ahmet, Germany*

In the excerpt above, Ahmet discussed a networked group of highly educated individuals. His emphasis on the high level of education for such individuals—who presumably were able to get jobs and stay in the country thanks to their skills and qualifications—implies the relevance of the educational domain, while the emphasis on them being networked implies the relevance of the social domain to the theme of building a diaspora community.

Making it easier for others to come study in their host countries is another way of building a diaspora and contributing to their home country. Ayten discussed this and explained how she makes it easier for other students from her home country to come and study abroad:

> I also give some counselling to people who want to study here. I send my statement of purpose as an example. I proofread their statement of purposes. This is my contribution to those who want to come here for studying. Or sometimes I advise those who want to get an opinion before submitting their homework. Ayten, UK

Lobbying for the host country is another way international higher education graduates who stayed in the host country may contribute to their home countries. Omer discussed this in his interview. The excerpt below illustrates how Omer and the network he built in his host country are, as a community, in contact with the officials from Turkey and lobbying for their fellow countryman:

> We also had one-on-one meetings with the consulate and others. Our ambassador needs people who are well integrated into the society here and who

> can represent Turkey as a lobby. Of course, we are lacking in this. We are trying to make this happen in almost every way. We are trying to be an entity that has a voice here, has a representation. *Omer, UK*

These sample excerpts shared in this theme indicate that building a diaspora community that works for the interests of Turkish society and helps make studying abroad easier for newcomers is a potential way graduates who have stayed contribute to their home country. These sample excerpts also indicate that the perceived contributions in building a diaspora community do not predominantly rely on one domain of self-formation, unlike those under the Bringing Back Expertise theme, but builds on multiple of them.

5.1.2.2 "Better from Abroad."

Close to one in five participants who stayed in their host country after graduation (5/26) argued that their contributions to Turkey are/would be better if they did not return. These are highly educated participants who argued that they could contribute to their home country "better from abroad," either because there were not adequate opportunities in Turkey (such as the necessary labs for research or large corporations focusing on their field) or because it is harder to do their jobs in Turkey (e.g., a restrictive academic atmosphere). Quotation marks used for the title of this theme denote that this is an in vivo code. Quotation marks will not be used after here for simplicity and avoiding potential confusion. Below, sample excerpts are shared to provide more details about this theme.

To start with, Yasar is a finance graduate who currently resides in London, UK. During his interview, he discussed extensively that his home country lacked big investment banks such as the one he worked in. In the excerpt below, he explained how his contribution could be much better and on a bigger scale if he stayed in London rather than returning:

> I think if I return, I won't contribute as much as I do from here. . . . My current company doesn't have any investment in Turkey yet. . . . Even if investing [in Turkey] becomes easier, somebody needs to tell potential sponsors about it. . . . 14 billion dollars a year enters [to Turkey in our area]. . . . Our average investment at once is 1 billion turnover. Now if I do one project on such a scale in Turkey, that 14 billion will become 15 billion. *Yasar, UK*

Another way of contributing better from abroad to Turkey could be through producing information and writing reports on Turkey. Kemal argued that there were no strong think tanks on his specific subject area in his home country, and with the expertise he built during his masters education, he could do more in a think tank in the host country he studied in. In the excerpt below, he explained how he could contribute to Turkey better from abroad by working outside the country:

> It can be through working, writing reports. For example, we also have role models now. For example, the man in charge of the International Energy Institute is a Turk now. So, you can do something by coming to these positions. Or, for example, the organisation I work for has done a project for Turkey. So, if they contact us, we can do a project for Turkey from abroad. I can work full time on this without being in Turkey. *Kemal, UK*

The perspective that the graduates are better able to contribute to Turkey from abroad sometimes comes because the graduate's academic studies may have a critical perspective towards contemporary issues in Turkey. An example of this is in the excerpt below from Zeynep. During the interview, Zeynep repeatedly mentioned the restrictive atmosphere for studying some topics in Turkey. Building on such claims, she explained that she could conduct such studies in Germany and contribute to her home country from abroad:

> Turkey, Italy, Greece—these have vast numbers of unemployed women, and some of them are not even considered unemployed . . . For example, this is one

> of the topics I want to work on if I can be successful in doing it. . . . I can work here on this population of women, who are not even considered unemployed in Turkey. I do not have to return to Turkey to do it. *Zeynep, Germany*

As the sample excerpts indicate, sometimes the participants' subject areas and their level of expertise may result in participants feeling that they may not achieve their full potential in Turkey where the opportunities are more limited and the atmosphere is more restrictive. These participants felt that their contributions to Tukey would be greater if they stayed in their host countries.

5.1.3 Any Location, with Differing Natures

5.1.3.1 Economic Contribution.

The study findings indicate that both returnee and migrant graduates of international higher education might economically contribute to their home country. One in five participants (10/50) explicitly discussed how they contributed to their home country economically. However, the nature of economic contributions may differ based on participants' return status and subject area.

One way of making an economic contribution to their home country from abroad after an international higher education is by selling products imported from there. For example, Berke, who studied for a computer engineering degree in Azerbaijan, went on to own an IT company there. In the excerpt below, he explained how he contributed to Turkey through his company:

> I sell Turkish brands. Let's say X million Turkish liras a year so that you can understand the scale of it [laughs] thanks to the exchange rate. We contribute to Turkey that much. *Berke, Azerbaijan, migrant graduate*

Another way of contributing to their home country economically from abroad after graduation is through working in large corporations that invest in other countries. Yasar explained his conscious decisions regarding his career development abroad, which were closely related to contributing to his home country in the future:

> I made that choice consciously . . . That is, large companies usually have a NY office, a London office, and an Asia-Pacific one. If there will be an investment from Macquarie or BlackRock to Turkey, this will be managed by the UK team. I have no particular zeal or ambition to work on Turkey constantly, but I would like to invest in Turkey one day. *Yasar, UK, migrant graduate*

Both quotations above imply the importance of the qualifications obtained abroad and the educational domain of self-formation in international higher education, as these two participants' successes were highly relevant to their personal efforts within their subject areas during their degree education, as their interviews indicated.

Also, sending remittances is another way of economic contribution to their home country for a migrant graduate. One in six participants who stayed in their host country after graduation (4/26) explicitly talked about this. A sample interview excerpt from Ahmet, who stayed in Germany after his degree education illustrates this:

> We make money, and of course, I spend 15% of this money, maybe 20% in Turkey depending on the situation and time. We have an economic contribution this way. It is a significant sum that cannot be ignored. *Ahmet, Germany, migrant graduate*

Further, economic contribution to Turkey was not limited to those who stayed in their host country after their graduation. Returnees also contributed to their home country economically in differing ways. One way of doing this was through trading. Tuna reflected on this in his interview:

> I had a good relationship with a friend from university. We are still in touch. Well, he opened a page there on Instagram, selling products and stuff. I ship products from here, he sells there, for example. . . . I bring dollars to Turkey by foreign trade and contribute to my country. *Tuna, Azerbaijan, returnee graduate*

Notice how the friendships Tuna built in Azerbaijan increased his potential to make money and start his own business, which in turn led to the input of foreign currency to his home country. Another example of the role of networks and friendships made during international higher education in the economic contributions to their home country is seen in Atakan's situation. Atakan established a company in his home country after graduation. He explained during his interview that his company helps attract Azerbaijani and other international students to Turkish higher education. This initially started due to his collaborations with his friends from his own international higher education experience in Azerbaijan. Below is an excerpt that explains the economic contribution aspect of this company:

> We have an impact on the period students are studying here and even on the period after they graduate. I mean, we have an effect like this: we are making a financial contribution to our country. So, you add value to your country economically; you bring money. International students mean spending, which means money. *Atakan, Azerbaijan, returnee graduate*

As these sample excerpts demonstrate, economic contribution is a potential way international higher education graduates contribute to their home country. This economic contribution may happen regardless of the student's return status but in different ways.

5.1.3.2 "Cultural Attaché."

Another potential contribution of international higher education graduates to their home country is through becoming a "cultural attaché." This theme gathers together participant

excerpts that dwelled on building cultural bridges across the two countries (i.e., the host and home countries). Since this theme gathers accounts of inter-community interactions that took place in day-to-day social situations (the study's definition for the social domain) the social domain of self-formation is more visible in the shared excerpts below. Twelve people directly addressed this among both returnee and migrant graduates, which is close to one in every four participants.

The migrant graduates who reflected on such a contribution mostly talked about how they represented Turkey in the host society. They reported that this was important as the local population may not have seen a person from Turkey before or may not have been aware of the culture. To illustrate, Onur resided in Bulgaria after obtaining his degree from there. He contrasted the contributions of migrant graduates in this regard with that of official consulates:

> Every student is actually a cultural attaché, a messenger here. They introduce their cuisine and give information about their country. You could not do this with money even if you wanted to. . . . Let me give an example: You assign a consul here. They can stay here 4–5 years at most. We have been living here for 12 years. The consul goes somewhere else after 4–5 years, but we stay here. *Onur, Bulgaria, migrant graduate*

Onur even gave a specific example of how significant their contribution as cultural attachés in the host country could be by detailing a large-scale organisation he and his friends organised together with a student club at his university:

> Here, we organised an excellent cultural organisation that your statesmen could not do. Me, being from Konya, we organised a whirling dervish performance for the first time in Bulgaria. This has never been done before. We had a student club. . . . We invited 800 people. *Onur, Bulgaria, migrant graduate*

Being a cultural attaché could take place within the professional life of international higher education graduates as well. Yasar's excerpt is a good example of this. Yasar explained during his interview that being the first Turkish employee in a large corporation in the UK impacted his life and his potential contributions to the wider society. In the excerpt below, Yasar reflected on his cultural attaché role further:

> For example, I was the first Turkish employee in my company. I was the first Turk they knew. Therefore, if I act as a good example, they will develop a positive perception towards Turkish employees and Turkey. If I act badly, bad perceptions will develop. *Yasar, UK, migrant graduate*

Later in the interview, I asked Yasar to provide more details about this. Below he explained how such a contribution to his home country may work:

> Before I started at the company, the people there only heard about Turkey when something negative happens. They heard for example when the pound to lira rate skyrocketed to 8, or when that killing in the Saudi embassy happened, etc. But now I bring Baklava when coming from Turkey. Then they have a friendly chat with me and work with me. They talk about me as a good person. *Yasar, UK, migrant graduate*

As explained at the beginning of the section, the graduates did not have to stay in their host countries to assume a cultural attaché role. This could still be done after returning home. Toprak, for example, explained how he ended up building bridges between Bulgaria—where he studied—and Turkey after returning to his home country.

> Some organisations asked if I could act as a bridge to Bulgaria. . . . to establish cultural or economic links between the local municipalities here and there. Such situations occurred. This is also a contribution to the country in terms of increasing dialogues between the countries. *Toprak, Bulgaria, returnee graduate*

Building cultural bridges does not have to be one-way either. To illustrate, Tuna reflected on how he changed the perspectives of his family and friends at home about the people in Azerbaijan positively:

> I think I broke down the prejudices of my family and the people around me. For example, they were a bit prejudiced towards Azerbaijan. Since they didn't know much, they were thinking differently. They thought it was like Iran. *Tuna, Azerbaijan, returnee graduate*

As the sample excerpts shared under this theme indicate, graduates of international higher education can help bridge the societies of the host country they studied in and their home country. The data indicate that assuming a cultural attaché role can take place regardless of the graduate's return status and does not need to be one-way.

5.2 No Contribution to Home Country

This theme is more about the participants' home country, Turkey, and the contemporary situation there. The excerpts shared here imply a weariness towards what is going on in Turkey and a resulting unwillingness to contribute to it. Thirteen people out of all the participants, meaning one in four, questioned why they would want to contribute to their home country and maintained their unwillingness to do so. The main point in the reflections of these thirteen people revolved around the questions that were succinctly put by Simge:

> Should I provide this support to Turkey? Do I want Turkey to develop? . . . Does Turkey deserve it? Or did it give me something to deserve it in terms of education and social rights? . . . I am not sure about that, and I guess it doesn't deserve it. *Simge, Bulgaria, Returnee graduate*

Notice how she questioned whether her own country gave her anything at all. When considering that primary, secondary, and tertiary education provided by state institutions

in Turkey are free, this may not be entirely true. However, according to the reflections shared under this theme, the situation is not that simple.

Kemal is another participant who expressed similar feelings with Simge. He explained in his interview that he used to have a motivation to contribute to his home country related to his subject area. However, as he explained in the excerpt below, this faded in time:

> The contribution I can give is mostly in the field of sustainable energy. I want to do this, but Turkey does not want to get it, and you wear out after a while. You question: what am I working for? I mean it will not respect you. It will denigrate you. It will not care about you. People don't accept your lifestyle. . . . I used to say I should contribute to my country but not that much anymore. *Kemal, UK, returnee graduate*

Both Simge and Kemal blamed Turkey for their unwillingness to contribute. This thinking is a common point among the reflections categorised under this theme. The participants never associated this attitude with their international higher education experience and their self-formation during it. It is their home country, Turkey, that does not deserve or accept their perceived contributions, which could otherwise be helpful now that they are well-educated and self-formed international higher education graduates.

The excerpt from Defne below is another example of this. Defne stressed that she graduated with a degree that focused on civil society organisations and that one of her goals was to contribute to humanity. However, when it came to contributing to her home country, she faced an uneasy situation, as she explained below:

> I would be happy to contribute to Turkey, I mean our beautiful country, but on the other hand, I think this way: I do not see reciprocity for this. I have such

> positive feelings towards Turkey, but Turkey does not seem to have such positive feelings towards me. *Defne, Germany, Migrant graduate*

Salih provided a more specific reason for why he has never thought of contributing to his home country before, which could further explain the viewpoint that Turkey did not deserve or accept their perceived contributions:

> It will seem a little selfish, but I have not thought of contributing to the country. So why should I help this government? There may be something like why I should help the country that voted for this government. Maybe this is why I didn't think about it. *Salih, UK, migrant graduate*

As can be seen, Salih equated contributing to his home country with contributing to the incumbent government there, which seems to demotivate him to do so.

In short, one in four participants (13/50) reflected on their unwillingness to contribute to their home country. Such thinking does not seem to be return-status bound as both returnees and migrant graduates reflected in a similar way. The location of study does not explain this either, as there are graduates from all four country contexts who shared similar thoughts. The subject area of study also does not seem to be the common denominator for this theme, as these 13 participants were graduates of varying subject areas, ranging from engineering, to law, to social policy. What could be the common denominator for all such reflections was the contemporary situation in the home country, Turkey, at the time and participants' perceptions of it, which affected their responses as indicated by the shared excerpts above.

5.3 Contributions to Humanity Instead

This section gathers together reflections from participants that focused on contributing to humanity in general instead of being limited to contributing to their home country only.

Eight participants out of fifty, one in six, discussed how they wanted to contribute to humanity overall.

A few of the excerpts categorised under this theme imply that the motive behind contributing to humanity in general instead is related to their unwillingness towards contributing to their home country, Turkey. This can be observed in Rana's quotation below:

> I have to create an added value after studying for so many years. . . . I am from here, but it is questionable whether I feel I belong here. So, the reason why it is questionable is that my heart is broken in general because I saw that you could live more pleasantly. . . . So, I want to create added value, but will this be country-based? No, it will be human-centred. I think people are global. I think the world is a global place. *Rana, Azerbaijan, Returnee graduate*

As can be seen, Rana reflected on how she recalibrated her thinking, during her international higher education experience, about where her contributions should go. Rana was not the only example of this. Below, Zeliha discussed how her ideals played a role in how or where to contribute:

> I don't want to do something I don't believe in. For me, there is no direct belonging to Turkey, but to the ideal I created. This is not like any country or national unity border. If it is a country compatible with my ideals, I would gladly return, live there, and work even for little money. *Zeliha, UK, migrant graduate*

As the two shared excerpts indicate, the participant reflections in this theme are predominantly about becoming more global, which is a topic discussed under the civic domain of self-formation. This was clearly supported by Aysel below:

> As a person who sees herself a bit more like a world citizen, I think that the issues of the world concern me. And therefore, I choose my work accordingly. . . . I was never like a person who thought that I should advance my country

> from one point to another, but it [studying abroad] further lowered my perceptions that I am attached to one nation. *Aysel, UK, returnee graduate*

The sample excerpts shared above were from social scientists. However, the desire to contribute to humanity in general, rather than Turkey, is not limited to that subject area. A chemistry graduate focusing on health sciences, Eylül, also reflected that her contribution is towards humanity instead:

> The field I work in is a great contribution. I work in the health sector: pharmaceutical projects. One of the main motivations in my masters degree in England was contributing to humanity. Well, I also worked on a pharmaceutical project during my undergraduate education. So, I think I still contribute in this sense. *Eylül, UK, returnee graduate*

In short, one in six participants (8/50) explicitly discussed that their contribution was/would be towards humanity in general instead of being limited to their home country only. These statements predominantly build on the civic domain of self-formation in international higher education, as they are related to the topic of becoming more global.

5.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter has addressed the second research question, which was on how international higher education graduates' explain their contributions to their home country (Turkey) and the wider society, and the potential relations between such contributions and self-formation. The findings reported here indicate a few points that may advance our knowledge with a more nuanced perspective.

Firstly, the examples given under the Contributions to Home Country section have shown that not returning to home country (Turkey) does not equate to not contributing to it, contrary to the traditional brain drain approaches in the literature. This is true for the

opposite situation as well: returning to home country does not automatically translate into contributing to it. The reflections shared under the No Contribution to Home Country section indicate that there are international higher education graduates who consciously avoid contributing to their home countries. The findings reported in this chapter indicate that while some may contribute to their home country better from abroad, others may avoid contributing to it even after returning. This indicates that drawing strict lines about an individual's societal contributions solely based on their return status could be misleading.

Moreover, the findings presented here support the idea that individual self-formation during international higher education is related to graduates' perceived societal contributions. However, this may not be a direct and easy to spot relationship partly because the three domains of self-formation in international higher education proposed in this thesis are not meant to be exhaustive and such a complex relationship is not easy to explain without having the whole picture. As explained in the chapter, this is a complex relationship, and it is hard to categorise contributions based on one domain, as they are usually a combination. Nevertheless, these findings do show that all the educational, social, and civic domains of self-formation are valid and that they play a role in the contributions of international higher education graduates.

Further, the No Contribution to Home Country section and, partly, the Contributions to Humanity Instead section show that Turkey is missing out on contributions from some of its most highly-educated and self-formed individuals. The reflections indicating an unwillingness to contribute to their home country came up repeatedly in the interviews. Such findings reported in this chapter have significant theory and policy implications, which are discussed in detail in the following discussion chapter.

Chapter 6: Discussion

This study investigated self-formation and societal contribution in international higher education through data collected from Turkish international higher education graduates. The study positioned international higher education students as self-forming agents who go through a transformative experience while studying abroad and whose societal contributions are influenced and shaped by this formative experience.

Through its international-comparative and exploratory approach, as explained in the Methodology chapter, this study collected the socially-constructed perspectives of Turkish international higher education graduates from five country contexts. The following research questions guided this investigation:

1. How do Turkish young adults who completed their degrees abroad explain their self-formation in international higher education?
2. How do Turkish young adults who completed their degrees abroad explain their (potential) contributions to their home country (Turkey) and the wider society?

The findings of the study revealed that self-formation in international higher education has three broad domains: the educational domain, the social domain, and the civic domain. The findings on these three domains are reported under their dedicated sections in the fourth chapter, titled International Higher Education and Student Self-Formation. These three domains of self-formation in international higher education are not intended to be exhaustive but are, nevertheless, significant ones that are shared among the country contexts included in this study.

Further, the analysis has shown that self-formation in international higher education is relevant to the graduates' contributions to their home country and the wider society,

indicating an indirect contribution of international higher education to society through graduates. The findings on this are reported under the fifth chapter, titled International Higher Education and Contributions to Society.

The findings mentioned above have implications for both theory and policy, which are dwelt on in the following sections. A discussion of the limitations and suggestions for future research round off the chapter.

6.1 Implications for Theory

The findings of this study are situated in the interdisciplinary area of higher education studies, and they build on fields such as sociology, psychology, economics, and educational studies. Below, the findings are discussed in light of such existing literature.

6.1.1 A Move Away from Seeing Students in Deficit

The study's findings strongly support the argument that some of the long-established and influential scholarly perspectives in higher education literature have severely neglected the student's role in higher education. One of these perspectives is the adjustment paradigm. This paradigm has positioned students in deficit in relation to their host countries' norms and cultures. In this paradigm, the students have been seen as passive receivers, and the focus has been on helping the students to adapt or adjust to the new study context (e.g. Andrade, 2006; Berry, 1980; Black & Mendenhall, 1991). This paradigm has been especially influential in the international higher education literature, regarding students crossing borders to study in a country context different from their native country. The analysis of the findings of this study demonstrates that international higher education cannot be explained entirely by this paradigm. This study highlighted students' active roles and agency in international higher education, which has been

severely missing in the adjustment paradigm amidst the overemphasis on the deficit-positioning of students (Volet & Jones, 2012).

The economic arguments of the human capital approach to higher education, do not do justice to students' role in higher education either. The study's findings strongly support the argument that the purpose of higher education, and within that, international higher education, is for more than just obtaining qualifications for employment and monetary returns, challenging the human capital approach that has dominated the literature on education. This approach has been shaping the field since the 1960s, notably in the writings of Schultz (1960, 1961), Mincer (1974) and Becker (1993). This has reached such a level that the primary purpose of higher education has come to be seen as only for economic returns and job attainment (Ashwin, 2020b). While such an approach may have some important points, it only covers certain parts of the broader picture and not necessarily the most significant parts (Ashwin, 2020b; Marginson, 2019a). Having focused on the instrumental value of university degrees, such an approach has downplayed graduates' own judgements or dreams about their degrees. In such an approach, university students are reduced to "vessels for others to fill" (p. 3), and the value of the vessel is decided by the market exchange (Marginson, 2018).

The findings of this study indicate that individuals go through a holistic self-formation process during their international higher education experience. Though this self-formative process may include the formation of skills related to the instrumental value of higher education, it goes beyond it. The findings reveal that self-formation in international higher education is not limited to what happens within the physical buildings of universities. The social day-to-day interactions and the extracurricular activities that happened in different country contexts emerged as significant catalysts for

student self-formation in international higher education. Also, the intercultural bridges built, thanks to such interactions during international higher education, are shown to play a role in the transformative nature of higher education, as reported in the findings under the Social Domain of Self-Formation in International Higher Education section.

The analysis showed that universities serve more than just the instrumental purpose of preparing students for the job market. Universities also provide students with a relatively safer and less discouraging environment for making mistakes, as emerged from the analysis. The combination of all the events taking place within universities (such as seminars, classes, and social events) with this environment that is reportedly safer for trial and error helps guide self-forming students in regards to the things they want to achieve or be knowledgeable about—or even help them become aware of the things that they did not know they are interested in.

The role of the university from the perspective of a self-forming individual seems to be that of a guiding one. This is not to claim an exhaustive role for universities but is to simply argue that this function of universities comes to the forefront among their other potential functions when students' work on the self is discussed. The guiding role of universities is congruent with self-formation theory, as the learners consistently emphasised their active agency in this process. Only the learner does the actual learning, as is shown by the analysis and in the existing literature (e.g., Marginson, 2018). Logically, the guidance role would not work with passive receivers or adjusters.

Also related to the holistic transformation in international higher education, the data collected within the scope of this study strongly supports that students self-form in terms of their civic values and perspectives in international higher education. The interview data related to the civic domain of self-formation in international higher education, which

had a findings section of its own and were summarised in detail in section 4.3.6, are quite substantial and cannot be ignored. The multi-country fieldwork indicates that there is a mechanism for the civic domain of self-formation in each context, though the nature of this may differ from one context to another. Their apprenticeship in different worldviews in each country, in combination with individuals' own agency, lead to unique self-formation trajectories. This is consistent with the existing literature as well: higher education, and within that, especially international higher education, tends to create overall more civically-aware and active citizens (e.g., Biesta, 2002b, 2002a; Crossley, 2008; Crossley & Ibrahim, 2012). However, different from the existing literature, this study drew attention to the students' roles in the formation of their civic values and perspectives in an international comparative study.

Positioning international higher education students as active agents and focusing on their holistic development in international higher education is central to this thesis work. The active role of students has been neglected and needs further consideration. The widespread attention in the relevant literature also seems to be shifting in this direction recently as some of the recent influential work is pointing towards the limitations of the existing paradigms, such as the human capital approach to higher education (e.g., Ashwin, 2020b; Marginson, 2019a; Piketty, 2014) or the adjustment paradigm in international education (Marginson & Sawir, 2012; Tran & Vu, 2018). An important question then is what theory(ies) will shape the narrative of the literature amidst the realisation that some of the long-established, influential paradigms are deemed inadequate. Such a theory does not necessarily have to be at odds with the instrumental understanding of higher education but can provide a more encompassing perspective towards it. The findings of this study indicate that self-formation theory is a contender for taking up this challenging task.

6.1.2 Self-Formation: A Fad or a Phenomenon?

Self-formation is still in its early theorisation phase in higher education and, within that, international higher education literature. There are only three introductory publications on self-formation theory by the original pioneers (i.e., Marginson, 2014, 2018; Marginson & Sawir, 2012). The review of the emerging line of empirical studies on self-formation discussed in section 2.2 of the Literature Review chapter indicate momentum for further papers to come. The same review also showed a diverse focus among the existing studies on self-formation theory. Such a diverse focus implies that self-formation theory has been successful in attracting scholars with different interests, which could be a good sign for the future of the theory. Nevertheless, an important question at this point is, in what direction will the future theorisation go? What path (or paths) will be taken? The answers to this question will determine this theory's fate and show whether it is just another passing fad or if it will become a long-enduring and influential theory that will shape the narrative going forward since the existing paradigms are beginning to be seen as inadequate.

When looking closely at the existing two papers that introduce self-formation to the literature by Marginson in 2014 and 2018, two different focuses can be observed. While the former article situated self-formation as a new perspective that goes against the adjustment paradigm in international education and dwelled extensively on student identity formation, the latter paper positioned self-formation theory as a more encompassing framework. In the latter paper, self-formation was explained as a modernist idea that is different from the perspectives that currently dominate mainstream approaches, where students are seen as "vessels for others to fill" (p. 3) and the value of the vessel is decided by the market exchange, not by the graduates' own judgements or

dreams. It emphasised the agentic self and built on some of the seminal discussions on agency and freedom, such as those of Archer (2003, 2008), Sen (1999), Giddens (2006), and others. The findings of this doctoral study provide empirical evidence for advancing the perspective provided in the latter paper published in 2018, by proposing that self-formation is an encompassing framework that has at least three robust, broad domains for international students. In this sense, one of the arguments in this thesis is that self-formation theory should be defined in a more comprehensive way to understand student development and experiences in higher education and, within that, international higher education. This way, the theory can play its role in shaping the narrative in understanding student gains in higher education in the long run and further advance its own approach, which is against the deficit positioning of students and instrumental/economic returns models that currently dominate mainstream approaches.

Furthermore, the three domains of self-formation in international higher education identified by this study (namely, the educational, social, and civic domains) were developed building on substantial data, and they seem to be quite robust in different country contexts. In this sense, this study worked towards a more nuanced conceptual understanding of self-formation theory in line with the vision of an encompassing framework for self-formation theory outlined in the preceding paragraph. In addition, although these three domains are important for self-formation theory, they are not necessarily exhaustive, and they are not intended to be so. Being an early doctoral-level study focusing on self-formation theory, this study had an exploratory perspective, and it should be treated as an early step in uncovering this emerging perspective. Further research can build on this study to refine these three domains, add new ones, or add a new dimension to the theory. A more detailed account of future research recommendations is provided in a separate section below.

Another important point to discuss is whether self-formation is a theory or just a label of a process in a new paradigm that denotes an overall different thinking. The deliberations on this and the paths taken afterwards will play out in the fate of this recently emerging theory. According to the findings of this study, self-formation should not be positioned as just a general paradigm shift in higher education. The shift in seeing students as active agents has also been discussed by different studies in the literature, building on different theories. An example of this could be the agency-for-becoming perspective discussed by Tran and colleagues (Tran, 2016; Tran & Vu, 2018), which gained some attention in the literature as determined by looking at the number of citations it reached in a relatively short period. How is self-formation different? Self-formation scholars should outline what the theory includes and explain the processes involved in it more concretely. When looked at closely, the human capital theory came to dominate the literature starting in the 1960s not because it merely denoted a paradigm shift in perspectives towards education, but because many researchers and practitioners worked on producing more nuanced understandings of it and developed it as a theory of education. This study's findings play a role in this by proposing the three domains for self-formation in international higher education.

Currently, a lot of the terminology used for self-formation is loosely defined, and sometimes the same terminology is used to mean different things in different contexts. For example, the terms "socially-nested self-formation", "social formation", and "socially-contextualized character of individual formation," which were used a number of times in Marginson's 2018 paper, or "student formation" and "self-formation" in different publications, can be better defined to ensure mutual understandability and remove ambiguity among the emerging community of self-formation scholars. While this situation may be understandable since this theory is in its early-theorisation phase, self-

formation scholars should work together to establish a more robust ecosystem of terminology for this theory.

6.1.3 An Ecological Approach to Understanding Self-Formation in International Higher Education

Agency is a central concept to self-formation theory. As explained before, positioning higher education students as active agents is essential in this perspective. Since it was hard to build on the previous research conducted on student self-formation as there are few empirical studies conducted on it, and those studies interpret the phenomenon in different ways, this doctoral study provided its own framework to advance the scholarship around student self-formation. To do this, this study reviewed numerous theoretical perspectives towards agency, examining the academic literature from multiple fields, including sociology, psychology, and educational studies. As can be observed from its dedicated section in the Literature Review chapter (2.1.2. Education and Agency), each perspective on agency emphasises a different aspect of it, and some may work better in certain contexts than others. Building on this discussion of agency perspectives, this study drew its agency perspective from Biesta and Tedder's (2007) ecological approach to conceptualise student self-formation in international higher education.

As previously introduced, Biesta and Tedder (2007) argued that agency is something that is achieved rather than something an individual inherently has. According to them, to think of agency as an achievement helps explain why agency can be achieved in one situation but not in another, or fluctuate within it over time. The authors identified three dimensions for agency and argued that agency is achieved by individuals "in and through engagement with particular temporal-relational contexts-for-action" (pp:136). The three

dimensions for agency constitute the main components of what the authors called the ecological perspective towards agency. Drawing from this framework, the individuals that this study focused on were international higher education graduates. To incorporate contexts-for-action into the inquiry, this study included four meticulously selected destination countries based on the assumption that different host-country contexts might influence the self-formation of international students differently. Lastly, the temporality dimension was incorporated into this study by placing international student-mobility experience at the focal point of the analysis and focusing on analysing the self-formation of participating graduates in terms of before, during, and after their international higher education experience. This is discussed in more detail in its dedicated section in the Literature Review chapter.

The analysis of the study findings provides support for the pertinence of the ecological perspective to agency for self-formation theory, especially for international comparative studies on higher education. The international comparative data collected within the scope of this study demonstrate that, although student subjects make their own choices and follow their unique temporal-relational path in forming themselves, their choices and decisions are influenced by the contexts-for-action they are embedded in. One example of this is different approaches to university instruction in different contexts. As reported in the section 4.1.5 under the educational domain of self-formation in international higher education, in some contexts (e.g., Germany and the UK) the students seemed to be treated as autonomous and self-responsible learners, while in others (e.g., Azerbaijan) they seemed to be viewed in a deficit model (examples include lecturers monitoring whether students are taking notes and a stricter stance towards monitoring attendance). These differences, although not possible to generalise given the nature of the data, seem to shed

some light on a potential pattern of different self-formation paths in different contexts, which can be highlighted due to the ecological perspective taken in this study.

The study findings indicate that no dimensions of the ecological approach to understanding self-formation in international higher education can be downplayed. International students' efforts in forming themselves always play out in relation to their context (i.e., the country context in this study) and temporality (i.e., before/during/after international student mobility in this study). Self-formation is a process that inherently requires a time period and an interaction with a context by an active, agentic individual.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that there are many takes on agency, as demonstrated in the Literature Review chapter, and different takes on agency lead to different perspectives towards self-formation. A similar study could have built on Bandura's (2001) social-cognitive theory or Archer's (2003) morphogenetic perspective, which may have led to a more internal focus. Building on the ecological perspective, this study had a more external focus on agency and student self-formation, which is its contribution. The choice of such an agency perspective also has implications for its limitations along with its strengths, which are discussed in more detail below under the Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research section.

6.1.4 The Broader Application of the Three Domains of Self-Formation

The empirical focus of this study was self-formation in international higher education, but the exploratory findings on the processes and mechanism of this theory have a broader application. That is, the three domains of self-formation (i.e., the educational, social, and civic domains of self-formation) are not peculiar to international higher education and may apply to studying higher education in one's home country as well. This is congruent with the existing scholarship discussed in the Literature Review section as well. For

example, forming oneself in day-to-day social interactions or forming further civic values does not necessarily take place only in international higher education. Self-formation in international higher education could be understood as an amplified and more condensed period of self-formation, as individuals go through significant changes in a relatively small period of time in a different societal and educational context while studying abroad. In this way, the study's findings can have implications for self-formation in domestic higher education as well.

However, the argument that the findings of this study would have implications for domestic higher education does not mean that international and domestic higher education are the same in every aspect. There are some aspects of international higher education that are specific to that experience and should not be downplayed. In international higher education, individuals get a chance to immerse themselves in a novel society with potentially different societal and civic understandings. The higher education system they are involved in or the different manners in which students interact with knowledge during international higher education may differ significantly from studying in their home country. Also, studying abroad may have an enhanced signalling value which could provide individuals with enhanced potentials. Thus, although the findings of the study may have implications for higher education at home, differences, such as the ones mentioned here, should also be taken into account.

Perhaps a broader question would be whether self-formation is limited to higher education overall. If self-formation is defined as an individual's agentic actions to cultivate and form themself, then the answer to this would be no, it is not limited to higher education. However, as discussed above, a primary difference of higher education and, within that, international higher education is that an individual has a compressed period

of time in which relatively big changes take place. This triggers a self-formative process. Higher education also provides students with an environment that is safer for trial and error when compared to life after graduating from a university. As the analysis indicates, in such an environment, all the events taking place in higher education, such as seminars, classes, and social events, guide student subjects in their self-formation. Other than these, though it was not the aim of this study, self-formation outside higher education cannot be argued to be non-existent, and the domains of self-formation identified here may apply there as well. One context where self-formation does seem unlikely is primary schools. This is because self-formation is, as discussed in the Literature Review chapter, about personal agency and being rational and autonomous. Younger children may not have developed these features yet. Thus, self-formation may not be as lively till an individual gets to a certain age. However, this was not the topic of investigation in this study and further research would be necessary to have more substantial claims about this.

6.1.5 Functions of Education Versus Domains of Self-Formation

A seminal line of work on the philosophy of education proposed three broad functions for education in general, namely, qualification, subjectification, and socialisation (Biesta, 2009, 2010). These may be relevant in understanding how international higher education works. How may these relate to self-formation in international higher education? The qualification function identified by Biesta has similarities with the educational domain of self-formation identified in this study in the sense that they both focus on what has been widely considered to be a purpose of education overall. However, the educational domain would be more inclusive as it is not limited to the contents of education (i.e., knowledge and skills) but also includes the approach to teaching and its impacts on learning and the guiding role of universities in one's life trajectory.

Another difference between these two concepts is that the qualifications function is mostly concerned with the educational contents, such as the knowledge and skills, and end results, such as the degrees or certificates obtained. These end results would demonstrate that the individual is qualified for certain prospects. However, the educational domain identified in this study does not focus on end result qualifications or graduate attributes but on the self-formation journey of the participants within the sphere of the qualifications, skills, and knowledge obtained in international higher education. In this sense, the educational domain of self-formation proposed in this study acknowledges the role of individual agency, whereas, the qualifications function proposed by Biesta (2009, 2010) is not interested in the concept of individual agency as much.

Agency can also play an active role in subjectification and socialisation functions, although Biesta did not discuss this. For example, becoming more like the society (socialisation) and becoming a unique person, different than others (subjectification) may require constant negotiation within a students' mind, resembling that of the internal discussion argued for by Archer (2003, 2008). However, the exploratory nature of this study revealed that these last two functions identified by Biesta become especially more complicated in international higher education, as they gain new layers of meanings. For instance, how does the socialisation function work for students who are studying abroad? Does it make them more a part of the host society while making them more subjectified in their home country? On the other side, how does subjectification in international education work? Is the student becoming more unique in the host society by choosing not to adapt? The latter prospect may be seen as marginalisation in some perspectives (e.g. Berry, 1980). These questions do not necessarily mean that these functions do not hold in international higher education. On the contrary, they identify some important

mechanisms behind education and potentially would be instrumental in attracting further studies to look at these mechanisms in an international-education context.

6.1.6 Contributions to Home Country and the Wider Society

Findings also provided significant insights regarding a long-standing question in the literature: Will international higher education graduates be able to contribute to their home countries or the wider society even if they do not return (cf. Campbell, 2020; Joan R. Dassin, 2009)? The short answer, based on the study findings, is an easy yes, but the long answer—as discussed in its dedicated chapter—provides a more nuanced perspective that explains the complexity of the matter.

In this thesis, the potential contributions to society are treated differently: it is argued that such contributions would be shaped by, and sometimes become possible due to, self-formation during international higher education experience. In this sense, contributions to society are an integral part of self-formation and the continuation of it. It is a flow from the individual to society: students go through self-formation during their international higher education experience and then, as graduates, they may contribute to their home country or the wider society accordingly. Thus, this doctoral study provided empirical evidence on the potential role of self-forming student subjects as higher education's indirect way of contributing to society.

When graduates and their contributions are situated this way, return status after graduation in international higher education obtains a different meaning, which is relevant to the current trends in this line of research (e.g., Campbell, 2019; Rizvi, 2005a; Tung, 2008). Return status used to be considered the defining factor for determining whether an individual was a lost "investment" by the home country or not. This is not straightforward in today's world. As the findings of the study reveal, return status still

has an impact on the nature and the overall perception of the contributions to one's home country or the wider society, but it is much more blurred now. Drawing strict lines about an individual's contributions solely based on return status would often be misleading.

The overall impression from the interview data is that the international higher education graduates put themselves first. After going through an immense self-formation during their international higher education experience in their host countries, these individuals tended to become more aware of their capabilities, and they developed a perspective towards how they could contribute to society. If they thought that going back to their home country would not work for their interests, they discussed how they could contribute from abroad. To illustrate, if a graduate obtained a high-paying job at a large investment bank in their host country, then their discussions on contributions were more about how they could direct some investments to their home country. Or for example, if they did not have a lab in their home country that they could work in, then the narrative became, again, how they could contribute to their home country or the wider society without returning. These would, of course, be valid contributions. They could better contribute to Turkey in such ways by not returning when considering that they would not be able to use their skillsets fully if they returned.

In addition to this, the findings revealed that some international higher education graduates simply did not want to contribute to their home country, Turkey. It is important to acknowledge that this was not expressed by the majority of the participants, but the number of participants who explicitly discussed this is still significant (13 out of 50). Their clear unwillingness to contribute to their home country was not related to their return status or their subject area, as the findings revealed. It was more of a conscious stance that seemed to be related to current developments in their home country. If one

phenomenon needs to be labelled as “brain drain,” it could be these individuals’ reluctance to contribute and their dislike towards their home country, which for some reportedly reached the level of hatred, due to current developments. Considering these are highly educated and self-formed young adults, who have a long, productive time ahead, it is in Turkey’s best interest to win their hearts back. Policy suggestions for this are shared below under the Policy Implications section.

Moreover, as findings demonstrate, some of the participants questioned why they would want to contribute to their home country only and expressed that they would prefer contributing to humanity in general instead. This could be interpreted as higher education’s indirect way of contributing to the global common good, a topic that has become an important matter of discussion recently (e.g., Marginson, 2007; Szadkowski, 2019; UNESCO, 2015). This could be compared to McCowan’s (2016) argument on the interaction dimension of higher education where self-formed graduates flow from universities to society. This interpenetration between higher education and society has existed for a long time at differing levels (McCowan, 2016). However, the interpenetration between international higher education and the global society is a relatively recent phenomenon. This study’s findings indicate that international higher education may contribute to the global common good indirectly, and it is potentially more likely to contribute than domestic higher education is due to self-formed graduates who want their contributions to not be limited by borders.

While it is true that international students only constitute a minority of overall enrolments in tertiary education (only 5.3 million worldwide in 2017 according to OECD data (2019)), their contributions should not be underestimated. As the literature review indicated, international higher education has an empowering effect that helps graduates

achieve more. Increased networks between different groups and communities help bring success to individuals' lives (e.g., Granovetter, 1973). Through these increased networks, they can thwart democratic backslides in their home countries (e.g., Puryear, 1994; Spilimbergo, 2009), and the high levels of social capital brought by these networks uplift their communities in many aspects, such as improved safety, better governance, and general happiness (Woolcock, 1998). Daily social interactions during international higher education experiences provide empowering environments in which students can obtain both intercommunity and intracommunity (fellow people from the same country studying abroad in the same university) networks.

6.1.7 Self-Formation in International Higher Education and Becoming a More Global Citizen: Can They Be Equated?

The analysis of the findings suggests that studying abroad may not automatically mean becoming a more global citizen. This study did not specifically aim to research the relationship between self-formation in international higher education and global citizenship. However, due to its exploratory nature, a few themes related to this naturally emerged from participant interviews. Although some participants did explicitly state that they felt they became more global citizens, they were among the minority (only one-fifth of the participants). Also, an even smaller minority of participants indicated that they became more nationalist. Perhaps stronger arguments about international higher education graduates becoming more global citizens could be advanced if built on the findings related to the news-following habits discussed under the civic domain of self-formation. As the findings reveal, international higher education graduates started following their host country news more, even after returning to Turkey. They did not see the world through only their home-country lenses anymore; they formed the capability to

understand how, for example, German or Bulgarian people see things. Considering that news-following habits may help shape what one thinks a community is and sometimes even draw the boundaries of it (cf. Anderson, 1983), this may be considered as a shift in the belongingness of the participants.

Overall, these findings in their current form do not contradict the influential argument that international higher education could nurture global citizenship only if it is combined with appropriate academic content and pedagogical delivery (Lutterman-Aguilar & Gingerich, 2002; Tarrant et al., 2014). Nonetheless, a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between self-formation in international higher education and the development of global citizenship (or lack of it) can potentially contribute to the emerging literature on self-formation.

6.2 Policy Implications

This study mainly focused on theory and contributing to the academic literature. However, some of its findings have policy implications as well. This section is dedicated to discussing the policy implications of the study.

To start with, the study findings have implications for universities. As discussed earlier, when positioning students as self-forming agents and looking from their perspective, the guiding role of universities seems to come to the forefront. This is not to claim an exhaustive role for universities but to argue that such a role of universities is more congruent with the student self-formation perspective, as the learners consistently emphasised their active agency in this process. Universities should acknowledge this and position themselves accordingly. Universities should focus on treating students as self-forming agents who are rational and autonomous and avoid positioning them as passive receivers. This may, in turn, have a multiplying effect in society in the medium to long

run. These self-forming students will eventually graduate and live and work in the public sphere together with other individuals throughout their lives. Autonomous and agentic graduates who have been treated as self-forming individuals in their educational experiences can play a catalyst role in the emergence of a strong civil society and act as the building blocks of a robust democracy, as discussed in the Literature Review chapter in more detail.

The study findings have implications for students as well. Students' expectations of their universities should be well managed, and the importance of agency should be further underlined. University education and the degrees obtained may help students to some extent in their lives. However, it is their agency that will make a larger difference for them and the wider society. The recourses and opportunities provided by the universities or the larger country context may not be the same. However, as Foucault indicated, people are "much freer than they feel" (p. 35) and that freedom is a process of struggle (Ball, 2017). They can still rise above their context, thanks to the highly individual nature of self-formation. This argument should not be degraded to the reductionist, neoliberal arguments that promote working hard as an elixir for achieving whatever one dreams of or for becoming rich. Instead, this is to emphasise that today's modern life is far less prescribed and more liquid than ever before (Bauman, 2000; Giddens, 2006). Agency gains significant importance, and life becomes a task for self-forming agents who make their own decisions in such a context, as discussed numerous times throughout the thesis.

The study findings have implications for host countries too. As discussed earlier in this chapter, the study findings indicate that international higher education graduates could be more likely than domestic higher education graduates to contribute to the global common good, due to their interest in not being limited by borders in their contributions

to the wider society. Such individuals, who are motivated to contribute to the global common good, may contribute to the prestige of their host country at the global level and enhance its soft power. Also, if these graduates decide to stay in their host country and find the means to do so, they could be substantial assets to their host society by building bridging social capital that induces trust among communities within society. This would contribute to democracy according to the social capital approach put forward by Putnam (2000; Putnam et al., 1993). They may also revive and contribute to the civil society by being highly educated, rational, and autonomous individuals as explained by Biesta (2002a). These graduates are valuable to their host countries if they return home as well. As the findings indicate, these individuals develop strong friendships and networks in their host countries while studying there and become more interested in following their host countries' agendas. This means that the host countries will procure a crucial opportunity to promote their soft power in the home countries of graduates through international higher education. In the long run, this could transform into a stronger cooperation between the host and home countries on a more macro level as well.

Furthermore, one in four participants of this study explicitly discussed that they did not want to contribute to their home country, Turkey. Although it is hard to make generalisations due to the nature of the data, this significant proportion of participating young adults, who directly stated their reluctance to contribute and their dislike towards Turkey, their home country, is telling. The demographic information collected about these participants indicates that this unwillingness to contribute to their home country cannot be directly attributed to their return status or subject area. Their interview data indicate that this was a conscious decision they made themselves. This dislike towards their home country needs to be addressed by Turkey. It would be in Turkey's best interest

to win the hearts of these people back, as they are highly educated and self-formed young adults who have a long, productive time ahead.

To do this, Turkish embassies abroad could make positive gestures, even small ones, to help these young adults feel that they are not alone in their journey abroad and that their home country is there for them. Sending out small gifts, such as calendars on important national days, or reaching out during difficult times, such as the current COVID-19 pandemic, could be good gestures to win the hearts of these people back. To illustrate, the Chinese embassy in the UK has been sending small gifts and cards to show support for its nationals. However, more importantly, a broader take on this issue is crucial. These individuals repeatedly mentioned that they did not feel included in Turkey and that their contribution is not wanted. A more inclusive policy atmosphere that sends out positive messages would be necessary to win the hearts of these young adults. Small gestures could be good at treating the symptoms, but creating a more inclusive atmosphere in Turkey would address the deeper reason behind the issue.

It should be noted here that the participants of this study were not Turkish government scholarship recipients, as explained in the Participant Selection section under the Methodology chapter. Turkish government-funded students have to work a certain amount of time in a pre-specified organisation in Turkey after graduation. Such mandatory measures did not apply to this study's participants as they were not officially obliged in such ways. Thus, the focus should be on soft approaches, as the preceding two paragraphs indicated.

In this regard, Turkey can learn more from China in that although they are one of the largest sending countries, they are able to strategically arrange this in a way to shift the burdens of training the next elite minds of their country to developed countries (Pan,

2011). Also, by creating good opportunities at home and providing a welcoming environment, they aim to maximise the contributions from foreign-educated Chinese individuals (Pan, 2011). Alternatively, Israel could be a good example in that it used its diaspora to boost the internationalisation of its higher education (Bamberger, 2019). Israel's case indicates that, when treated well, diasporas can help universities receive more international students, which is a positive contribution to the development of universities.

In addition to Turkish young adults who have studied abroad, there are over 6.5 million Turks residing outside Turkey (Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2020). This is a significant number by any criteria. To put that into perspective, more than half of the countries in the world each have a population lower than 6.5 million (Worldometer, 2020). Not all of these Turks residing outside of Turkey are as highly educated as international higher education graduates, but they can still contribute to Turkey in certain ways. These groups need to be engaged as diaspora communities to ensure their contribution to Turkey. This issue has not been studied adequately in the literature. The recommendations provided above could help engage the overall diaspora of Turks abroad, but we need more studies about this that incorporate the specific dynamics of Turkey and Turkish people. Luckily, there are newly emerging, studies focusing on what more can be done about this, such as a recently commenced doctoral study at UCL by an esteemed colleague. There is also a forthcoming journal article (Oldac & Fancourt, 2020) discussing Turkish diaspora and Turkish international higher education graduates in Germany building from the data collected by this doctoral study.

Further, there was an implicit assumption prevalent among the participants of this study that any degree received outside Turkey was better than the ones available in Turkey.

This repeatedly came up during the interviews such as “you’ll have a better future when you study abroad” understanding (*Toprak, Bulgaria*). However, is this really so? Neither prestige nor quality of education, which impacts an individual’s self-formation, is equally distributed among the universities around the world. This unequal distribution is very dependent on the country context a student studied in and the signalling value that comes with it. There is inequality among the institutions within the countries as well. Besides, there are strong higher education institutions within Turkey too. Accordingly, steps should be taken to better manage the expectations of the youth in Turkey regarding international and domestic higher education.

6.3 Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

This study implemented a rigorous methodology to address its research questions, which were on self-formation in international higher education and international higher education graduates’ contributions to their home country and the wider society. Nevertheless, the findings should be considered in light of the limitations of the study. This section is devoted to discussing the limitations of the study and pointing out future research recommendations based on these limitations.

Firstly, the study utilised two main methods of data collection: interviewing and self-drawn, life-timeline forms. Both of these are self-reported methods and are subject to self-desirability issues. That is, the participants’ responses to these data collection approaches may have been influenced by what they thought was more socially desirable. This may have led to over-emphasising the socially acceptable and under-emphasising the socially-bad behaviours. Several measures were taken to alleviate this. One of them was to use a semi-structured interview guide. Semi-structured interview guides help structure the questions and ensure more relevant responses (Patton, 2015). Also, during

the interview, probing questions were asked, and examples were requested for claims made by participants both when discussing the life-timeline forms and during the rest of the interview meetings.

Further, the participants were not recruited or selected as representative of the larger population in each country. There were no means of conducting a random selection for the study purposes, as no related dataset or authority was available to draw the sample from in a random manner. This might pose some issues in terms of sample composition. To remedy this, maximum variation method was used to make sure that the participants varied based on rigorous, previously established criteria, which are dwelled on in the Methods chapter.

Moreover, this study made use of cross-sectional data collected from five country contexts to address its research questions. The nature of self-formation, however, naturally includes a process of time. Because of this, the use of a longitudinal methodology could have helped with understanding the process of self-formation that students go through during their international higher education experience. However, considering the three-year doctoral funding from Oxford, the study did not include a longitudinal design to ensure the feasibility of this international comparative study but instead included other creative ways to incorporate the temporality dimension. To start with, the life-timeline forms were designed to provide information about the important moments in participants' lives. These helped situate the information obtained in the interviews within the participants' life stories. Also, at the beginning of each interview, the participants were asked to chronologically go over the life-timeline form that they had prepared beforehand. Participants talked freely at this part, and I did not intervene. This helped incorporate the temporality dimension, through which what happened before,

during, or after international higher education could be distinguished. In addition, the decision to include graduates only was also related to the cross-sectional data collection approach. While studies of current students can provide important insights on international student mobility, as indicated by Collins and his colleagues (2017), recent graduates can provide precious accounts on the longer-term value of an international higher education experience, and they can reflect on their self-formation process. These being said, further studies with longitudinal designs could provide a different perspective which may give more information about the formative process.

International comparative data does make a difference if the purpose is to obtain a more holistic picture of self-formation in international higher education while it is in its early theorisation phase. This helps the research highlight certain things that seem to be shared across contexts—such as the three domains of self-formation discussed in this study—and distinguish context-specific issues. Although individuals have their unique ways of forming themselves, their choices and decisions are nested within the broader cultural context they are embedded in. One example of this is the differences in the educational domain among different cultural contexts, such as the relationship between academic knowledge and individual. This relationship in certain contexts is under a more detailed investigation by a recently commenced doctoral study and another study by a valued colleague (i.e., Ashwin, 2020a; S. Lee, 2020). However, as the findings of this study and the literature review showed, such a relationship between knowledge and individuals may change from one country context to another. Thus, this study overall indicated that this line of research could benefit further from international comparative studies.

Being an early doctoral-level study to investigate self-formation theory, this study had an exploratory nature. Because of this, it highlighted some of the important issues about self-

formation in international higher education and graduate contributions to society. Future researchers can build on these findings and be more specific in what they are looking for earlier on in the research process. This will be useful in obtaining even more detailed accounts of the identified three domains of self-formation and contributions to society. Future researchers may wish to focus on revising these domains, adding new ones, or adding a new dimension to this overall perspective.

An important point to reflect on, this doctoral study had a specific perspective towards student agency and hence towards student self-formation. It drew on the ecological perspective on agency put forward by Biesta and Tedder (2007). As the literature review of this study has shown, there are many takes on agency, and different takes on agency would lead to different perspectives towards self-formation. Thus, the agency perspective taken in this study has influenced the course of the research process, just like a different take on agency would have influenced the study differently. For example, a similar study could have built on Archer's (2003) morphogenetic perspective or Bandura's (2001) social-cognitive theory, which may have led to a more internal focus. Building on the ecological perspective, this study had a more external focus on agency and student self-formation, which is its contribution to the field. Future researchers could build on this or may choose to have a different theoretical approach. This way, a better picture of student self-formation could develop.

Another important point to reflect on, the findings indicate that self-formation in international higher education is related to the perceived contributions a student makes to their home country and the wider society. However, this relationship is complex and hard to spot. This could be partly because the three domains of self-formation in international higher education proposed in this thesis are not meant to be exhaustive and

such a complicated relationship is not easy to explain without having the whole picture. Also, it is hard to categorise contributions based on one domain since they are usually the result of a combination of domains (e.g., the combination of the social domain and the civic domain for starting an NGO for environmental sustainability, or the educational domain and the civic domain for establishing a company that works towards better rights for citizens). Future researchers can utilise more innovative methods to shed light on this complex but meaningful relationship.

Furthermore, the current COVID-19 pandemic circumstances pose new challenges but, at the same time, opportunities for researching student self-formation in higher education. Currently, there is much uncertainty about whether to continue teaching in-person or through online instruction, a lack of preparations for online teaching that would otherwise be taught in-person, a limit to social environments, and a reduced opportunity for immersion experiences—especially for international students. It was forecasted that it may take up to five years for higher education to fully recover to its pre-pandemic conditions (Dennis, 2020; Mitchell, 2020). Under such limiting circumstances, it will be the students' active agency that will make the difference: they will be steering the course of their own lives, albeit under the pandemic circumstances that they do not control. This may help with the conceptual advancement of self-formation theory as this situation has the potential to make the agentic actions of students more explicit. Since self-formation theory is recently beginning to establish its empirical research base and the existing studies have only focused on traditional, in-person higher education, research on how self-formation may work in the new normal created under the pandemic circumstances may help with the conceptual advancement of this theory.

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Appendices

A. The Central University Research Ethics Committee (CUREC) Approval

CUREC 1A Ref ED-CIA-18-159 Approval - Yusuf Oldac 6.05.2018 21:27

CUREC 1A Ref ED-CIA-18-159 Approval

Laura Molway

Tue 03/04/2018 14:06

To:Yusuf Oldac <yusuf.oldac@education.ox.ac.uk>;

Cc:Nigel Fancourt <nigel.fancourt@education.ox.ac.uk>; Education Research Office <research.office@education.ox.ac.uk>;

Dear Yusuf,

Title: The development of human capital, social capital and civic values during international study experience of Turkish students and its links to perceived contributions to home country.

The above application (reference number ED-CIA-18-159) has been considered on behalf of the Departmental Research Ethics Committee (DREC) in accordance with the procedures laid down by the University for ethical approval of all research involving human participants.

I am pleased to inform you that, on the basis of the information provided to DREC, the proposed research has been judged as meeting appropriate ethical standards, and accordingly, approval has been granted.

If your research involves participants whose ability to give free and informed consent is in question (this includes those under 18 and vulnerable adults), then it is advisable to read the following NSPCC professional reporting requirements for cases of suspected abuse

http://www.nspcc.org.uk/Inform/research/questions/reporting_child_abuse_wda74908.html

Should there be any subsequent changes to the project which raise ethical issues not covered in the original application you should submit details to research.office@education.ox.ac.uk for consideration.

Good luck with your research study.

Yours sincerely,

Laura Molway

Member of DREC

B. Life-Timeline Form

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University of Oxford
15 Norham Gardens
Oxford, OX2 6PY

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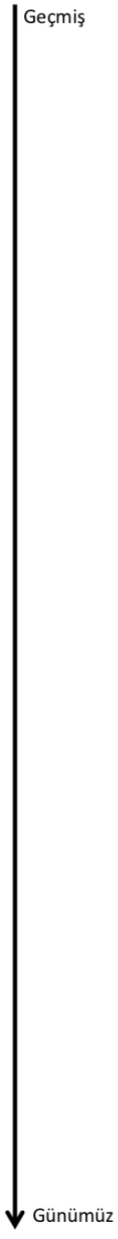
Oxford telefon numarası: +44 7586 743456
Oxford eposta adresi: yusuf.oldac@education.ox.ac.uk

Lütfen hayatınızdaki önemli anları aşağıdaki çizgide işaretleyiniz ve bu anlardan kısaca bahsediniz.



C. Life-Timeline Form Prior to Pilot Study

Department of Education
University of Oxford
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Oxford eposta adresi: yusuf.oldac@education.ox.ac.uk

Lütfen hayatınızdaki önemli anları belirten bir çizgi çizerek bu önemli anlardan kısaca bahsediniz.

Geçmiş

Günümüz

D. Interview Guide

- Sizinle hayat hikayeniz hakkında konuşmak istiyorum. Esas odak noktam uluslararası eğitim ama tarih şeridindeki önemli anlarla göstermiş olduğunuz genel olarak hayatınız benim için değerli.

	Pre	During	After

Hikayeniz
• Hayatınızdaki önemli anları daha detaylı anlatır mısınız?
  o Yurtdışı eğitiminiz sırasında tipik bir gün; özel bir gün/durum
  o Yurt dışı eğitiminiz sırasında en çok neler hoşunuza giderdi?			

Genel
• Hangi üniversitelere gittiniz?
  o Branş/bölüm
  o Öğrenim seviyesi
  o Burs durumu
  o Burs türü
• Mesleğiniz
• Ailenizin mesleği
• Neden bu ülkede okumayı seçtiniz?
  ➢ Eğitim kalitesi
  ➢ Kabul alma kolaylığı
  ➢ Ailesel/ebeveyn durum
  ➢ Coğrafi yakınlık
  ➢ Kişisel tercihler
  ➢ Ülkemin durumu/ihtiyacı
• Beklentileriniz karşılandı mı peki? Nasıl?
• Sizce üniversitelerin amacı nedir?			

HC
• Beceriler/vasıflar
• Konu alanınınız dışında ne gibi bilgiler edindiniz?
  o Ev sahibi ülkenin yönetim yapısı
  o Diğer uluslararası öğrencilerin hayatları
  o Diğer uluslararası öğrencilerin ülkeleri hk bilgi
• Aynı bilgileri Türkiye'de okusaydınız da elde edebilir miydiniz?
  o Sizce yurtdışı diploması daha kaliteli bir eğitim için mi yoksa ismi için mi daha önemli?
• Lisans(üstü) eğitiminiz dışında eğitime, kurslara katıldınız mı?			

SC
• Arkadaşlıklar
  o Kişisel arkadaşlıkların gelişimi / Ev sahibi ülke vs memleket farkı
  o Türk
  o Uluslararası
  o Yerel
• Güven
  o Kişisel gevene dayalı ilişki gelişimi / Ev sahibi ülke vs memleket farkı
  o Türk
  o Uluslararası
  o Yerel
• Komşuluk ilişkileri
  o Kişisel komşuluk ilişkileri gelişimi / Ev sahibi ülke vs memleket farkı
• Aile ve akrabalık			

○ Kişisel aile ve akrabalık ilişkileri gelişimi / Ev sahibi ülke vs memleket farkı • Sosyal grup ve spor kulüpleri • Sanat, zanaat veya diğer rekreasyonel aktiviteler ○ Ne sıklıkla? • Toplumsal aktivitelere gönüllü olmak/ yardımcı olmak ○ Ne tür? ○ Ev sahibi ülke vs memleket farkı			
CV • Haber takip etme alışkanlıkları ○ Basılı vs çevrimiçi; sosyal veya alışılagelmiş medya? ○ haber kaynakları? ○ Sıklık • İnsanlarla güncel meseleleri konuşmak/tartışmak ○ Aile ○ Arkadaşlar ○ İş arkadaşları • Sivil aktiviteler ○ Global insani kuruluşlar ve projeler ○ Hayırsever kurumlara üyelik veya bağış ▪ Ev sahibi ülke vs memleket farkı ○ Doğal kaynakları koruma etkinlikleri ○ İyi bir davayı desteklemek için yürümek, koşmak veya bisiklet sürmek veya bağışta bulunmak • Çevresel, sosyal veya politik meselelerle ilgili düşüncelerini nasıl ifade edersin? ➢ Web sitesi, kişisel bloglar ➢ Çevrim içi veya basılı bir dilekçe imzalamak ➢ Rozet/yapışkanlı etiket/semboller giymek veya sergilemek ➢ Belirli ürünleri boykot etmek ➢ Hükümetten biriyle bağlantıya geçmek veya birini ziyaret etmek ➢ Protestolara katılmak ➢ Gazete veya radyo ○ Ev sahibi ülke vs memleket farkı			
Katkı algısı • Ülkenize veya insanlığa katkınız hakkında ne düşünüyorsunuz? • Yurt dışı eğitiminiz sırasında elde ettiğiniz bilgi birikimini, sosyal çevrenizi ve sivil değerleri konuştuk. Bunların Türkiye'ye olan katkınız üzerinde nasıl bir etkisi var?			
<u>Memlekete dönenler</u> • Yurt dışı eğitimini tamamlayıp Türkiye'ye ilk döndüğünüzde nasıl hissettiniz? ○ Kültürel şok? • Yurt dışında okumuş olmak Türkiye'ye olan bakış açınızı değiştirdi mi?			
<u>Göçmenler</u> • Neden dönmeme kararı aldınız? • Bu ülkeden Türkiye'ye olan katkılarınız hakkında ne düşünüyorsunuz? ➢ Sizce burada kalmak Türkiye'ye olan katkınızı etkiliyor mu? ➢ Türkiye'ye nasıl katkıda bulunuyorsunuz? teknolojiyle sınırları mı aşıyorsunuz veya ikamet ettiğiniz ülkeyle memleketiniz arasında gidip geliyor musunuz?			

- Şu anki kendinizi, kişiliğinizi nasıl tanımlarsınız? Yurtdışına okumaya gitmeden önceki XXX'le şimdiki XXX arasında ne değişti?
- Eklemek istediğiniz bir şey var mı?

E. English Translation of the Interview Guide

- I would like to talk to you about your life story. Although my main focus is international education, all the critical moments that you shared via the life-timeline form is valuable for me.

	Pre	During	After

Your Story
• Can you please tell me about the important moments in your life in a more detailed way?
  ○ A typical day; a special day/occasion
  ○ What were the things you enjoyed during your study abroad experience?			

General
• Which Universities did you go?
  ○ Area of study
  ○ Degree level
  ○ Scholarship status
  ○ Type of scholarship
• Your Profession
• Parents' profession
• Why did you choose to study in this country?
  ➢ the quality of education
  ➢ easier to get into a degree program
  ➢ familial/parental reasons
  ➢ geographical proximity
  ➢ personal preferences
  ➢ home country's situation/needs
• Were your expectations met? How?
• In your opinion, what's the purpose of universities?			

HC
• Skills/qualifications
• What knowledge have you acquired out of your subject area?
  ○ E.g. other int SS lives
  ○ Governance structure of host country
  ○ Countries of other int SS
• Would you have obtained the same info/knowledge if you studied in TR?
• Do you think a degree obtained abroad is important for a higher quality education or for its brand value?
• Have you attended any training or course other than your degree education?			

SC
• Friendships
  ○ Personal friendships development / host vs home country
  ○ Turkish
  ○ International
  ○ Local
• Trust
  ○ Personal trust-based relationship development/host vs home country
  ○ Turkish
  ○ Local
  ○ International
• Neighbourhood connections
  ○ Personal neighbourhood connections development / host vs home country
• Family and kinship
  ○ Personal family and kinship relations development / host vs home country
• Social groups or sports clubs
• Arts, crafts or other recreational activities			

○ how frequently? • volunteering or helping community activities ○ what kind? ○ host vs home country			
CV • news-following habits ○ Online vs printed; social media vs conventional media? ○ news sources? ○ frequency • discussing contemporary issues with people ○ family ○ friends ○ colleagues • civil activities ○ global humanitarian organizations or projects ○ membership or donation to charity organizations ▪ host vs home country ○ ecological conservation activities ○ participating in a walk, run, or bike ride to support a benevolent cause • How do you express your concerns about environmental, social, or political problems? ➢ website, blog ➢ signing an e-mail or written petition seeking to help individuals or communities abroad ➢ displaying and/or wearing badges/stickers/signs ➢ boycotting certain products ➢ contacting or visiting someone in government to seek public action ➢ protests, demonstrations ➢ newspaper or radio ○ difference between host-home countries			
Perceived contributions • What do you think about your contributions to your country or humanity? • We talked about the skills and knowledge, social network, and civic values you obtained during your study-abroad experience. How do you think these affect your contributions to Turkey?			
<u>For returnees</u> • Can you explain how you felt when you first arrived back to Turkey after your study abroad experience? ○ Cultural shock? • Do you think studying abroad changed your perspective towards Tukey?			
<u>For migrants</u> • Why did you decide not to return? • What do you think about your contributions to Turkey from this country? ➢ Do you think staying in this country impacts your contributions? ➢ How do you contribute to your country? Do you use technology to transcend the borders or divide your time between current residence and Turkey?			

- How would you define your current self? What has changed between XXX before going abroad to study and XXX now?
- Is there anything else you would like to add?

F. Interview Guide Prior to Pilot Study

Interview Questions

CUREC Approval Reference: ED-CIA-18-159

The development of human capital, social capital and civic values during international study experience of Turkish students and its links to perceived contributions to home country.

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. What are the critical moments in your life? How would you story them?
    a. Why do you story it in this way?
3. Shall we talk more about the critical moments in your education history?
    a. How about your education history before studying abroad?
        i. Which university(ies)?
        ii. Undergraduate? /Postgraduate?
    b. What about your study-abroad experience?
        i. area of study?
        ii. degree level?
        iii. Personal financially support? Or any scholarship? the kind of scholarship?
    c. Why did you choose to study in another country?
        i. Do you think it was the quality of education that attracted you?
        ii. Do you think it was easier to get into a degree program there?
        iii. Are there familial/parental reasons behind your choice of study abroad? If so what are they?
        iv. Do you think geographical proximity played a role in your choice of study abroad?
        v. What is the impact of personal preferences in your decision to study abroad?
        vi. How do you think your country's situation/needs had an effect in your area of study choice?
4. Now, I would like to converse with you about how your study-abroad experience developed your skills, knowledge, networks and values.
    a. Tell me about the skills you developed during your study-abroad experience.
    b. Have you attended any formal trainings other than your degree study? If so, can you tell me about them?
    c. Tell me what knowledge you have gained during your study-abroad experience other than your subject-specific area knowledge.
        i. How about the way other international students live?
        ii. What about the governance structure of the host country?
        iii. What about information about other international students' countries?
    d. Tell me about your friendships.
        i. What about your friendships during your study-abroad? How do you think it impacted your friendships?
            1. What about Turkish friendships during your study-abroad experience?
            2. What about other international students?
            3. What about local students?
        ii. How do you think your study-abroad experience developed your trust in others?
            1. What about trusting people from other international students?

2. What about trusting Turkish students?
3. What about trusting local students?
4. What do you think about trust-based relationships among your community in your home country?

e. Tell me about your neighbourhood connections.
   i. Do you think studying abroad made a difference in your neighbourhood connections? If so, can you elaborate on this?
   ii. Is there any visible difference between your home countries and the host country for your international study that you would like to talk about? (e.g. getting help when needed, asking a neighbour to take care of your child, visiting each other (from Onyx and Bullen,2000))
f. Tell me about your family and kinship connections.
   i. Do you think studying abroad made a difference in your family and kinship connections? If so, can you elaborate?
   ii. Is there any visible difference between your home countries and the host country for your international study that you would like to talk about? (e.g. frequency of contacts, closeness (from Onyx and Bullen,2000))
   iii. Do you think people should rely on their networks for help? Is it just their family that they should rely on?
g. Have you participated in any social groups or sports clubs throughout your life? If so, can you tell me about them?
   i. How do you think they developed you?
   ii. What about during your-study abroad experience and possibly afterwards?
h. Do you get together with people to do arts, crafts or other recreational activities? If so, shall we talk about them?
   i. how often?
   ii. What about during your study-abroad experience?
      1. How do you think these developed you?
   iii. What about their effect on your social network?
i. Have you volunteered or helped in community activities? If so, shall we talk about them?
   i. What kinds of community activities have you attended in your life?
   ii. What about during your study-abroad experience?
   iii. How do you compare your home country and the host country for your international study in terms of voluntary work?
      1. Is there a difference in the emphasis put on voluntary work?
j. Tell me about your news-following habits.
   i. For example: Online vs printed? Social media vs conventional media? How frequently? International sources?
   ii. How do you think studying abroad made a difference in your news-following habits?
   iii. What do you think about the news sources you had been following till your study-abroad experience and after graduation?
k. Do you discuss contemporary issues with people?
   i. Who do you generally discuss contemporary issues with?
      1. What about family, friends or colleagues?
   ii. How do you think studying abroad made a difference in with whom and how you discuss contemporary issues?
l. I would like to get your opinion about civil activities.
   i. Have you involved in or do you plan to participate global humanitarian organizations or projects? If so, can you please tell me about it?

1. How do you think studying abroad impacted your plans about this?

ii. What is your opinion about membership or donation to charity organizations?
1. What do you think about the membership or donation to charity organizations in Turkey and your study-abroad host country?

iii. Have you attended ecological conservation activities? If so, can you talk to me about them?
1. What do you think about the impact of studying abroad on your participation in ecological conservation activities?

iv. Have you expressed your concerns about environmental, social, or political problems? If so, what do you feel about expressing your concerns?
1. Is there any mean you use for this? (if participant asks for clarification, I'll use the examples below)
a. newspaper or radio
b. website, blog, or chat room
c. contacting or visiting someone in government to seek public action
d. signing an e-mail or written petition seeking to help individuals or communities abroad
e. displaying and/or wearing badges/stickers/signs
f. boycotting certain products
g. protests demonstrations
2. Can you talk about the differences/similarities in the ways people in Turkey and your host country for international study express their concerns?
3. How do you think your study abroad experience developed you in terms of expressing your concerns?

m. What do you feel about participating in a walk, run, or bike ride to support a benevolent cause?
n. What do you feel about donating money for a specific cause?

5. You mentioned (…) as a critical moment in your life after your international study experience. Can you elaborate on that? (this item might be repeated depending on participant response to the very first question and self-drawn timeline)
a. Possible probes such as what was it like when...?; In what ways...?; Why...?; and How...?
6. What is it like to be an international-study graduate in relation to the experiences of others who are not? Why are there differences and similarities?
7. Do you think studying abroad developed your perspectives towards your home country? If yes, how so?

For returning expatriates:

a. Can you explain how you felt when you first arrived back to Turkey after your study abroad experience?
i. Have you experienced any reverse cultural shock?

For migrants:

b. How do you feel about yours contributions to Turkey from this country?
i. How do you think staying in this country impacts your contribution to Turkey?
1. Do you use available technology to transcend the borders in contributing to your home country or do you divide your time between current residence and Turkey?

8. Tell me how your study-abroad experience impacts your contributions to Turkey?
    a. What about the skills and knowledge you developed during your study-abroad experience?
    b. What about the social network you developed during your study-abroad experience?
    c. What about the civic values you developed during your study-abroad experience?

Is there anything else you would like to add?

G. English Translation of Participant Information Sheet

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The development of human capital, social capital and civic values during international study experience of Turkish students and its links to perceived contributions to home country.

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Ethics Approval Reference: ED-CIA-18-159

1. ***What is the purpose of this research?***

   The purpose of this research is to examine how Turkish migrants and returning expatriates who have obtained a degree abroad explain their contributions to their home country and how they describe the links between their perceived contributions to their home country and the skills, knowledge, networks and civic values they developed during their study abroad experience. It is being conducted as part of a doctoral dissertation.

2. ***Why have I been invited to take part?***

   You have been invited because you are a Turkish person who obtained a degree from a higher education institution that is located in a different country than Turkey.

3. ***Do I have to take part?***

   No. You can ask questions about the study before deciding whether or not to participate. If you do agree to participate, you may withdraw yourself from the study at any time, without giving a reason and without penalty, by advising the researchers of this decision. If you decide to withdraw yourself from the study, all the data collected will be deleted permanently. Please indicate if you want to withdraw from the study before the interview ends.

4. ***What will happen to me if I take part in the research?***

   If you are happy to take part in the research, you will be asked to fill in a self-drawn timeline form that you will be provided with and then attend an interview with the researcher. Before the interview starts, the researcher will provide information about the purposes of the research and you will be given the chance to ask any questions.

   The researcher will tape-record the interview with your permission. The tape-record of the interviews will be securely stored in researcher's password protected computer. No information that may reveal your identity will be shared in any of the published material. The interview should take approximately 50 minutes.

   If you are still happy to take part, you will then be asked to sign a consent form.

5. ***Are there any potential risks in taking part?***

   No, there is no risk involved in participating in this study. This study is conducted purely for academic purposes to advance our understanding of the international study experiences of Turkish students and how their international mobility experience might relate to their contributions to their home country.

6. ***Are there any benefits in taking part?***

   There will be no direct benefit to you from taking part in this research.

7. ***What happens to the data provided?*** [1]

   The research data will be stored confidentially in the researcher's password-protected computer and will not be shared to any third party. Your responses will be anonymised and any information that may reveal your identity will not be shared or published in any way. In addition, we would like your permission to use direct quotes for this specific research. No information that may reveal your identity will be shared in these direct quotes. The data will be stored as long as they are of academic value.

8. ***Will the research be published?***

   This study is being conducted as part of the researcher's doctoral thesis. There is a likelihood that one or more academic journal articles and/or a book will be published at a later date which will incorporate the data and information from this interview.

   Also, the research will be written up as a thesis. On successful submission of the thesis, it will be deposited both in print and online in the University archives, to facilitate its use in future research. The thesis will be openly accessible.

   The University of Oxford is committed to the dissemination of its research for the benefit of society and the economy and, in support of this commitment, has established an online archive of research materials. This archive includes digital copies of student theses successfully submitted as part of a University of Oxford postgraduate degree programme. Holding the archive online gives easy access for researchers to the full text of freely available theses, thereby increasing the likely impact and use of that research.

9. ***Who is organising and funding the research?***

   The researcher's doctoral study is being funded by Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies.

10. ***Who has reviewed this study?***

    This study has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the University of Oxford Central University Research Ethics Committee (Reference number: ED-CIA-18-159).

11. ***Who do I contact if I have a concern about the study or I wish to complain?***

    If you have a concern about any aspect of this study, please speak to the relevant researcher, Yusuf Ikbal Oldac at +44 7586743456 or yusuf.oldac@education.ox.ac.uk, or their supervisor, Maia Chankseliani at +44 01865611011 or maia.chankseliani@education.ox.ac.uk, who will do their best to answer your query. The researcher should acknowledge your concern within 10 working days and give you an indication of how they intend to deal with it. If you remain unhappy or wish to make a formal complaint, please contact the relevant chair of the Research Ethics Committee at the University of Oxford who will seek to resolve the matter in a reasonably expeditious manner:

    Chair, **Social Sciences & Humanities Inter-Divisional Research Ethics Committee**; Email: ethics@socsci.ox.ac.uk; Address: Research Services, University of Oxford, Wellington Square, Oxford OX1 2JD

12. ***Further Information and Contact Details***

    If you would like to discuss the research with someone beforehand (or if you have questions afterwards), please contact:

    Mr Yusuf Ikbal Oldac
    Department of Education, University of Oxford
    15 Norham Gardens, Oxford, OX2 6PY
    Turkey telephone number: +90 537 816 1833
    Oxford telephone number: +44 7586 743456
    Email address: yusuf.oldac@education.ox.ac.uk

[1] Please refer to CUREC's Best Practice Guidance on Data Collection and Management (BPG 09)

H. English Translation of Participant Consent Form

Department of Education
University of Oxford
15 Norham Gardens
Oxford, OX2 6PY

Yusuf İkbal Oldaç
PhD candidate in Education
Turkey telephone number: +90 537 816 1833
Oxford telephone number: +44 7586 743456
Oxford email address: yusuf.oldac@education.ox.ac.uk

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

CUREC Approval Reference: ED-CIA-18-159

The development of human capital, social capital and civic values during international study experience of Turkish students and its links to perceived contributions to home country.

The aim of this research is to examine how Turkish migrants and returning expatriates who have obtained a degree abroad explain their contributions to their home country and how they describe the links between their perceived contributions to their home country and the skills, knowledge, networks and civic values they developed abroad.

		Please initial each box
1	I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.	☐
2	I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason, and without any adverse consequences or academic penalty.	☐
3	I understand that research data collected during the study may be looked at by designated individuals from the University of Oxford where it is relevant to my taking part in this study. I give permission for these individuals to access my data.	☐
4	I understand that this project has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the University of Oxford Central University Research Ethics Committee.	☐
5	I understand who will have access to personal data provided, how the data will be stored and what will happen to the data at the end of the project.	☐
6	I understand how this research will be written up and published.	☐
7	I understand how to raise a concern or make a complaint.	☐
8	I consent to being audio recorded	☐
11	I understand how audio recordings will be used in research outputs	☐
12	I give permission to be anonymously quoted directly in the research publication	☐
13	I agree to take part in the study	☐

Name of Participant	Date	Signature

Name of person taking consent	Date	Signature

I. English Translation of Oral Consent Form

Department of Education
University of Oxford
15 Norham Gardens
Oxford, OX2 6PY

Yusuf İkbal Oldaç
PhD candidate in Education
Turkey telephone number: +90 537 816 1833
Oxford telephone number: +44 7586 743456
Oxford email address: yusuf.oldac@education.ox.ac.uk

Type 1: Oral Consent only

[Where separate written participant information has already been read by the participant beforehand, and oral consent is then sought.
Record this consent process using a digital recorder (if participant has consented to this) or by using a Record of Consent Form.]

Hello again, I'm Yusuf Ikbal Oldac from the University of Oxford and I wanted to talk to you about the project I gave you information about before. To recap, the broad aims of my project is to gain a better understanding about how Turkish migrants and returning expatriates who have obtained a degree abroad explain their contributions to their home country and how they describe the links between their perceived contributions to their home country and the skills, knowledge, networks and civic values they developed abroad.

Are you still interested in taking part in the project? *[Await confirmation].* Now I'd like to confirm some of the details of the project to make sure you understand what's involved for you:

- It's a project about international study experiences of Turkish people and how they perceive their study-abroad experiences is related to their perceived contributions to their home country and it's being used for my doctoral research.
- If you agree to take part, I'll need to interview you lasting approximately 50 minutes. I may also contact you for follow-up interviews depending on the outcome of this interview.
- There are no risks involved in participating in this research as I will be interviewing you about your experiences and thoughts about your study-abroad experience and how it helped you develop.
- You don't have to agree to take part; you can ask me any questions you want before or throughout; you can also withdraw at any stage without giving a reason and without any negative consequences.
- I will be the only person to access to this research data. If you decide to withdraw yourself from the study, all the data collected will be deleted permanently. Please indicate if you want to withdraw from the study before the interview ends.
- You are aware that an Oxford University Research Ethics committee has approved this research project and how to contact me (in the first instance) or the committee in case of any concerns or complaints. I have given you the project's ethics reference number and relevant contact details. To reiterate: their email address is ethics@socsci.ox.ac.uk *[for SSH IDREC studies]*.
- I won't keep any of your details for longer than necessary. I won't use your name next to data you provide; unless you would like to be named. I will like ask your permission for quoting you directly in research publications.
- I will store any information you provide safely and confidentially. I will store the information resulting from this interview in my password-protected personal computer and I will not share it

with any third party. Your responses will be anonymised and any information that may reveal your identity will not be shared or published in any way. The data will be stored as long as they are of academic value.

- I would like to be able to use your anonymised data in future studies, and to share this data with other researchers.
- I would like to audio record you unless you say that I can't.
- The project will be published as my doctoral thesis. Also, this work might result in one or more academic journal articles or a book.

Are you still willing to take part? Do you give your permission for me to interview and audio record you? Do you give your permission for me to re-contact you to clarify information?

[*Await confirmation]* So if you're happy with all of that, and have no more questions, let's start.

J. Start List for Coding

11 September 2019

This is a list that I compiled from the relevant general literature and using my analytical thoughts during the transcription process.

Name	Abbreviation	Description
brain drain		Educated people in desire to leave the country. It might be worth changing the code title in the future.
changes in perspectives towards home country	persp-turkey	
Contributions to home country	contribution-turkey	This is a holistic code about participant's perceptions towards their contribution to their home country. I plan to develop subcodes as I progress.
Contributions to humanity	contribution-humanity	This is a holistic code about participant's perceptions towards their contribution to humanity and the world overall. I plan to develop subcodes as I progress.
political apprenticeship	pol_app	The participants seem to develop a more nuanced understanding towards the political system of the country they study in. This sometimes mean a change in worldview but not necessarily so.
becoming a socialist and critical	pol_app-socialism	
becoming less nationalist	pol_app-nationalist-less	
becoming more nationalist	pol_app-nationlist-more	Becoming more protective of your country and culture because you have been living in another country
problematising borders		
civic values		This is a holistic code about civic values without a specific reference to any other concept.
corrupt ISM		I will use this for those who graduated from their international degree through improper means.
empowerment		ISM empowers students in the sense that they feel more capable during/after their international experience

Name	Abbreviation	Description
family values		Family values are an important part of social capital
impact of international student mobility	ism_impact	Just living in a different country has an impact on an individual's life regardless of the country they studied in.
mobility capital		Once a person lives in another country, they kind of feel less uncomfortable about living in another country again or moving/travelling abroad.
network dynamics		This is a holistic code to denote how participant's network developed in the host country. I plan to develop subcodes for this as I progress.
perception of locals		This is a holistic code to denote how participants perceive the locals in their host country. This might have implications for their social capital development.
perception of Germans	perception-Germans	
perception of Azerbaijanis	perception-Azerbaijani	
perception of Bulgarians	perception-Bulgarians	
perception of British people	perception-British	
purpose of education	purpose_edu	This is a holistic code about participants talking about purposes of education. I plan to develop subcodes as I progress.
purpose of universities	purpose_uni	This is a holistic code about participants talking about purposes of universities. I plan to develop subcodes as I progress.
pragmatic purpose for university education	purpose_uni-pragmatic	Participants emphasize job finding feature of universities. Practical reasons
university to broaden your horizon	purpose_uni-nonvocational	Participants emphasize nonpragmatic purposes of uni education. Universities are not just to obtain jobs afterwards.
Functions of international education	funct_ism	Biesta's three functions of education applied to international student mobility
qualification	funct_ism-qualification	
subjectification	funct_ism-	

Name	Abbreviation	Description
	subjectification	
socialisation	funct_ism-socialisation	
self-formation through ism		This is a holistic code about participants talking about becoming her-himself through ism experience without a specific reference to a more detailed concept. I plan to develop subcodes as I progress.
signalling		Human Capital Signalling Theory
“tension”	tension	“tension” is an in-vivo code. Participants keep mentioning the tension in home country as a push factor to study abroad.